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April 22, 2020

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Ohio's Progress Serving Preschool Children Already Stalled, Threatened by COVID-19 *State Spending, Pre-K Enrollment Slip*

NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ — The COVID-19 pandemic is putting pre-K education at greater risk, including in Ohio, which enrolls 11 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).

Ohio 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.

Access to state pre-K decreased slightly in Ohio as did the state's investment in pre-K. With limited dollars, Ohio has focused on enrolling primarily 4-year-olds in the year before kindergarten.

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."

Ohio met five of ten minimum standards for high-quality preschool education and spent \$4,000 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.

"Ohio needs to make progress on pre-K. Enrollment was stalled, spending fell this year, and spending per child isn't keeping pace with inflation," said Barnett. "The state also needs to commit to improving pre-K quality."

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.

OHIO: 2018-19 FAST FACTS

Met five of 10 quality standards benchmarks.

Enrolled 17,870 children, a decrease of 43 from 2017-18.

Total state funding was \$71,480,000, a decrease of \$2,755,199 from 2017-18 (inflation adjusted).

State spending-per-child was \$4,000, compared to \$4,144 in 2017-18 (inflation adjusted).

Ohio's national rankings:

- 33rd in access for 4-year-olds
- 27th in access for 3-year-olds
- 30th in state spending per child