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Virginia Falls Further Behind Serving Preschool Children, COVID19 May Make it Worse *Pre-K enrollment, spending slip in Virginia*

NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ — The COVID-19 pandemic is putting pre-K education at greater risk, including in Virginia, which enrolls 17 percent of its 4-year-olds in pre-K, according to a new report from the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER).

Virginia 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.

Enrollment and state spending for the Virginia Preschool Initiative, the state's pre-K program, fell 2 percent. State spending per child was nearly unchanged and well below the national average. With budget cuts on the horizon the future does not look bright for Virginia's most vulnerable children.

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."

Virginia met six of ten minimum standards for high-quality preschool education and spent \$3,967 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.

"Virginia failed to increase quality, spending, or access this year," said Barnett. "The state must evaluate how they can increase their investment in this important program by improving quality and expanding access for 4-year-olds in the state."

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.

VIRGINIA: 2018-2019 FAST FACTS

Met six of 10 quality standards benchmarks.

Enrolled 17,657 children, a decrease of 302 from 2017-2018.

Total state funding was \$70,049,572, a decrease of \$1,519,203 from 2017-2018 (inflation adjusted).

State spending-per-child was \$3,967, compared to \$3,985 in 2017-2018 (inflation adjusted).

Virginia's national rankings:

- 31st in access for 4-year-olds
- 31st in state spending per child