



Press Release

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Kentucky Pre-K Loses Ground in 2014 Says National Report

Enrollment and Funding Fall for Quality Program; Future Brightens Slightly

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.

Improvements seen nationally were not evident for Kentucky's Preschool Program in 2013-2014. Kentucky served fewer children in 2013-2014 than in the previous year, to rank 17th among 41 states with publicly funded pre-K, down from 16th the previous year and well below 2002 when it ranked 7th. State resources also slid significantly as Kentucky spent 5 percent less per child in 2013-2014 than the prior year, resulting in the state falling six positions in a national ranking to 30th. Quality standards for Kentucky's pre-K program remained high despite these cuts, as it continued to meet 9 of 10 quality standards benchmarks. In 2013-2014, only 11 of 41 state programs attained this level.

"Kentucky certainly felt the adverse impact of the Great Recession in 2013-2014. While retaining its commitment to high standards, and we've seen little improvement in the state during the past decade. We are optimistic that the worst is behind however, with opportunities presented by the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge, and recent legislative action to increase state funding and broaden eligibility requirements allowing an additional 5,000 children to be served next year, Kentucky appears to be turning the corner," 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.

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.