

PEW REPORT APPLAUDS RHODE ISLAND LAWMAKERS FOR INVESTING IN HIGH-QUALITY PRE-K

New Program is Important Step Toward Educational Success & Economic Recovery

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Although Rhode Island faced nearly a 20 percent budget shortfall, it became one of two states to approve new pre-k programs, according to a state-by-state analysis by Pre-K Now, a campaign of the Pew Center on the States. The new pilot program removes Rhode Island from the “pre-k wilderness” where only ten states remain without publicly-funded pre-k.

“The approval of Rhode Island’s demonstration project shows that lawmakers on both sides of the aisle believe that early learning is a vital part of the state’s educational success and economic recovery,” said Marci Young, project director of Pre-K Now. “We hope these first pre-k classes are an indication of continuous support for pre-k programs in the upcoming years.”

The non-partisan annual report, “Votes Count: Legislative Action on Pre-K Fiscal Year 2010,” evaluates state budgets to determine which legislatures count voluntary, high-quality pre-k among their top education reform strategies. Using this information, Americans can determine whether their elected leaders are committing the resources necessary to develop the successful students and workers central to economic recovery.

Even as they confronted large budget gaps of up to 35 percent, twenty-nine states and the District of Columbia chose to increase or hold steady funding for pre-k programs in the coming fiscal year. “Votes Count” also sheds light on one particular funding strategy for early education – the school funding formula. States that include pre-k in their school funding formula allocate per-child funding for 4 year olds based on enrollment, just as they do for K-12 schools.

Rhode Island lawmakers approved the governor’s \$700,000 funding recommendation for a small pre-k program that includes program delivery in both public and private settings and features research-based quality measures, particularly a bachelor’s degree requirement for teachers. This new demonstration project will mean an overall increase in state early education investments of 50 percent. In addition to the four classrooms funded in the state budget, two school districts have agreed to fund three additional classrooms with \$450,000 in Title I funds from the stimulus bill.

Highlights of this year’s analysis include:

- Twenty-three states and the District of Columbia increased or are projected to increase pre-k investments by a total of more than \$187 million.
 - Thirteen legislatures increased investment in existing programs by nearly \$130 million: Alabama, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Kansas, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oregon, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia.
 - Two states that previously had no state pre-k programs, approved pilot initiatives: Alaska and Rhode Island.
 - Nine states and the District of Columbia anticipate increases through the school funding formula (Texas is included in this group as well but counted only once in the tally of 23 states with increased investments).
- Six states maintained investments at FY09 levels: Delaware, Kentucky, Minnesota, Missouri Nevada and Pennsylvania.
- Among the states suffering the 10 worst budget shortfalls (measured as a percentage of the budget), only Connecticut and New York approved a cut to early education programs.

- Ten states decreased funding: Connecticut, Illinois, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, South Carolina and Washington.
- Ohio's cut is estimated to deny pre-k to the largest number of children, at least 12,000.
- Arizona had not finalized its pre-k budget at press time.

Pre-k is one of the most well-researched public education strategies of the last forty years. The vast body of evidence shows that quality early learning helps children succeed in school and in life, and results in savings to states for every dollar invested. Children who complete quality pre-k programs are more academically and socially prepared when they enter school, less likely to be held back or need special education services, and more likely to complete high school and contribute to their community as adults. For more details about “Votes Count,” please visit www.pewcenteronthestates.org/preknow.

About the Pew Center on the States and Pre-K Now

Pre-K Now, a campaign of the Pew Center on the States, collaborates with advocates and policymakers to lead a movement toward high-quality, voluntary pre-kindergarten for all three and four year olds.

The Pew Center on the States (www.pewcenteronthestates.org), a division of The Pew Charitable Trusts, identifies and advocates effective policy approaches to critical issues facing the states. The Pew Charitable Trusts is driven by the power of knowledge to solve today’s most challenging problems. Pew applies a rigorous, analytical approach to improve public policy, inform the public and stimulate civic life.

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