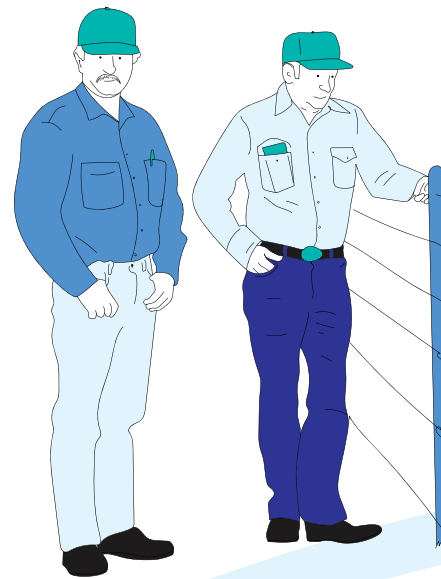
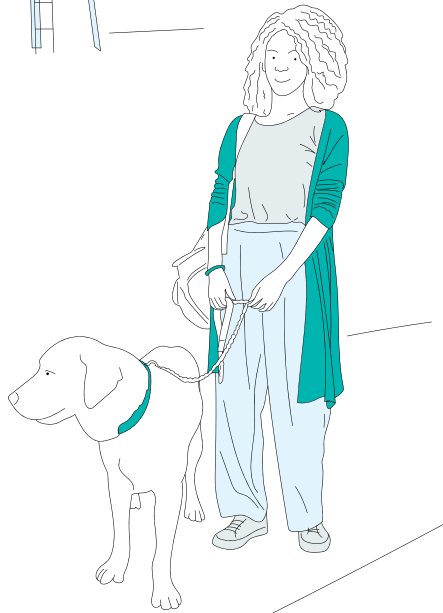
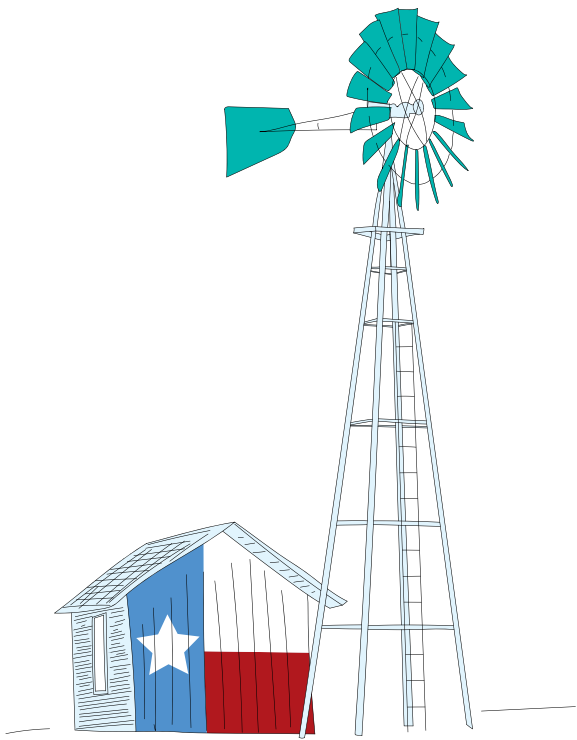


# Strong Support, Clear Challenges

The 2023 poll on Texans' attitudes toward public education



*Charles Butt*  
— FOUNDATION —

Public Opinion Research



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# Letter From the Charles Butt Foundation

In support of the Charles Butt Foundation's mission of pursuing a more equitable and prosperous future for all Texans, the Foundation engages in public opinion survey research to listen to a representative sample of all Texans about essential public education issues. Now in our fourth consecutive year, we continue to learn from Texans and public school parents about what is on their minds and hearts, and what they believe is essential to strengthening the future of Texas public education.

Encouragingly, the 2023 poll results indicate much greater common ground among Texans than differences in supporting the foundation and future of Texas public schools. Parents report high levels of satisfaction with public schools; Texans recall the positive impacts teachers made on their own lives; and Texans agree on the importance of transparency and accountability for state funding.

Another issue Texans agree on is the importance of school safety. For the 2023 poll, we focused on this issue to gather data from Texans and parents in the wake of the school shooting tragedy in Uvalde, Texas, in May 2022. Findings indicate Texans have increasing concerns for children's safety in schools. While polling about the physical acts that make a school safe, we also asked parents about students' sense of belonging in school.

Building on a finding from our 2022 poll that found a student's sense of belonging is an important indicator of parents' broader school satisfaction and experience, we sought out additional data about this important concept. This year, we asked parents if their child's school environment is a place where students can be their authentic selves, participate fully in learning, and have supportive relationships with educators and peers.

As we approach the 2023 Legislative Session, let us focus on actionable areas where Texans agree across party lines and across the state. Our report reveals strong support for increasing state funding to pay Texas teachers more, especially our tenured teachers. In addition, Texans and public school parents overwhelmingly support Career and Technical Education (CTE), universal pre-kindergarten access, and mental and physical health support for students.

We hope this information serves as a catalyst to support and strengthen public education in Texas. May we all take positive action and leverage our expertise, passion, and influence to make this happen for our children, our state, and our future.



**Shari B. Albright**  
President

# Key Findings

**W**hile aware of their challenges, Texans express a deep reservoir of goodwill for the state's public schools. Parents are broadly satisfied with the quality of their child's education and the public overwhelmingly supports increasing state funding to boost teacher pay.

Eighty-nine percent of public school parents say they are satisfied with the quality of education their child is receiving, surpassing the comparable national figure of 80 percent from an August 2022 poll.<sup>1</sup>

Support for teachers is strong, and the vast majority of Texans say their life has been positively impacted by a teacher. But the latest statewide survey on public education by the Charles Butt Foundation finds the profession under duress: Just 39 percent of Texans now say they would like to have their child take up teaching in the public schools, down 10 points in one year.

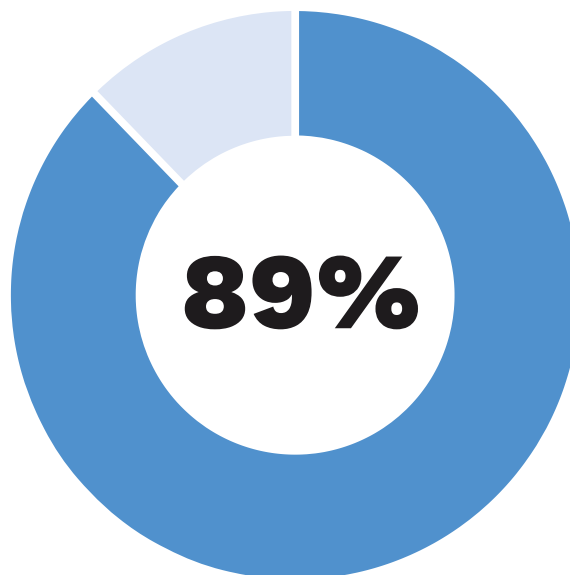
The numerous pressures on teachers are widely recognized. Three-quarters of Texans think public school teachers are undervalued or disrespected by society; 66 percent say they are overworked; and 75 percent or more think average salaries of longer-tenured teachers are too low.

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<sup>1</sup> Saad, L. (2022, September 1). *Americans' satisfaction with K-12 education on low side*. Gallup. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/399731/americans-satisfaction-education-low-side.aspx>

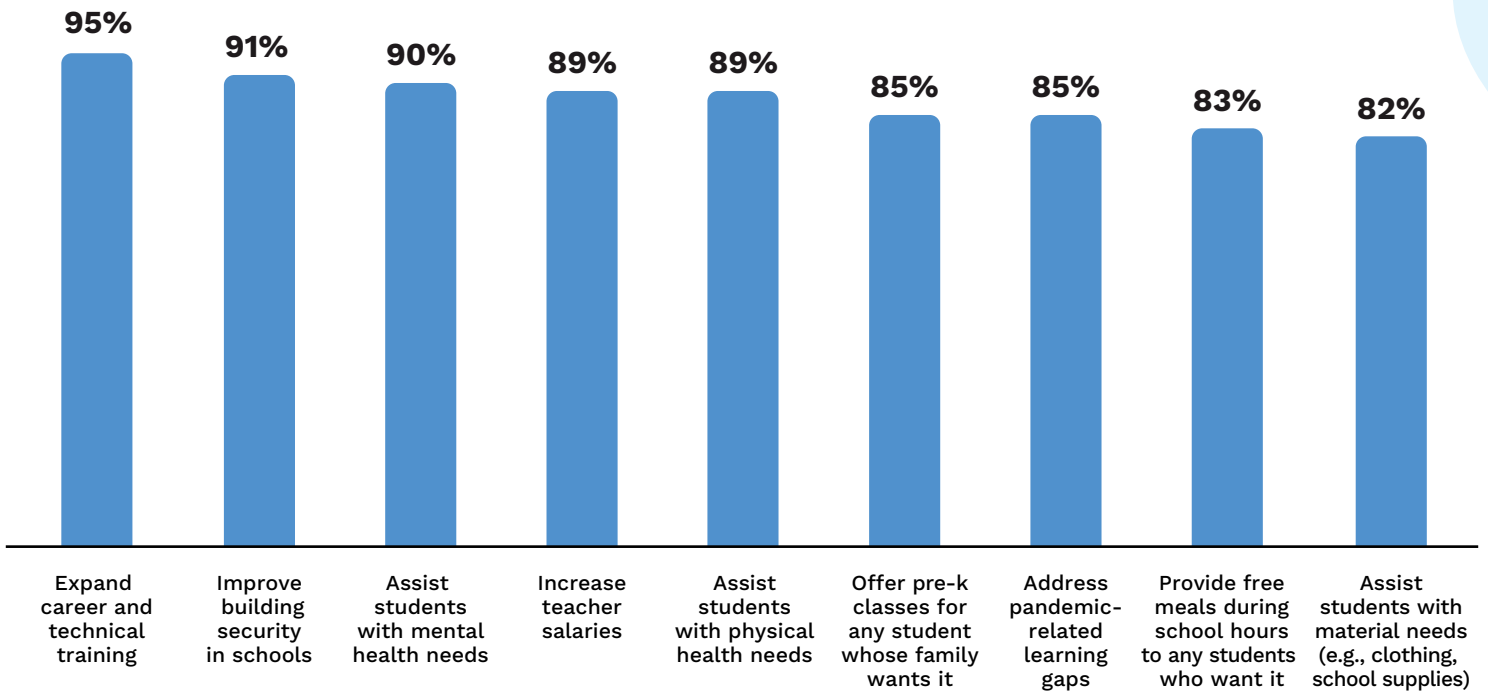
## Most Texas Parents Satisfied With Their Child's Public School Education

% of public school parents who are somewhat/very satisfied with the quality of education their child is receiving



# Texans Favor Increased State Funding for Public School Priorities

% of Texans who somewhat or strongly support increasing state funding for each initiative



Texans broadly support steps to address the pay problem. Eighty-nine percent support increasing state funding for PK–12 public schools to boost teacher salaries. The public favors a comprehensive compensation system, with years of experience, inflation, and level of education as the most preferred factors to increase pay over a teaching career.

