



Press Release

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May 11, 2015

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

Tennessee's pre-K program in holding pattern

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.

Tennessee's pre-K program demonstrates the continued impact of the Great Recession. The state's ranking for enrolling 4-year-olds in its high quality pre-K program dropped 2 positions to rank 23rd nationally, as enrollment was unchanged for the third consecutive year. Tennessee spent less per child in 2013-2014 than the previous year when adjusted for inflation; however, its ranking for state funding per child improved slightly from 16th to 15th as other states experienced shifting funding levels. Tennessee continued to meet 9 out of 10 quality standard benchmarks, placing it in upper tier of state pre-K programs for quality standards. Only 5 programs in 41 states and DC achieved a higher rating for quality.

"Tennessee remained stuck in a holding pattern as other states pulled themselves out from under the recession," said NIEER Director Steven Barnett "and we remain very concerned that reduced state support places the program and children it serves at greater risk. Fortunately, Tennessee was able to win a competitive Preschool Development Grant, which could signal a positive shift for the state in the future."

"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.

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.