



## Press Release

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### **ACCESS TO QUALITY PRE-K IN MASSACHUSETTS LAGS BEHIND OTHER STATES**

#### *Continued Problems with Access, Resources, and Quality for Massachusetts*

**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 Massachusetts, enrollment in 2014-2015 continued to reach just 7 percent of the state's 4-year-olds. Massachusetts fell six positions in its national ranking for enrollment of 4-year olds, from 28 to 34, but increased five positions to 13 for enrollment of 3-year olds. NIEER recalculated data from previous years to provide an accurate comparison. The ranking stands in stark contrast to 2002 when the state ranked 15<sup>th</sup>. Massachusetts continued to meet 6 of 10 NIEER's quality standards for both programs that were rated in the study. In terms of resources, Massachusetts dropped four positions nationally to 29<sup>th</sup>, spending \$122 less per child than the previous year. At \$3,626 per child, Massachusetts remains well below the national average of \$4,489. In 2002, Massachusetts was ranked eighth for dedicating state resources to pre-K.

"Massachusetts' 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 their communities. We've seen some worrisome setbacks for early education progressing over the years in Massachusetts, and the state needs to do more. Your kids, their families, and your 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, which reveal Massachusetts reports having a variety of policies to support pre-K teachers, but their salaries still fall significantly below those of their K-12 counterparts in public schools while state pre-K teachers in private providers are paid \$40,000 less than K-12 teachers. One-

fourth of Massachusetts' preschoolers are considered to be DLL, and 2,000 of these children, or 6 percent were enrolled in state pre-K programs. Pre-K teachers are required to possess qualifications enabling them to work with DLL students and multiple policies are in place to support DLL children and their 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 such as New York and Michigan increasing their enrollment and improving quality, and new states like Mississippi, Hawaii, and Indiana implementing pre-K initiatives, 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 like Massachusetts. 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.*