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### **SUPPORT FOR QUALITY PRE-K IN NEBRASKA GROWS**

*Efforts to Expand Preschool Education Enjoy Bipartisan Support but Much Work Remains*

**[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 for 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.

Enrollment increased in Nebraska changed little in 2014-2015. The state did see gains in terms of quality standards, earning a new benchmark for serving at least one meal per day. Nebraska now meets 7 of NIEER’s 10 minimum quality standards benchmarks. More importantly, funding per child increased by nearly \$600 to support quality improvement.

“Nebraska’s economic future depends on early investment in our kids,” said Aubrey Mancuso, Executive Director at Voices for Children in Nebraska. “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 Nebraska communities. We are pleased to see continued progress in Nebraska, but we need to continue to make early investments in our kids even as the state faces budgetary challenges.”

*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 reveals that Nebraska does not offer sufficient support for dual language learners and teachers do not have salary parity with K-3 education.

The report finds that for the nation as a whole, total state spending on pre-K programs 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 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 large Hispanic populations. State governments should increase and stabilize funding for pre-K and raise standards for the benefit of all children.”

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.*