

Contact: Chris Beakey cbeakey@americasedge.org

COALITION OF 1,000 BUSINESS LEADERS CALLS FOR QUALITY PRESCHOOL EXPANSION TO DRIVE ECONOMIC GROWTH

Data in NIEER State Preschool Yearbook is Cause for Alarm

(WASHINGTON, DC) ReadyNation/America's Edge, a coalition of more than 1,000 business leaders from across the country, is calling for an unprecedented expansion of quality preschool for children from low- and moderate-income families.

ReadyNation founder Dr. Rob Dugger made the announcement at the release of the annual *State of Preschool* report from the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER). He voiced strong concerns about the economic impact of weak enrollment in public, private, and church preschool programs, cuts in funding for many of those programs, and the fact that more than 500,000 children are in programs that meet few quality standards.

"The most important product America produces is ready-for-life young adults," said Dugger. "They are the key to U.S. competitiveness and productivity. Science is clear that the skills children learn in preschool improve their prospects for success. This year's NIEER report is a warning of how we're crippling ourselves economically by not getting more children into preschool now. We're talking about fewer high school graduates, fewer young people prepared for life, and a widening of a skills gap that's already hobbling business growth."

Release of the NIEER report occurred the day before a Senate mark-up of the bipartisan *Strong Start for America's Children Act*, which would provide states with significant resources for creating, strengthening, and expanding quality private, church, and public preschool programs. It comes at a time of rising bipartisan support for quality preschool, with Republican and Democratic governors of 25 states proposing or signing into law significant expansions of preschool programs in 2013 alone.

Dugger and NIEER Director Steve Barnett emphasized the need to ensure all children are in high-quality programs, with teachers who have bachelor's degrees, small classes, age-appropriate curricula and other factors tied to success. The *Strong Start for America's Children Act* will support state preschool programs that incorporate these qualities.

Dugger, a retired partner in the hedge fund Tudor Investment Corporation, emphasized numerous recent ReadyNation/America's Edge reports that spotlighted early learning programs in dozens of states, including Pennsylvania, Illinois, Kentucky, Maine, New York, North Carolina and Washington.

(more)

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The range of benefits from quality preschool is extensive, and can include:

- Increases in pre-math and pre-literacy skills
- Reductions in the need for special education and the number of children held back in higher grades
- Higher high school graduation rates
- Higher lifetime earnings

Dugger also cited immediate economic benefits of quality preschool programs, which generate roughly \$2 in local sales for every \$1 invested. (Click here for research details on several states, including California, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Michigan, Missouri, Montana, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Washington, and Wyoming: <http://www.americasedge.org/research/>)

“The good news about this year’s report is that several cities, including Boston, Cleveland, San Antonio, and Seattle, are making major commitments to quality early childhood education,” said Dr. Barnett. “Several states, including Mississippi and Indiana, are developing programs for the first time. If ever there were a time for local, state and national levels to unite in their efforts to provide quality preschool, this is it.”

2013 State of Preschool Highlights (Full report is at www.nieer.org)

- Total state preschool enrollment declined for the first time, as states continued to struggle with challenges brought on by the Great Recession.
- More than half of states with preschool programs cut funding to them.
- More than 500,000 children were served in programs that met fewer than half of the quality standards benchmarks.
- Across the nation, 28 percent of 4-year-olds were enrolled in state-funded pre-K programs.

ReadyNation/America’s Edge is a membership organization of more than 1,000 business leaders who work to strengthen businesses and the economy through proven investments in children and youth.

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.

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