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

*EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE: CONTACT: Jen Fitzgerald*

*April 29, 2013 (848) 932-3138,* [*jfitzgerald@nieer.org*](mailto:jfitzgerald@nieer.org)

**New York State Pre-K Lost Support in 2012 But Declines in Other States Were Larger Says National Report**

***Enrollment Was Down and So Was Funding When Adjusted for Inflation***

*Washington, D.C. —* Across the nation, state funding for pre-K decreased by more than half a billion dollars in 2011-2012, the largest one-year drop ever, says a new study from the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER), which has tracked state pre-K since 2002.

The *State of Preschool 2012* yearbook cited two other “firsts”: After a decade of growth, enrollment in state pre-K has stalled. And despite stagnant enrollment, state funding per child fell to $3,841 — well below the $5,020 (inflation-adjusted) national average in 2001-2002.

While New York state pre-K lost some ground in 2012, those losses were far less than many other states. Even though the state enrolled 1,000 fewer children, it maintained its national ranking of 9th for enrollment of 4-year-olds. In 2002, New York ranked 5th for enrollment of this age group. New York now enrolls 44 percent of 4-year-olds.

Despite being flat-funded for 2012, the state’s ranking improved from 24th in the nation for per-child spending in 2011 to 21st in 2012. In 2002, the state ranked 11th in the nation for resources per child. When adjusted for inflation, flat funding of programs in reality translates to funding reductions. Quality remained the same for 2011 and 2012 with programs achieving 7 of NIEER’s 10 benchmarks for quality standards. New York’s 2013-2014 state budget includes $25 million for full and half-day pre-kindergarten grants, which will allow for more full-day pre-K programs across the state and additional half-day pre-K slots.

“While New York has done better than some states in the face of difficult times, the state continues to struggle in achieving its goal of providing universal access to state pre-K,” said NIEER director Steve Barnett.

“Even though the nation is emerging from the Great Recession, it is clear that the nation’s youngest learners are still bearing the brunt of the budget cuts,” Barnett said. Reductions were widespread with 27 of 40 states with pre-K programs reporting funding per child declined in 2011-2012.

The adverse consequences of declining funding were manifested in a retrenchment in program quality as well. Seven programs lost ground against benchmarks for quality standards while only three gained. Only 15 states plus the District of Columbia provided enough funding per-child to meet all 10 benchmarks for quality standards. And, only 20 percent of all children enrolled in state-funded pre-K attend those programs. More than half a million children, or 42 percent of nationwide enrollment, were served by programs that met fewer than half of NIEER’s quality standards benchmarks.

Education in the years before kindergarten plays an important role in preparing our youngest citizens for productive lives in the global economy. Yet, our nation’s public investment in their future through pre-K declined during the recent economic downturn at the very time that parents’ financial capacity to invest in their children was hardest hit. America will pay the price of that lapse for decades to come. Barnett also noted that “while the recession greatly exacerbated the decline in funding, there was already a general trend in the states toward declining funding for quality.” In this respect, President Obama’s new universal pre-K proposal is especially timely. “We have studied the President’s plan and find it provides states with strong incentives to raise quality while expanding access to pre-K. The plan will assist states already leading the way, states that lost ground during the recession, and the 10 states that still have no state-funded pre-K,” he said.

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*The National Institute for Early Education Research (*[*www.nieer.org*](http://nieer.org/)*) at the Graduate School of Education, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ, supports early childhood education policy and practice through independent, objective research.*