

Perceptions in a Pandemic: Texans' Support for Public Schools Grows



Texas' annual statewide poll on
attitudes toward public education

RAISE
YOUR HAND TEXAS
FOUNDATION

| Poll

2021

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Texas' annual statewide poll on
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Key Findings

Texans' views of their public schools improved as educators scrambled to adapt to the coronavirus pandemic in the past year, with higher ratings for the schools overall compared with a year ago and broad endorsement of districts' learning models among parents.

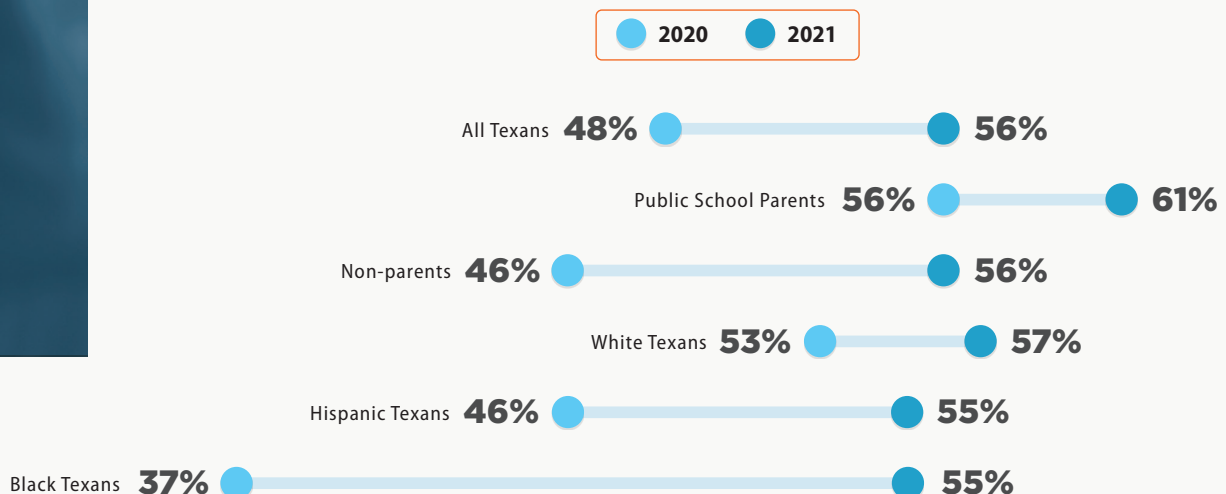
Fifty-six percent of Texans give their community's public schools an A or B grade in the latest statewide survey of attitudes toward public education by the Raise Your Hand Texas® Foundation – an 8-point improvement over pre-pandemic views in late 2019. Interviews for this survey were conducted Oct. 9-20, 2020.

Among public school parents, moreover, 78 percent rate their school's learning model – online, in-person or hybrid – as very or somewhat effective. This includes 70 percent of those whose child's learning is fully remote, rising to 87 percent of those with an in-person or hybrid model. The gap widens substantially, though, in seeing a learning model as “very” effective – just 19 percent among parents whose child is learning remotely, compared with 50 percent of parents with in-person or hybrid learners.

Fifty-one percent of Texas public school parents overall report greater appreciation for their community's schools now than before the pandemic, while just 7 percent express less appreciation. This, too, differs by learning model – it's 42 percent among parents whose child is in remote learning, compared with 62 percent among those with in-person or hybrid classes. Respondents were invited to elaborate in open-ended responses, with highlighted quotes featured throughout this report.

Texans Give Higher Grades for Public Schools This Year

% Texans who give A or B grades for local public schools



Challenges are apparent on pandemic-related and other matters alike. Some of these challenges are reflected in open-ended responses to what Texans see as the biggest problems facing the public schools in their community. Twenty-five percent cite the coronavirus, the most common response, and 6 percent mention remote learning. Sixteen percent cite lack of funding, the only other item with a double-digit mention.

Other results underscore how the pandemic isn't the schools' only challenge. In one example, sizable majorities of Texans see barriers to learning for low-income students across a range of issues ranging from food insecurity to lack of access to learning resources. Majorities also believe Texas students face such barriers on the basis of race or ethnicity, though White Texans are less apt than other racial and ethnic subgroups to think so.

