

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
April 22, 2020

Contact: Ernest Landante, Jr.  
[elandante@nieer.org](mailto:elandante@nieer.org)  
848-932-0770

## **Montana's Pre-K Program Ends as COVID-19 Threat Looms** ***Legislature Fails to Fund State Pre-K beyond 2018-2019***

**NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ** — The COVID-19 pandemic is putting pre-K education at greater risk, even as Montana ends its program, according to a new report from the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER). Despite the increased strains on public education and families from the health crisis and its economic impact, this vital support for young children and families is ending rather than expanding.

Montana trails most of the nation in support for pre-K. Nationally, pre-K enrollment surpassed 1.6 million in the 2018-2019 academic year, with 34% of 4-year-olds in state pre-K.

The state's small pre-K pilot program, which finished its second and final year in 2018-2019, continued to provide one of the nation's highest per child spending rates for pre-K. Despite the governor's support, the state legislature failed to approve continued funding for the program.

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."

Montana met six of ten minimum standards for high-quality preschool education and spent \$8,492 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.

"Montana's state legislature missed a critical opportunity to provide continued support for the state's youngest learners," said Barnett. "The fallout from their decision will impact countless children in future years."

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).*

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

Met six of 10 quality standards benchmarks.

Enrolled 340 children, an increase of 34 from 2017-18.

Total state funding was \$2,887,242, an increase of \$221,278 from 2017-18 (inflation adjusted).

State spending-per-child was \$8,492 compared to \$8,712 in 2017-18 (inflation adjusted).

Montana's national rankings:

- 45th in access for 4-year-olds
- 32nd in access for 3-year-olds
- 6th in state spending per child