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Date: Nov. 27, 2013
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National analysis shows states increasing investment, emphasis on early education in 2013

DENVER – States are increasingly focusing their education policies and funding on their youngest learners, according to a national analysis of 2013 legislative policy changes by the Education Commission of the States (ECS).

Highlights of a 50-state scan examining changes in policy for preschool through grade 3 include:

- Hawaii and Mississippi established their first statewide preschool programs, increasing to 41 the number of states providing public funds for programs serving 4-year-olds
- Another state required the retention of students struggling to read proficiently by grade 3, bringing to 15 the number of states passing similar literacy laws in the past two years
- Funding for preschool programs increased for a second year, with states introducing new scholarship programs or re-allocating dollars used for K-12 efforts

Examples of funding changes include Minnesota, where state leaders created a preschool scholarship program for low-income families, and Texas, where dollars saved in a three-year high school pilot can be used to add preschool slots.

Bruce Atchison, director of the Early Learning Institute at ECS, said the increased attention to grades P-3 may be particularly notable as states emerge from the national recession and implement K-12 reforms such as new standards and assessments.

“State policymakers are cautious with their spending,” Atchison said, “and the fact they are choosing to invest in early learning suggests they see it as a vital component in producing stronger educational outcomes.”

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About ECS

ECS is the only nationwide, nonpartisan organization that works directly with governors, legislators, chief state school officers, higher education officials, and other leaders across all areas of education, from pre-K to college and the workforce. Since 1965, we have tracked policy, translated research, provided unbiased advice, and created opportunities for state policymakers to learn from one another. ECS is located in Denver and maintains the nation’s most extensive clearinghouse on education policy.

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