



Press Release

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PENNSYLVANIA STATE PRE-K GAINS QUALITY STANDARDS *Spending Per Child Up, Enrollment Down Slightly*

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.

Pennsylvania significantly increased quality standards in its four pre-K programs through a variety of changes. Its Education Accountability Block Grant and K4 programs once again meet the requirements for professional development. The state had previously lost this benchmark through a two-year moratorium on professional development. The state's Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program also now requires assistant teachers to have a Child Development Associate degree, in line with increased requirements in the federal Head Start program.

The state ranked 30th for 4-year-old enrollment, the same as it did in 2013, though it did cut almost 500 slots. Pennsylvania also serves 5 percent of its 3-year-olds, ranking 15th in the nation for that age group. Funding in the state was cut by \$1.3 million across programs, though the state did improve its spending per child ranking, increasing spending by \$56 per child.

Gov. Wolf recently proposed \$2 billion in additional funding for early childhood. Senator Bob Casey from Pennsylvania has also been pushing for expanding child care tax credits. Pennsylvania ranks 10th in resources based on state spending.

“Early childhood education is a proven and vital strategy in preparing children for successful academic outcomes throughout their lives,” Governor Tom Wolf said. “Here in Pennsylvania, we are taking important steps to ensure more students have access to high-quality pre-kindergarten

by investing an additional \$120 million into programs like Pre-K Counts and Head Start Supplemental Assistance. These proposed increases represent a first step in achieving our goal of universal pre-k for families across the commonwealth.”

“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 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 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.

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.