Anxieties over school shootings are apparent in survey findings as well.<sup>2</sup> Fifty-three percent of Texans see at least a moderate risk that public school students in their community might experience a mass shooting event at school. Also, 4 in 10 parents see at least a moderate risk to their own child.

<sup>2</sup> The 2023 Texas Education Poll was administered nearly four months after the shooting at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, which took the lives of 19 students and two teachers.



In an open-ended question about the biggest problems facing local public schools that has been asked since the survey's inception in 2020, concerns surrounding school safety, including the risk of gun violence, rose to the number one spot in 2023. Twenty-three percent of Texans overall—triple what it was a year ago—and 32 percent of public school parents said it is their top concern.

In response to a section of questions digging deeper into school safety and student belonging, Texas parents shared perspectives on behalf of their children. Encouragingly, 82 percent of parents express confidence in each of the four measures of student belonging surveyed—that their child can be their genuine self at school, feels supported by teachers, is encouraged to share ideas and participate in class, and has good relationships with other students.

In a troubling result, two-thirds of public school parents think there is at least a moderate risk their child might experience some form of bullying, sexual harassment, or discrimination while at school, including 30 percent who see a large risk of at least one of these happening. Among the top concerns, 53 percent of parents think their child has at least a moderate chance of experiencing cyberbullying and 48 percent say the same about physical bullying or fights.

Regarding how Texans perceive schools generally, a gap among perceptions between parents and non-parents continues, a phenomenon first reported in the 2022 Texas Education Poll report. Forty-three percent of non-parents now give their local public schools an A or B grade, compared with 64 percent of parents, a continued gap of roughly 20 points between the two groups.<sup>3</sup> A smaller, yet significant gap also exists in ratings of Texas teachers. Seventy-six percent of parents give their community's public school teachers an A or B grade, 16 points higher than non-parents' ratings.

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<sup>3</sup> The terms "parents" and "public school parents" are used interchangeably in this report to refer to Texans with a child enrolled in public pre-K–12 schools. "Non-parents" refers to Texans without a child enrolled in pre-K–12 school.

Despite the differences in how Texans grade public schools generally, there is extensive support for increasing state funding in eight areas, ranging from 95 percent for expanding career and technical training to 90 percent for assisting students with mental health needs and 82 percent for assisting students with materials needs such as clothing and school supplies. Results are bipartisan, with two-thirds or more of Democrats, Republicans, and independents alike in support of increasing state funding for each item surveyed.

On testing and accountability, public school parents are divided on whether or not the State Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) tests effectively measure student learning. Most non-parents, for their part, think STAAR does not accomplish that goal. When it comes to grading schools, among the one-third of Texans who are aware of accountability ratings issued to their local public schools by the Texas Education Agency (TEA), roughly 8 in 10 say those grades are at least somewhat helpful in understanding school quality.

On school vouchers, Texans, by 54–44 percent, oppose implementing a voucher program in their community if it meant reducing the amount of funds available to the local public schools. While most non-parents oppose this, parents split evenly at 49–49 percent.

In response to a hypothetical question about a scenario in which private schools were to receive state education funding, most Texans think they should be held to similar requirements as public schools, including 88 percent who believe private schools should be required to publicly report all school finances, just over 80 percent who favor requiring acceptance of students with special education needs and providing special education services, and 73 percent who favor requiring private schools to follow state curriculum guidelines.

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<sup>4</sup> Differences that are significant at the 95 percent confidence level (or higher) are reported without qualification. Those that are significant at 90–94 percent confidence are described as “slight” differences. Those that are significant at less than 90 percent confidence are not reported as differences.

## About the Poll

The fourth annual Texas Education Poll—previously known as the Charles Butt Foundation poll—was produced for the Charles Butt Foundation by [Langer Research Associates](#), with data collection occurring September 9–19, 2022, in English and Spanish, among a random statewide sample of 1,211 Texas adults via the Ipsos KnowledgePanel®, a probability-based online survey panel. Results have a margin of error of 3.7 points for the full sample; error margins are larger for subgroups. All differences described in this report have been tested for statistical significance.<sup>4</sup>

The 2023 Texas Education Poll was directed by Lauren Cook, senior strategist, and Jessica Enyioha, Ph.D., director of research; with Audrey Boklage, Ph.D., vice president of learning and impact. The report and user interface were designed by Joel Goudeau, art director; and multimedia designers Lauren Reed and John Jacob Moreno; with visualization support by Kurt Lockhart, data insights manager; and web development support from Karen Wang, web developer. The lead author of this report is Allison De Jong, senior research analyst at Langer Research Associates; with Christine Filer, Ph.D., senior research analyst; Steven Sparks, Ph.D., research analyst; Jared Sousa, research associate; and Gary Langer, project director.



# Attitudes Toward Teachers

Even while recognizing the challenges teachers face, non-parents have grown more critical of public school teachers. Sixty percent of non-parents give the public school teachers in their community an A or B grade, down from 68 percent in the 2021 report.<sup>5</sup> By contrast, 76 percent of public school parents give their local teachers an A or B, matching their high in 2022.

The shift among non-parents brings local teachers' A–B grades among all Texans to 63 percent, down a slight 5 points in two years.

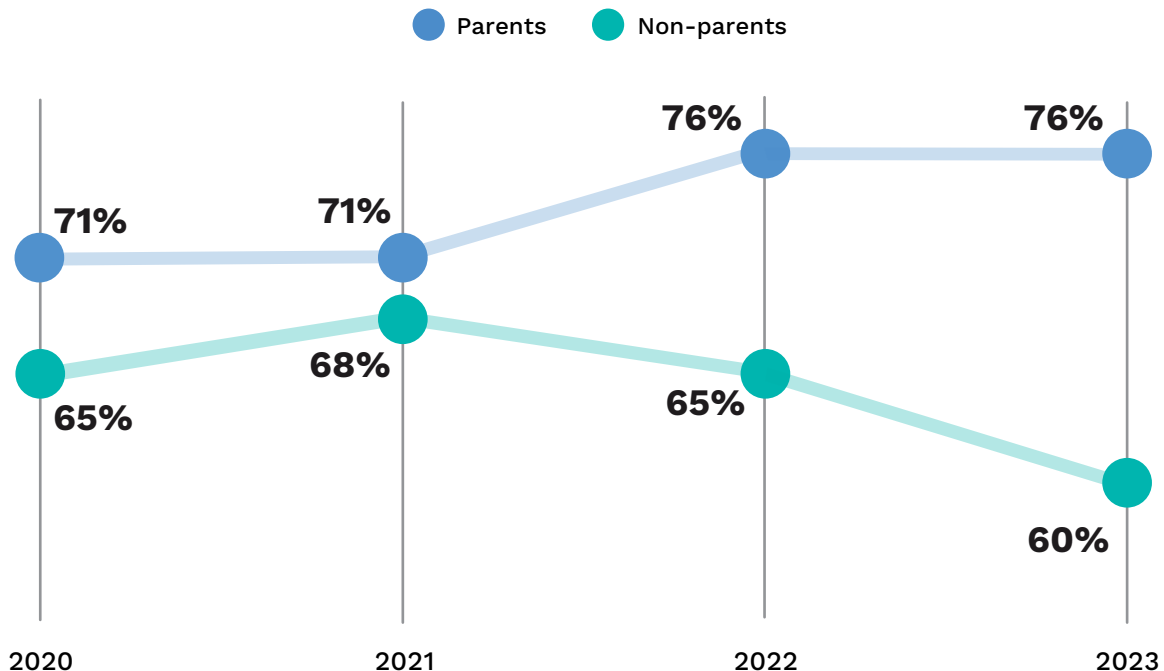
Views of the profession's desirability have also lost ground. The share of Texans who would like their child to teach in public schools as a career dropped 10 points this year to 39 percent, with the decline broadly based across groups. A national Phi Delta Kappan (PDK) poll from June 2022 found similar results using a slightly different question, with 37 percent of Americans saying they would like a child of theirs to become a public school teacher in their community.<sup>6</sup>

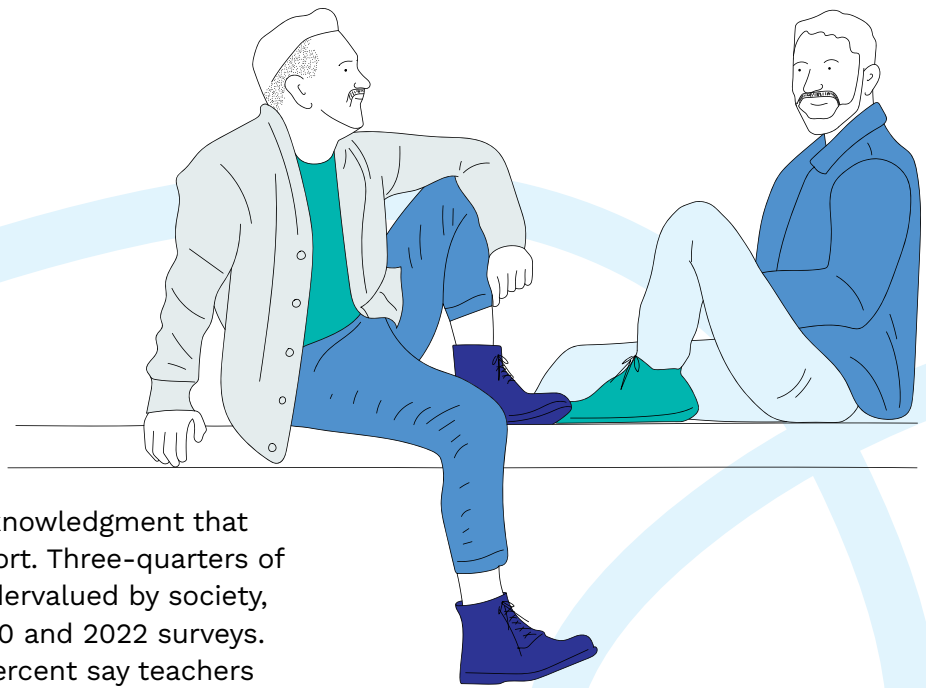
<sup>5</sup> Here and throughout, surveys are denoted by the year in which they were released. Each was fielded during the previous winter or fall.

<sup>6</sup> Phi Delta Kappan. (2022). *The 54th annual PDK poll: Local public school ratings rise, even as the teaching profession loses ground*. PDK International. <https://pdkpoll.org/2022-pdk-poll-results/>

## Parents' Grades for Teachers Remain High, While Non-Parents' Grades Drop

% of public school parents and % of non-parents who give A or B grades for public school teachers





Results also indicate an acknowledgment that teachers lack societal support. Three-quarters of Texans say teachers are undervalued by society, similar to results in the 2020 and 2022 surveys. Surveyed another way, 74 percent say teachers receive too little respect from society.

