



Press Release

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WEST VIRGINIA CONTINUES PROGRESS TOWARD UNIVERSAL PRE-K *A model for other states*

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.

Despite difficult budget times, West Virginia has stayed on schedule as it marches toward its goal of offering every child access to high quality preschool education, serving as a model for other states to follow. About 70 percent of 4-year-olds are enrolled in the state's pre-K program for a ranking of 5th in the nation for access for this age group. The state ranks 7th for access for 3-year-olds.

West Virginia now meets 9 of 10 quality standards benchmarks monitored by NIEER. It met the teacher bachelor's degree benchmark for the first time in the 2013-2014 year, part of a gradual plan to increase personnel requirements in the program. The program also increased the number of instructional days per year from 108 to 128 and the number of instructional hours per week from 12 to 14. Beginning in 2016-2017, all programs will operate full day (25 hours per week minimum) for 5 days a week.

“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.