



## Press Release

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### **NEW JERSEY PRE-K: STRONGER THAN THE STORM, BUT WILL THERE BE A POST-SANDY RECOVERY?**

#### *Past Commitments Maintained, but Promised Expansions Have Been Delayed*

*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.

Recovering from effects of the Great Recession, New Jersey continued to be a national leader in its dedication to the quality of pre-K education. New Jersey was one of 18 states to increase state

per-child spending in 2012-2013, ranking 2<sup>nd</sup> in the nation behind newly included District of Columbia. New Jersey also increased enrollment to serve 28 percent of 4-year-olds, but still ranked just 17<sup>th</sup> among 41 states with state-funded pre-K programs at this age, while ranking 2<sup>nd</sup> for percent of 3-year-olds enrolled. Quality standards held, as each of New Jersey's three programs met at least 8 of 10 NIEER benchmarks for quality standards. However, New Jersey has failed to move forward with the preschool expansion called for by existing law. With its new federal Early Learning Challenge Grant, the Garden State should be poised to make real progress for the first time in many years. "While New Jersey continues to rank high for the resources and quality it provides to pre-K, the state has failed to keep its promise to broaden access to its highly effective preschool programs," remarked NIEER director Steven Barnett, adding that the issue deserves a re-commitment as the state emerges from the recession.

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.

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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.*

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