Additionally, Texans broadly recognize teachers in their community are overworked; 66 percent say so, more than double the share who think they have an appropriate workload (26 percent) or who think they are underworked (6 percent). This view aligns with the experiences of Texas public school teachers. Texas teachers reported working an average of 57 hours per week, with many citing excessive workloads as a reason for seriously considering leaving their position.<sup>7</sup>

Public schools in Texas, as nationally, have struggled to attract and retain teachers, and large majorities of Texans, including parents, are aware of the problem locally. About 9 in 10 say teacher shortages are a problem in their community's public schools, with a majority calling it either a serious problem (43 percent) or a crisis (16 percent). Those closest to the public schools are most apt to express concern. Among people who work in a public school or did so in the past (12 percent of all Texans), 8 in 10 say teacher shortages are a serious problem or crisis. That compares with 64 percent of those who have a close friend or family member who works in the schools and 53 percent of those with no such connection.

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<sup>7</sup> *2022 Texas Teacher Poll: Persistent Problems and a Path Forward* published by the Charles Butt Foundation

There are regional differences in the highest-level concern. Seeing teacher shortages as a crisis among Texans peaks at 23 percent in Central Texas and 22 percent in the Houston area, compared with 11 to 12 percent in the East, West and South/Southwest—Dallas/Fort-Worth residents are in the middle, at 15 percent.<sup>8</sup>

Perceived shortages are associated with bleaker views of the profession. The 59 percent of Texans who call teacher shortages a serious problem or crisis in their community are 33 points more inclined than others to think teachers are overworked, 80 versus 47 percent. The Texans who call teacher shortages a serious problem or crisis are 35 points more likely to think teachers are undervalued and 24 points more likely to think they receive too little respect from society.

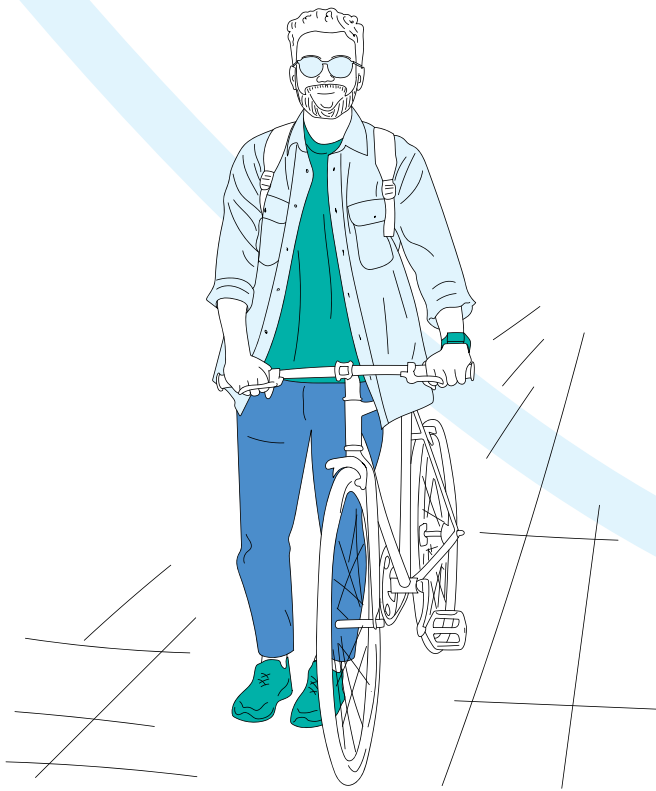
Staffing challenges, moreover, may reinforce difficulties in recruitment. Texans who call teacher shortages a crisis in their community are 11 points less likely than others to say they would like to have a child of theirs become a public school teacher.

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<sup>8</sup> See survey methodology at [CharlesButtFdn.org/2023TxEdPoll](https://CharlesButtFdn.org/2023TxEdPoll) for composition of state regions.

## Survey Questions

- Q. Thinking about public school teachers in your community, using the A, B, C, D, Fail scale, what grade would you give them as a group?**
- Q. Would you like to have a child of yours take up teaching in the public schools as a career?**
- Q. Do you feel that public school teachers are undervalued, overvalued, or valued appropriately in society today?**
- Q. Do you think public school teachers generally receive too much respect, too little respect, or about the right amount of respect in society today?**
- Q. Do you think public school teachers in your community are overworked, underworked, or have an appropriate workload?**
- Q. As far as you are aware, how big a problem are teacher shortages in your community's public schools?**



## Teacher Salaries

**T**he public overwhelmingly backs boosting teacher pay. Eighty-nine percent of Texans support increasing state funding for K–12 public schools to increase teacher salaries.

Texans across political parties overwhelmingly support teacher pay increases, ranging from 95 percent among Democrats to 90 percent among political independents and 83 percent among Republicans.

This in part reflects a broad sense that longer-tenured teachers, in particular, are underpaid. Eight in 10 Texans think the statewide average salary for public school teachers with 10 years of experience—\$57,676—is too low. Nearly as many, 74 percent, say the same for teachers with 20 years experience (an annual average of \$63,093).<sup>9</sup> Just 16 and 21 percent, respectively, say these salaries are about right, and almost none—1 and 2 percent—say they are too high.

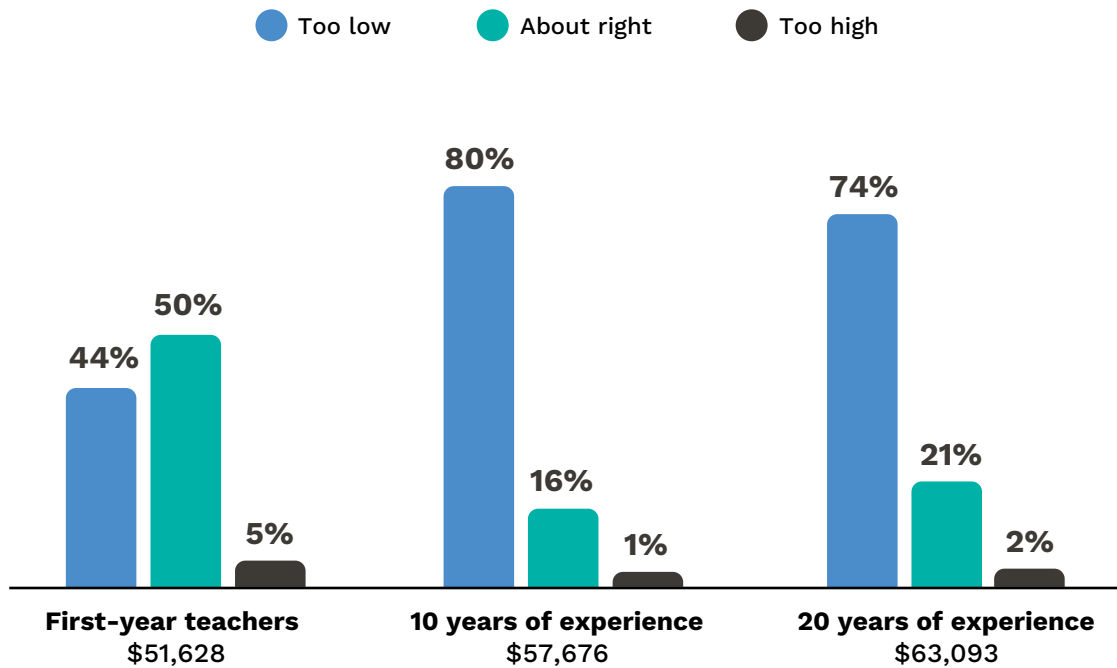
There is more of a division on the average salary of first-year teachers, \$51,628. Half of Texans think this is about right, while 44 percent think it is too low; again few—5 percent—say it is too high. In the Foundation’s survey of teachers themselves in 2022, 81 percent felt their pay was unfair, with little variation by tenure.

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<sup>9</sup> Salary averages are from an [analysis](#) of salary data from the TEA prepared for the Charles Butt Foundation by the University of Houston.

## Most Texans View Salaries for Experienced Teachers as Too Low

% of Texans reporting views on average teacher salaries for different levels of experience



There is broad agreement across political affiliations that experienced teachers earn too little money. Eighty-five percent of Democrats think the average annual salary for teachers with 10 years on the job is too low, as do 81 percent of independents, and 75 percent of Republicans.

Texans who view teacher shortages as a serious problem or crisis are 16 to 27 points more likely than others to say average salaries in each tenure group are too low. This view also peaks, among those who see teachers as undervalued by society, disrespected, or overworked.

People who rate their community's teachers highly are more likely to say they are underpaid. Half of those who give their local public school teachers an A or B grade say the average salary for a first-year teacher is too low, compared with 34 percent of those assigning lower grades.

## Pay Increases Over Time

Texans think a range of factors should determine how much a teacher's salary increases over time. Roughly 9 in 10 say a teacher's level of education and certification (89 percent), the cost of living or inflation (88 percent), and years of experience (87 percent) should be factors in teacher compensation. This includes about half, 48 percent, who say a teacher's level of education and certification should be a major factor; just over 4 in 10 say the same for the cost of living and years of experience.

More than 80 percent of Texans say classroom observations and other performance assessments by school administrators should be a factor in salary increases, including 34 percent saying it should be a major factor. Additionally, 73 percent of Texans think local housing costs should be a component in pay raises, including a third who think this should be a major factor.

Fewer Texans believe student performance on state standardized tests should be a factor. While 60 percent say this should be a factor in determining how salaries increase over time, a quarter think it should be a major factor.

Current and former public school teachers are more likely than those who have never worked in public schools to say the cost of living should be a major factor. They are also less likely than Texans who have not worked in public schools to support factoring in student performance on state standardized tests and performance assessments by school administrators.

Support for using standardized tests in setting teacher pay is higher among public school parents than non-parents (68 versus 58 percent). It peaks at 69 percent among Texans with household incomes less than \$50,000 and at 66 percent of Hispanic Texans. Results also show that skepticism about the STAAR test impacts views on how it should be used. In fact, 8 in 10 Texans who are at least somewhat confident that the test effectively measures how well a student is learning say it should be a factor in determining pay raises, versus 24 percent of those who are not at all confident in this.

## Texans Prioritize Experience and Living Costs Over Test Scores for Teacher Salary Increases

% of Texans who say the following items should be a factor or a major factor in teacher salary increases



### Survey Questions

- Q. In their first year on the job, the average annual salary for a public school teacher in Texas is \$51,628. Do you think this salary is too high, too low, or about right for a first-year teacher?
- Q. After 10 years on the job, the average annual salary for a public school teacher in Texas is \$57,676. Do you think this salary is too high, too low, or about right for a teacher with 10 years of experience?
- Q. After 20 years on the job, the average annual salary for a public school teacher in Texas is \$63,093. Do you think this salary is too high, too low, or about right for a teacher with 20 years of experience?
- Q. How much of a factor, if at all, should each of these be in determining how much a teacher's salary increases over time? a.) How their students perform on state standardized tests b.) Classroom observations and other performance assessments by school administrators c.) Years of teaching experience d.) Their level of education and certification e.) The cost of living (i.e., inflation) f.) Local housing costs.

