



Press Release

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ACCESS TO QUALITY PRE-K IN WEST VIRGINIA OUTPACES OTHER STATES

West Virginia Makes Gains in Quality Standards to Join States at the Top

[NEW YORK, NY]—Many 3- and 4-year-olds 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 low in some of the nation's largest states such as 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 West Virginia, enrollment was 16,622, down by 212 children in 2014-2015. However, the state serves 68 percent of 4-year-olds in the state and ranks 5th in the nation in access for 4-year-olds. West Virginia also saw gains in terms of quality standards – meeting all 10 of NIEER's minimum quality standards benchmarks with the new requirement for assistant teachers to have at least a Child Development Associate credential. Only 5 other states meet all 10. The passage of SB 146 (2016) helps move West Virginia forward in the provision of equitable services for all children, serving as a model for other states by requiring a minimum of 25 hours of weekly instruction. toward its goal of universal pre-K access and increases the hours of weekly instruction, serving as a model for other states.

"West Virginia recognizes that the state's economic future depends on early investment in its youngest citizens," 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 West Virginia communities," he said.

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 West Virginia stands out as a leader in policies to support DLLs. Teachers are required to have qualifications specifically related to DLLs, recruitment and enrollment materials must be in the family's home language, and the state provides professional development around DLLs. West Virginia has more work to do regarding policies to support the pre-K workforce. While state policy does mandate salary and benefit parity between pre-K teachers who are

employed by the LEA and primary school teachers, it is not mandated for those pre-k teachers who are employed by a collaborative (Head Start or childcare) program .

The report finds that total state spending on pre-K programs across the nation 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 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](#).

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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.