



Press Release

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

For Immediate Release: May 12, 2016

Contact: Michelle Ramjug, mramjug@nieer.org, [848-932-4350](tel:848-932-4350)

ACCESS TO QUALITY PRE-K IN ALABAMA IMPROVES

Alabama Continues to Rise in National Pre-K Rankings

New York, NY—Many 3- and 4-year-olds across the nation still lack access to high-quality preschool education despite modest gains in enrollment, quality, and funding, according to an [annual report](#) by the nonpartisan National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) at Rutgers University. While several states, including Alabama and New York made significant progress through a concerted effort to increase enrollment and funding and improve quality, progress is slow and uneven nationally and quality standards are particularly low in some of the nation's largest states- California, Florida and Texas. Despite the relatively good news this year, the rate of progress is so slow that it will take 150 years for the nation to reach 75 percent enrollment in voluntary state pre-K even at age 4.

In Alabama, enrollment was up by 1,738 students, a substantial increase in 2014-2015, while maintaining its strong rating in terms of quality standards— meeting all 10 of NIEER's minimum quality standards benchmarks. Alabama also improved its national standing for state resources dedicated to pre-K by three positions, increasing by nearly \$1,000 per child to remain just above the national average.

"Alabama's economic future depends on early investment in its kids," said NIEER Director Steve Barnett. "Ensuring that every child has access to high-quality preschool can help pave the way for their success in school, on the job, and in Alabama's communities. The state made notable progress on early education thanks to strong state leadership, and more remains to be done. Alabama's kids, their families, and the state depend on it."

The State of Preschool Report for the 2014-2015 school year, which includes objective state-by-state profiles and rankings, indicates that urgent action is needed from lawmakers at all levels of government to ensure that every child – particularly those from low-income families – have access to high-quality early education. For the first year, NIEER also analyzed states' early education workforce and Dual Language Learner (DLL) policies which reveal Alabama mandates few pre-K policies for serving DLL, such as providing recruitment and outreach information in appropriate languages and developing a systematic, written plan for individual DLL children despite serving 16 percent of the state's pre-K DLL students. Salary parity is lacking for pre-K teachers, with pay varying as much as \$6,000 between public and nonpublic schools, and lagging as much as \$17,000 behind elementary school teachers with equivalent qualifications.

The report finds that total state spending on pre-K programs across the country increased by 10 percent, or \$553 million, since the previous year, bringing state spending in 2014-2015 to over \$6.2 billion. The number of children served by state-funded pre-K served increased by 37,167 in 2014-2015, bringing the total to almost 1.4 million children – the largest number of children ever served by state-funded pre-K. With an average rate of \$4,489, states also made one of the most significant increases in spending per child in recent history.

Despite these gains, the report's findings underscore that those states like California, Florida, and Texas with the largest populations of young children are falling behind—they were among the states that met the fewest quality standards benchmarks, and Texas and Florida also reduced enrollment and spending in 2014-2015. Nationally, enrollment has risen by just one percentage point for both 4- and 3-year olds over five years. The sluggish pace of change disproportionately impacts low-income families.

“We’re encouraged to see several states including Alabama increasing enrollment and maintaining a commitment to quality, but access to high-quality pre-K in the United States remains low and highly unequal,” said Barnett. “Expanding access to quality pre-K programs is one of the best investments we can make, and it’s critical that we raise and standardize salaries for early education teachers and have strong Dual language Learner policies in states with large Hispanic populations. State governments should increase and stabilize funding for pre-K and raise standards for the benefit of all children.”

The State of Preschool Report reviews state-funded pre-K programs on 10 benchmarks of quality standards, including the presence of a qualified instructor, class size, teacher-to-student ratio, presence of an assistant, and length of instruction per day.

For more information on *The State of Preschool 2015* yearbook and detailed state-by-state breakdowns on quality benchmarks, enrollment, and funding, please click [here](#).

###

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.