# The Impact of Teachers

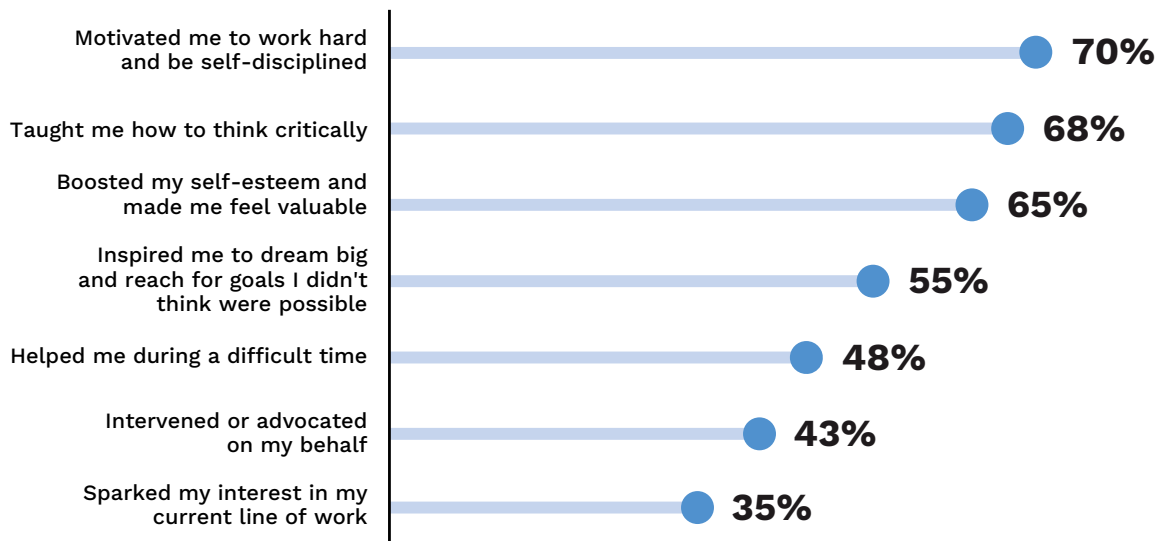
A vast majority of Texans shared that a teacher positively impacted their life. Eighty-four percent identify with positive impacts in at least one of seven ways specified in the survey. Large majorities also say a K–12 teacher or coach motivated them to work hard and be self-disciplined (70 percent), taught them how to think critically (68 percent), or boosted their self-esteem and made them feel valuable (65 percent). Over half, 55 percent, say a teacher or coach has inspired them to dream big and reach for goals they did not think were possible.

About half also say a teacher or coach has helped them during a difficult time. Forty-three percent say one intervened or advocated on their behalf. More than a third of Texans (35 percent) say a teacher or coach sparked their interest in their current line of work. Among the 6 percent of Texans who are current or former public school teachers, 73 percent say the same.

Reported impacts are similar across racial and ethnic groups, with one notable exception: Sixty percent of Black Texans say a teacher intervened or advocated on their behalf, compared with 45 percent of Hispanic Texans and 37 percent of White Texans.

## Texans Report Multiple Positive Ways Teachers Shaped Their Lives

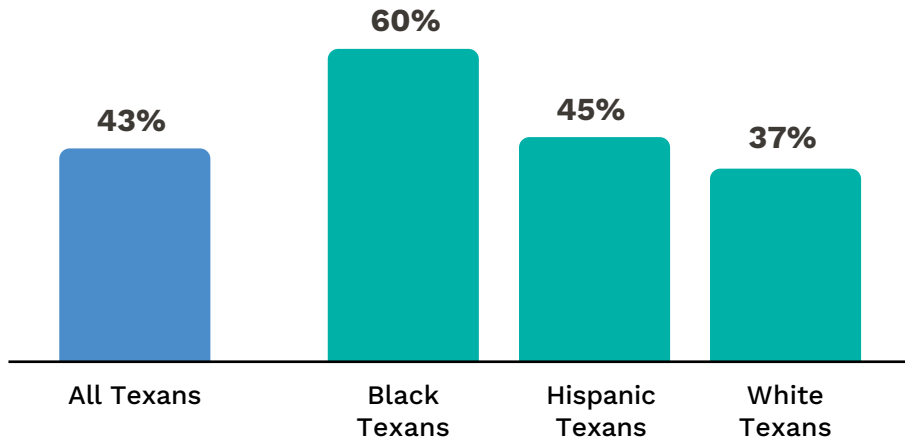
% of Texans who report positive impacts from their K-12 teachers or coaches





## Black Texans More Likely to Experience Teachers Advocating on Their Behalf

% of Texans by race or ethnicity who had a teacher intervene or advocate on their behalf



These experiences matter. Texans who say their life has been positively impacted by a teacher or coach are more likely (31 percent) than those without such influences (20 percent) to have graduated from college. They are also more likely to be higher income-earners, with 38 percent living in households earning more than \$100,000 annually compared with 22 percent of others.

Texans who have been personally impacted by a teacher tend to have more positive perceptions of the teaching profession. Those who report at least one positive impact of a teacher or coach on their life are substantially more likely (66 percent) than others (47 percent) to give the teachers in their community A or B grades. They are more apt to say they would like a child of theirs to become a teacher, 41 versus 27 percent.

School ratings show a positive effect as well. Forty-nine percent of Texans who have been positively impacted by a teacher give their community's public schools an A or B grade, compared with 33 percent of others. They are also a slight 10 points more likely to be satisfied with the quality of education public school students receive statewide (58 versus 48 percent).

### Survey Question

Q. Thinking back on your K-12 education, did you have a teacher or coach who positively impacted your life in any of the following ways? a.) Helped me during a difficult time b.) Boosted my self-esteem and made me feel valuable c.) Inspired me to dream big and reach for goals I didn't think were possible d.) Motivated me to work hard and be self-disciplined e.) Taught me how to think critically f.) Intervened or advocated on my behalf g.) Sparked my interest in my current line of work

# Safety, Belonging, and Inclusion

The 2022 Texas Education Poll gauged parents' perceptions of their child's sense of belonging in school. The results showed a positive connection between belonging and certain school issues. Namely, parents who reported a stronger sense of belonging on behalf of their children had higher perceptions of school quality. These parents chose their current public school given other enrollment options and had a higher level of trust in school decision-makers.

Building on that result, this year's 2023 survey included four specific measures of belonging in Texas public schools: 1-whether parents think their child can be their genuine self at school, 2-if their child feels supported

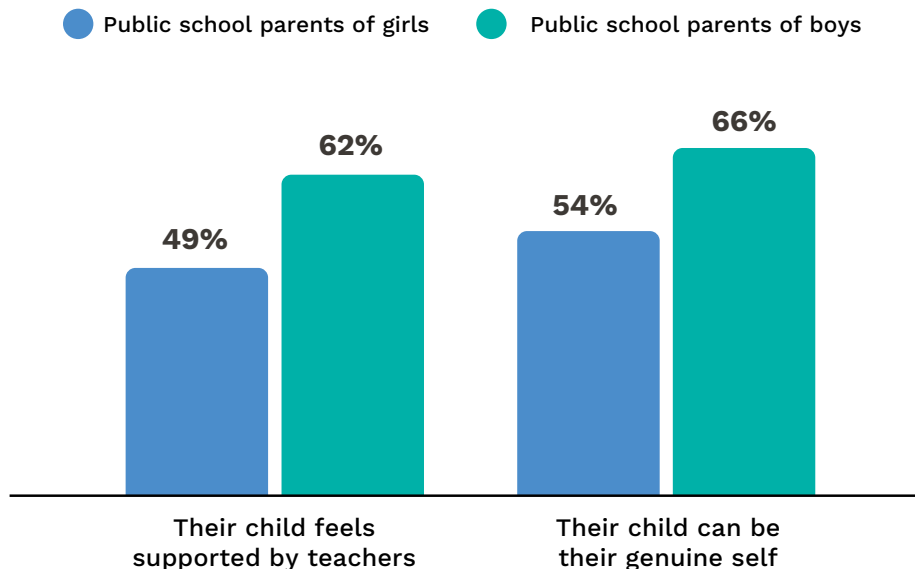
by teachers, 3-whether their child has good relationships with other students, and 4-if their child is encouraged to share ideas and participate in class. Encouragingly, 9 in 10 public school parents are at least somewhat confident in any single measure, including 82 percent in all four.<sup>10</sup>

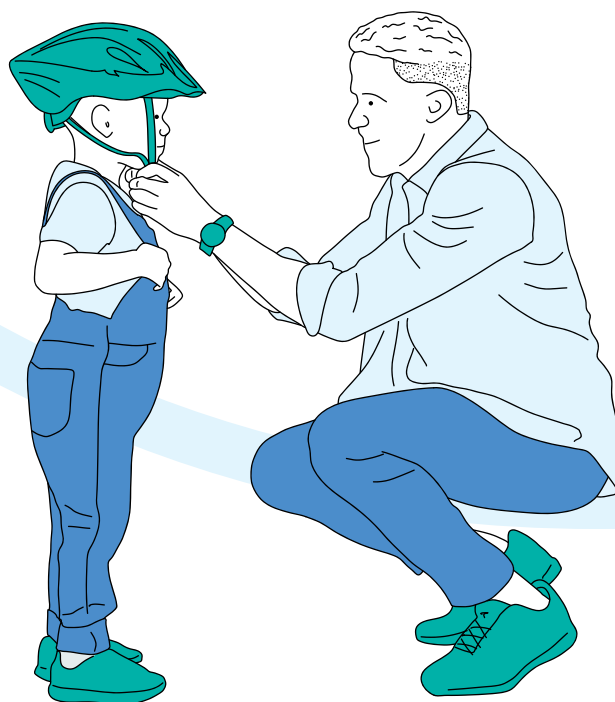
Most parents—55 to 62 percent—are extremely or very confident in any one measure of belonging, though only 36 percent have a high degree of confidence in all four items. Results echo those from the 2022 Texas Education Poll when 77 percent of public school parents said their child had at least a somewhat strong sense of belonging at their school, but just 30 percent said it was very strong.

<sup>10</sup> Here and elsewhere, parents with multiple children were asked about their oldest child.

## Public School Parents of Boys More Confident Than Parents of Girls in Child's Sense of Belonging

% of public school parents who are extremely or very confident in their child's belonging factors





On par with results from the 2022 survey, parents' confidence in their child's sense of belonging is strongly related to positive attitudes toward public schools. Sixty-five percent of parents who are highly confident in all four measures are very satisfied with the quality of education their child is receiving, compared with just 32 percent who are confident in two or three items and 11 percent of those confident in just one item or none of the items.

