

National Group Blasts Florida Again

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A report released by the National Institute for Early Education Research ranks Florida second to last in Pre-K Quality and Spending.

Yet another report blasts the overall quality of Florida's pre-kindergarten program despite the efforts of advocates and the dedication of a growing number of providers committed to high standards in their programs.

Aimed squarely at policy-makers responsible for setting the standards in Florida statute, and the executive branch and their counterparts which have consistently resisted efforts to raise the bar, the National Institute for Early Education Research ([NIEER](#)) ranks Florida second to last, once again. The report states, "Children in Georgia or Alabama will have access to a program that meets eight or 10 of the NIEER quality benchmarks, respectively, whereas programs in neighboring Florida are required to meet only four of the benchmarks."

Somewhat lost in the statistics are the faces of children behind the facts. Not providing each of the 133,846 four-year-olds a high quality pre-k education compromises their learning potential with all the human and financial costs to come.

The quality benchmarks established by NIEER are based on brain science backed up by convincing research, and not on political ideology or sociological rhetoric.

Meeting the quality standards and requiring a bachelor degreed teacher in each pre-k classroom, as is done in Alabama, North Carolina, Oklahoma and Texas to name a few, would improve Florida's readiness rates, which fell by 4% in the past year. This would result in subsequent years in reducing the kindergarten through fifth grade failure rate, which is shockingly high.

The financial benefits are astounding. The annual cost to increase the quality of Florida's pre-kindergarten teachers according to a fiscal impact statement provided recently by the Agency for Workforce Innovation hovers around \$60-million, or \$276-million LESS than the ANNUAL cost of school non-promotion in the elementary years. Long term costs of NOT PROVIDING high quality pre-k are projected to exceed \$800,000,000.

Children taught by bachelor degreed teachers experienced educational gains in print, math and reading up to 70% higher than those taught by lesser degreed personnel.

These results - and their life-long impact on children - clearly move the debate to a level of fiscal and moral imperative.

Highlights of NIEER Press Release: [The State of Preschool 2008](#)

Florida's Voluntary Prekindergarten program ranks second highest in the nation for access, but the state ranks close to the bottom for funding provided and quality benchmarks met.

Florida enrolls 61 percent of the state's 4-year-olds, trailing only Oklahoma for the percentage of children enrolled. However, with funding levels at \$2,500 per child - well below the national average of \$4,061 per child - the state ranks 34th out of the 38 states providing preschool education (Children's Campaign Editor Note: Florida's current reimbursement rate is \$2,190 for summer and \$2,575 for school year program.)

Florida joins California and Texas in having the largest populations of children and serving the most children in pre-K, but meeting the fewest quality benchmarks.

Nationally, there was an 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.

Across the country, the annual report showed an overall increase in state-funded programs by more than 108,000 children for 2008, which brought enrollment nationally to more than 1.1 million children in the 38 states that operate programs. Spending on public preschool rose to almost \$4.6 billion.

Due to the economy and declining state revenues, however, the immediate future of state-funded preschool is uncertain. In most states, expenditures on pre-K are entirely discretionary and therefore easier to cut than expenditures for K-12 education and other programs.

The report recommended a new federal initiative to help states increase pre-K enrollment rates and meet higher levels of quality.