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## **Missouri Makes Some Progress Serving Preschool Children, COVID-19 Poses Threat *New Pre-K Program Increases Access, But Quality Standards Are Low***

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

Missouri 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.

While Missouri added a second preschool program, increasing its pre-K investment and student enrollment, quality is an issue. The Missouri Preschool Program met nine quality benchmarks, but the Missouri Foundation Formula met only five.

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."

Missouri met an average of 5.9 of ten minimum standards for high-quality preschool education and spent \$3,330 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.

"Missouri is moving in the right direction by serving more children. The state should now expand investment to improve quality standards and access," 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.*

*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).*

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

Met 5.9 of 10 quality standards benchmarks.

Enrolled 5,788 children, an increase of 3,410 from 2017-18.

Total state funding was \$19,274,567, an increase of \$8,054,483 from 2017-18 (inflation adjusted).

State spending-per-child was \$3,330, compared to \$4,718 in 2017-18 (inflation adjusted).

Missouri's national rankings:

- 39th in access for 4-year-olds
- 26th in access for 3-year-olds
- 37th in state spending per child