

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 22, 2020

Contact: Ernest Landante, Jr.
elandante@nieer.org
848-932-0770

Georgia's Preschool Program Stalled, While COVID-19 Poses New Threat ***Progress Needed in Georgia to Raise Standards and Reach More Children***

NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ — The COVID-19 pandemic is putting pre-K education at greater risk, including in Georgia, which enrolls 60 percent of its 4-year-olds in pre-K, according to a new report from the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER).

Georgia is among the nation's leaders in 4-year-old pre-K enrollment, but its status as a leader has been eroded in recent years. Nationally, pre-K enrollment surpassed 1.6 million in the 2018-2019 academic year, and six states now serve far larger percentages of their 4-year-old population.

Georgia saw a slight reduction in 4-year-old pre-K enrollment. State spending per child in real dollars never recovered from cuts in the last recession, making it difficult to raise quality or reach more children.

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."

Georgia met eight of ten minimum standards for high-quality preschool education and spent \$4,539 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.

"Georgia remains short of its goal of providing pre-K for all", says Barnett. "Georgia pre-k has not yet rebounded from the last recession and now faces new challenges. Quality standards have not returned to pre-Great Recession levels. Georgia needs strong action to reclaim its status as a national leader in the future."

Despite the economic outlook, pre-K can be protected and advanced because politicians from both sides of the aisle 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.

GEORGIA: 2018-19 FAST FACTS

Met eight of 10 quality standards benchmarks.

Enrolled 80,493 children, a decrease of 43 from 2017-18.

Total state funding was \$365,326,541, a decrease of \$2,660,448 from 2017-18 (inflation adjusted).

State spending-per-child was \$4,539, compared to \$4,569 in 2017-18 (inflation adjusted).

Georgia's national rankings:

- 7th in access for 4-year-olds
- 26th in state spending per child