Differences among Texas parents emerge when asked about their sense of belonging and their child's gender. Forty-five percent of public school parents whose oldest or only child is a boy are highly confident in all four measures, compared with 26 percent of parents whose oldest or only child is a girl, a 19-point difference. On specific measures, 62 percent of parents considering their son are highly confident that their child is supported by teachers, compared with 49 percent of those talking about their

daughter. Parents of boys also are slightly more likely (66 percent) to have a high degree of confidence that their child can be their genuine self at school, compared with parents of girls (54 percent).

Perceptions of belonging differ based on education and income levels. Public school parents with a college degree are 17 points more likely (67 percent) than those with less education (50 percent) to be highly confident that their child feels supported by teachers. Similarly, 66 percent of parents with household incomes of \$100,000 or more are highly confident that their child feels supported by teachers, compared with 50 percent of those earning less than \$50,000.

In another difference, public school parents in suburban and rural areas are 15 points more likely (62 percent) than urban residents (47 percent) to be highly confident their child is supported by teachers.

## Risks of Bullying, Harassment, and Discrimination

Two-thirds of public school parents think there is at least a moderate risk their child might experience some form of bullying, sexual harassment, or discrimination while at school. Thirty percent see a large risk of at least one of these happening.

Perceived risks are strongly connected to overall feelings of belonging. A modest 19 percent of parents who say their child faces a large risk of bullying, harassment, and discrimination are highly confident in all four measures of belonging for their child, compared with 56 percent of parents who say those risks to their child are small or nonexistent.<sup>11</sup>

Bullying is the most common risk identified by public school parents; 53 percent see at least a moderate risk that their child might experience cyberbullying, and nearly as many (48 percent) say the same for physical bullying or fights. The view is evenly distributed across racial or ethnic groups, education levels, and income groups, with about half or more in each seeing cyberbullying as at least a moderate risk to their child and 4 in 10 or more saying the same for physical bullying or fights. Parents asked about their son were somewhat more likely (55 percent) to see physical bullying or fights as a risk than parents who were asked about their daughter (42 percent).

Among other concerns, about 4 in 10 public school parents think their child faces at least a moderate risk of sexual harassment from other students. Again, gender differences emerge from the data. Parents who were asked about their daughter (45 percent) are 16 points more inclined to call this a risk than parents who were asked about their son (29 percent).

A sizable share also identifies risks of discrimination based on their child's racial or ethnic background. Thirty-seven percent of public school parents overall say there is at least a moderate risk their child might face discrimination at school based on their racial or ethnic background; parents of color are more likely (43 percent) to say there is at least a moderate risk their child might face discrimination at school based on their racial or ethnic background than White parents (20 percent). Among Hispanic parents specifically, 42 percent see at least a moderate risk their child might experience discrimination based on their racial or ethnic background.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The sample size of public school parents who say their child faces a large risk of bullying, harassment, and discrimination is small, n=91, against a preferred standard of n=100 for subgroup analysis.

<sup>12</sup> Sample sizes among parents of other racial and ethnic backgrounds are not large enough for reliable analysis.

Among other forms of potential discrimination, 35 percent of parents overall think their child faces at least a moderate risk of discrimination based on their economic status, rising to 45 percent of parents with annual household incomes less than \$50,000 versus 19 percent of parents earning \$100,000 or more.

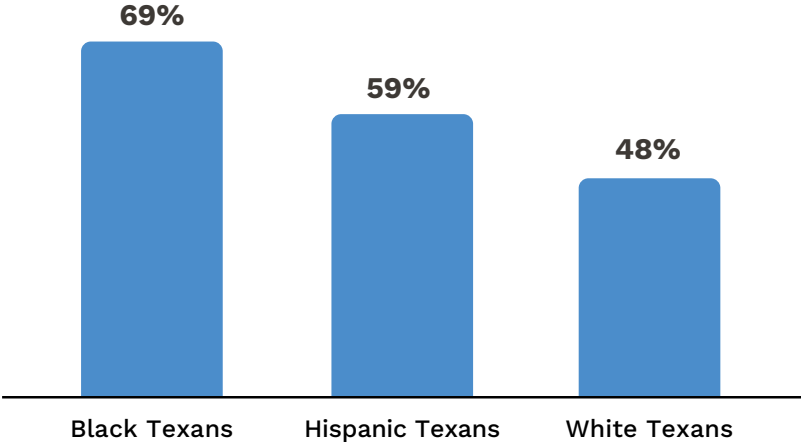
Twenty-nine percent of parents say their child faces at least a moderate risk of discrimination based on their gender identity or sexual orientation.

Twenty-six percent of public school parents whose child speaks a language other than English at home say their child faces at least a moderate risk of discrimination based on their English-language capabilities.

Texans overall were asked to assess the risks of bullying, sexual harassment, and discrimination faced by public school students in their community, generally. Coinciding with the relative risks parents perceive for their children, cyberbullying and physical bullying are at the top of the list, with 74 and 68 percent, respectively, seeing these as large or moderate risks for public school students in their community.

### **Texans of Color see More Risks for Discrimination Among Students in Their Communities**

% of Texans by subgroup who believe public school students face a moderate or large risk of discrimination based on their race or ethnicity

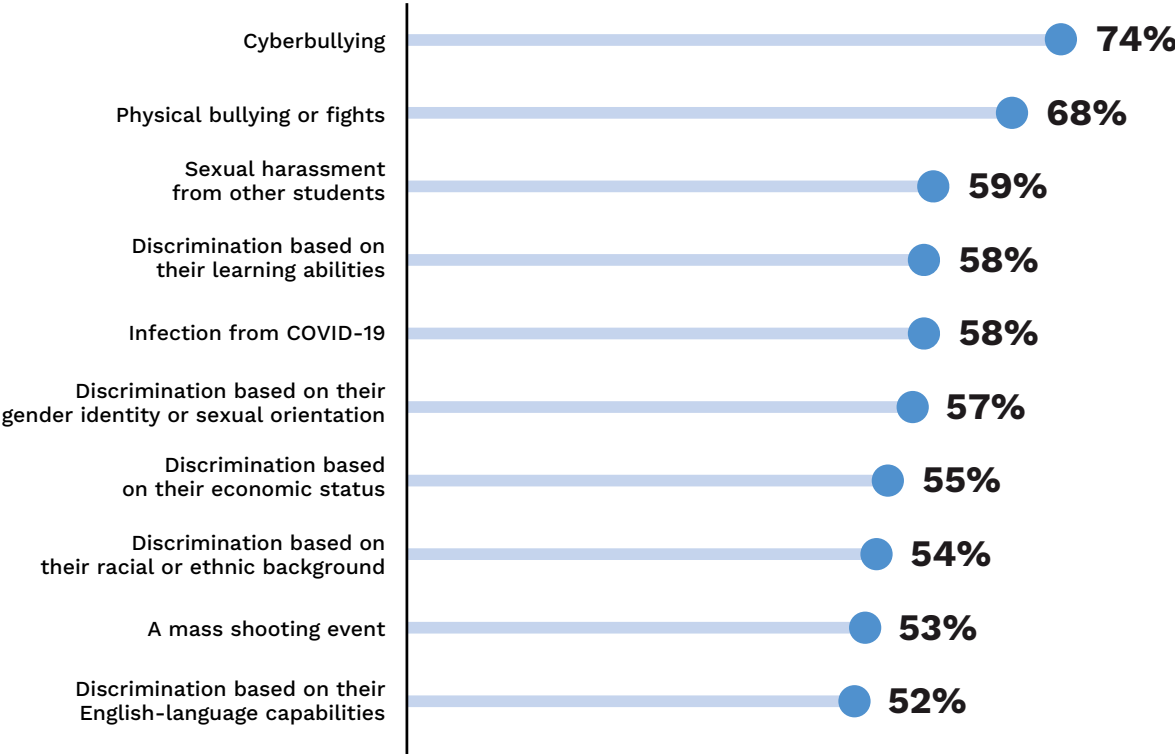


Perceptions among public school parents and non-parents are largely aligned, with a few exceptions: Parents are 11 to 17 points less likely than non-parents to think public school students in their community are at risk of sexual harassment and discrimination based on gender identity or sexual orientation, English-language capabilities, and learning abilities.

Other differences are informed by race or ethnicity and income. Sixty-nine percent of Black Texans and 59 percent of Hispanic Texans say public school students in their community face at least a moderate risk of discrimination based on their racial or ethnic background, compared with 48 percent of White Texans. As for discrimination based on economic status, 64 percent of Texans with household incomes less than \$50,000 say this is a risk to students, compared with 51 percent of those who earn \$100,000 or more.

### Texans see a Variety of Risks Facing Students in Their Communities

% of Texans who rate the following as moderate or large risks



## Risk of COVID-19 Infection

Among other school safety concerns, 58 percent of Texans think there is at least a moderate risk public school students in their community might experience infection from COVID-19 via exposure at school, including 24 percent who see this as a large risk. About as many public school parents, 59 percent, say there is a risk of COVID-19 infection for their child, including 18 percent who view this as a large risk.

Hispanic Texans (68 percent) and Black Texans (62 percent) are more likely than White Texans (50 percent) to see COVID-19 infection as at least a moderate risk for public school students in their community. In other gaps, urban and suburban residents are more inclined than rural residents (69 percent compared with 47 percent) to view COVID-19 infection as a sizable risk; and women are 22 points more apt than men to think so.

Risk perceptions are highly partisan, with three-quarters of Democrats and 61 percent of independents saying there is at least a moderate risk to their community's public school students, compared with 38 percent of Republicans. By political ideology, 74 percent of liberals see a sizable risk, dropping to 62 percent of moderates, and 45 percent of conservatives.

## Risk of a Mass Shooting Event

A majority of Texans, 53 percent, think a mass shooting event poses at least a moderate risk to public school students in their community, including about a quarter who see a large risk.

When asked about their child, 41 percent of public school parents say there is a large or moderate risk they might experience such an event, including 18 percent who see a large risk of this happening.<sup>13</sup>

Risk perceptions peak in the South/Southwest region of the state, home to Uvalde County. Here, 64 percent of residents see at least a moderate risk of a school shooting, compared with 51 percent in Dallas/Fort Worth and 45 percent in East, Central and West Texas alike. Views in Houston are in between, at 56 percent.

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<sup>13</sup> The 2023 Texas Education Poll was administered four months after the school shooting at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde on May 24, 2022.



Hispanic Texans are especially inclined to call mass shootings a risk to public school students in their community; 67 percent say so compared with 43 percent of White Texans. Black Texans are in the middle at 56 percent. Similarly, 47 percent of Hispanic parents think there is at least a moderate risk their child might experience a mass shooting event at school, compared with 25 percent of White parents.

