



Press Release

73 Easton Avenue • New Brunswick, NJ 08901 • Phone 848.932.4350 • Fax 732.932.4360 • www.nieer.org

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NIEER Contact: Michelle Ramjug, mramjug@nieer.org, [848-932-4350](tel:848-932-4350)

ACCESS TO QUALITY PRE-K IN RHODE ISLAND FAR BEHIND OTHER STATES BUT LATEST DATA SHOWS PROGRESS

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 *The State of Preschool 2015*, an [annual report](#) by the nonpartisan National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) at Rutgers University. *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.

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 nationally in state pre-K even at age 4.

The State of Preschool 2015: Access to Pre-K in Rhode Island

In Rhode Island, enrollment was up slightly by 72 children in 2014-2015 to serve a total of 306 4-year-olds. Despite the marginal increase, Rhode Island fell slightly in its national ranking for access to 41 among 43 states with 97 percent of 4-year-olds unable to enroll. Funding increased by nearly \$1 million in 2014-2015 and per child spending rose by more than \$1,000, ranking the state third in the nation for per child resources. The state maintained its high ranking for quality standards – meeting all 10 of NIEER's minimum quality standards benchmarks. Rhode Island's program is one of only 7 in the nation to meet all quality benchmarks that are linked to improved child outcomes.

"Rhode Island's economic future depends on early investment in its kids," said NIEER Director Steven 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. Rhode Island is a national leader for dedicating funds to ensure a quality learning experience for every child served; however, much more needs to be done if every child is to have access this opportunity. Rhode Island's kids, their families, and the entire state depend on it."

The State of Preschool 2015, 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. 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.

“Rhode Island has a high-quality state pre-K program that is expanding and has tripled in size since the data in this national report was collected. The state also invests resources to expand Head Start to serve the lowest income children. However, access to high-quality pre-K remains limited in Rhode Island. Expanding access to high-quality pre-K programs is one of the best investments we can make,” said Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT recently released *The 2016 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook*, which charts improvements and declines in the wellbeing of Rhode Island’s children. An indicator included each year is ‘State Pre-K,’ which shows that as of the current school year (2015-2016), there are 594 children enrolled (almost double the number from the previous year) and the program is projected to grow to serve 1,008 children in the upcoming school year (2016-2017). To access ‘State Pre-K’ please visit <http://bit.ly/RIStatePreK>. A local contact for this report is Katherine Linwood Chu, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, kchu@rikidscount.org, [401-351-9400 x 22](tel:401-351-9400).

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.