



Press Release

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SOUTH CAROLINA CONTINUES TO EXPAND STATE FUNDED PRESCHOOL *But Spending Per Child Is at the Bottom of National Rankings*

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.

South Carolina's policymakers have demonstrated a desire to continue investing in early childhood education, with the expansion of full-day pre-kindergarten for low-income children living in high poverty school districts. A recent poll of South Carolina residents indicated that a majority supported the Legislature's expansion of the 4K program, and in general, support more public investment in early education. About 30 percent of South Carolina's 4-year-olds who live in poverty attend a full-day preschool program funded by the state, following two expansions approved by the legislature.

About 12,500 poor 4-year-olds in 60 school districts are participating this school year. That's up from 5,300 children in 34 eligible districts in 2012-2013, before legislators began expanding access to the program they created as a pilot in 2006. Meanwhile, more than 20,000 poor 4-year-olds live in 21 districts not eligible for the state program. The "Read to Succeed" law passed last year calls for eventually expanding availability to all 4-year-olds from low-income families statewide. However, state spending per child for pre-K in South Carolina is low, as the state ranks 40th among states with programs on that measure.

"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.