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Minnesota Makes Progress Serving Preschool Children, Has Far to Go as COVID-19 Threatens State Serves More Children and Invests More But Additional Progress Is Needed

NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ — The COVID-19 pandemic is putting pre-K education at greater risk, including in Minnesota, which enrolls 10 percent of its 4-year-olds and one percent of its 3-year-olds in pre-K, according to a new report from the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER).

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

The state has increased pre-K enrollment over the last few years but still only reaches a small fraction of preschoolers. Minnesota's pre-K spending per child is above the national average.

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."

Minnesota met 5.4 of ten minimum standards for high-quality preschool education and spent \$6,570 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.

"The state is moving in the right direction but more needs to be done to increase pre-K access and quality," said Barnett.

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.

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MINNESOTA: 2018-19 FAST FACTS

Met 5.4 of 10 quality standards benchmarks.

Enrolled 8,237 children, an increase of 565 from 2017-18.

Total state funding was \$54,114,602, an increase of \$4,105,137 from 2017-18 (inflation adjusted).

State spending-per-child was \$6,570, compared to \$6,518 in 2017-18 (inflation adjusted).

Minnesota's national rankings:

- 34th in access for 4-year-olds
- 28th in access for 3-year-olds
- 15th in state spending per child