



## 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**

#### ***Maine Parallels National Trend as Future Brightens for Program***

*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.

Maine's Public Preschool Program struggled in 2013-2014 to pull out of the grip of the Great Recession. It served 3 percent fewer children than the previous year, seeing its national ranking for 4-year-old enrollment drop from 13th to 14th. While state funding per child rose 17 percent in this period to improve slightly its national ranking for dedicated state resources, Maine continued to rank among the lowest nationally (33rd of 41) for state funds devoted to pre-K. Maine also saw its quality rating fall, meeting 5 of 10 research-based quality standards benchmarks when it was determined program monitoring requirements were not set in policy.

"Maine demonstrates how the Great Recession adversely impacted young children and state pre-K programs, and the state now needs to increase its support," said NIEER Director Steven Barnett. "Looking ahead, the future appears brighter thanks to the state's approval of voluntary universal pre-K expansion in 2015-2016, funded by casino revenue, as well as new policies strengthening program quality and the recent receipt of a competitive federal Preschool Development Grant. The pieces are finally falling into place for Maine's young children."

"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.*