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## **District of Columbia Makes Some Progress Serving Preschool Children Continues To Lead U.S. In Preschool Enrollment and Spending**

*NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ* — The COVID-19 pandemic is putting pre-K education at greater risk, including in the District of Columbia, which enrolls 87 percent of its 4-year-olds and 71 percent of its 3-year-olds in pre-K, according to a new report from the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER).

The District of Columbia was the nation's leader in 3- and 4-year-old pre-K enrollment. Nationally, pre-K enrollment surpassed 1.6 million in the 2018-2019 academic year.

The District of Columbia increased enrollment and spending, but met only four of NIEER's quality standards benchmarks. The District's universal pre-K program is delivered through a multi-sector approach. Two of three sectors (traditional public schools and community-based organizations) follow state quality standards but Public Charter Schools are allowed to set their own policies for school operations.

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."

D.C. met four of ten minimum standards for high-quality preschool education and spent \$18,669 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.

"Once again, D.C. leads the nation in preschool access for 3- and 4-year-olds, and spending," said Barnett. "However, many of their policies do not extend to Public Charter Schools leaving over half of their students in settings that are largely unregulated by the Office of the State Superintendent of Education."

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](http://www.nieer.org).*

### **DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA: 2018-2019 FAST FACTS**

Met four of 10 quality standards benchmarks.

Enrolled 13,763 children, an increase of 271 from 2017-2018.

Total state funding was \$256,938,561, an increase of \$11,760,137 from 2017-2018 (inflation adjusted).

State spending-per-child was \$18,669, compared to \$18,172 in 2017-2018 (inflation adjusted).

District's national rankings:

- 1st in access for 4-year-olds
- 1st in access for 3-year-olds
- 1st in state spending per child