



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.

ACCESS TO QUALITY PRE-K IN IOWA OUTPACES OTHER STATES

Program Quality Standards Remained Consistent and Funding Rose 3 Percent

[NEW YORK, NY]—Many 3- and 4-year olds in the U.S. 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 like 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 Iowa, enrollment was 25,952, up by 69 children in 2014-2015, serving over 61 percent of the state's 4-year-olds and 3 percent of 3-year-olds in two pre-K programs, Shared Visions and the Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program (SVPP). Iowa remained consistent in terms of quality – SVPP continued to meet 7 of NIEER's minimum quality standards benchmarks and Shared Visions continued to meet 6. Iowa's state pre-K funding increased by \$2.5 million (3 percent), inflation-adjusted, in 2014-2015. However, at only \$3,000, the state's funding per child lags behind other states.

"Iowa recognizes that its economic future depends on early investment in its youngest citizens and is doing something about it," said NIEER Director Steve Barnett. "Ensuring that every child has access to high quality preschool can help to pave the way for their success in school, on the job, and in Iowa communities," 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 that Iowa has few policies in place to support the pre-k workforce of DLLs. Although SVPP has salary and fringe benefit parity with K-3 public school teachers for lead and assistant teachers working in public settings, Shared Visions does not require compensation parity. Teachers in both programs are paid less on average than elementary school teachers. The state also lacks concrete policies to support young DLLs, although they do offer professional development on topics related to DLLs.

Despite the gains nationally, 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](#).

###

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.