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April 22, 2020

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Massachusetts Makes Little Progress Serving Preschool Children *Per Child Spending Increase Offset By Drop in Enrollment*

NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ — The COVID-19 pandemic is putting pre-K education at greater risk, including in Massachusetts, which enrolls 30 percent of its 4-year-olds and 16 percent of its 3-year-olds in pre-K, according to a new report from the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER).

Massachusetts trails the national average in 4-year-old pre-K enrollment, but is a leader in enrollment of 3-year-olds. Nationally, pre-K enrollment surpassed 1.6 million in the 2018-2019 academic year.

Although the state's per child spending increased in 2018-2019, Massachusetts has one of the lowest per child investments of state funds in the country.

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."

Massachusetts met an average of 5.2 of ten minimum standards for high-quality preschool education and spent \$2,716 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.

"Massachusetts is a national leader in K-12 education," said Barnett. "But the state isn't providing comparable resources or access for preschool-age children. The state can look to Boston as an example of high-quality preschool."

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.

MASSACHUSETTS: 2018-19 FAST FACTS

Met 5.2 of 10 quality standards benchmarks.

Enrolled 37,246 children, a decrease of 542 from 2017-18.

Total state funding was \$101,170,969, an increase of \$15,273,807 from 2017-18 (inflation adjusted).

State spending-per-child was \$2,716 compared to \$2,273 in 2017-18 (inflation adjusted).

Massachusetts' national rankings:

- 24th in access for 4-year-olds
- 6th in access for 3-year-olds
- 40th in state spending per child