



Press Release

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State-Funded Pre-K on Slow Road to Recovery Says National Report

Missouri Ranks Near Bottom for Access and Resources in 2014

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.

Unlike many states recovering from the Great Recession, Missouri showed no progress in 2013-2014. Missouri's national ranking for state financial commitment to early education declined when state spending fell by 4 percent, continuing a decade-long slide. Missouri spent \$1,000 less per child in 2014 than in 2008, adjusted for inflation, and now ranks 39th among 41 states funding pre-K programs. Despite increased enrollment from the previous year, Missouri remained near the bottom for access with only 4 percent of all 4-year-olds enrolled, dropping from 35th to 38th among 41 states with pre-K programs. Since 2001-2012, enrollment has decreased by 2,400 children. Program quality standards remained the same in 2013-2014, meeting 7 of 10 quality standards benchmarks.

“The results for Missouri in 2013-2014 are disappointing,” said NIEER Director Steven Barnett. “Still, we are encouraged by additional funding committed to support program expansion in 2015-2016 and legislation recently signed by Gov. Nixon that could gradually allow low-income preschool children to be counted in the school funding formula. These are small but welcome steps in what remains a long road ahead for many Missouri children lacking the opportunity to benefit from a quality preschool experience.”

“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 states and cities dramatically ahead, but far too many states have yet to follow. 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. And, as some cities move to provide preschool for all, most recently New York and Seattle, other areas of their states are left behind.

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.