



Press Release

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FLORIDA RANKS HIGH IN PRE-K ACCESS BUT QUALITY STANDARDS REMAIN LOW, SAYS NATIONAL REPORT

Fewer Children Participate in 2012-2013

New York. N.Y. — Total state preschool enrollment declined for the first time as states, hard hit by the Great Recession, continued to deal with its consequences in the 2012-2013 school year. And, while total funding was up slightly, more than half of states with programs continued to make cuts. Those are the conclusions of a national study conducted by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER), a nonpartisan organization at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey.

“Our nation has emerged from the recession, but preschool-age children are being left to suffer its effects,” said NIEER director Steve Barnett. “A year ago, our data showed a half-billion-dollar cut in funding for state pre-K and stalled enrollment. For 2012-2013, we find that enrollment is down and funding per child, while up slightly, remains stalled at near-historic lows,” he said.

Nationally, four thousand fewer children attended state pre-K in 2012-2013 than the previous year—the first time a decline in total enrollment has been documented since NIEER began tracking state pre-K in 2002. Of the 40 states and District of Columbia with programs, 20 cut funding and 18 increased funding by more than one percent. The increases outweighed the decreases which, coupled with reduced enrollment, resulted in a net increase of \$36 per child or \$30.6 million, nationally.

Barnett said program quality standards, which also declined in a number of states as a result of the recession, remained stalled in 2012-2013. The study found one state (Ohio) gained against one quality benchmark while two (Missouri and Arizona) lost ground. More than half a million

children, or 41 percent of nationwide enrollment in state pre-K, were served in programs that met fewer than half of NIEER's 10 research-based benchmarks for quality standards.

Florida ranks 2nd in the nation for access, second only to the District of Columbia, and enrolling 78 percent of the state's 4-year-olds in 2012-2013. However, there are serious concerns regarding program spending, which is far below average and ranks 35th among 41 states for funding per child. Following a 10 percent decrease in state spending per child during 2011-2012, per-child expenditures dropped an additional 3 percent in 2012-2013 when adjusted for inflation. Quality standards also remain very low as Florida continued to meet just 3 of 10 quality standards benchmarks.

“We are encouraged by Governor Scott's recent involvement with the Florida Chamber of Commerce, The Children's Movement of Florida, United Way, and Florida TaxWatch. Florida's leaders should truly fulfill the 2002 State Constitutional Amendment by ensuring that every Florida child has access to a high quality pre-K program. A recently approved increase in per-child funding in both the school-year and summer programs is a small step in the right direction,” said NIEER director Steven Barnett.

In the aftermath of bad news nationally, some positive responses are already apparent. Local governments are developing their own plans to move ahead on early childhood education, from Boston and Cleveland to San Antonio and Seattle. A few states, including Connecticut and Maine, have made strong commitments to their existing programs while others, including Mississippi and Indiana, are beginning work on small programs for the first time. No better example can be found than New York, where the Mayor of the nation's largest city put forward a bold proposal for universal high quality pre-K and was joined in this commitment by the Governor and state legislature. “If ever there were a time for leaders at the local, state, and national levels to unite in their efforts to provide high-quality preschool education to our next generation, this is it,” Barnett said.

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.

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