There also are substantial differences by income, with 64 percent of Texans in households earning less than \$50,000 annually believing there is a risk to the public school students in their community, compared with 42 percent of those earning \$100,000 or more. Among public school parents, 51 percent in lower-income households say there is a risk to their child, versus 28 percent of those earning \$100,000 or more.

Among other gaps, 60 percent of women consider a mass shooting event as at least a moderate risk at their community's public schools, compared with 46 percent of men. Similarly, among public school parents, 46 percent of mothers perceive a risk to their child compared with 32 percent of fathers, a difference of 14 points.

Risk perceptions also are informed by partisanship. Sixty-five percent of Democrats say there is at least a moderate risk of a mass shooting event at their community's public schools, as do 58 percent of independents, compared with 34 percent of Republicans.

## Survey Questions

- Q. When you send your (oldest) child to school, how confident are you in the following? a.) He/She/They can be his/her/their genuine self b.) He feels/She feels/They feel supported by teachers c.) He is/She is/They are encouraged to share ideas and participate in class d.) He has/She has/They have good relationships with other students
- Q. How big of a risk do you think there is that the public school students in your community might experience any of the following while at school? a.) Infection from COVID-19 b.) A mass shooting event c.) Physical bullying or fights d.) Cyberbullying e.) Sexual harassment from other students f.) Discrimination based on their racial or ethnic background g.) Discrimination based on their gender identity or sexual orientation h.) Discrimination based on their economic status i.) Discrimination based on their English-language capabilities j.) Discrimination based on their learning abilities
- Q. Now thinking about your (oldest) child in public school, how big of a risk do you think there is that he/she/they might experience any of the following while at school? See answer choices a-i listed above



# Rating the Schools

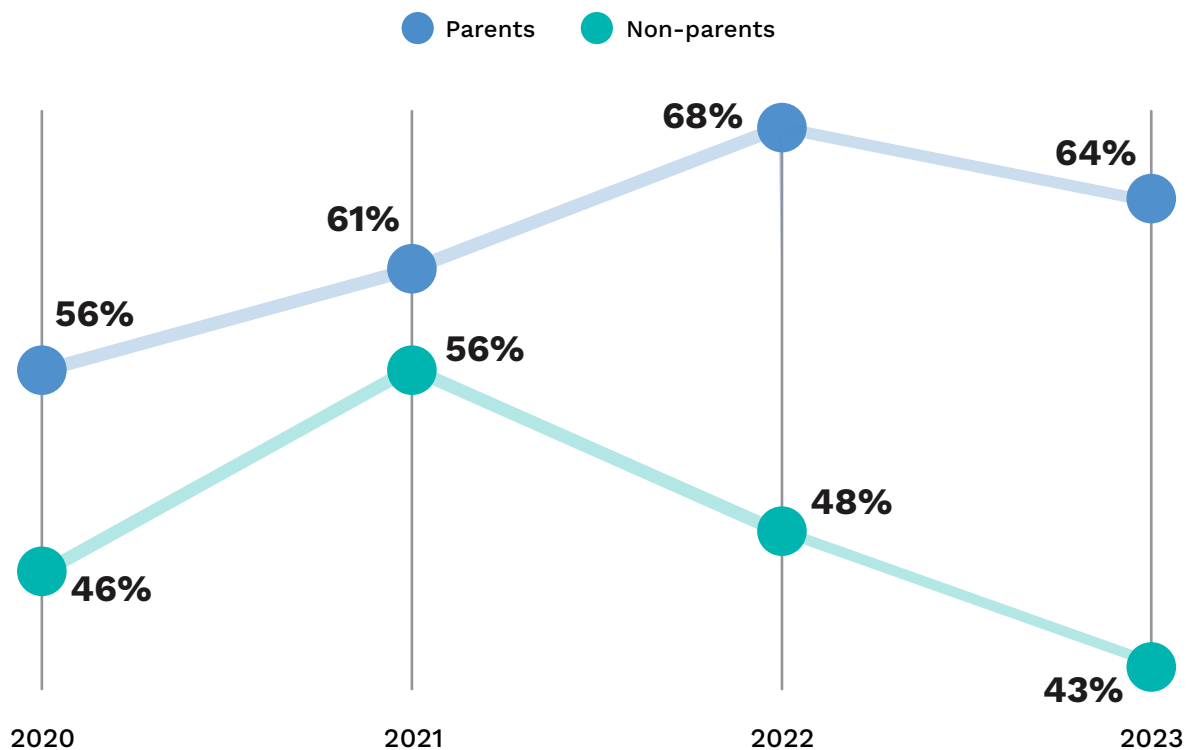
As noted, a disconnect in perceptions of local public schools between parents and non-parents persists in this year's survey. Sixty-four percent of public school parents give their community's public schools an A or B rating, which is about even with its peak of 68 percent in 2022 and up slightly from its pre-pandemic level of 56 percent.

Conversely, ratings among non-parents continue to fall, down 13 points since 2021 to 43 percent As or Bs, a low in four years of tracking. The decline among non-parents brings A or B ratings among all Texans to 47 percent, down 9 points in two years to entirely erase gains made in the first year of the pandemic.

There is a particularly sharp decline among Texans in the Central region of the state. In the 2021 report, 64 percent of Central Texans gave A or B ratings to their community's public schools, numerically higher than any other region; just 39 percent do so now. Ratings in the South/Southwest region also fell, down 12 points since 2021 to 45 percent, while they have held essentially steady in other regions of Texas, ranging from 45 to 52 percent.

## Gap Between Parent and Non-Parent Perceptions of School Quality Continues

% of public school parents and % of non-parents who give A or B grades for local public schools



Among other differences, 34 percent of Texans who call teacher shortages a crisis in their community give their community's public school an A or B rating, compared with 54 percent of those who say it is not a serious problem or not a problem at all.

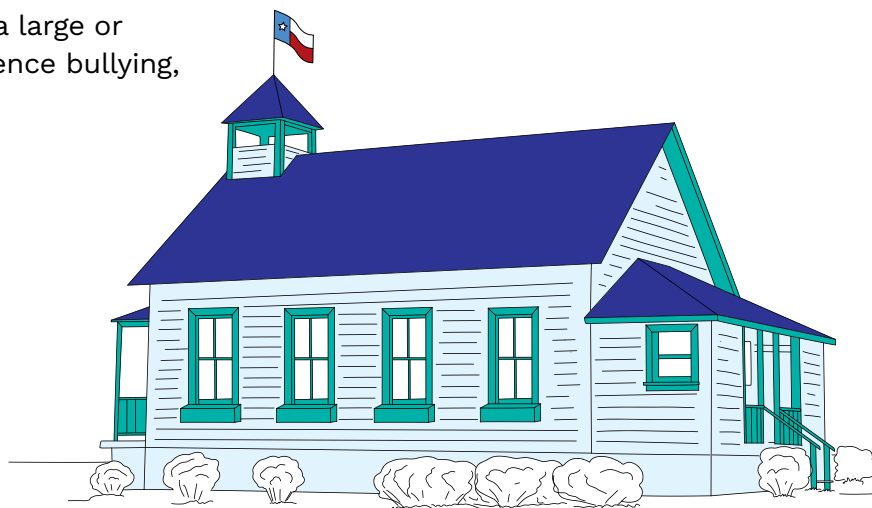
The division between parents and non-parents extends to views of public education in the state as a whole. Seventy-seven percent of public school parents are at least somewhat satisfied with the quality of education K–12 students receive in Texas, compared with 51 percent of non-parents, a 26-point gap. Combining these groups, 56 percent of Texans overall are at least somewhat satisfied, including 11 percent who are very satisfied, with public education as a whole.

Asked about the quality of education their child is receiving, a vast 89 percent of Texas public school parents are satisfied, exceeding the share of all parents with children in grades K–12 who said so nationally (80 percent) in a Gallup survey in August 2022. Moreover, just 18 percent would send their child to a different public school if given the option, with 82 percent instead saying they would keep their child at their current school.

That is not to say there is not considerable room for improvement: Thirty-seven percent of Texas public school parents are very satisfied with the quality of their child's education, in line with national results. As noted, strong satisfaction is particularly low among parents who are not highly confident their child can be their genuine selves, feels supported by teachers, is encouraged to participate in class, and has close relationships with other students. It is also lower among those who see a large or moderate risk their child might experience bullying, harassment, or discrimination.

# 82%

of Texas public school parents would **keep their child in their current public school**, if given other public school options.



## Problems Facing Schools

As concerns about the pandemic fade, mentions of school safety have risen to the most-cited problem facing Texas public schools. In an open-ended question, 23 percent of Texans overall and 32 percent of parents mention issues around school safety as among the biggest problems facing their community's public schools, up from 7 and 13 percent, respectively, in 2022. Among all Texans, this includes 12 percent who mention safety and security generally, 6 percent bullying or cyberbullying, and 6 percent who mention school shootings and gun violence. Public school parents are especially concerned about bullying or cyberbullying, which were mentioned by 15 percent.

Among other concerns, mentions of ideological issues as a top problem have risen to 18 percent among all Texans (10 percent among public school parents and 19 percent among non-parents), up from 11 percent in 2022 and 6 percent in 2021. This includes general mentions of political bias or indoctrination in schools (7 percent) as well as complaints about political correctness, gender issues, and critical race theory (6 percent). Fewer, 2 percent, specifically mention conservative bias.

Concerns about educational quality, ranging from poor curriculum to overcrowded classrooms and declining standards, are cited by 16 percent of Texans and essentially as many public school parents (15 percent). Each has held steady for the past four years.

Among other issues, 16 percent of Texans say the biggest problems facing their public schools are teacher shortages or difficulty getting and retaining quality teachers, up 6 points in a year. Nine percent of all Texans also mention issues regarding the teaching profession, such as low pay, lack of respect, and excessive workloads.

Other commonly named problems include a lack of school funding—cited by 12 percent overall—and 11 percent identified issues related to student well-being such as a lack of discipline, mental health, and drugs in schools. Other concerns receive single-digit mentions, including just 3 percent for pandemic-related issues, down sharply from 23 percent in 2022 and from 29 percent in 2021.

## Survey Questions

- Q. Students are often given the grades of A, B, C, D, and Fail to denote the quality of their work. Using the same scale, what grade would you give the public schools in your community?**
- Q. Thinking about public schools in the state as a whole, how satisfied are you with the quality of education students receive in kindergarten through grade 12 statewide?**
- Q. How satisfied are you with the quality of education your (oldest) child is receiving?**
- Q. If you could send your (oldest) child to any public school, would you send them to the school they now attend or to a different public school?**
- Q. What do you think are the biggest problems facing the public schools in your community?**

# Funding the Public Schools

**B**road majorities of Texans support increasing state funding for K–12 public schools in nine focus areas, ranging from 82 percent support for assisting students with material needs like clothing and school supplies to 95 percent for expanding career and technical training.

Increasing state funding for K–12 public schools has wide appeal, with two-thirds or more across demographic, political, and ideological groups supporting each of the nine proposed items. This includes more than 8 in 10 Democrats, independents, and Republicans alike who support increased funding to expand career and technical training, improve building security in schools, assist students with mental health needs, and increase teacher salaries.

