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Contact: Kirsty Clarke Brown, kbrown@nieer.org, 732-993-8051

Laura Brandon, laura.brandon@berlinrosen.com, 202-800-8690

New Report: Small Gains Nationally in State-Funded Pre-K, but Less Than a Third of 4-Year-Olds Enrolled and 40 Percent of Enrolled Children Still Served in Inadequate Programs

National Institute for Early Education Research Calls for Aggressive State and Federal Measures to Regain Early Education Momentum

Washington, D.C. – State funded preschool education, hard hit by the Great Recession, has started to get back on track, but inequalities in access to quality programs continues to grow, with 40 percent of preschoolers—more than half a million—still served in inadequate programs, according to an annual [report](#) by the nonpartisan National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) at Rutgers University.

The State of Preschool Report for the 2013-2014 school year, which includes objective state-by-state profiles and rankings, shows positive trends nationally: states increased funding by nearly \$120 million over the previous year, enrollment increased modestly, and seven states gained ground on NIEER's 10 benchmarks for quality standards. Despite the overall trend toward increased funding and enrollment, the report found that only 29 percent of 4-year-olds and 4 percent of 3-year-olds were enrolled in pre-K nationally, with nine states having no state-funded preschool program and about a third of children served by state pre-K residing in the two states with the lowest standards—Florida and Texas.

“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, but there is still a lot of work to be done to recover from the deep cuts to early education during the recession,” said NIEER Director Steve Barnett. “It’s clear that public investments in quality pre-K yield great educational and economic gains, but increasing disparities in access to quality pre-K leave far too many children behind and simply represent a missed opportunity.”

There have been uneven gains in states across the country, meaning that access to high quality preschool education continues to depend on a child’s zip code and family income. Mississippi, for example, made great gains over the course of the school year. In January 2014, Mississippi became the first state in four years not yet funding pre-K statewide to create a new program. It spent \$3 million to enroll 1,774 children, and met all 10 of NIEER’s quality standards benchmarks – a great feat for a new program.

On the other hand, while Florida ranks toward the top for enrollment, with state-funded pre-K serving more than 75 percent of 4-year-olds, it meets only three quality benchmarks – ranking second to last for quality.

NIEER released the report at an event with U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and Mike Chesser of Ready Nation, at CentroNia, a pre-K program in Washington, D.C.

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 continue to impact preschool-age children and our nation’s prosperity depends on their future productivity,” he said. “At a minimum, state pre-K should be of adequate quality and available to all children in low- to moderate-income families, and the best way to do that is to offer pre-K to all children.”

Key findings of *The State of Preschool 2014* yearbook [LINK] are:

- Total state funding for pre-K programs increased by more than \$116 million across the 40 states plus D.C. that offered pre-K in the 2013-2014 year, a 1 percent increase in real dollars.
- State pre-K funding per child increased slightly by \$61 (inflation-adjusted) from the previous year, to \$4,125.
- State funding per child for pre-K increased by at least one percent in 19 of the 41 states with programs, when adjusted for inflation. In 20 states, per-child funding fell by at least 1 percent, adjusted for inflation. In 5 states per-child spending fell by 10 percent or more from the previous year; in 6 states, per-child spending increased by the same margin.
- More than 1.3 million children attended state-funded pre-K, 1.1 million at age 4.
- Four percent of 3-year-olds & 29 percent of 4-year-olds were served in state-funded pre-K.
- In addition to Mississippi, four states – Alabama, Alaska, North Carolina and Rhode Island – and one of Louisiana’s programs, met all 10 of the benchmarks for state pre-K quality standards. Seventeen states met eight or more.
- More than half a million children, or 40 percent of nationwide enrollment, were served in programs that met fewer than half of NIEER’s quality standards benchmarks. Five states met fewer than half of the benchmarks – California, Ohio and Vermont met four; Florida met three; and Texas met only two.

The State of Preschool Yearbook reviews state-funded pre-K programs on 10 benchmarks of quality standards, including the presence of a qualified instructor, class size, teacher-to-student ratio, presence of an assistant and length of instruction per day.

For more information on The State of Preschool 2014 yearbook or to get detailed state-by-state breakdowns on quality benchmarks, enrollment and funding, please click [here](#).

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The National Institute for Early Education Research (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.