

EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE:  
May 4, 2010

CONTACT: 732-932-4350 (w)  
Steve Barnett 732-221-8002(c) or  
Carol Shipp 732-672-5292 (c)

## Recession Hits State Preschool Programs; More Cuts Expected Annual Survey Shows Drop in Spending Per Child

Washington, May 4 - Preschool-age children across the country are feeling the impact of the recession as states cut back on early education programs, according to the annual survey of state-funded preschool programs.

“We are seeing a pause in the rapid increase in state preschool programs that we have seen in the last several years,” said W. Steven Barnett, co-director of the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) at Rutgers University and author of the report. “In some states enrollment has been cut back to the lowest levels in many years. Other states have cut funding and quality.

“The immediate future of pre-K seems much more perilous than past trends might suggest,” Barnett said. “State budgets will more fully bear the brunt of the recession in 2010 and 2011.” Looking ahead, one state, New Mexico, already has cut pre-k spending for 2011 and cuts are being considered in 11 states including Florida, Illinois, Wisconsin, New York and Arizona. In Arizona, the governor has proposed cutting the program entirely. More cuts may be coming as state legislatures cope with budget shortfalls.

NIEER released its annual report, *The State of Preschool 2009*, at a news conference here today. The survey ranks all states on enrollment in state-funded preschool programs, the amount states spent per child, and how many of NIEER’s 10 quality benchmarks a state met for the 08-09 school year.

The report showed that the average amount states spent per child, when adjusted for inflation, declined from \$4,179 in 2008 to \$4,143 in 2009, ending an upward trend. Real spending per child declined in 24 of 38 states with programs.

Total enrollment and spending increased, but not in every state. In nine states—Arizona, Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, Missouri, and Oklahoma—enrollment actually declined. And 12 states—Alaska, Hawaii, Idaho, Indiana, Mississippi, Montana, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Utah and Wyoming—provided no state-funded preschool programs.

Other key findings showed modest growth in some areas and vast discrepancies between states:

- Enrollment nationally increased by over 81,000. More than 1.2 million children attended state-funded preschool education, over 1 million at age 4.
- Total funding for State Pre-K rose to more than \$5 billion. The increase in state funding was \$446 million, about half the increase of the previous year.
- Twenty-three of 38 states with state-funded preschool failed to fully meet NIEER benchmarks for teacher qualifications and 26 failed to meet the benchmark for assistant teacher qualifications. Seven states had programs that met fewer than half of the benchmarks for quality standards. States failing to meet most benchmarks included three of the four states with the largest number of children —California, Texas, and Florida.
- Texas sets no maximum class sizes or limits on staff-child ratios. California and Maine had limits on staff-child ratios but no class size limit. Most other states limited classes to 20 or fewer children with a teacher and an assistant.
- Oklahoma remained the only state where almost every child had the opportunity to attend a quality preschool education program at age 4. Oklahoma was rated as the leader of the top 10 states in the country. The others were Arkansas, West Virginia, New Jersey, Maryland, Georgia, North Carolina, Illinois, Louisiana and Tennessee.
- Enrollment of 3-year-olds continued to rise, though in very small numbers. Illinois, Vermont and New Jersey were clear leaders in serving children at age 3.

“With more families facing economic hardship, publicly supported preschool is more important than ever,” Barnett said. He cited new research published in the journal *Child Development* showing that low family income has disproportionately more negative effects on preschool-age children than on older children and adolescents. Those effects include higher school dropout rates, lower income as adults, and greater adult health problems. “We need to get the recession babies on a progression path so they don’t carry the scars for a lifetime,” Barnett said.

He called on the federal government to place greater emphasis on providing aid to states for educationally effective pre-K programs.

“As pure economic stimulus it is hard to beat pre-K programs,” Barnett said. “Pre-K is a high-return investment in our children’s future that will help pay for the deficits we run now. In the meantime it generates jobs in local communities, with virtually none of the money spent on imported goods or services.

“The alternative of cheap child care with low standards may reach more families, but it is bad policy, doing little to improve child development or the quality of our future workforce.”

#####

*The National Institute for Early Education Research (www.nieer.org), a unit of the Graduate School of Education, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ, supports early childhood education policy by providing objective, nonpartisan information based on research. NIEER is supported through grants from The Pew Charitable Trusts and others.*