



Press Release

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ALASKA PRE-K MEETS ALL NIEER QUALITY BENCHMARKS

Future funding remains unclear

New York, N.Y. — Total state preschool enrollment declined for the first time as states, hard hit by the Great Recession, continued to deal with its consequences in the 2012-2013 school year. And, while total funding was up slightly, more than half of states with programs continued to make cuts. Those are the conclusions of a national study conducted by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER), a nonpartisan organization at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey.

“Our nation has emerged from the recession, but preschool-age children are being left to suffer its effects,” said NIEER director Steve Barnett. “A year ago, our data showed a half-billion-dollar cut in funding for state pre-K and stalled enrollment. For 2012-2013, we find that enrollment is down and funding per child, while up slightly, remains stalled at near-historic lows,” he said.

Nationally, four thousand fewer children attended state pre-K in 2012-2013 than the previous year—the first time a decline in total enrollment has been documented since NIEER began tracking state pre-K in 2002. Of the 40 states and District of Columbia with programs, 20 cut funding and 18 increased funding by more than one percent. The increases outweighed the decreases which, coupled with reduced enrollment, resulted in a net increase of \$36 per child or \$30.6 million, nationally.

Alaska bucked the national trend, increasing enrollment slightly in its Pre-Kindergarten program in the 2012-2013 school year, in eight programs serving 345 children. The small program ranks 37th for access of the 41 states providing pre-K, but ranks 7th for state per-child spending for its strong financial commitment. The state also met all 10 of NIEER’s quality benchmarks, one of only four states to do so. However, funding beyond the end of fiscal year 2014 is uncertain. “Alaska has built a strong foundation for children, in addressing both quality and access,” said

NIEER director Steve Barnett. “Now is the time to expand on these efforts, not leave the state’s young learners behind.”

Barnett said program quality standards, which also declined in a number of states as a result of the recession, remained stalled in 2012-13. The study found one state (Ohio) gained against one quality benchmark while two (Missouri and Arizona) lost ground. More than half a million children, or 41 percent of nationwide enrollment in state pre-K, were served in programs that met fewer than half of NIEER’s 10 research-based benchmarks for quality standards.

In the aftermath of bad news nationally, some positive responses are already apparent. Local governments are developing their own plans to move ahead on early childhood education, from Boston and Cleveland to San Antonio and Seattle. A few states, including Connecticut and Maine, have made strong commitments to their existing programs while others, including Mississippi and Indiana, are beginning work on small programs for the first time. No better example can be found than New York, where the Mayor of the nation’s largest city put forward a bold proposal for universal high quality pre-K and was joined in this commitment by the Governor and state legislature. “If ever there were a time for leaders at the local, state, and national levels to unite in their efforts to provide high-quality preschool education to our next generation, this is it,” Barnett said.

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.

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