



Press Release

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

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CONTACT: *Kirsty Clarke Brown*

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

RHODE ISLAND EXPANDS STATE PRE-K *Quality Standards and Spending Per Child Are High*

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 2014, the Rhode Island General Assembly increased its investment in the Rhode Island State Pre-Kindergarten Program by \$500,000. Additionally, two pre-K classrooms were funded with Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge funds as part of an exploratory study (\$334,000) examining the impact of a high-quality Pre-K classroom on overall program quality. This resulted in enrollment of an additional 90 children for the year.

Because Rhode Island's state pre-K is a small program, it ranks at the bottom of national rankings for access for 4-year-olds at 40th among states with programs. Only 2 percent of Rhode Island's 4-year-olds attend the program. The state ranks 5th in spending per child and 4th when all sources of spending are considered. It is one of only five programs in the nation to achieve all 10 of NIEER's benchmarks for quality standards. In 2014, Rhode Island was awarded a competitive federal preschool development grant for \$2.3 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 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 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.