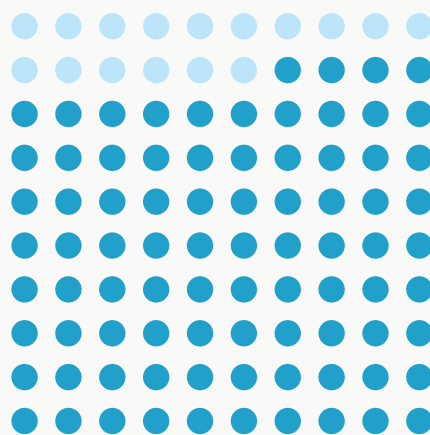
Diving deeper into pandemic concerns, a broad 72 percent of parents cite missing social interactions at school or with friends as a problem for their child. Sixty-four percent say the same about missing a personal connection with teachers.

Concerns also are high about potential fiscal impacts. More than 8 in 10 Texans overall are very or somewhat concerned that a cut in funding would impact the quality of public education in the state. That includes 54 percent who are very concerned about this – rising to 66 percent of public school parents.

Indeed, rather than sustaining cuts, most Texans say public schools need more funding to address each of nine COVID-related challenges, with safety measures topping the list. More than 7 in 10 think schools need more funding for additional cleaning and sanitization (73 percent) and safety measures for school staff (72 percent). These compare with 57 percent who think public schools in their community have too little money in general, essentially the same as a year ago.


Support is especially strong for state-provided broadband internet access for Texas public school students whose families cannot afford it on their own. Eighty-three percent of Texans think the state should take this step, including large majorities across demographic groups.

Considering potential revenue sources to support public education, Texans widely back a tobacco tax increase and a new tax on vaping devices and products to provide additional school



more than
8 in 10

Texans are concerned that a cut
in funding would impact the
quality of public education



funding. Each is supported by about three-quarters of residents. Roughly two-thirds support three other approaches: legalizing and taxing casino gambling; legalizing and taxing marijuana; and alcoholic beverage taxes.

On the testing front, more than half of Texans overall, including most public school parents, lack confidence that the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) standardized tests effectively measure how well a student is learning. Just 1 in 10 thinks public schools should be graded entirely on student scores on state standardized tests.

Moving to attitudes on vouchers and charter schools, a majority of Texans (55 percent) opposes a voucher program that would allow tax dollars to partly pay for tuition at private and religious schools without state oversight. A majority (53 percent) likewise opposes establishing or adding charter schools in their community if it meant reducing funding for their local public schools.

About the Poll

The second annual Raise Your Hand Texas Foundation Poll was produced for Raise Your Hand® by [Langer Research Associates](#). It was conducted in English and Spanish among a random sample of 1,034 Texas adults via the Ipsos KnowledgePanel®, a probability-based online survey panel. Results have a margin of sampling error of 3.9 percentage points for the full sample; error margins are larger for subgroups.

The full survey report follows in eight sections, covering views of the coronavirus response, equity issues, school funding, ratings of the state's public schools and their biggest problems, ratings of teachers, and attitudes toward testing, vouchers and charter schools. All poll questions are listed by section within the report. The survey methodology is included at the end. Topline results are available at RaiseYourHandTexas.org/2021poll.

The 2021 Raise Your Hand Texas Foundation Poll was directed by Jennifer Jendrzey, vice president of strategy and evaluation, and Lauren Cook, director of strategic alignment, with support from Victoria Wang, research associate. The report was designed by Joel Goudeau, art director. Web development support was done by Karen Wang, web developer, and Marcela Giraldo, senior designer. The project manager and lead author of this report is Steven Sparks, Ph.D., research analyst at Langer Research Associates; with Allison De Jong, MA, research analyst; Christine Filer, Ph.D., senior research analyst; and Gary Langer, project director.

Raise Your Hand thanks Cypress-Fairbanks ISD, Southside ISD, Edgewood ISD, Van ISD, and Waco ISD for providing the photos featured in this report.

