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## **Alabama a National Leader for Preschool Quality Standards Despite Pandemic's Perils**

*Federal/State Partnership Needed to Better Serve Young Children and their Families*

*NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ*—The COVID-19 pandemic set back state preschool enrollment and funding across the country according to the 2020 edition of *The State of Preschool Yearbook* by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) at the Rutgers Graduate School of Education.

Prior to the pandemic, Alabama increased enrollment and inflation-adjusted spending while maintaining high standards for quality. Enrollment was down slightly during the pandemic.

Now is the time for a renewed commitment to high-quality pre-K for all beginning with those in the lowest income families.

Nationally, the report found that:

- Growth in state-funded preschool was slowing before the pandemic.
- The pandemic imposed serious setbacks and reversed recent progress.
- Uneven progress among states is worsening inequality in children's access to high-quality preschool.
- Most states spend too little per child to support high-quality, full-day pre-K and few reach all their 3- and 4-year-olds.

“Alabama continues to be a leader for high-quality preschool, modeling steady increases in enrollment and funding over time while maintaining a strong commitment to preschool quality,” said Steven Barnett, Ph.D., NIEER’s founder and senior co-director.

Nationwide, enrollment in state-funded preschool increased slightly in 2019-2020, but took a hit in 2020-2021 as many programs closed or only offered virtual learning, and parents were hesitant to send children to in-person school during the pandemic.

“Alabama must continue to mitigate the pandemic’s impacts on young children and pre-K programs and recommit to expand access to high-quality, full-day preschool,” said Barnett. “Many more of Alabama’s children could benefit from First Class Pre-K. The federal government should provide support for, and states commit to, high-quality pre-K. While federal rescue and recovery dollars can help, a new federal initiative NIEER has proposed could bring \$104.1 million in federal support to Alabama for preschool during the next four years.”

Across the country the survey reveals bipartisan support for preschool with both "red" and "blue" states among the nation's leaders in high quality pre-K. That offers hope that the nation can move ahead to expand access to high-quality pre-K more rapidly in the future.

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*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.*

### **ALABAMA: 2020 FAST FACTS**

Met 10 of 10 quality standards benchmarks.

Enrolled 20,439 children, an increase of 3,219 from 2018-19.

Total state funding was \$122,798,645, an increase of \$25,439,359 from 2018-19 (inflation adjusted).

State spending-per-child was \$6,008 compared to \$5,654 in 2018-19 (inflation adjusted).

Alabama national rankings:

- 17 in access for 4-year-olds
- 18 in state spending per child