

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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2018 State of Preschool Report Shows Progress Stalled in New Jersey State Pre-K Investment and Enrollment Decreased Before Recent Expansion

New Brunswick, NJ— New Jersey recently expanded access to state preschool, but in the 2017-18 school year, state funding failed to keep pace and enrollment declined, 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.

New Jersey, which boosted state pre-K spending in the 2018-19 academic year, remained a national leader in access for 3-year-olds and pre-K spending per-child, which is linked to quality. New Jersey also provides lead state pre-K teachers compensation parity with K-3, regardless of classroom location. But overall, state funding and statewide enrollment stalled in 2017-18.

“Nationally, we are disappointed by the lack of progress,” said NIEER Founder and Senior Co-Director Steven Barnett, Ph.D. “New Jersey’s expansion efforts should be prioritized to ensure more children have access to the state’s quality programs.”

This year’s report includes a special section on policies affecting the preschool teacher workforce, focusing on salary and benefit parity. (*see box for New Jersey 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, like New Jersey, slow growth is partially due to a shift from part-day to full-day in the state’s two smaller 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.

New Jersey 2017-18 Fast Facts

Met 8 of 10 quality standards benchmarks

Enrolled 50,684 children, a decrease of 2,686 from 2016-17

Total state funding = \$659,789,000, a decrease of \$15,986,421 from 2016-17

State spending-per-child = \$13,018, compared to \$12,662 in 2016-17

New Jersey requires a BA, and salary parity with K-3 for all lead teachers

National rankings:

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

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