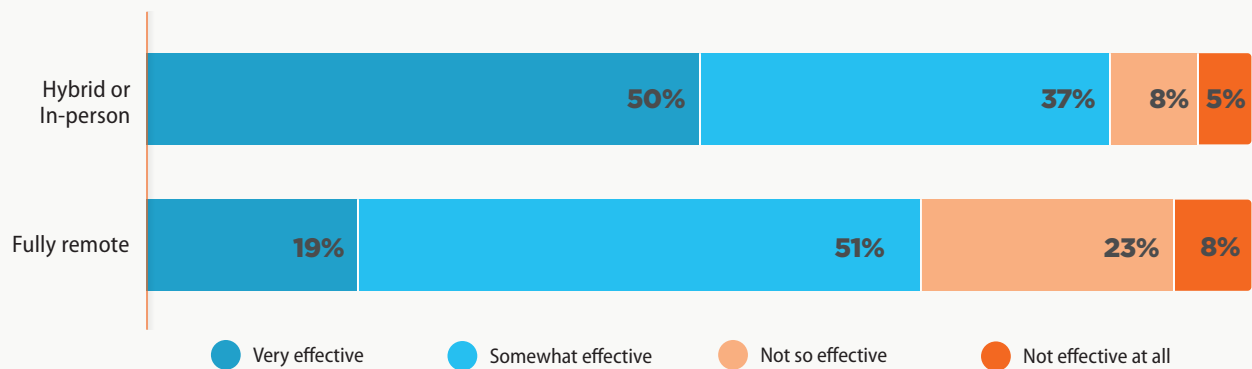
A digital download and additional resources are available at RaiseYourHandTexas.org/2021poll.

Pandemic Response

The 2021 Raise Your Hand Poll – with interviews conducted in October 2020 – found disparate school responses to the coronavirus pandemic. Fifty-four percent of public school parents said their child was receiving fully remote instruction. For 35 percent, it was fully in-person, while 11 percent said their child’s school had a hybrid model with some days remote and some days in-person.

Texans Rate Hybrid or In-person Learning as More Effective than Fully Remote

% public school parents



Experiences were positive generally, albeit with differences by approach and especially in strength of sentiment. Overall, 78 percent of public school parents said their child’s learning model was very or somewhat effective. That ranged from 87 percent of those whose child’s school had an in-person or hybrid model to 70 percent of those with fully remote learning.

That gap nearly doubles, however, in seeing the approach as “very” effective – 50 percent among those in in-person or hybrid learning – versus just 19 percent among those in fully remote learning. The sample of parents with children in in-person or hybrid learning is small (91) but the results are statistically significant.

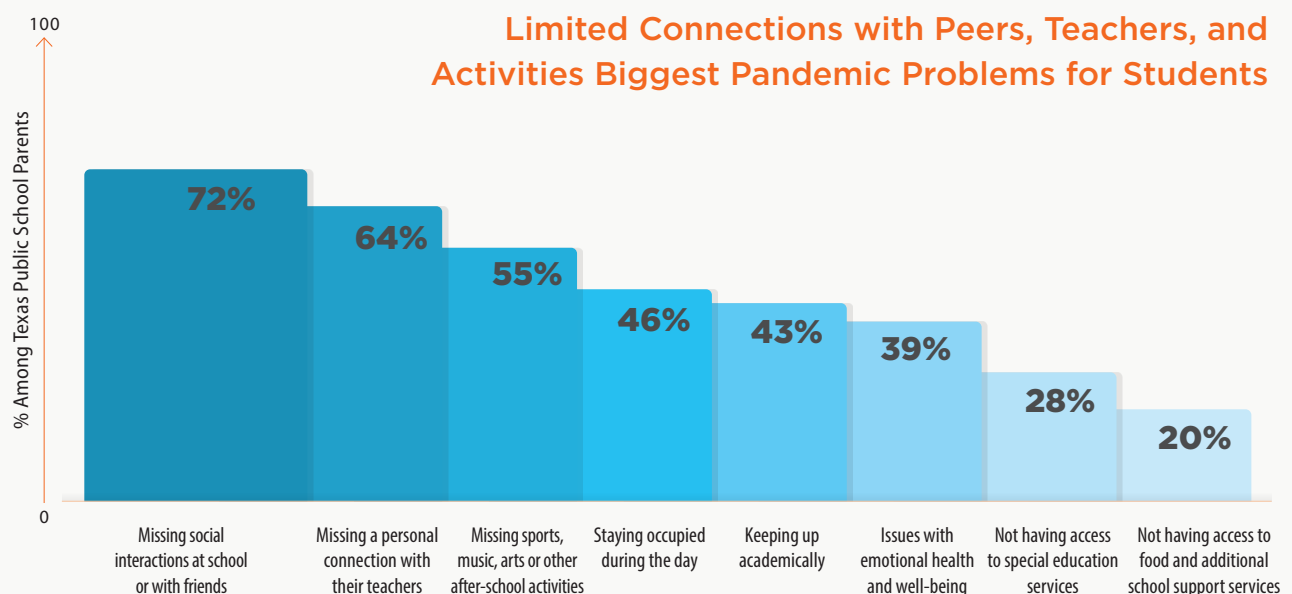
This analysis combines parents with children in in-person and hybrid learning models for an adequate sample size for comparison with those with a fully remote learning model. Though sample sizes are especially small, ratings often are considerably more positive among those with entirely in-person learning versus those in a hybrid approach.

