



Press Release

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

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CONTACT: *Kirsty Clarke Brown*

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(732) 993-8051, kbrown@nieer.org

TEXAS PRE-K RANKS HIGH IN ENROLLMENT, LOW IN QUALITY *Governor Abbott Places Higher Priority on Pre-K*

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.

Texas continues to be in the top 10 states for access, ranking 9th and serving 52 percent of 4-year-olds in 2013-2014. The program also enrolled 6 percent of the state's 3-year-olds, ranking 13th for this measure. However, as the program grows in size, measures have not been taken to improve funding or ensure quality. The state ranks 29th in the nation for state spending per child, and 33rd out of 41 states with programs for spending from all sources. The program only meets 2 of NIEER's 10 quality standards benchmarks, and has no limits on class size or student-teacher ratio, which are basic standards for student learning and safety.

Governor Abbott announced during his state of the state address that preschool would be his first emergency item. Currently, there is legislation to establish an office of early learning. In addition, House Bill 4 would provide additional funding to school districts that adopt curriculum and teacher quality standards. However, problems remain in regard to finding funding to make programs full day.

“Elsewhere, 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 cities and states dramatically ahead, but far too many states have yet to follow. As some cities move to provide preschool for all, most recently New York and Seattle, other areas of their states are left behind. 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.

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.