



Press Release

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For Immediate Release: May 12, 2016
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SUPPORTS FOR PRE-K QUALITY IN FLORIDA LAG BEHIND OTHER STATES

Florida continues lead most states in enrollment but even that is falling

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, Michigan, Mississippi, 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 such as 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 Florida, enrollment remained among the nation's highest despite serving 3,700 fewer 4-year-olds in 2014-2015, one of 4 states to see enrollment decrease by 2,000 or more children. Still, Florida ranked 3rd nationally serving 77 percent of its 4-year-olds. Florida made no progress toward improving quality standards – meeting just three of NIEER's 10 minimum quality standards benchmarks. Only Texas met fewer quality benchmarks. Florida dropped three positions in its ranking for state resources to 39th despite an approved increase of \$54 per child. With declining enrollment, state pre-K spending fell by \$3 million and spending per child increased by \$32 when adjusted for inflation.

"Florida's economic future depends on early investment in our 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 all communities across the state. As Florida celebrates VPK's 10th birthday, access to voluntary pre-K for every 4-year-old in Florida remains high, but the state needs to invest more in quality to make a real difference. Florida'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 policies. However, Florida chose not to report data on policies or services for its 63,000 4-year-old dual language learners nor did the state provide information regarding its early childhood workforce policies and practices such as parity in salary and benefits between pre-K teachers working in public schools, pre-K teachers in nonpublic schools, and public K-12 teachers.

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 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 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 like Florida 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) at the Graduate School of Education, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ, supports early childhood education policy and practice through independent, objective research.