 Press Release

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**Rhode Island One of Four States to Achieve Highest Quality Standards Benchmarks for State Pre-K in 2012 Says National Report**

***But State Spending Levels Reduced Nearly 50 Percent***

*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 state funding for Rhode Island’s pre-K program was cut in 2011-2012, the state offset these cuts by using funding from non-state sources, adding up to $9,278 in all-reported spending per child, ranking 3rd in the nation.

The quality of Rhode Island state pre-K remains high as the state is one of only four states to achieve all 10 of NIEER’s benchmarks for quality standards. In 2011, the state was selected to receive $50 million to support early learning initiatives in the Obama administration’s highly competitive Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge. NIEER Director Steve Barnett praised Governor Chaffee’s restoration of $1.5 million in state funding for pre-K in 2012-2013 and proposed $1 million in additional funding to support pre-K expansion in 2013-2014. Rhode Island’s pre-K program is incorporated into the state school funding formula with a 10-year expansion plan.

“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.*