EDUCATION: Bilingual Programs Still Important in Texas

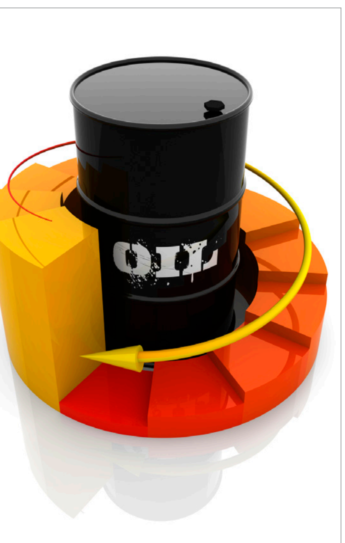
A total of 980,487 students—18.5 percent of Texas public schools enrollment—are not proficient in English. Texas trails only California in the number of so-called English Language Learners (ELLs), with the great majority speaking Spanish at home.

Texas requires that elementary schools with more than 20 ELLs in one grade provide bilingual programs, which include instruction in the native language at least 50 percent of the time for two to seven years. By comparison, a 1998 California referendum limited bilingual education, reducing the share of students receiving such instruction to 8 percent from 30 percent.

Texas law describes four models of bilingual education, which vary in the number of years and amount of English allowed. A 2002 study funded by the U.S. Department of Education compared programs for ELLs in the Houston Independent School District.

The study found that among secondary students, former ELL students who had always been in mainstream classes fared worse than the average student, as did ELL students who had been in English-only classes; those who were in bilingual programs performed as well as native English speakers. Top achievers were in two-way dual-language immersion programs—ELL and native English speakers taught in both Spanish and English for six to seven years. By the fifth grade, these students scored above grade level on English and Spanish tests.

—Stephanie Gullo



ENERGY: Louisiana Slips into Recession amid Oil Bust

Louisiana slipped into recession in 2015, following the oil industry bust that began with plummeting prices in 2014. Employment decreased 1.1 percent while real (inflation-adjusted) gross domestic product (GDP) growth stagnated in 2015.

Employment was down 0.2 percent through June while the unemployment rate stood at 6.2 percent in June, up from 5.8 percent in December. The Louisiana labor force is 1.4 percent smaller than at its peak in December 2014.

While service sector employment held steady last year, the goods-producing sector shrank 4.4 percent, cutting 15,000 positions during 2015. Mining (which includes the oil and gas industry) and durable goods manufacturing were hardest hit, declining faster than other industries in Louisiana. Other oil-dependent states, such as Texas and North Dakota, experienced a similar pattern of job loss. Meanwhile, Louisiana's health and education services and retail trade continued healthy growth.

Louisiana's economy was particularly exposed to the oil downturn because of its high dependency on mining and manufacturing, which at their 2014 peak made up about 30 percent of state GDP. That declined to 25.5 percent by year-end 2015. By comparison, those industries in Texas contributed 21.4 percent to state GDP last year.

—Justin Lee

TRADE: Brexit May Harm Texas Exports; Other Impacts Unclear

The United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union won't noticeably affect the overall Texas economy, though some export activities may weaken.

The U.K. ranks 10th among Texas' trading partners—accounting for about 2 percent, or $9.1 billion, of the state's imports and exports. When the British pound depreciated against the dollar following the Brexit referendum on June 23, U.S. exports, including those from Texas, became relatively more expensive. Imports from the U.K. grew cheaper. Transportation equipment comprises the largest share of Texas' U.K. exports, 19 percent in 2015, while machinery products made up the largest share of imports from the U.K., according to the International Trade Administration.

U.K. investment is also important. Since 2011, U.K. investors have funded hundreds of foreign direct investment (FDI) projects in Texas, totaling $2.3 billion, according to the Texas governor's office. In a post-Brexit world, the weaker pound will increase costs of new FDI projects while boosting the value of any future revenue streams. Thus, Brexit's net effect on U.K. FDI in Texas is unclear. Of course, better relative growth prospects in Texas may also encourage more investment.

Ultimately, commerce and investment effects will also depend on the nature of trade agreements and the new regulatory environment in place once the U.K. officially leaves the European Union.

—Sarah Greer