When public school parents were asked about problems facing their children during the pandemic, lack of personal connections leads the list. Seventy-two percent of parents identified missing social interactions at school or with friends as a problem for their child. Majorities also cited missing a personal connection with their teachers (64 percent) and missing sports, music, arts or other after-school activities (55 percent).

Fewer than half, though still substantial numbers, reported problems for their child staying occupied during the day (46 percent), keeping up academically (43 percent) and issues with their emotional health and well-being (39 percent). About 3 in 10 said the same for not having access to special education services.

When it comes to basic needs, 2 in 10 public school parents identified lack of access to food and school support services as a problem. This response is about four times more prevalent among parents with household incomes of less than \$50,000 per year, compared with those with higher incomes.

Asked which of these was the single biggest problem for their child, 38 percent identified missing social interactions at school or with friends, the leader by a wide margin. That was followed by keeping up academically (17 percent) and missing a personal connection with teachers (15 percent). Other items received single-digit mentions as the topmost problem.



Results generally are similar by learning model – remote versus in-person or hybrid – indicating the extent of the pandemic disruptions. Just two significant gaps appear. Parents whose children were learning fully remotely were more apt to report problems with access to special education services (35 percent versus 20 percent). They also were more likely to describe access to food and other support services as a problem (26 percent versus 13 percent).

Some of these experiences relate to views of the learning model's effectiveness. Among those whose child did not have a problem keeping up academically because of the pandemic, 88 percent saw their school's learning model as effective. That declined to 64 percent – nonetheless still a clear majority – among those whose child did have problems keeping up.

An additional result shows that major problems keeping up academically are twice as apt to be reported by parents of high schoolers, 27 percent, compared with 13 percent of those with children in grades K-8.



School measures

Texans were asked to rate the importance of schools addressing each of five pandemic-related items. Sizable majorities called each one extremely or very important:

- Three-quarters said it's highly important for schools to provide a safe, sanitized environment for in-person learning.
- Three-quarters also said it's highly important to provide support for remote learning, such as teacher training and student technology needs.
- 7 in 10 said it's extremely or very important for schools to address learning loss caused by the move to remote learning.
- About 7 in 10 said it's extremely or very important to provide support for students' and teachers' emotional health and well-being.
- 6 in 10 said it's highly important for schools to address student nutrition support, such as free meals.



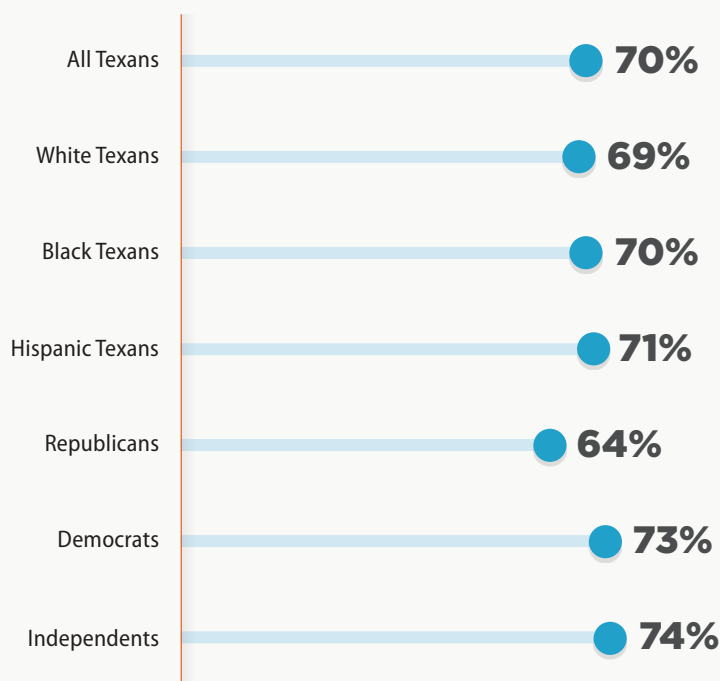
Photo credit: Edgewood ISD

“Todos hemos sentido el efecto de la falta de la escuela, el lugar que provee por los niños, la estabilidad mental que da a los niños y como ayuda a los padres con la vida laboral.”

“We have all felt the effects of not being in school, the place that provides for our children, provides mental stability for the kids and helps parents with our work life.”

