

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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**Washington Makes Slow Progress for Preschool Children, COVID-19 Poses Threat  
Ranks 4<sup>th</sup> in Pre-K Spending Per Child, but remains far below average in providing equitable access**

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

Washington 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.

More children were enrolled in pre-K in Washington this year as the state spent more on pre-K. But spending per child failed to keep pace with inflation, and Washington likely remains far from reaching all children in poverty much less reaching children in middle income families. COVID-19 budget cuts could roll back that meager progress.

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."

Washington met eight of ten minimum standards for high-quality preschool education and spent \$8,969 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.

"Washington has made progress towards its goal of serving all eligible children within the next four years," said Barnett. "But progress has been slow and the state must ensure that quality is maintained."

Despite the economic outlook, pre-K can be protected and advanced 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).*

**WASHINGTON: 2018-19 FAST FACTS**

Met eight of 10 quality standards benchmarks.

Enrolled 13,491 children, an increase of 1,000 from 2017-18.

Total state funding was \$121,004,051, an increase of \$6,454,018 from 2017-18 (inflation adjusted).

State spending-per-child was \$8,969, compared to \$9,171 in 2017-18 (inflation adjusted).

Washington's national rankings:

- 38th in access for 4-year-olds
- 16th in access for 3-year-olds
- 4th in state spending per child