



Press Release

73 Easton Avenue • New Brunswick, NJ 08901 • Phone 848.932.4350 • Fax 732.932.4360 • www.nieer.org

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CONTACT: *Kirsty Clarke Brown*

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(732) 993-8051, kbrown@nieer.org

OKLAHOMA MAINTAINING HIGH STANDARDS AND ACCESS TO PRE-K *Continuing with What Works*

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.

Oklahoma is one of only four states to enroll more than 70 percent of 4-year-olds, ranking 4th in the nation for access to state pre-K for that age group. The state ranks 26th for spending per child. When all sources of spending are considered, the ranking for resources rises to 9th in the nation. Oklahoma's program achieves 8 of NIEER's 10 benchmarks for quality standards. No major changes occurred during the 2013-2014 school year, and none are anticipated for 2014-2015.

"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 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."

Governor Mary Fallin said: "Oklahoma is a national leader in early childhood education and we are honored to receive recognition for our efforts. The real winners, however, are Oklahoma children, who are getting a head start on the learning and cognitive skills they need to succeed in kindergarten and onwards."

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.