



## Press Release

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### **State-Funded Pre-K on Slow Road to Recovery Says National Report**

*Florida Continues to Rank High in Pre-K Access; Resources and Quality Remain Low*

*Washington, D.C.* — State funded preschool education, hard hit by the Great Recession, has turned the corner and in many states is back on an expansion track according to the national survey of the states done annually by the nonpartisan National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) at Rutgers University. For the second year in a row, NIEER's data show that, nationally speaking, the states have increased funding for pre-K.

Adjusted for inflation, state funding for pre-K increased by nearly \$120 million in 2013-2014 across all 50 states and Washington, DC. Enrollment growth also resumed, albeit modestly, with a total increase of 8,335 slots to reach its highest level recorded over the report's 12-year history. And program quality standards increased as an unprecedented seven states gained ground on NIEER's 10 benchmarks for quality standards.

As states begin their recovery, Florida continued to enroll nearly 80 percent of 4-year-olds in state-funded pre-K. Florida fell in its resources ranking, dropping to 36<sup>th</sup> among 41 states with pre-K programs for funding per child. Florida was one of 20 states to see a reduction in per-child state spending when adjusted for inflation in 2013-2014, already alarmingly low and far below the national average. Quality standards also remain among the lowest in the nation as Florida continued to meet just 3 of 10 quality standards benchmarks.

"Florida's young children will not be well served until the state's leaders give quality the same attention they have devoted to providing access. Recently approved budget increases to provide additional funding to higher quality programs and improve per-child funding for pre-K are small but encouraging signs," said NIEER director Steven Barnett. "Still, much remains to be done before the state constitutional amendment requiring that every Florida child has access to a high quality pre-K program is honored."

"It is heartening to see state funded pre-K, once the fastest growing area in the entire education sector, back on the road to recovery," said NIEER director Steve Barnett, "but given that the states cut half a billion dollars in funding in 2011-2012 and a number of states have yet to address those cuts, much work remains to be done."

Joined at the press conference by U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, Barnett called on all levels of government to dedicate additional resources to preschool education in order to bridge the gap. "Unfortunately, the effects of the recession landed hardest on preschool-age children and our future prosperity depends on their future productivity," he said.

Barnett said that in addition to adequate funding, state pre-K should have adequate quality and serve all children under 200 percent of poverty. Bold leaders from both major parties are moving some states and cities dramatically ahead, but far too many states have yet to follow. At the same time, quality preschool is becoming a right for every child in some states; other states offer their children no pre-K at all. And, as some cities move to provide preschool for all, most recently New York and Seattle, other areas of their states are left behind.

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*The National Institute for Early Education Research ([www.nieer.org](http://www.nieer.org)) at the Graduate School of Education, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ, supports early childhood education policy and practice through independent, objective research.*