

Idaho's Children Shut Out of Preschool Education

Federal Program Called for to help States Bolster State Pre-K

New Brunswick, NJ, April 8— Idaho is one of only 12 states not providing preschool education, according to *The State of Preschool 2008* released today. The annual report produced by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) ranks all 50 states on the percentage of children served and spending per child for 2007-2008. It also compares the number of quality benchmarks met.

Idaho does not have a state-funded preschool initiative that is funded, controlled and directed by the state with a predominately educational component serving preschool aged children. As a consequence, most children from lower and middle-income families are denied access to early education opportunities to help them succeed in school and life.

The 11 other states not providing preschool education are Alaska, Hawaii, Indiana, Mississippi, Montana, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Utah and Wyoming.

Nationally, the annual survey of state-funded preschool programs showed impressive expansion in enrollment and spending. However, it cautioned that the recession may reverse the trend, curtailing early education opportunities for children in lower and middle-income families, in those states which fund preschool education.

Key findings include:

- Enrollment increased by more than 108,000 children. More than 1.1 million children attended state-funded preschool education, 973,178 at age 4 alone.
- Thirty-three of 38 states with state-funded programs increased enrollment.

- Based on NIEER's Quality Standards Checklist, nine states improved the quality of their preschool programs. Only one fell back.

- State pre-K funding rose to almost \$4.6 billion; from all reported sources to \$5.2 billion, an increase of nearly \$1 billion (23 percent) from 2007.

- There was a decline in the number of states providing sufficient funding to meet NIEER's quality benchmarks.

Based at Rutgers University, NIEER has produced an annual report on state preschool programs since 2002.

Due to declining state revenues, the immediate future of state-funded preschool is uncertain. Generally, expenditures on pre-K are discretionary and easier to cut than expenditures for K-12 education and other programs.

NIEER Director Steve Barnett said states that fund pre-K are considering cutting enrollment, reducing program standards, and postponing expansion plans even with the availability of new federal stimulus funds.

Of 38 states with state-funded preschool, cuts are likely in at least nine.

“A federal initiative is needed to support early learning and development,” said Barnett. “We propose that the federal government commit to doubling growth in state pre-K while raising quality standards so that by 2020 all 4-year-olds in America will have access to a good education.”

To do this, the federal government should match state spending with up to \$2,500 for each enrolled child in state pre-K programs meeting basic quality standards. The federal government also should facilitate increased integration of child care, Head Start, and state pre-K.

Research shows that high-quality pre-K can help improve the educational success of all children, decrease dropout rates and crime and delinquency, and improve economic productivity and health.

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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.