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## **NIEER RESEARCH URGES STATE PRESCHOOLS TO FOCUS ON 'THINKING SKILLS' TO ACHIEVE LONG-TERM GAINS**

### **Study Examines Pre-K in AR, CA, MI, NJ, NM, OK, SC and WV**

*New Brunswick, NJ* – A new study by the National Institute for Early Education Research finds a variety of state-funded pre-K programs prepare children for kindergarten but recommends states raise classroom quality to encourage deeper language development leading to greater long-term gains.

[“Prekindergarten Effects on Early Learning at Kindergarten Entry: An Analysis of Eight State Programs”](#) found participation in these preschool programs resulted, on average, in broad gains in children’s learning at kindergarten entry in literacy, math and language. Literacy improvements – recognizing letters, for example – were almost uniformly large. Estimated effects on math were moderate and estimated effects on language (vocabulary, comprehension) were smallest.

“We studied a diverse array of public preschool programs and they all produced large short-term effects on the simplest, easiest to acquire skills,” said NIEER Founder Steven Barnett, lead co-author of the report. “But on average programs had much more modest effects on language acquisition; in some states estimated language effects were near zero.”

The pattern raises concerns, Dr. Barnett noted, because language development in the preschool years is important and large boosts to deep learning in language and math are more likely to lead to long-term gains in achievement and school success.

Today, 43 states home to more than 96% of the nation’s 3- and 4-year-olds provide some form of publicly funded preschool. The report is based on a diverse sample of state pre-K programs from every region of the country, including Arkansas, California, Michigan, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oklahoma, South Carolina and West Virginia.

“Our study adds to the evidence that public pre-K can improve learning and development for both disadvantaged and general populations, at least in the short term,” the report states. “It also raises concerns about the need to improve quality. State pre-K program effectiveness cannot simply be assumed but should be measured regularly with a goal of continuous improvement.”

“States should not rely on assessment of narrow literacy skills alone...,” the report states. “Monitoring and evaluation of pre-K program effectiveness should...include language, mathematics, and other measures predictive of long-term achievement and school success.”

The study was published online in [AERA Open!](#) NIEER co-authors include Dr. Barnett, Kwanghee Jung, Allison Friedman-Krauss, Ellen C. Frede, Milagros Nores.

Founded in 2002, NIEER promotes early learning and development through research informing effective, evidence-based policy. NIEER is a unit of the Rutgers University Graduate School of Education.