Strong support by Texans varies by item. Expanding career and technical training (66 percent), assisting students with mental health needs (64 percent), and improving building security in schools (62 percent) top the strong-support list among all Texans. Results are similar among public school parents, except they are 9 points more apt to strongly support increasing state funding to improve building security.

The majority of Texans also strongly support increasing funding to improve teacher salaries (58 percent), provide free meals during school hours to any students who want it (55 percent), offer pre-kindergarten classes for any student whose family wants it (53 percent), and assist students with physical health needs (53 percent). Items that fall just below the majority are addressing pandemic-related learning gaps (49 percent) and assisting students with material needs (44 percent).



In addition to improving building security, public school parents are slightly more likely than non-parents to strongly support increasing state funding to provide free meals during school hours (62 percent) and to offer pre-kindergarten classes for any student (60 percent).

Across the board, strong support for increasing state funding for these purposes is higher among Democrats and independents than Republicans. For example, 70 percent of Democrats and 60 percent of independents strongly support increasing state funding to provide free meals, compared with 36 percent of Republicans.

Strong support is also higher for most items among women, Black Texans, and those with household incomes less than \$100,000, compared with men, White Texans, and those with higher incomes. By gender and race, the exception is expanding career and technical training, which receives high support across groups. Texans in the \$50,000–\$100,000 income bracket are more inclined than those with either lower or higher incomes to support increasing state funding for higher teacher salaries.

## Survey Questions

Q. Would you support or oppose increasing state funding for K-12 public schools to do the following? a.) Provide free meals during school hours to any students who want it b.) Increase teacher salaries c.) Assist students with mental health needs d.) Assist students with physical health needs e.) Assist students with material needs (clothing, school supplies) f.) Address pandemic-related learning gaps g.) Improve building security in schools h.) Expand career and technical (CTE) training i.) Offer pre-kindergarten classes for any student whose family wants it

# STAAR Testing & Accountability

## STAAR Testing

Public school parents differ on the usefulness of the standardized STAAR tests in measuring student learning: Fifty-three percent are confident that the test effectively measures student learning, while 45 percent are not confident. Skepticism is higher among non-parents; just 39 percent are confident in the test’s evaluative ability, for a result of 42 percent among all Texans. Both results are unchanged from the 2022 Texas Education survey, although the share of public school parents who are “very” confident the STAAR test effectively measures student learning has decreased 10 points since 2022 to 10 percent, returning to its 2021 level.

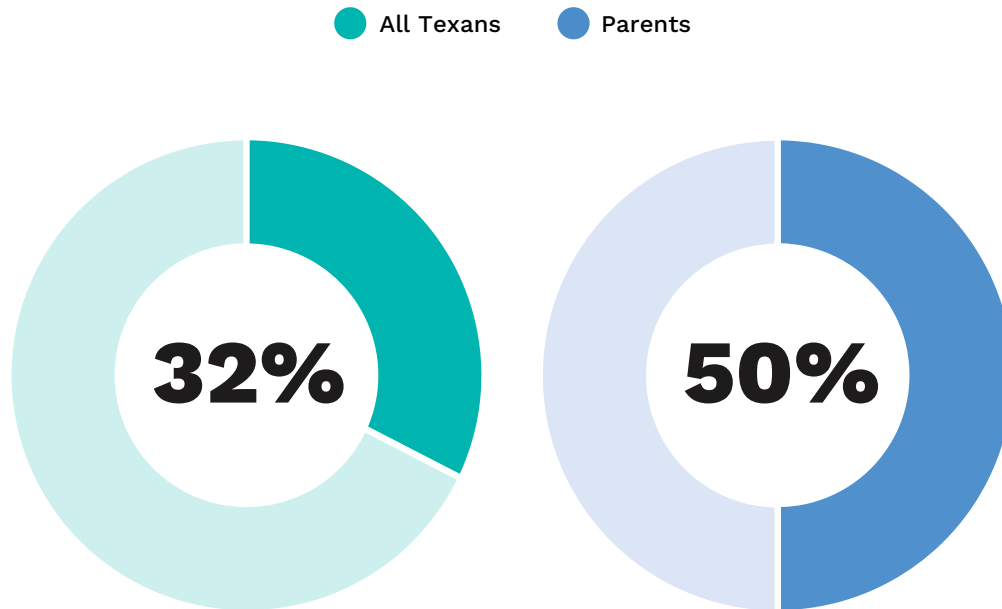
Current or former public school employees (76 percent) are especially likely to have little confidence in the exam’s effectiveness as a measure of student learning, and it is a similar 81 percent specifically among current or former teachers. (Results from the Foundation’s poll among Texas public school teachers in May of 2022 were similar, with 83 percent of teachers lacking confidence in the test.) Skepticism is much lower, 53 percent, among those who have not worked in a public school.

Rating local schools highly is associated with more positive evaluations of the exam: Seventy-one percent of those who assign an A grade to their community’s public schools are confident the test effectively measures learning, falling to 46 percent among those who assign a B and 34 percent among those who rate their schools lower.

Among other groups, 52 percent of those with a high school education at most are confident in the test as a measure of student learning, compared with 35 percent of those with more than a high school education. Respondents earning less than \$50,000 similarly express higher STAAR confidence than their higher-earning counterparts. About half of Hispanic Texans (48 percent) are confident in the test, compared with 38 percent of Black Texans and 36 percent of White Texans. Finally, moderates (48 percent) and conservatives (44 percent) are more inclined than liberals (32 percent) to express confidence in the test.

## Only One-Third of Texans and Half of Public School Parents Know Their Local Schools' A-F Grades

% of all Texans and % of public school parents aware of Texas Education Agency accountability ratings for any public schools in their community



### Accountability

Texas public schools are rated on an A–F scale by the Texas Education Agency (TEA), largely based on STAAR scores. Beginning in 2022, schools that fail to earn at least a C grade are instead assigned a “Not Rated” label.<sup>14</sup> Two-thirds of Texans are unaware of the grades of any of the public schools in their community, up from 60 percent in the 2020 report. Parents are more knowledgeable of the rating scale; half say they are aware of their local schools’ grades, essentially unchanged since 2020.

Among those who are aware of local school grades, 83 percent say they are at least somewhat helpful in understanding a school’s quality; 17 percent say the grades are not so or not at all helpful. Results are similar among grade-aware public school parents and non-parents alike, and each is steady since 2020.

<sup>14</sup> Texas Education Agency. (2022, August 15). *TEA releases 2022 A–F accountability ratings.* <https://tea.texas.gov/about-tea/news-and-multimedia/news-releases/news-2022/tea-releases-2022-a-f-accountability-ratings>

While those who are aware of school grades find them helpful, Texans overall split on confidence of whether these grades accurately reflect school quality. Fifty-one percent are not so or not at all confident that TEA letter grades accurately represent school quality, while 47 percent are at least somewhat confident in these ratings. This includes relatively few, 7 percent, who are very confident, similar to results in the 2020 report. Just among public school parents, more than 57 percent are at least somewhat confident in the TEA letter grade, though again few (12 percent) express strong confidence, essentially unchanged since 2020.

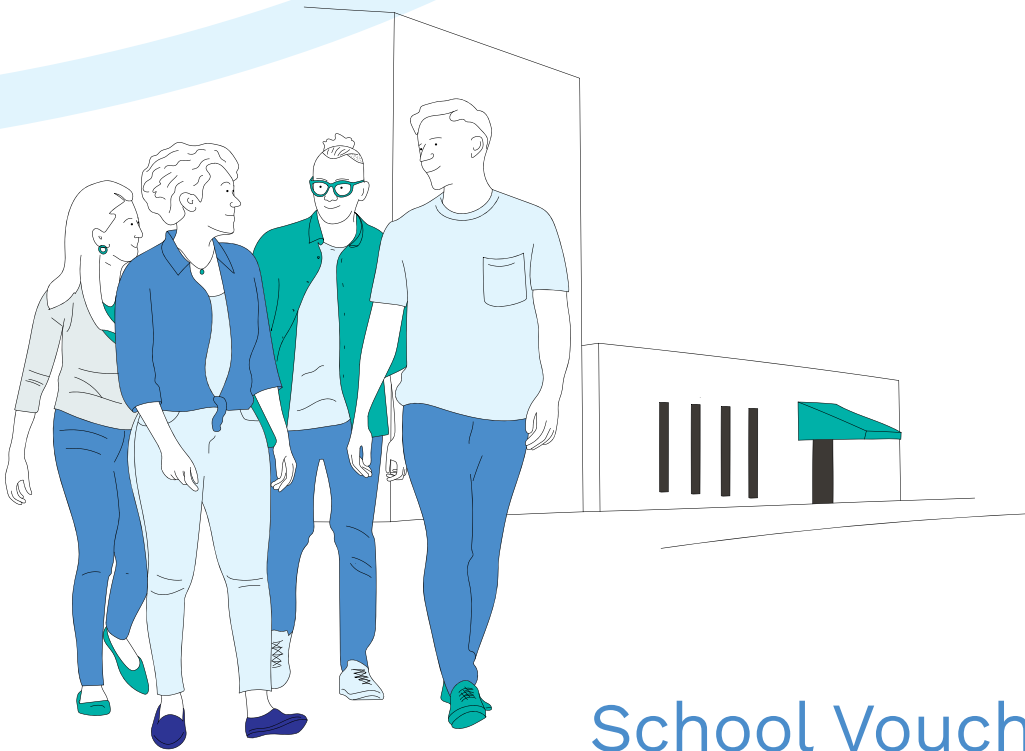
A third of past or present public school employees are confident in the accuracy of TEA letter grades, compared with half of those who have not worked in a school.

Lower-income earners are more likely to have confidence in the accuracy of the school letter grades. Fifty-six percent of those earning less than \$50,000 a year are confident, dropping to 44 percent of those with higher incomes. Additionally, Hispanic Texans (52 percent) are more inclined than White Texans (41 percent) to express confidence in the TEA grades.

## Survey Questions

- Q. Again thinking about the state standardized test known as STAAR, how confident are you that the STAAR test effectively measures how well a student is learning?**
- Q. The state grades all public schools on an A, B, C, D, Fail scale. Do you happen to know the A-F grades for any of your community's public schools?**
- Q. Do you find the letter grade for your local public schools helpful or not helpful in understanding the school's quality?**
- Q. The state letter grades for local public schools are based primarily on the state standardized test known as STAAR. How confident are you that the state letter grades on the quality of local public schools accurately represent the quality of those schools?**





## School Vouchers

**F**ifty-four percent of Texans oppose implementing a voucher program in their community if it meant reducing the amount of funds available to their local public schools; 44 percent are in support. Results were essentially the same in the Foundation survey released in 2021: 55 percent opposed vouchers versus 43 percent who supported them. Public school parents split 49–49 percent on the issue.<sup>15</sup>

Voucher programs are opposed by 45 percent of Republicans, 51 percent of independents, and a strong majority, 68 percent, of Democrats.

