



## Press Release

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### **WASHINGTON HOLDS QUALITY PRE-K PROGRAM STEADY** *State, Seattle poised to improve current offerings*

*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.

Washington has barely managed to hold its program steady over the last few years. The state ranks 33rd for access for 4-year-olds. The program saw only a slight enrollment increase in 2014, with another 350 children enrolled. The state ranks 8th for state spending, though it experienced a slight decrease in per-child spending in 2014 (reduced \$76). With the addition of funding from other sources, Washington spends \$6,658 per child and is one of the few states spending a sufficient amount to provide a high-quality program, coming in at 8<sup>th</sup> in the resource rankings. The program achieves 9 of NIEER's 10 quality standards benchmarks. The nonpartisan Washington State Institute for Public Policy has found that the state's Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) leads to strong gains in later achievement, but less than 1 in 10 of the state's 4-year-olds and only 2 in 100 3-year-olds receive the program.

With access to quality pre-K so limited in the state, Seattle is one of several large cities across the nation that has stepped up to expand early learning opportunities on its own, with a new program to offer quality preschool to all children. In the state legislature, a proposal to increase per-child funding and add 1,350 new slots for full-day and extended-day services was approved for 2014-2015. Gov. Inslee has proposed plans to expand preschool access to poor children and develop full-day kindergarten.

“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.

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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.*