



## Press Release

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### **WISCONSIN'S STATE-FUNDED PRE-K CONTINUES TO EXPAND** *Spending Per Child Ranks in the Bottom Half of States with Programs*

*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.

Wisconsin's ranks 6<sup>th</sup> in the nation for percent of 4-year-olds enrolled in state-funded preschool, as enrollment has expanded by about 45 percentage points since the start of the decade. This has occurred as efforts were made to provide the 4K program in districts where it was not previously offered, and more children have enrolled in existing programs.

The state's high ranking for pre-K access stands in contrast to its relatively low ranking for per-child spending. Wisconsin ranks 27<sup>th</sup> among states with programs in resources devoted to pre-K. The state also provides pre-K through collaboration with the Head Start program. This program now meets 8 out of NIEER's 10 benchmarks for quality standards. Assistant teachers are now required to have at least a CDA degree to conform with increased federal Head Start requirements. Wisconsin's 4K program achieves 5 out of 10 quality standards benchmarks. Wisconsin is a recipient of Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge funds, and many of the tasks supported by the grant involve 4K, including alignment with the quality rating system.

"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.*