

Pre-K for CC

Economic Pulse, 2023 Issue 1

South Texas Economic Development Center

Takeaways

- Corpus Christi provides early education to only one in five preschoolers ages 3 and 4.
- Inequities in early childhood education prevail across different neighborhoods.
- Kindergarteners learn more in communities with more pre-K services.

A region's economic competitiveness and living standards hinge on the productivity of its workforce. Employees tend to be more productive and more adaptable to change if they are more educated or better trained with specific skills.

However, communities in South Texas have historically faced the challenge of relatively low education attainment.

This makes education and workforce development an economic priority for this region.

The Case for Early Learning

Despite moderate improvement in the overall level of education attainment over the past two decades, the share of Corpus Christi population age 25 years and older with post-secondary education or training has remained far below the U.S. average.

Educational Attainment

Population 25 years and over	U.S.	Corpus Christi City
Less than 9th grade	4.8%	7.3%
9th to 12th grade, no diploma	6.6%	10.1%
High school graduate	26.9%	29.0%
Some college, no degree	20.0%	23.8%
Associate's degree	8.6%	8.3%
Bachelor's degree	20.3%	14.4%
Graduate or professional degree	12.8%	7.8%

Source: 2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

Students are less likely to succeed in college if they are underprepared by the time they graduate from high school. There is also [evidence](#) that students who outperform their peers in early childhood also tend to perform better through high school later.

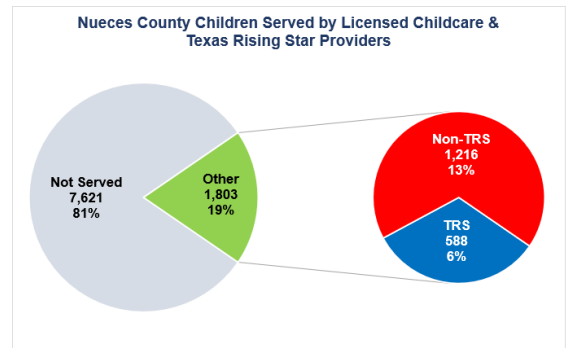
Beyond academic performance, [extensive research](#) among communities with a long history of public pre-K education has supported the benefits of early childhood education on the children's social and emotional skills throughout the rest of their lives.

Despite these positive findings, the U.S. falls behind most other rich countries in promoting pre-Kindergarten and childhood education. According to [New York Times](#), the U.S. pays an average of \$500 per year for a toddler's care, compared to \$14,000 per year in Europe.

Local Childhood Services

The amount of childcare services is even less adequate locally. In Nueces County, licensed childcare providers serve only one in five children ages 3 and 4. And only one-third of those

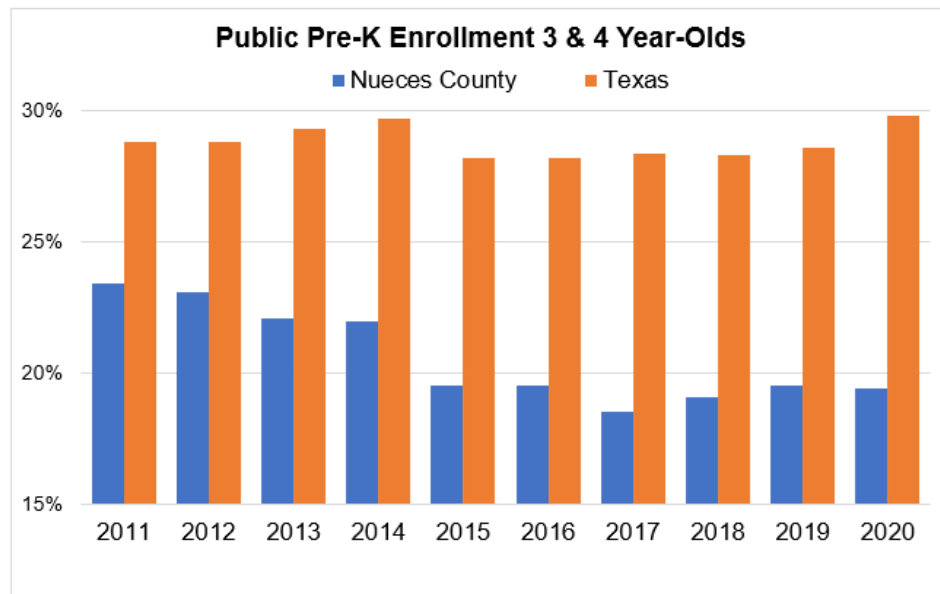
preschoolers are served under the Texas Rising Star program--a quality rating certified by the Texas Workforce Commission.



The local pre-K enrollment gap relative to the state has in fact widened during the past decade. In 2011, 23.4% of more than 2,200 three- and four-year-olds in Nueces County enrolled in pre-K programs, compared with the state average of 28.8%.

In 2020, this share dropped to below 20% locally, but it rose to nearly 30% statewide.

Today, less than 3% of local three-year-olds receive pre-K education, compared with 6.5% for the state. Nearly half of four-year-olds across the state attend pre-Kindergarten, while that population share drops to 36.5% in Nueces County.



Source: The Annie E. Casey Foundation, Kids Count Data Center.

Recognizing the local challenge of providing early childcare and education, the City of Corpus Christi’s Education and Workforce Stakeholders group has been pursuing a Pre-K for CC initiative, inspired by the Pre-K 4 SA program in San

Antonio. The first step in this initiative is to understand the families or communities that need childcare education the most.

Education Inequity

Powered by Esri

In Corpus Christi, there are 174 licensed or registered childcare centers. These centers together have the capacity to serve more than 11,000 children.

These centers serve roughly 2,200 age 4 and younger, meaning less than 20% of their capacity is utilized.

Powered by Esri

The locations of local childcare centers spread unevenly across the city.

They do not seem to match the number of pre-schoolers in their neighborhoods.

Instead, higher-income neighborhoods, notably the Southside, tend to have more availability of pre-K services.

Kindergarten Performance

Kindergarteners in communities with more pre-K availability tend to show a higher reading proficiency level on average.

However, disparities in reading proficiency of those young learners might be due to factors other than pre-K education, such as their parents' education level.

Additional evidence for the benefits of childcare services: Improvement in reading proficiency during the first year of kindergarten tends to be higher in neighborhoods with more pre-K services.

Challenges Going Forward

The initiative to expand early childcare and education, however, is facing additional challenges related to labor shortages. As [researchers at the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas](#) reported recently, the number of preschool teachers today is 10% below the pre-pandemic level.

Their average wage of pre-K teachers in Texas is less than \$12 per hour. Because of such a low wage rate, many preschool teachers have pursued other occupations in the past two years, particularly in the low-skill service sector and other caregiving jobs.

##

Note: This is an excerpt of a presentation given to the Corpus Christi City Mayor's Education and Workforce Stakeholders on

May 25, 2022. The [interactive maps](#) in this presentation can be viewed online.

Cover Image

Andrew Caballero-
Reynolds/Agence France-Presse,
Getty Images