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National Report Ranks Texas Public Pre-k Program: Texas Ranks High in Numbers, Below Average on Standards

AUSTIN, TEXAS - March 23, 2005- For the fourth consecutive year, enrollment of 4-year-olds in the Texas public pre-kindergarten program grew, reaching the third highest percentage in the nation at 46 percent, yet additional work is needed in regards to standards, according to *The State of Preschool: 2005 State Preschool Yearbook*, released today. The annual *Yearbook* ranks all 50 states on access to, resources for and quality of state preschool initiatives for the 2004-2005 school year.

Although Texas provided state-funded pre-kindergarten to more than 176,000 children, a higher number than any other state, including California, the Texas program meets only four of the 10 quality benchmarks cited by the *Yearbook*, produced by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) of Rutgers University.

“The Texas program provides preschool to a significant number of children,” said NIEER Director W. Steve Barnett. “The state must be vigilant about providing high-quality preschool to its 3- and 4-year olds, which will help accrue the economic, social and developmental benefits for the children, the communities and the state.”

Research shows that children who have high-quality pre-kindergarten experiences are less frequently assigned to special education, less likely to drop out of school, and perform better on standardized tests. In addition, national research demonstrates that every \$1 invested in high quality early childhood education saves taxpayers up to \$7 through higher levels of college attendance, fewer arrests, and fewer social services consumed.

Texas has excellent standards when it comes to teacher qualifications. However, Texas does not require a limit on class size or staff to child ratios. “In the upcoming special session and when the Legislature convenes again in 2007, Texas needs to bolster access and continue bi-partisan efforts to improve the quality and effectiveness of its pre-kindergarten program to ensure school readiness,” said Sandi Borden, Executive Director of the Texas Elementary Principals and Supervisors Association (TEPSA) and Co-Chair of the Texas Early Childhood Education Coalition (TECEC).

Texas has one of the fastest growing child populations in the country. In addition, approximately one out of every five children in Texas is growing up in poverty. “High quality early childhood education is a proven solution. If we do not act now, the future of our state will include a less educated workforce and an economy that cannot sustain itself,” stated Kaitlin Guthrow, Executive Director of the Texas Early Childhood Education Coalition (TECEC).

The full *Yearbook* is available at www.nieer.org.

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The Texas Early Childhood Education Coalition (TECEC) is a policy and advocacy organization comprised of more than 200 member organizations dedicated to building a movement for a high-quality, voluntary early childhood education system for children ages birth to five in Texas.