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Connecticut Makes Progress Serving Preschool Children ***State Funding, Enrollment Increase***

NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ — The COVID-19 pandemic is putting pre-K education at greater risk, including in Connecticut, which enrolls 31 percent of its 4-year-olds and nine percent of 3-year-olds in pre-K, according to a new report from the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER).

Connecticut is right around the national average in 4-year-old pre-K enrollment. Nationally, pre-K enrollment surpassed 1.6 million in the 2018-2019 academic year.

Connecticut increased its investment in pre-K, improving its national ranking for state pre-K spending per child. Quality policies remain an issue as state program policies meet only five or six of 10 benchmarks.

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."

Connecticut met an average of five of ten minimum standards for high-quality preschool education and spent \$8,786 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.

"While Connecticut is moving in the right direction in terms of overall funding and per pupil spending, the state should also focus efforts on increasing program quality across all three state preschool programs," said Barnett.

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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CONNECTICUT: 2018-19 FAST FACTS

Met an average of five of 10 quality standards benchmarks.

Enrolled 15,008 children, an increase of 423 from 2017-18.

Total state funding was \$131,864,893, an increase of \$16,866,664 from 2017-18 (inflation adjusted).

State spending-per-child was \$8,786 compared to \$7,885 in 2017-18 (inflation adjusted).

Connecticut's national rankings:

- 21st in access for 4-year-olds
- 10th in access for 3-year-olds
- 5th in state spending per child