



Press Release

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

Program quality and resources improve in Oregon; enrollment stagnant

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.

Oregon's pre-K program showed some signs of improvement. Quality standards for Oregon's pre-K program, a model for collaboration between state and Head Start efforts, improved in 2013-2014 to its highest level ever, meeting 9 out of 10 benchmarks when assistant teacher qualifications were raised. The state improved one position to rank 4th for state spending per child among 41 states with state-funded pre-K. Despite this ranking, state per-child spending has plummeted more than \$2,000, or 20 percent when adjusted for inflation, since 2001-2002. Oregon continues to rank near the bottom for access by enrolling less than 10 percent of its 4-year-olds, ranking 31 out of 41 states.

"Oregon presents a mixed story in our recent report but it is nonetheless encouraging," said NIEER Director Steven Barnett. "The state made gains in quality and dedicating resources, though it was unfortunate the needle didn't budge for expanding enrollment. We remain hopeful that Oregon's federal Early Learning Challenge Grant and legislative efforts to expand state pre-K to public and private providers with qualified, fairly compensated teachers will provide quality early learning opportunities for many more of the state's 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.

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.