



## Press Release

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### **MINNESOTA PRE-K IS HIGH ON QUALITY, LOW ON ENROLLMENT** *Retains high standards and spending ranks high*

*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.

Minnesota ranks last out of 41 states with pre-K programs for access for 4-year-olds. This suggests that thousands of Minnesota's youngest learners are missing the opportunity for a solid start. The state serves 1 percent of 3-year-olds, ranking 24th on this measure. The state's pre-K program, which builds from its Head Start offerings, meets 9 of NIEER's quality standards benchmarks, falling short only on the degree requirement for lead teachers. Minnesota is currently in 6<sup>th</sup> place for resources devoted to pre-K and 8<sup>th</sup> in resources based on all reported spending.

Governor Dayton is making the case for making tuition-free preschool available by using about one fifth of state budget surplus funds. Minnesota currently has the third most expensive child care costs in the country. With this initiative; pre-K would no longer be an out-of-pocket expense.

“Elsewhere, 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 it is they upon whose future productivity our future prosperity depends,” 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 cities and states dramatically ahead, but far too many states have yet to follow. As some cities move to provide preschool for all, most recently New York and Seattle, other areas of their states are left behind. 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.

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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.*