



Press Release

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

New Mexico enrollment increase second largest in nation; quality unchanged

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.

Several states demonstrated strong gains for pre-K in 2013-2014, including New Mexico. The state enrolled an additional 2,300 students, an increase of 9 percent, to improve its national access ranking from 25th to 19th and was the second largest expansion nationally. New Mexico also regained some ground when state pre-K funding was increased; however, the significant increase in enrollment resulted in a 2 percent decrease in state per-child spending from the preceding year and the state's national rank for resources dropped one position to 28th. Total spending for pre-K including other funding sources resulted in a 41 percent overall increase. Program quality remained unchanged in 2013-2014, meeting 8 of 10 NIEER Quality standards benchmarks. Quality has greatly improved since the program's inception in 2005 when 4 benchmarks were met.

“New Mexico turned a blind eye to any lingering effects of the Great Recession in 2013-2014 to become a real bright spot for pre-K in the nation,” said NIEER Director Steven Barnett. “State leaders showed that quality need not be sacrificed in order to serve additional children, and we are encouraged by their committing increased state funds to continue this trajectory into the future.”

“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.