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## **Florida's Preschool Program Needs Improvement, Faces Headwinds from COVID-19** **State Ranks 4<sup>th</sup> for Enrolling 4-Year-Olds but Preschool Quality and Spending Are Inadequate**

**NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ** — The COVID-19 pandemic is putting pre-K education at greater risk, including in Florida, which enrolls 75 percent of its 4-year-olds in pre-K, according to a new report from the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER).

Florida is among the nation's leaders in 4-year-old pre-K enrollment. Nationally, pre-K enrollment surpassed 1.6 million in the 2018-2019 academic year.

Florida decreased overall pre-K spending, falling well below the national average on spending per child. The state met only two of NIEER's 10 minimum quality standards benchmarks but is one of five states to reach 70 percent or more of 4-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."

Florida met two of ten minimum standards for high-quality preschool education and spent \$2,253 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.

"Florida's pre-K quality is concerning. Without adequate funding or standards, children aren't receiving the high-quality preschool education they deserve and need," said Barnett. "While pre-K is available to all 4-year-olds, Florida needs to prioritize quality improvements."

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).*

### **FLORIDA: 2018-19 FAST FACTS**

Met two of 10 quality standards benchmarks.

Enrolled 173,633 children, an increase of 3,917 from 2017-18.

Total state funding was \$391,215,901, a decrease of \$2,342,412 from 2017-18 (inflation adjusted).

State spending-per-child was \$2,253, compared to \$2,319 in 2017-18 (inflation adjusted).

Florida's national rankings:

- 4th in access for 4-year-olds
- 42nd in state spending per child