



## Press Release

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### **NATIONAL REPORT FINDS ACCESS TO QUALITY PRE-K IN WISCONSIN STALLS**

*Despite serving nearly 65 percent of Wisconsin 4-year-olds and increased funding, enrollment fell by 2,000 in 2014-2015 and program quality standards showed no improvement.*

**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 nationally in state pre-K even at age 4.

In Wisconsin, enrollment was down by 2,000 children, or two percent in 2014-2015. Despite this reduction, the state retained its national rank of sixth among the states, reaching 64 percent of the state's 4-year-olds. There was no movement in terms of improving quality standards – meeting just 5 of NIEER's 10 minimum quality standards benchmarks for its larger program and 8 benchmarks for the much smaller program. Wisconsin moved up one position to 26<sup>th</sup> nationally for state resources dedicated for pre-K, the result of adding \$7 million while reducing enrollment. While per child spending for 4-year-olds increased by \$221 to \$3,800, it remained well below the national average of \$4,489 and Wisconsin's national ranking of 12<sup>th</sup> a decade ago.

“Wisconsin’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 to pave the way for their success in school, on the job, and in their communities throughout the state. Wisconsin has made some progress and seen setbacks on early education. More needs to be done. Wisconsin’s kids, their families, and the 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 different findings for Wisconsin’s two pre-K programs. Wisconsin

was unable to provide average salary figures of pre-K teachers working in nonpublic centers to determine parity with those teaching pre-K in public schools earning an average \$50,020 in 2014-2015. This is about \$4,500 less than the average for K-12 teachers. Wisconsin enrolled 1,356 DLL children in pre-K during 2014-2015, 17 percent of the DLL preschool population. The state has no requirements for pre-K teachers to have specialized qualifications or training to work with DLL children as this is determined locally by programs, while the state requirements for other DLL support services vary between the state's two pre-K programs.

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 South Carolina, New York and Michigan increasing enrollment and improving quality, 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. 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.*