



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

MISSOURI PRE-K SUFFERS SETBACKS, IN NATIONAL STUDY

Access, Resources, and Quality Standards Fall in 2013

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.

Barnett said program quality standards, which also declined in a number of states as a result of the recession, remained stalled in 2012-2013. 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.

Missouri’s national rankings for accessibility, resources and quality standards all fell in 2012-2013. Per child spending dropped by 25 percent, with a cumulative reduction of \$1,000 over two

years. Missouri now ranks 38th among the 41 states in per child funding pre-K programs. Missouri served 10 percent fewer children than the previous year, and ranked 35th with for serving 3 percent of 4-year-olds and 21st on access for 3-year-olds. Since 2001-2012, enrollment has decreased by 2,500 children. In 2010-2011, Missouri's program met nine of NIEER's 10 quality standard benchmarks. Two years later, Missouri met only seven of these benchmarks, after first site visits in 2011-2012 and then professional development requirements were lowered in 2012-2013. "One can attribute pre-K's decline to the Great Recession for only so long before it demands action," says NIEER director Steven Barnett. "While recent commitments to restore and substantially increase funding to improve quality and access to the Missouri Preschool Project are encouraging, there is a great deal to be done to move Missouri up from the bottom ranks."

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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