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New Mexico Makes Progress Serving Preschool Children, COVID-19 Poses Challenge *Pre-K Program Sees Enrollment, Spending Increase with High Standards*

NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ — The COVID-19 pandemic is putting pre-K education at greater risk, including in New Mexico, which enrolls 38 percent of its 4-year-olds and five percent of 3-year-olds in pre-K, according to a new report from the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER).

New Mexico is above the national average in 4-year-old pre-K enrollment. Nationally, pre-K enrollment surpassed 1.6 million in the 2018-2019 academic year.

New Mexico's pre-K enrollment increase led to a higher national ranking for access. However, despite being above the national average, the program only serves 38 percent of 4-year-olds.

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."

New Mexico met nine of ten minimum standards for high-quality preschool education and spent \$6,060 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.

"New Mexico is moving in the right direction by increasing access while maintaining quality," said Barnett. "Now is the time to invest more resources so more children will benefit from the program."

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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NEW MEXICO: 2018-19 FAST FACTS

Met nine of 10 quality standards benchmarks.

Enrolled 11,251 children, an increase of 2,132 from 2017-18.

Total state funding was \$68,184,800, an increase of \$12,976,400 from 2017-18 (inflation adjusted).

State spending-per-child was \$6,060, compared to \$6,054 in 2017-18 (inflation adjusted).

New Mexico's national rankings:

- 13th in access for 4-year-olds
- 18th in access for 3-year-olds
- 17th in state spending per child