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## **Oklahoma Makes Strong Progress Serving Preschool Children, COVID-19 Threat Looms** *State Moves into 3<sup>rd</sup> for Access to 4-Year-Olds*

*NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ* — The COVID-19 pandemic is putting pre-K education at greater risk, including in Oklahoma, which enrolls 76 percent of its 4-year-olds and three percent of its 3-year-olds in pre-K, according to a new report from the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER).

Oklahoma is among the nation's leaders in 4-year-old pre-K enrollment. Nationally, pre-K enrollment surpassed 1.6 million in the 2018-2019 academic year.

The state moved from 34<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> in state spending per child after investing an additional \$31 million into its pre-K program. Part of this increase is due to the newly included funding for 3-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."

Oklahoma met nine of ten minimum standards for high-quality preschool education and spent \$4,264 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.

"Oklahoma continues to lead the nation in both quality of state pre-K and access for 4-year-olds," said Barnett. "Although per child spending levels are low, the state is moving in the right direction this year."

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).*

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

Met nine of 10 quality standards benchmarks.

Enrolled 42,606 children, an increase of 2,799 from 2017-18.

Total state funding was \$181,685,479 an increase of \$31,460,481 from 2017-18 (inflation adjusted).

State spending-per-child was \$4,264 compared to \$3,774 in 2017-18 (inflation adjusted).

Oklahoma's national rankings:

- 3rd in access for 4-year-olds
- 20th in access for 3-year-olds
- 27th in state spending per child