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Maryland Makes Preschool Progress Despite the Pandemic's Problems, Big Challenges Remain

Federal/State Partnership Needed to Better Serve Young Children and their Families

NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ—The COVID-19 pandemic set back state preschool enrollment and funding across the country, according to the 2020 edition of *The State of Preschool Yearbook* by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) at the Rutgers Graduate School of Education.

Pre-pandemic, Maryland expanded enrollment and sharply increased funding (inflation-adjusted) for pre-K. And despite the pandemic, the Governor has allocated an additional \$20 million increase for pre-K while holding program quality standards stable.

Nationally, the report found that:

- Growth in state-funded preschool was slowing before the pandemic.
- The pandemic imposed serious setbacks and reversed recent progress.
- Uneven progress among states is worsening inequality in children's access to high-quality preschool.
- Most states spend too little per child to support high-quality, full-day pre-K and few reach all their 3- and 4-year-olds.

“The newly passed Blueprint for Maryland’s Future creates a 10-year pathway to full-funding of high-quality pre-K for all 3- and 4-year-olds in low and moderate income families. Now is the time to create the on-ramp to that pathway with the modest improvements in quality standards needed and funding to support them, including pay parity with K-12 for preschool teachers who have shown just how essential and valuable they are in responding to the pandemic,” said Steven Barnett, Ph.D., NIEER’s founder and senior co-director.

Nationwide, enrollment in state-funded preschool increased slightly in 2019-2020, but took a hit in 2020-2021 as many programs closed or only offered virtual learning and parents were hesitant to send children to in-person school during the pandemic.

“Maryland is well on its way with plans to mitigate the pandemic’s impacts on young children and increase access to high-quality pre-K for all young children in the long-term,” said Barnett. “New state commitments and federal rescue and recovery dollars can help, but we estimate \$13,493 per child is needed now to fully fund high quality. That is why NIEER proposes a new federal cost-sharing initiative to bring \$115.4 million in federal support to Maryland for preschool during the next four years.”

Across the country the survey reveals bipartisan support for preschool with both "red" and "blue" states among the nation's leaders in high quality pre-K. That offers hope that the nation can move ahead to expand access to high-quality pre-K more rapidly in the future.

The 2020 State of Preschool Yearbook was supported with funding from the Heising-Simons Foundation and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Cost modeling and funding analyses were supported with funding from the PNC Foundation. For more information and detailed state-by-state profiles on quality, access, and funding, please visit www.nieer.org.

The National Institute for Early Education Research at the Rutgers Graduate School of Education, New Brunswick, NJ, supports early childhood education policy and practice through independent, objective research and the translation of research to policy and practice.

MARYLAND: 2020 FAST FACTS

Met 7 of 10 quality standards benchmarks.

Enrolled 33,109 children, an increase of 1,074 from 2018-19.

Total state funding was \$158,104,001, an increase of \$21,990,968 from 2018-19 (inflation adjusted).

State spending-per-child was \$4,775 compared to \$4,245 in 2018-19 (inflation adjusted).

Maryland national rankings:

- 13 in access for 4-year-olds
- 22 in access for 3-year-olds
- 23 in state spending per child