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### **ENROLLMENT IN PENNSYLVANIA STATE PRE-K ROSE BUT FUNDING FELL**

#### *The State's Four Programs Vary Widely in Quality Standards*

**[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 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 Pennsylvania, enrollment was 26,038, up by 892 children in 2014-2015 in its four pre-k programs, while Pennsylvania's programs varied in terms of quality standards—meeting a low of 3 of NIEER's minimum quality standards benchmarks with the Kindergarten for 4-Year-Olds and School-Based Pre-K (K4) program and a high of 9 in the Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program. Total state pre-K funding was cut by \$1.1 million and the per-child spending was reduced by \$199 (4 percent), adjusted for inflation.

“Pennsylvania's economic future depends on early investment in its youngest citizens,” said NIEER director Steve Barnett. “Yet state leaders continue to erratically fund early education programs. Pennsylvania needs to pursue a program of systematic expansion of high quality state pre-K,” 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 none of Pennsylvania's pre-K programs offer teacher salary parity with the K-3 teachers, even when pre-K teachers are required to have a Bachelor's degree and early childhood certification; provisions for DLL supports are in place at the school district level for the K4 program, and policies related to assessing DLLs in their home language and teacher requirements are determined at the local level.

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 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.”

*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.*