



PRESS RELEASE

Mississippi First

MacKenzie Stroh Hines

Director of Communications and Operations

<mailto:mackenzie@mississippifirst.org>

662.743.4055

Mississippi First Releases Second *State of Pre-K* Report

Today, Mississippi First released the second report in its ground-breaking series, *The State of Pre-K in Mississippi*, which focuses on pre-K access and quality in Mississippi. The report released today—*The State of Pre-K in Mississippi (2014-2015)*—updates our 2011-2012 report on public pre-K and expands it to include information about licensed childcare centers serving four-year-old children. This report is the first attempting to quantify pre-K access—whether public or private—in every Mississippi community. Additionally, the report presents information about the quality of each school district program according to national benchmarks and includes programmatic information about all licensed childcare centers serving four-year-old children.

Important statewide findings from the report include the following:

- Public pre-K programs (school district, Head Start, and state-funded programs) had the capacity to serve approximately 41% of four-year-olds in Mississippi in 2014-2015. Of four-year-olds who entered public school Kindergarten in 2015-2016, 44% had been served by a public pre-K program.
- Licensed childcare centers had the capacity to serve 37% of four-year-olds in 2014-2015. An estimated 28% of four-year-olds were actually enrolled in licensed childcare centers.
- For 2014-2015 four-year-olds entering public Kindergarten in 2015-2016, access to public pre-K statewide was unchanged from our first report. School district and state-funded pre-K grew between 2011-2012 and 2014-2015 and the number of entering Kindergarteners declined, offsetting a significant loss in Head Start capacity for four-year-old children in the same time period. The loss of Head Start capacity was largely due to federal budget cuts to the program.
- The number of school districts offering full-year, classroom-based pre-K programs free-of-charge for all students increased by 2, from 70 school districts in 2011-2012 to 72 in 2014-2015.
- On average, the state-funded pre-K program increased access to pre-K in funded communities by 37%.
- Of the 18 school district programs meeting all ten benchmarks for a high-quality pre-K program, 17 were state-funded, which includes all of the school districts that received state pre-K dollars.
- An estimated 22% of four-year-olds in Mississippi lacked access to any pre-K program—whether provided by school districts, Head Start, or licensed childcare.

In addition to the statewide findings, this report finds that families face varying levels of access to pre-K depending on their zip code. The report identifies 9 high-poverty school districts as focus communities because they have below-average access to pre-

K. Additionally, there are indicators that disparities in quality exist among programs – both public and private – serving four-year-old children. “Stronger collaborations between public and private early education providers such as those funded through the state pre-K program can help close access gaps and increase program quality in many places,” stated Angela Bass, Deputy Director of Policy.

Rachel Canter, Executive Director, added, “The state-funded pre-K program is one of the biggest success stories in Mississippi’s early childhood history. As this report shows, state-funded pre-K is both increasing access and quality for our youngest learners. We strongly recommend that the state expand the program.”

The full report can be found online at <http://www.mississippifirst.org/education-policy/pre-kindergarten/msf-prek-publications/state-pre-k-mississippi-2014-2015/>. The data set that underlies the report will be available on Mississippi First’s website by January 31, 2017.

###

Mississippi First has been an advocate for early childhood education in Mississippi—specifically the expansion of high-quality, state-funded pre-Kindergarten—since our founding in 2008. In January 2012, Mississippi First published Leaving Last in Line, an issue brief advocating for a state-funded pre-K program using collaborative delivery. Leaving Last in Line served as the basis for the Early Learning Collaborative Act of 2013.

The mission of Mississippi First is to champion transformative policy solutions ensuring educational excellence for every Mississippi child. Mississippi First is a leading voice for state-funded pre-K, high-quality public charter schools, and rigorous state learning standards. For more information about Mississippi First, visit www.mississippifirst.org or contact Executive Director Rachel Canter at 601.398.9008.