



Press Release

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Wyoming Still Provides No State-Funded Preschool Education

Nearly Half of All the State's Children Deemed Not Kindergarten-Ready

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.

Wyoming, on the other hand, remains one of a handful of states without a state-funded pre-K program. Legislation introduced recently will begin preliminary statewide discussion of kindergarten readiness and options for early education. NIEER director Steve Barnett said it is "about time" since statewide survey data from 2009 showed that only slightly more than half of all Wyoming kindergarteners were considered "kindergarten-ready." Recent efforts to expand and improve early education in Wyoming have been rejected by lawmakers; something Barnett called "unfortunate."

"Elsewhere, 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 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.