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April 22, 2020

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Hawaii Needs Action to Better Serve Preschool Children Despite COVID-19 Threats *Despite Increases in Funding and Enrollment, Access Remains Limited*

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

Hawaii trails far behind the national average in 4-year-old pre-K enrollment. Nationally, pre-K enrollment surpassed 1.6 million in the 2018-2019 academic year.

Pre-K classrooms in public charter schools originally funded through the federal Preschool Development Grant have been incorporated into Hawaii's state-funded program in 2019-20.

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."

Hawaii met eight of ten minimum standards for high-quality preschool education and spent \$7,208 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.

"Hawaii's limited investment puts it well behind most other states in enrolling 4-year-olds," says Barnett. "While quality is fairly high and improved this year, the program fails to reach many preschool children."

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.

HAWAII: 2018-19 FAST FACTS

Met eight of 10 quality standards benchmarks.

Enrolled 415 children, an increase of 42 from 2017-18.

Total state funding was \$2,991,420, an increase of \$300,784 from 2017-18 (inflation adjusted).

State spending-per-child was \$7,208, compared to \$7,214 in 2017-18 (inflation adjusted).

Hawaii's national rankings:

- 44th in access for 4-year-olds
- 10th in state spending per child