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Photos by Chitose Suzuki/Dallas Morning News

A news conference is held in Midlothian on Google's plans to invest \$40 billion into data centers and workforce training in Texas.

## Data centers part of \$40B Google plan

Abbott says investment in Texas tied to AI is company's largest in any state

By Claire Hao and James Osborne STAFF WRITERS

Google plans to invest \$40 billion into artificial intelligence data centers and related workforce training across Texas through 2027, CEO Sundar Pichai announced Friday at a news briefing alongside Gov. Greg Abbott.

That includes plans to build three new data centers — two in Haskell County and one in Armstrong County — Pichai said at the news conference 30 minutes south of Dallas.

'They say everything is bigger in Texas, and I think that applies to the golden opportunity with AI," Pichai said at Fri-



Gov. Greg Abbott and Google CEO Sundar Pichai attend the news conference, held at a Google data center. Texas is one of the most attractive states to build such centers.

day's briefing.

It's the latest massive investment from tech giants racing to surpass each other in the development of AI. In fact, the announcement represents Google's largest investment in any state, Abbott said in a statement Friday. And if the plans come to fruition, Texas is expected to have more Google AI data centers than anywhere else in the world, according to Abbott.

As AI is increasingly integrated into our everyday lives, more data centers — essentially warehouses full of computers will be needed to run AI technologies. These facilities are expected to consume lots of electricity, some as much as en-

Google continues on A4

#### **Vouchers** unknown by half of parents

Survey: 40% say they would apply for state program

By Elizabeth Sander STAFF WRITER

More than half of Texas parents still haven't heard of the state's private school voucher program, according to a new report by Texas Southern Univer-

Applications are expected to open Feb. 4, 2026, according to documents obtained last month by the Chronicle, but 53% of people surveyed said they were unfamiliar with the program. Only 18% of respondents said they were "very familiar" with the \$1 billion so-called "educational freedom accounts," one of the largest universal school voucher programs in U.S. history.

"You can look at it as a glass half-full or glass half-empty perspective — roughly half of these parents are familiar with the program, and roughly half of them are not," said  $\check{\mathsf{Mark}}$  Jones, a public policy professor at Rice University who co-authored the report. "That's an issue that I think the program will have to address between now and Janu-

The survey, performed by the Barbara Jordan Public Policy Center at Texas Southern, also found that 40% of parents said they would apply for a voucher, with most of them saying their main motivation was to seek a better education. Of the 60% of parents who said they would not apply, the majority said it was because they were happy with their child's current public school.

Overall, the survey found that a majority of lower-income families — with household incomes under \$65,000 — would apply, while most higher-income families would not. However, only 37% of families who had household incomes under \$65,000 said they knew about the program.

Just under half of Black and Latino families surveyed said they would apply for a voucher, while about 1 in 4 of white families surveyed said they would

"For many Latino and Black parents, particularly lower-income Latino and Black parents, they view (the funding) as a potential route for their child to get access to a better education that they presently are not able to obtain," Jones said. "(White Democratic parents) tend to be located in better school districts, and then within those districts, their children attend better schools."

While a majority of overall respondents said they would not apply for the program, just over half the respondents said they

Vouchers continues on A2

#### Emails reveal Epstein's network of rich, powerful

By Jesse Bedayn ASSOCIATED PRESS

By the time Jeffrey Epstein pleaded guilty in 2008 to soliciting prostitution from an underage girl, he had established enormous network of wealthy and influential friends. Emails made public this week show the crime did little to diminish the desire of that network to stay connected to the financier.



Jeffrey Epstein was able to keep ties to influential people despite his status as a sex offender.

Thousands of documents released by the House Oversight Committee on Wednesday offer a new glimpse into what Epstein's relationships with business executives, reporters, academics and political players looked like over a decade.

They start with messages he sent and received around the time he finished serving his Florida sentence in 2009 and continue until the months before his arrest on federal sex

trafficking charges in 2019. During that time, Epstein's network was eclectic, spanning the globe and political affiliations: from the liberal academic Noam Chomsky to Steve Bannon, the longtime ally of President Donald Trump.

Some reached out to support Epstein amid lawsuits and prosecutions, others sought introductions or advice on everything from dating to oil prices. One consulted him on how to respond to accusations of sexual harassment.

Epstein was charged with sex trafficking in 2019, and killed himself in jail a month later.

Epstein continues on A2

### Would closing GOP primary benefit Paxton in Senate race?

By Taylor Goldenstein STAFF WRITER

Attorney General Ken Paxton says his push to restrict the upcoming GOP primary only to registered Republican voters is based on legal grounds.

But one of his top advisers recently suggested the move could also benefit Paxton politically as he seeks to oust U.S. Sen. John Cornyn in one of the state's most heated primary races.

Michelle Smith told conserva-

tives that blocking independent and Democratic voters from participating in the March 3 contest would help Paxton and hurt

"(Critics are) saying Paxton just wants this so he can win his primary, and I said, 'Well, of course, any Republican, it's good for all Republicans, not just General Paxton," Smith said on an X Spaces live event last month, adding about Cornyn: "These guys know they need to trigger the Democrats to come vote for them,

and without that, they know they won't win."

Paxton's office has joined the Republican Party of Texas in its lawsuit against the state to close the March primary election, arguing its a First Amendment issue. The decision has split the state's top GOP leaders.

Grassroots conservatives, who say closed primaries help guard against moderate candidates, are rallying behind Paxton.

'Republicans, and only Re-Paxton continues on A4



Texas AG Ken Paxton's office has joined the Republican Party of Texas' lawsuit to limit the primary election to only GOP voters.

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