



Press Release

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

For Immediate Release: May 12, 2016

Contact: Michelle Ramjug, mramjug@nieer.org, 848-932-4350.

TEXAS SERVED FEWER KIDS IN STATE PRE-K IN 2015

Quality Standards Remain Low as Enrollment Dropped Off

[New York, NY]—Many 3- and 4-year olds still lack access across the nation to high-quality preschool education despite modest gains in enrollment, quality, and funding, according to an [annual report](#) by the nonpartisan National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) at Rutgers University. While several states, including New York, made significant progress through a concerted effort to increase enrollment and funding and improve quality, progress is slow and uneven nationally and quality standards are particularly low in some of the nation's largest states like California, Florida and Texas. Despite the relatively good news, this year the rate of progress is so slow that it will take 150 years for the nation to reach 75 percent enrollment in state pre-K even at age 4.

In Texas, enrollment in the Texas Public School Prekindergarten initiative was 219,488, down by 6,738 children in 2014-2015. Texas also maintained a consistently low level of quality – again meeting only 2 of NIEER's 10 minimum quality standards benchmarks and the state continues to set no limits for class size or teacher to child ratios. Texas continues to be in the top 10 states nationally for access, serving 48 percent of 4-year-olds in 2014-2015. The program also enrolls 7 percent of the state's 3-year-olds, ranking 12th for this measure. State funding was reduced in 2014-2015 by \$12.3 million (2 percent). In 2015, the Texas Legislature passed House Bill 4 to increase the quality of the Texas Public School Prekindergarten programs, which included a \$118 appropriation over two years. Funds are to be implemented in the 2016-2017 school year through grants to districts and Charter Schools to improve pre-K quality.

"Texas is taking a step forward with the new grant program, but this report is a reminder that we have much more work to do to ensure kids are prepared to succeed in school," said Stephanie Rubin, CEO of Texans Care for Children, a statewide nonprofit organization that works on multiple children's policy issues. "To make sure Texas children and taxpayers are getting the most out of pre-k, state leaders need to ensure we have manageable class sizes and the other hallmarks of effective pre-k programs. A smaller class gives teachers an opportunity to work with kids in small groups or even one-on-one to make sure they have a chance to learn their letters, play number games, and engage in conversations with new vocabulary words. Fortunately, we have a strong bipartisan consensus in Texas that strengthening pre-k is a priority."

NIEER Director Steve Barnett echoed that sentiment. “Ensuring that every child has access to high-quality preschool can help pave the way for their success in school, on the job, and in Texas communities. Kids, their families, and the state depend on it.”

The State of Preschool Report for the 2014-2015 school year, which includes objective state-by-state profiles and rankings, indicates that urgent action is needed from lawmakers at all levels of government to ensure that every child – particularly those from low-income families – have access to high-quality early education. For the first year, NIEER also analyzed states’ early education workforce and Dual Language Learner (DLL) policies, which reveal that Texas has few policies in place to support the pre-K workforce or DLLs. However, Texas does require that pre-K teachers in public settings are paid on par with K-3 teachers.

The report finds that total state spending on pre-K programs increased by 10 percent, or \$553 million, since the previous year, bringing state spending in 2014-2015 to over \$6.2 billion. The number of children served by state-funded pre-K served increased by 37,167 in 2014-2105, bringing the total to almost 1.4 million children – the largest number of children ever served by state-funded pre-K. With an average of \$4,489, states also made one of the most significant increases in spending per child in recent history.

Despite these gains, the report’s findings underscore that those states like California, Florida, and Texas with the largest populations of young children are falling behind—they were among the states that met the fewest quality standards benchmarks, and Texas and Florida also reduced enrollment and spending in 2014-2015. Nationally, enrollment has risen by just one percentage point for both 4- and 3-year olds over five years. The sluggish pace of change disproportionately impacts low-income families.

“We’re encouraged to see several states increasing in enrollment and improving quality, but access to high-quality pre-K in the United States remains low and highly unequal,” said Barnett. “Expanding access to quality pre-K programs is one of the best investments we can make, and it’s critical that we raise and standardize salaries for early education teachers and have strong Dual language Learner policies in states with large Hispanic populations. State governments should increase and stabilize funding for pre-K and raise standards for the benefit of all children.”

The State of Preschool report reviews state-funded pre-K programs on 10 benchmarks of quality standards, including the presence of a qualified instructor, class size, teacher-to-student ratio, presence of an assistant, and length of instruction per day.

For more information on *The State of Preschool 2015* yearbook and detailed state-by-state breakdowns on quality benchmarks, enrollment, and funding, please click [here](#).

###

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.