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## **Texas Serves Nearly Half of 4-Year-Olds in Preschool but Funding is Low and Proposed Legislation would Further Weaken Standards**

*Nationally Uneven Access & Quality Span Two Decades, but New Universal Preschool Efforts Offer Hope*

**NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ** – As state-funded preschool partially recovered last year from the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in Texas, proposed new legislation threatens to undermine the standards needed for effectiveness. Texas mirrored national trends in early education across the country as preschool access remained below pre-pandemic levels, funding was inadequate, and quality standards failed to improve, according to the [2022 State of Preschool Yearbook](#), released today by Rutgers University’s National Institute for Early Education Research ([NIEER](#)).

Key findings from the annual survey, which focused on the 2021-2022 school year, are summarized below for Texas:

- Enrollment in state-funded preschool was 222,424, an increase of 26,203;
- State spending for preschool programs was \$871,371,254, including \$24,680,790 in federal pandemic relief funding, an increase of \$122,950,371 (inflation adjusted);
- State spending per child enrolled in preschool was \$4,267;
- Texas met 4 of 10 quality standards benchmarks;
- Texas has not committed to universal preschool for four-year-olds;
- Texas did not provide incentives for preschool teacher retention or recruitment.

### **TEXAS: 2022 NATIONAL RANKINGS**

- Enrollment at age 4: 10th (47%)
- Enrollment at age 3: 14th (9%)
- State spending per child: 32nd (\$4,267)
- All-reported spending per child: 37th (\$4,971)

The new [report](#) found substantial year-over-year progress in enrollment nationally with a 13% increase of children in state-funded preschool in 2021-2022 with 180,668 more preschoolers enrolled than in the prior school year, and growth in nearly every state.

Despite this, most children still lack access to high-quality, publicly-funded early childhood education, and preschool enrollment is down by 8% compared to pre-pandemic levels, from the high of 1.66 million in 2019-2020 to 1.53 million in 2021-2022. Thirty-two percent of 4-year-olds and 6% of 3-year-olds were enrolled in state-funded preschool. Adding in Head Start and Early Childhood Special Education, public preschool enrollment was 41% at age 4 and 17% at age 3.

States spent an estimated \$9.9 billion on preschool, including more than \$393 million in COVID-19 relief, an inflation adjusted increase of only \$71 million (0.7%) from the prior year. Spending

per child enrolled in preschool was \$6,571. Adjusting for inflation, spending per child has not changed in 20 years and remains too low to support high-quality full-day preschool.

Most state-funded preschool programs reported experiencing a shortage of qualified teachers during the 2021-2022 school year, but few states reported providing incentives for teacher recruitment or retention. Waivers to teacher education requirements were more prevalent than in previous years, raising concerns about preschool quality.

“Progress in expanding access to high-quality state-funded preschool over the last two decades has been slow and uneven, despite proven benefits to children, families and our nation’s economy as a whole,” **said Allison Friedman-Krauss, Ph.D., the report’s lead author.** “Texas should continue to expand access while improving quality and addressing issues of teacher retention and pay to ensure that all children have access to the educational opportunities they deserve.”

A handful of states considering universal preschool offers a bright spot and an opportunity to expand access for nearly half of preschoolers across the country.

**W. Steven Barnett Ph.D., NIEER’s senior co-director noted that** “It is concerning Texas is considering creating a two-tiered system where some children have less qualified, more poorly paid teachers, when teacher quality has been one of the few strengths of state-funded preschool in Texas. Every child deserves the same level of quality and Texas should be improving quality not reducing it in a penny wise pound foolish strategy that will undermine program effectiveness and reduce benefits to children and taxpayers.”

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*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.*