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April 22, 2020

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Alabama Makes Progress Serving Preschool Children, More is Needed ***State Continues Leading the Nation in Pre-K Quality; Increases Enrollment***

NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ — The COVID-19 pandemic is putting pre-K education at greater risk, including in Alabama, which enrolls 32 percent of its 4-year-olds in pre-K, according to a new report from the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER).

Alabama was right around the national average in 4-year-old pre-K enrollment. Nationally, pre-K enrollment surpassed 1.6 million in the 2018-2019 academic year.

Alabama was one of four states to meet all 10 of NIEER's quality standards benchmarks, and funding per child increased to support those high standards. Additional funds are needed to expand preschool to reach even one-third of the state's four-year-olds.

NIEER's *The State of Preschool 2019* annual report finds states investing more than \$8.7 billion in pre-K. But progress has been uneven, exacerbating inequality in early education opportunity and widening gaps between the best and worst states for educating young children. The expected recession will make progress more difficult.

"Even when the economy has been strong, progress providing state pre-K has been slow and uneven," said Dr. Steven Barnett, NIEER's senior co-director and founder. "With another recession likely, extraordinary state and federal action will be needed to ensure our youngest learners are not just protected, but better served."

Alabama met all ten minimum standards for high-quality preschool education and spent \$5,116 in state funds per student. Ten states met fewer than half the minimum standards for quality. State spending per child varies by a factor of 10, from more than \$10,000 to less than \$1,000.

"Alabama continues to lead the nation in high quality pre-K" said Barnett. "The state has been committed to expanding access and must continue to invest more resources and expand access so more children benefit from this quality program."

Despite the economic outlook, pre-K can be protected and advance because politicians from both sides of the aisle and states with very different political leanings have found common ground in offering high quality education to young children.

"States that could not be more different politically, like Michigan and Alabama and Oklahoma and New Jersey, share a commitment to high-quality preschool education," said Barnett. "While there are issues dividing the country, our survey finds quality early childhood education is one where bipartisan agreement is possible."

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

The State of Preschool 2019 yearbook was supported with funding from the Heising-Simons Foundation. Findings, interpretations, and conclusions in this report are solely those of the authors. For more information and detailed state-by-state profiles on quality, access, and funding, please visit www.nieer.org.

ALABAMA: 2018-19 FAST FACTS

Met 10 of 10 quality standards benchmarks.

Enrolled 18,756 children, an increase of 2,705 from 2017-2018.

Total state funding was \$95,962,050, an increase of \$15,729,732 from 2017-2018 (inflation adjusted).

State spending-per-child rose to \$5,116 from \$4,999 (inflation adjusted) the prior year.

Alabama's national rankings:

- 19th in access for 4-year-olds
- 21st in state spending per child