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2018 State of Preschool Report Finds Limited Progress in Alaska State Increases Funding But Decreased Enrollment and Program Quality

New Brunswick, NJ—Alaska increased state preschool spending by more than \$1 million (over 50%), but enrollment decreased, compared to last year, reaching only 3% of 4-year-olds, according to new research by the National Institute for Early Education Research.

The State of Preschool 2018 annual report, based on 2017-18 academic year data, finds just a third of 4-year-olds and 5.5 percent of 3-year-olds enrolled in public preschool programs nationwide—virtually no change in years. State funding is failing to keep pace with even the slow increases in enrollment and state spending per child has *decreased*, when adjusted for inflation. Inadequate funding undermines classroom quality, and most states fail to pay pre-K teachers comparably to K-3 teachers.

Alaska increased spending last year and has committed to an additional \$6 million for the next two years. New policies eliminated maximum class size and staff-child ratio requirements, now permitting no limit on these two critical aspects of quality.

“Nationally, we are disappointed by the lack of progress,” said NIEER Founder and Senior Co-Director Steven Barnett, Ph.D. “Alaska has invested more resources but needs to focus on increasing enrollment and improving quality to yield the promised benefits for children and families.”

This year’s report includes a special section on policies affecting the preschool teacher workforce, focusing on salary and benefit parity. (*see box for Alaska specifics*)

Enrollment has more than doubled since 2002—with almost 1.6 million children enrolled nationwide—but expansion has slowed in recent years. In some states, slow growth is due to a shift from part-day to full-day programs, which can better support child development as well as family work schedules, but nevertheless leaves many children unserved.

The *State of Preschool 2018 yearbook* was supported with funding provided by the Heising-Simons 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 (www.nieer.org) at the Graduate School of Education, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ, supports early childhood education policy and practice through independent, objective research. For more information, contact: Michelle Ruess mruess@nieer.org 848-932-4350

Alaska 2017-18 Fast Facts

Met 3 of 10 quality standards benchmarks

Enrolled 315 children, a decrease of 43 from 2016-17

Total state funding = \$3,200,000, an increase of \$1,131,301 from 2016-17

State spending-per-child = \$10,159, compared to \$5,778 in 2016-17

Requires a BA and K-3 salary parity only for pre-K teachers in public schools

National rankings:

- 42 in access for 4-year-olds
- 3 in state spending per child