



Press Release

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NORTH CAROLINA MAINTAINS ACCESS TO QUALITY PRE-K

Stagnant Enrollment Pose Risks for Nationally Recognized Quality Pre-K

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, including new state pre-K initiatives in Mississippi, Hawaii, and Indiana, 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.

North Carolina enrolled approximately 27,000 4-year-olds, 22 percent of the state's 4-year-olds, in the high-quality, effective pre-K program. However, there was little progress in expanding enrollment during 2014-2015 when only 234 additional students participated, and the state continued to rank 24th nationally. North Carolina was able to sustain quality standards with one of only seven programs operating across six states in the nation to meet all 10 of NIEER's minimum quality standards benchmarks, a feat it has done since 2005-2006.

"North Carolina'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 pave the way for their success in school, on the job, and in our communities. North Carolina set and maintained a high bar for quality, but North Carolina 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 (DLL) policies. Only North Carolina's pre-K teachers in public schools are paid on par with their kindergarten counterparts. Pre-K teachers working in nonpublic settings are not assured parity, creating a disparity between NC Pre-K teachers based on their setting. In North Carolina nearly 6,300 DLL students attend pre-K, 30 percent of 4-year-olds identified as DLL, and several policies are in place to support their education such as providing information to families in their home language and

addressing DLL in the early learning standards with other services determined locally. Also, the Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE) developed a plan to better serve pre-K English Language Learners and their families, but no additional resources are allocated to programs taking into account DLL status or necessary services. Although professional development is offered to teachers working with DLL students, local programs determine minimum DLL qualifications for its 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 2014-2105, 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 South Carolina, New York and Michigan increasing enrollment and others like North Carolina maintaining and improving quality, but access to high-quality pre-K in the United States remains low and highly unequal,” said NIEER Director Steve 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 growing Hispanic populations like North Carolina. 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.