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Texas Makes Some Preschool Progress, Looming Recession Poses Serious Threat ***Enrollment Increased, but Spending Per Child Decreased***

NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ — The COVID-19 pandemic is putting pre-K education at greater risk, including in Texas, which enrolls 49 percent of its 4-year-olds and nine percent of its 3-year-olds in pre-K, according to a new report from the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER).

Texas is 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.

The state's enrollment increased by 7,436 children in 2018-2019, but funding has been a problem and per child spending decreased, lowering Texas' ranking to 34. With the oil market and COVID-19 both pushing the Texas economy toward a recession, strong political will is needed to protect preschool education quality and access as both public education and families are stressed.

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."

Texas met three of ten minimum standards for high-quality preschool education and spent \$3,579 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.

"It's encouraging to see Texas increasing enrollment," said Barnett. "Ideally, the state would also increase per child funding to support higher quality while increasing access."

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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TEXAS: 2018-19 FAST FACTS

Met three of 10 quality standards benchmarks.

Enrolled 238,921 children, an increase of 7,436 from 2017-18.

Total state funding was \$854,984,186 an increase of \$1,609,841 from 2017-18 (inflation adjusted).

State spending-per-child was \$3,579 compared to \$3,687 in 2017-18 (inflation adjusted).

Texas' national rankings:

- 10th in access for 4-year-olds
- 13th in access for 3-year-olds
- 34th in state spending per child