



Press Release

73 Easton Avenue • New Brunswick, NJ 08901 • Phone 848.932.4350 • Fax 732.932.4360 • www.nieer.org

EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE:

CONTACT: *Kirsty Clarke Brown*

May11, 2015

(732) 993-8051, kbrown@nieer.org

National Report Shows Hawaii Lacking in State Funded Pre-K

Initiative Now Underway Is New Beginning

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.

In the report, which looks at the 2013-2014 school year, Hawaii remained one of 10 states without a state-funded pre-K program, though a new initiative has started for the 2014-2015 school year. The Executive Office of Early Learning launched a prekindergarten program in Hawaii's public schools: 20 classrooms in 18 schools across the state with approximately 360 students. It is supported by five Early Learning Resource Teachers with Master's Degrees in Early Childhood Education. The program received \$3 million in funding for the 2014-2015 school year.

“This is a small start but at least it is a start toward providing young children with a quality preschool education,” said NIEER director Steve Barnett. A bill to restore \$6 million in funding for Hawaii's state preschool subsidy program is still moving through the state legislature. Hawaii's Amendment 4 ballot measure did not pass in last year's election. It would have allowed spending public funds on private early education programs. This would have increased the number of pre-K slots for the state's children, eventually serving all 17,200 4-year-olds by giving the state the ability to combine pre-K classrooms in public schools and state-funded slots in private preschools. Last year Hawaii was awarded a competitive federal Preschool Development Grant for \$2 million.

“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.