

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 22, 2020

Contact: Ernest Landante, Jr.
elandante@nieer.org
848-932-0770

West Virginia's Progress for Preschool Children Paused ***Change in Age Eligibility Temporarily Cuts Enrollment, Will COVID-19 Hinder the Rebound?***

NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ — The COVID-19 pandemic is putting pre-K education at greater risk, perhaps including in West Virginia, which enrolls 59 percent of its 4-year-olds and six percent of its 3-year-olds in pre-K, according to a new report from the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER).

West Virginia's 4-year-old enrollment dropped 13 percent this year due to a policy change moving up the minimum age eligibility date. Program quality remains high and preliminary reports for 2019-2020 indicate increased enrollment and participation. COVID-19's state budget impact is still unclear, but political will be needed to keep West Virginia a national leader in early education.

Despite this decrease, West Virginia is still 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.

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."

West Virginia met nine of ten minimum standards for high-quality preschool education and spent \$7,316 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.

"West Virginia remains a leader in pre-K program quality," said Barnett. "The state must increase their investment toward expansion, especially for 3-year-olds."

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.

WEST VIRGINIA: 2018-19 FAST FACTS

Met nine of 10 quality standards benchmarks.

Enrolled 13,534 children, a decrease of 1,567 from 2017-2018.

Total state funding was \$99,009,024 (including TANF), a decrease of \$2,784,511 from 2017-2018 (inflation adjusted).

State spending-per-child was \$7,316, compared to \$6,741 in 2017-2018 (inflation adjusted).

West Virginia's national rankings:

- 8th in access for 4-year-olds
- 15th in access for 3-year-olds
- 8th in state spending per child