



Press Release

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For Immediate Release: May 12, 2016

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WASHINGTON MAKES GAINS IN PRE-K FUNDING AND ENROLLMENT

Even So, Only 8 Percent of 4-Year-Olds Are Served by the State Program

[New York, NY]—Many 3- and 4-year olds across the nation still lack access 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 for low 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 Washington, the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) enrolled 10,091 children, up 1350 in 2014-2015, serving 8 percent of the state's 4-year-olds. Washington maintained consistent progress in terms of quality standards— meeting 9 of NIEER's minimum quality standards benchmarks. As of 2014-2015, ECEAP was required to participate in the state's quality rating and improvement system, called Early Achievers. In 2014-2105, the state invested a total of \$83 million in ECEAP, with approximately \$76 million of these funds coming from state dollars from the state general fund and the "opportunity pathways account," which is derived from lottery revenue.

"Washington's economic future depends on early investment in our kids," said NIEER Director Steve Barnett. "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 Washington communities. Our kids, their families, and our 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 policies, which reveal that Washington is one of 14 states that can report the home language of every pre-K student. However, Washington does not require pre-K teachers to have a Bachelor's degree, nor does it provide salary parity between pre-K and K-3 teachers.

The report finds that total state spending on pre-K programs for the nation as a whole 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 increased by 37,167 in 2014-2015, bringing the total to almost 1.4 million children – the largest number of children ever served by state-funded pre-K. With an average rate 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.”

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](#).

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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.