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Oregon Lacks Progress Serving Preschool Children Among Top Three States for Per Child Spending, but Access Remains Low

NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ — The COVID-19 pandemic is putting pre-K education at greater risk, including in Oregon, which enrolls 12 percent of its 4-year-olds and eight percent of its 3-year-olds in pre-K, according to a new report from the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER).

Oregon 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.

Oregon funds two preschool programs with very different policies to support quality and spending that differs by nearly \$2,000 per child.

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."

Oregon met an average of 7.5 of ten minimum standards for high-quality preschool education and spent \$9,820 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.

"This is the Preschool Promise program's third year and it serves only two percent of 3- and 4-year-olds," said Barnett. "The state needs to work on expanding access and improving quality standards without reducing per-child spending."

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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OREGON 2018-19 FAST FACTS

Met an average of 7.5 of 10 quality standards benchmarks.

Enrolled 9,360 children, a decrease of 117 from 2017-2018.

Total state funding was \$91,917,617, a decrease of \$2,880,539 from 2017-2018 (inflation adjusted).

State spending-per-child was \$9,820, compared to \$10,003 in 2017-2018 (inflation adjusted).

Oregon's national rankings:

- 32nd in access for 4-year-olds
- 14th in access for 3-year-olds
- 3rd in state spending per child