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North Dakota Makes Little Progress Providing High-Quality Services for Preschool Children *Fledgling Program Needs More Funding To Support Access and Quality*

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

North Dakota 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.

North Dakota's pre-K program has the lowest state per child spending for pre-K, making it difficult to achieve a high level of quality.

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."

North Dakota met two of ten minimum standards for high-quality preschool education and spent \$531 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.

"North Dakota has work to do to increase access and support high quality," said Barnett. "With more resources, the state would have a much greater impact on its youngest learners."

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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NORTH DAKOTA: 2018-19 FAST FACTS

Met two of 10 quality standards benchmarks.

Enrolled 1,062 children, an increase of 97 from 2017-18.

Total state spending was \$564,009, an increase of \$13,172 from 2017-18 (inflation adjusted).

State spending-per-child was \$531 compared to \$571 in 2017-18 (inflation adjusted).

North Dakota's national rankings:

- 36th in access for 4-year-olds
- 45th in state spending per child