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Contact:

Ashley Davison, NIEER, adaviosn@nieer.org, (848) 932-3142 (o), (609) 969-1587 (m)

Adam Muhlendorf, Longleaf Strategies, adam@longleafstrategies.com, (334) 625-0175 (o), (202) 641-6216 (m)

Ohio Seeks to Rise from Bottom Half of National Preschool Rankings

National report says it's a "time to choose," as states have bounced back unevenly from the pandemic when it comes to preschool enrollment and quality

NEW BRUNSWICK, N.J. - A new national report released today ranks Ohio 36th in the nation for preschool enrollment for four-year-olds and 26th for three-year-olds.

The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) today released its annual *State of Preschool* report, which tracks preschool enrollment, funding, and quality across states. The 2023 State of Preschool Yearbook found that, in the 2022-2023 school year:

- Ohio served 11% of four-year-olds and 2% of three-year-olds in state-funded preschool, for a total combined enrollment of 18,000 (an increase of 1,268 from the prior year).
- State spending totaled \$72,000,000, up \$585,889 (1%), adjusted for inflation, since last year.
- State spending per child equaled \$4,000 in 2022-2023, down \$268 from 2021-2022, adjusted for inflation.
- Ohio met 5 of 10 research-based quality standards benchmarks for minimum quality recommended by NIEER.

Recently, Ohio leaders have made bold moves to expand access to quality preschool – actions that should improve Ohio's preschool enrollment rankings in next year's report. In August of 2023, Ohio Governor Mike DeWine announced that Ohio's preschool program will serve an additional 14,901 students from low-income families due to a \$122 million increase in state funding over the biennium. In addition to the expansion, per-pupil funding for the program is rising to \$4,250, an increase of \$250 per child. This is the first increase in the per-pupil allocation since 2009.

"Children only get one chance to grow up; there are no dress rehearsals and no do-overs which is why Ohio is committed to ensuring all children have the services and supports to reach their full potential," **said Governor Mike DeWine**. "Ohio's commitment to pre-school expansion is a promise to invest in the future of our children, but it is not enough. Ohio is expanding access to preschool and child care to ensure working families have access to a healthy, safe, quality environment for their children to learn and grow. With bold moves, new programs, and increased funding, we're rewriting the narrative, ensuring every child has the educational foundation they need and deserve."

"We applaud the efforts by Governor DeWine and Ohio lawmakers to expand preschool access to more children and families and raise quality," **said W. Steven Barnett, Ph.D., NIEER's senior co-director and founder**. "We encourage Ohio to keep up the progress, as much work remains to provide access to full-day, adequately funded early learning opportunities that will help children develop and parents earn a living."

Nationally, the report finds that this is a critical moment for preschool. The nation has emerged, albeit unevenly, from the COVID-19 Pandemic. States are poised to make new progress toward serving more three- and four-year-olds in high-quality, full-day preschool programs. How each state chooses to move forward – and whether the federal government helps – will determine how much real progress is made. Most states have not committed to serving all children, and even those states that have often fall short. Most states need to increase funding per child substantially to enable providers to meet minimal standards for a high-quality, effective program.

During the 2022-2023 school year, states enrolled over 1.63 million children in preschool, marking a 7% surge compared to the preceding year. Preschool enrollment reached 35% of 4-year-olds and 7% of 3-year-olds, with state expenditures reaching \$11.73 billion—an 11% increase from 2021-2022 when adjusted for inflation. Notably, state spending per child surpassed \$7,000 for the first time. However, despite this notable progress, most states still fell

short of their pre-pandemic preschool enrollment. While several states made strides towards achieving universal preschool access, six states persisted in not allocating any funding for preschool programs.

"With the pandemic in the rear view, it is time for states to choose whether they are going to support high-quality preschool and how," **said Allison Friedman-Krauss, Ph.D., the report's lead author.** "Will states commit to serving all four-year-olds? Will states serve both three- and four-year-olds? Will states make the investments needed to ensure that programs are effective? Will states support a mixed-delivery model for preschool incorporating both existing child care programs and public schools? Will states provide a full school-day option for all families who want it? How will states recruit, support, and retain preschool teachers? These decisions will impact millions of children for years to come."

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The 2023 State of Preschool Yearbook was supported with funding from the Heising-Simons Foundation and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. For more information and detailed state-by-state profiles on quality, access, and funding, please visit www.nieer.org.

The National Institute for Early Education Research at the Rutgers Graduate School of Education, New Brunswick, NJ, supports early childhood education policy and practice through independent, objective research and the translation of research to policy and practice.