



Press Release

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NATIONAL REPORT SAYS CALIFORNIA STATE PRE-K FALLS SHORT *Insufficient spending, weak standards raise concerns for children*

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.

California served over 130,000 students in its state pre-K program, though it meets only 4 of NIEER's 10 recommended quality standards. While the state is in the middle of the pack in terms of pre-K spending per child, there has been very little change in this position. California does serve a significant number of 3-year-olds, ranking 8th in the nation for serving 9 percent of kids that age. The state also provides transitional kindergarten to 4-year-olds who are no longer eligible for kindergarten after a change in the cut-off age.

“The Golden State has not made the financial commitment necessary to improve quality or serve all the children who need quality pre-K,” said NIEER director Steve Barnett. The Preschool for All Act of 2015 (AB47) recently passed by the Assembly has renewed the drive to expand access to state pre-K for tens of thousands of young children and their families who wish to attend but can't, for lack of sufficient places.”

“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.