



## Press Release

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### **State-Funded Pre-K on Slow Road to Recovery Says National Report**

#### ***Maryland followed national trend in 2014; Goal of universal pre-k remains elusive***

*Washington, D.C.* — State funded preschool education, hard hit by the Great Recession, has turned the corner and in many states is back on an expansion track according to the national survey of the states done annually by the nonpartisan National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) at Rutgers University. For the second year in a row, NIEER's data show that, nationally speaking, the states have increased funding for pre-K.

Adjusted for inflation, state funding for pre-K increased by nearly \$120 million in 2013-2014 across all 50 states and Washington, DC. Enrollment growth also resumed, albeit modestly, with a total increase of 8,335 slots to reach its highest level recorded over the report's 12-year history. And program quality standards increased as an unprecedented seven states gained ground on NIEER's 10 benchmarks for quality standards.

Maryland's pre-K program performance paralleled the national picture in 2013-2014, showing signs of improvement for dedicating state resources to pre-K while access and quality remained largely unchanged. Maryland improved its ranking from 19<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> for state spending per child among 41 states with pre-K, greatly improved from 2002 when the state ranked 32<sup>nd</sup>. In terms of providing access and quality, however, Maryland has seemingly plateaued. Despite no change in the percent of eligible children served in 2013-2014, Maryland's ranking in access to state-funded pre-K fell from one position to 13<sup>th</sup>. Program quality standards were unchanged, meeting 8 of 10 quality standard benchmarks for consecutive years.

“We are optimistic that Maryland's leadership appears to be heading in the right direction, demonstrating its commitment to expand access to early childhood education,” said NIEER director Steven Barnett. “Increased funding for 2015 and broader income eligibility requirements intended to enroll 1,600 more children, combined with federal Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge and Preschool Development Grant awards help the state move forward. However, the state should heed the Institute of Medicine's call to require every pre-K teacher have a college degree and specialized training. And, leaders must have a much greater sense of urgency if they are to reach the goal of providing voluntary, universal pre-K in the next decade.”

“It is heartening to see state funded pre-K, once the fastest growing area in the entire education sector, back on the road to recovery,” said NIEER director Steve Barnett, “but given that the states cut half a billion dollars in funding in 2011-2012 and a number of states have yet to address those cuts, much work remains to be done.”

Joined at the press conference by U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, Barnett called on all levels of government to dedicate additional resources to preschool education in order to bridge the gap. “Unfortunately, the effects of the recession landed hardest on preschool-age children and our future prosperity depends on their future productivity,” he said.

Barnett said that in addition to adequate funding, state pre-K should have adequate quality and serve all children under 200 percent of poverty. Bold leaders from both major parties are moving some states and cities dramatically ahead, but far too many states have yet to follow. At the same time, quality preschool is becoming a right for every child in some states; other states offer their children no pre-K at all. And, as some cities move to provide preschool for all, most recently New York and Seattle, other areas of their states are left behind.

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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.*