



## Press Release

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May 11, 2015

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### **State-Funded Pre-K on Slow Road to Recovery Says National Report**

#### ***Colorado Program Shows Some Improvement in Resources and Access While Quality Stalls***

*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 Colorado Preschool Program's performance paralleled the national picture in 2013-2014, showing signs of improvement for dedicating state resources to pre-K, while access and quality remained largely unchanged. Its ranking improved slightly from 37<sup>th</sup> to 35<sup>th</sup> for state spending per child among 41 states with pre-K, increasing by 5 percent, yet still down from 2002 when it ranked 23<sup>rd</sup>. In terms of providing access and quality, however, Colorado has seemingly plateaued. Despite a slight increase in the percent of children served, Colorado continued to rank 22<sup>nd</sup> nationally with only one in five 4-year-olds enrolled, and below its 2002 ranking of 14<sup>th</sup>. Program quality has stalled as well, meeting 6 of 10 benchmarks for consecutive years, somewhat improved from a decade ago when it met only 4. "The actions seen here could be the first small step to improving quality and access for Colorado's young children, but overall the state's program remains well below average," said NIEER director Steven Barnett.

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

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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.*