



## Press Release

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### **CALIFORNIA LAGS BEHIND OTHER STATES IN PRE-K**

#### *Gains Made in Funding and Enrollment, But Quality Standards Remain Weak*

**[NEW YORK, NY]**—Many 3- and 4-year-olds 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 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 including 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 state pre-K even at age 4.

In California, enrollment was 132,695, up by 298 children in 2014-2015. The state maintains a consistently low set of quality standards – meeting only 4 of NIEER's 10 benchmarks for minimum quality standards. There is no standard for maximum class size. State pre-K funding increased by \$45.4 million (8 percent) in 2014-2015, adjusted for inflation. Despite an increase in funding and funding per child, the lack of stronger standards for the California State Preschool Program is cause for concern. The state serves 18 percent of 4-year-olds and 8 percent of 3-year-olds in its pre-K program. California also continued to expand its transitional kindergarten program, serving children who are too young to enter kindergarten after the state changed the birthday cut-off. In 2014-2015, this program served 77,274 children, spending \$604 million to do so.

“California’s economic future depends on early investment in the state’s youngest citizens,” 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 California communities. The state serves a larger proportion of preschool-age kids than some other states, but its low quality standards are troubling as high quality is the key to giving every child a great start,” he said.

*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 California has few policies in place to support the pre-K workforce and does not require salary or fringe benefit parity with elementary school educators. California is one of ten state pre-K programs that allocate extra dollars to serve DLLs, in addition, DLL children are required to be assessed in their home language.

The report finds that total state spending on pre-K programs across the nation 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 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 increasing in enrollment and improving 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](#).

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*The National Institute for Early Education Research ([www.nieer.org](http://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.*