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2018 State of Preschool Report Shows Mixed Progress in Oklahoma
State Remains Leader in Access, Improves Quality But Invests Less Per Child

New Brunswick, NJ— Oklahoma remained a national leader in preschool access for 4-year-olds and improved on policies related to quality standards, according to new research by the National Institute for Early Education Research.

The State of Preschool 2018 annual report, based on 2017-18 academic year data, finds just a third of 4-year-olds and 5.5 percent of 3-year-olds enrolled in public preschool programs nationwide—virtually no change in years. Nationally, state funding failed to keep pace, as spending per child decreased, when adjusted for inflation. Inadequate funding undermines classroom quality, and most states fail to pay pre-K teachers comparably to K-3 teachers.

Oklahoma enrolled 74% of 4-year-olds statewide; however, state funding decreased by $6.4 million (inflation-adjusted), causing a 3% reduction in per-child spending. The state does provide the same salary and benefits to pre-K lead teachers and K-3 teachers.

Nationally, we are disappointed by the lack of progress,” said NIEER Founder and Senior Co-Director Steven Barnett, Ph.D. “Oklahoma has been moving in the right direction with increased access to pre-K and improved quality standards, but increased funding is needed to sustain progress and quality.”

This year’s report includes a special section on policies affecting the preschool teacher workforce, focusing on salary and benefit parity. (see box for Oklahoma specifics)

Enrollment has more than doubled since 2002—with almost 1.6 million children enrolled nationwide—but expansion has slowed in recent years. In some states, slow growth is due to a shift from part-day to full-day programs, which can better support child development as well as family work schedules, but nevertheless leaves many children unserved.

The State of Preschool 2018 yearbook was supported with funding provided by the Heising-Simons 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 (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. For more information, contact: Michelle Ruess mruess@nieer.org 848-932-4350