



Press Release

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ALASKA PRE-K HAS HIGH QUALITY STANDARDS, UNCERTAIN FUTURE *Funding Prospects Look Bleak*

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.

The prospects for state funded preschool looked bright in 2009-2010 when Alaska launched its pilot program. That program met all 10 of NIEER's benchmarks for quality standards and has continued to do so since the program shifted from pilot status in 2011-2012. A scheduled endowment change and re-competition for state grants occurred in fiscal year 2013, and an increase of \$800,000 in funding allowed for expansion to eight programs serving 345 children in the 2012-2013 school year.

However, this increase was removed in 2014. Although pre-K funding was slated for closure in 2014-2015, supporters were successful in obtaining grant extensions for two years. In March, the House shot down operating budget amendments that would have added funds back into the state funded pre-K program, which ranks 39th in access for 4-year-olds. "It is unfortunate that Alaska, after doing the hard work of establishing a high-quality program, appears ready to squander that effort, leaving the overwhelming majority of its youngest learners with no state-funded pre-K," said NIEER director Steve Barnett.

"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 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.