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California Makes Progress Serving Preschool Children, COVID-19 Threatens Gains *Spent Over \$105 Million More On Pre-K, Served More Children*

NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ — The COVID-19 pandemic is putting pre-K education at greater risk, including in California, which enrolls 38 percent of its 4-year-olds and 12 percent of 3-year-olds in pre-K, according to a new report from the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER).

California is above the national average in 4-year-old pre-K enrollment. Nationally, pre-K enrollment surpassed 1.6 million in the 2018-2019 academic year.

In California, state pre-K spending increased by six percent, more children were served, and per-child spending increased by four percent compared to 2017-18.

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."

California met an average of 4.7 of ten minimum standards for high-quality preschool education and spent \$8,253 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.

California is moving in the right direction, expanding pre-K enrollment and increasing funding. The state leads all others in total preschool spending and number of children served," said Barnett. "But more progress is needed on meeting quality standards to ensure children benefit from the programs."

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.

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CALIFORNIA: 2018-19 FAST FACTS

CSPP met 6 of 10 quality standards benchmarks; TK met 3 out of 10.

Enrolled 245,614 children, an increase of 3,317 from 2017-18.

Total state funding was \$2,027,027,473, an increase of \$105,860,705 from 2017-18 (inflation adjusted).

State spending-per-child was \$8,253, compared to \$7,929 in 2017-18 (inflation adjusted).

California's national rankings:

- 15th in access for 4-year-olds
- 8th in access for 3-year-olds
- 7th in state spending per child