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South Dakota Denies Children a High-Quality Preschool Education *One of Six States Lacking State-Funded Pre-K*

NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ — South Dakota is one of the last remaining states to deny its youngest children the benefits of a high-quality state-funded preschool education, according to a new report from the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER).

“Children who receive high-quality pre-K are better prepared for kindergarten,” said Dr. Steven Barnett, NIEER’s senior co-director and founder. “For many children in South Dakota, that can put them on a path to higher achievement throughout school and greater social and economic success beyond school. Preschool-aged children in South Dakota deserve the same advantages as children in most of the country.”

NIEER’s *The State of Preschool 2019* annual report finds states are 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. Families will struggle even more to provide a good early education and inequality will increase where states do not step up.”

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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