



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*

May 11, 2015

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

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

Virginia drops in access and resources rankings; quality standards 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.

The lingering effects of the Great Recession can be seen in Virginia's numbers. Despite a slight increase in 4-year-old enrollment, the state enrolled fewer than one in five children statewide and fell to 27th among the states. Virginia's ranking for state pre-K resources dropped to 24th in 2013-2014, spending less per child than the year before when adjusted for inflation. Virginia has spent less per child in real dollars every year since 2002 when the state ranked 15th in resources. The state continued to meet 6 of 10 quality standard benchmarks measured by NIEER.

"With the recession behind us, we are hopeful that Virginia's pre-K program will see better days ahead," said NIEER Director Steven Barnett. "Level funding will not allow the state to keep pace, let alone move ahead. New opportunities such as Virginia's federal Preschool Development Grant award will allow more children to participate in higher quality programs and encourage the state to do more for its young students."

"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.