Among other groups, 62 percent of Texans with household incomes of \$100,000 or more oppose vouchers, compared with 52 percent among Texans with incomes between \$50,000 and \$100,000, and 48 percent among Texans earning less than \$50,000. By education, 59 percent of college graduates oppose vouchers, while 48 percent of Texans with no more than a high school diploma oppose them.

Regionally, opposition to vouchers is highest in the Dallas/Ft. Worth area at 60 percent. It is 56 percent in Houston, with the rest of the regions in Texas hovering around 50 percent opposition.

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<sup>15</sup> Raise Your Hand Texas. (2021). *Perceptions in a pandemic: Texans' support for public schools grows*. Charles Butt Foundation. <https://charlesbuttdn.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/2021-Foundation-Poll.pdf>

Voucher programs use public funds for private school tuition. If private schools were to receive state funding, most Texans say they should be held to similar requirements as public schools. Specifically, 88 percent say that if they were to receive state funding, private schools should be required to publicly report all school finances. Eighty-four percent say the same for providing special education services; 83 percent say that private schools should accept students with special education needs.

Seventy-three percent of Texans say private schools should be required to follow state curriculum guidelines if they receive state funding. Nearly as many, 70 percent, say the same for administering state standardized tests. Six in 10 Texans say private schools should be required to accept students with a discipline record if they receive state funding.

## Texans Strongly Favor Transparency and Equal Access for Taxpayer Dollars for Education

% of Texans in favor of requirements for private schools if they were to receive state funding



Views among public school parents are similar, except 84 percent say private schools should follow state curriculum guidelines, 11 points higher than all Texans.

With the exception of accepting students with a discipline record, majorities of Democrats, independents, and Republicans alike say that private schools should be held to the same requirements as public schools on each item if they receive state funding. More than 8 in 10 across these groups say private schools should publicly disclose all school finances and about three-quarters or more say they should provide special education services and accept students with special education needs.

There is a difference when it comes to accepting students with a discipline record. Seventy-two percent of Democrats and 63 percent of independents think this should be a requirement, compared with 44 percent of Republicans.

### Survey Questions

- Q. Voucher programs allow parents to use tax money to partly pay for tuition at private and religious schools, with no state educational oversight. Would you support or oppose a voucher program in your community if that meant reducing the amount of funds distributed to your local school?**
  
- Q. Currently, Texas public schools are required to do the following things. If private schools were to receive state funding, do you think they also should be required to do these things, or not? a.) Publicly report all school finances b.) Accept students with a discipline record c.) Accept students with special education needs d.) Provide special education services e.) Administer state standardized tests f.) Follow state curriculum guidelines**

# Personal Connections to Public Schools

In a gauge of Texans' personal connections to public schools, about a quarter report having at least one family member (27 percent) or close friend (23 percent) currently working in a public school. Twelve percent of Texans polled have done so, including 1 percent currently teaching in a public school, 2 percent currently working in a public school in a non-teaching role, 5 percent former teachers, and 4 percent other former employees. Forty-six percent of all Texans have at least one such connection.

Women (14 percent) are more apt than men (9 percent) to have worked in a public school. College graduates (34 percent) are much more likely than their counterparts (19 percent) to have a close friend working in a public school. Black Texans (37 percent) are slightly more likely than White Texans (26 percent) to have a family member working in a public school. Hispanic Texans are in between at 28 percent.

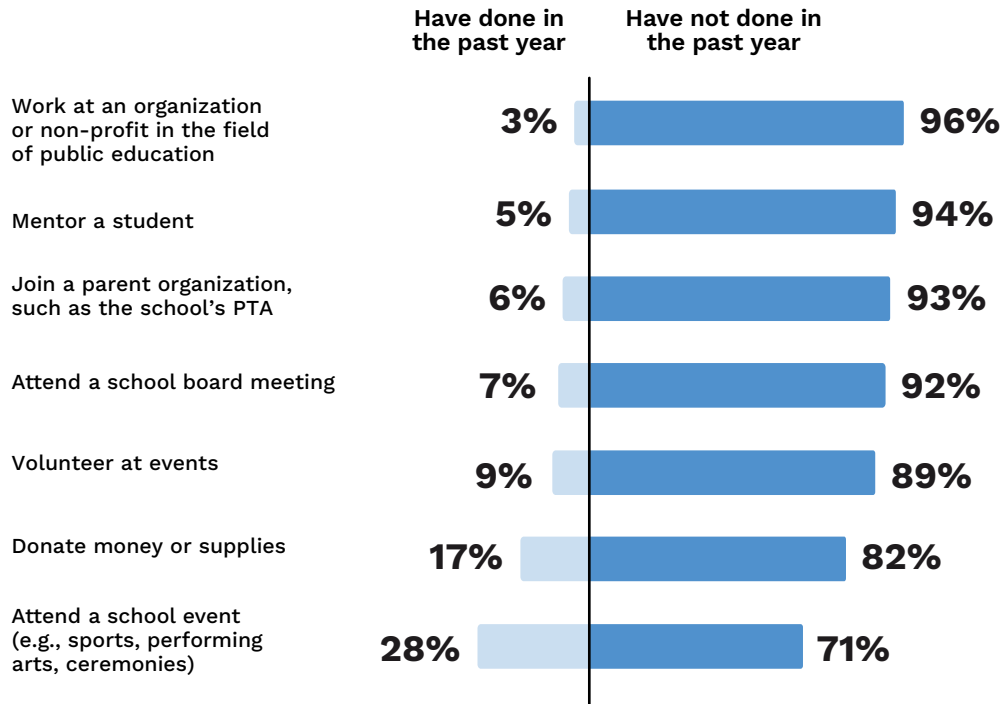
Texans were also asked whether they had been involved in any of seven items related to their local public schools in the past year. Topping the list, 28 percent have attended a school event (i.e., sports, performing arts, ceremonies) and 17 percent have donated money or supplies. Fewer have volunteered at events (9 percent), attended a school board meeting (7 percent), joined a parent organization (6 percent), mentored a student (5 percent), or worked at an organization or non-profit in the field of public education (3 percent). Thirty-seven percent of Texans did at least one of these.

Public school parents (71 percent) are more inclined than non-parents (28 percent) to have done any of these. In specific areas, there is a 40-point gap between parents and non-parents for attending school events, a 22-point gap for donating money or supplies, a 21-point gap for volunteering, and a 13-point gap for attending a school board meeting.

Hispanic Texans are twice as likely (11 percent) as White Texans (5 percent) to have attended a school board meeting. Regionally, having volunteered at events peaks at 13 percent in Dallas/Fort Worth, falling to 5 percent in West Texas, with other regions in between. Women are more likely (32 percent) than men (25 percent) to have attended a school event.

## Most Texans are not Engaged with Their Local Public Schools

% of Texans who have engaged with their local public schools in the past year in certain activities



### Survey Questions

- Q. Do you or any of your close friends or relatives work in the public schools?
- Q. In the past year, have you done any of the following related to your local public schools?  
 a.) Volunteer at events b.) Attend a school board meeting c.) Donate money or supplies d.) Join a parent organization, such as the school's PTA e.) Mentor a student f.) Work at an organization or non-profit in the field of public education g.) Attend a school event (e.g., sports, performing arts, ceremonies) h.) Other i.) None of the above

# Survey Methodology

The 2023 Texas Education Poll was produced by [Langer Research Associates](#) via the nationally representative Ipsos KnowledgePanel®, in which participants were randomly recruited via address-based sampling to respond to survey questionnaires online. Households without internet connections were provided a web-enabled device and service.

The survey was designed to consist of approximately 1,125 Texas adults, including about 1,000 from the general population and an oversample of parents with children aged 3–18 in school.

The questionnaire, in English and Spanish, was pretested September 2–6, 2022, and field work was conducted September 9–19, 2022. After initial invitations, reminder emails were sent on the third, fifth, and seventh days of the field period. Out of 2,431 panel members invited to participate, 1,237 provided completed, qualified surveys. Participants completed the survey in a median time of 13 minutes.

In quality control, the fastest 2 percent of respondents in total completion time within their survey path were flagged for possible inattention; these 26 cases (18 non-parents and 8 parents) were deleted. The final sample included 1,211 Texas adults, including 1,062 in the general population, and an oversample of 149 pre-K–12 parents for a total of 340 in this group.

In analyzing Q1, an open-ended question asking about the local public schools' biggest problem or problems (up to three were accepted), two independent coders reviewed and categorized responses, first using categories from previous years, then adding new categories as warranted. The coders then compared and reconciled their work. In the 2020 and 2021 Texas Education Polls, response categories were netted in accordance with previous national PDK polls, for comparative purposes. In 2022, net categories were reorganized for maximum

clarity and were retroactively applied to the two previous poll results. The reorganized categories remain in place for the 2023 poll report.

Data were weighted via iterative proportional fitting to the following benchmark distributions of general population Texas adults from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2019 American Community Survey:

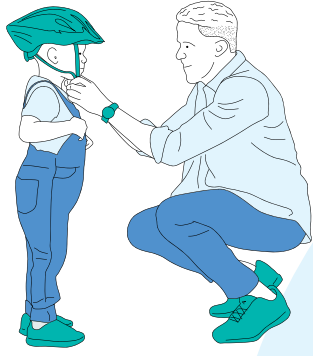
- Gender (male, female) by age (18–29, 30–44, 45–59, 60+)
- Race/ethnicity (White, non-Hispanic; Black, non-Hispanic; Other, non-Hispanic; Hispanic; 2+ races, non-Hispanic)
- Education (less than high school, high school, some college, Bachelor's or higher)
- Household income (Less than \$25,000, \$25K–\$49,999, \$50K–\$74,999, \$75K–\$99,999, \$100K–\$149,999, \$150K+)
- Hispanic nativity (U.S.-born Hispanic, not U.S.-born Hispanic, non-Hispanic)
- Marital status (married, not married)
- Parent with child aged 3–18 (yes, no)
- Language proficiency (English-dominant Hispanic, bilingual Hispanic, Spanish-dominant Hispanic, non-Hispanic)

A post-weight to recent estimates of political party identification in the general population was applied. Data were also weighted to correct for the parent oversample.

General population weights were trimmed at 1.05 percent and 98.95 percent of their distribution (minimum 0.191, maximum 5.589). Because of weighting to adjust for nonresponse and oversampling, the design effect of this survey is 1.77 for the full sample and 1.46 for public school parents, resulting in margins of sampling error of plus or minus 3.7 percentage points for the full sample and 6.4 points for public school parents. Error margins are larger for subgroups.

A digital download of the report and additional resources about the survey methodology are available at [CharlesButtFdn.org/2023TxEdPoll](https://CharlesButtFdn.org/2023TxEdPoll).





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