2018 State of Preschool Report Shows Some Progress in West Virginia
State Pre-K Exceeds National Average for Access, Quality Standards But Funding Falls

New Brunswick, NJ—West Virginia preschool access exceeded the national average, with nearly 70% of all 4-year-olds in the state and 5% of 3-year-olds enrolled; and state quality standards remain high despite a drop in state funding, 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.

West Virginia is a leader in pre-K access for 4-year-olds and quality standards. The state requires a BA for all pre-K teachers and starting salary parity with K-3 teachers.

“Nationally, we are disappointed by the lack of progress,” said NIEER Founder and Senior Co-Director Steven Barnett, Ph.D. “West Virginia is on the right track regrading quality standards but the moving in the wrong direction on funding. More resources are needed to expand access, especially for 3-year-olds.”

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