Texans Agree on Importance of Addressing Pandemic Learning Loss

% who call this extremely or very important to address

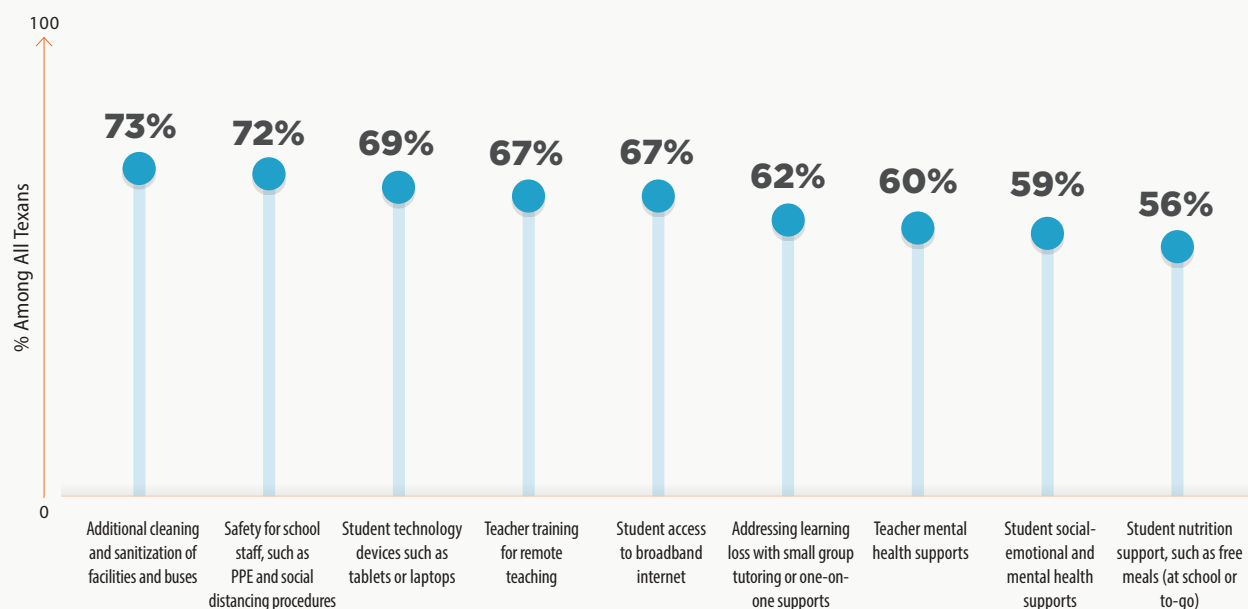


Majorities across demographic and partisan political groups agree about the importance of addressing learning loss caused by the move to remote learning. Virtually equal numbers of Hispanic Texans (71 percent), Black Texans (70 percent), and White Texans (69 percent) agree it is extremely or very important to address this issue. Seventy-four percent of independents, 73 percent of Democrats, and 64 percent of Republicans call this issue extremely or very important to address.

Other racial and ethnic subgroups are 10 points to 13 points more apt than White Texans to call it highly important for schools to address issues raised by the pandemic relating to students' and teachers' emotional health and well-being, remote learning support, student nutrition support and providing a safe, sanitized environment. That includes similar shares of Black Texans and Hispanic Texans on each item.

Democrats are 21 points to 33 points more apt than Republicans to call the same four issues extremely or very important for schools to address. Independents are closer to Democrats on these issues and fall in between the two partisan groups on a fifth, the importance of student nutrition support.

Texans Say Public Schools Need More Funding to Address COVID-Related Challenges



Pandemic-related funding

Most Texans say the state's public schools need more funding to address each of nine COVID-related challenges raised. Safety measures top the list: Nearly three-quarters see a need for more funding for additional cleaning and sanitization (73 percent) and for staff safety measures such as personal protective equipment and social distancing procedures (72 percent).

Support also is broad for more funding for access to technology and training: 7 in 10 say schools need more money for student technology devices, and 67 percent say the same for two other items, student access to broadband and teacher training for remote teaching.

On the remaining items, 56 percent to 62 percent say more funding is needed for tutoring to address learning loss and for steps to support teachers' mental health, students' emotional and mental health and student nutrition. Just 1 in 10 or fewer would cut funding for any of the proposed items.

Democrats are 20 points to more than 30 points more apt than Republicans to say schools need more funding for each item. The gaps are widest on nutrition support, broadband internet access,

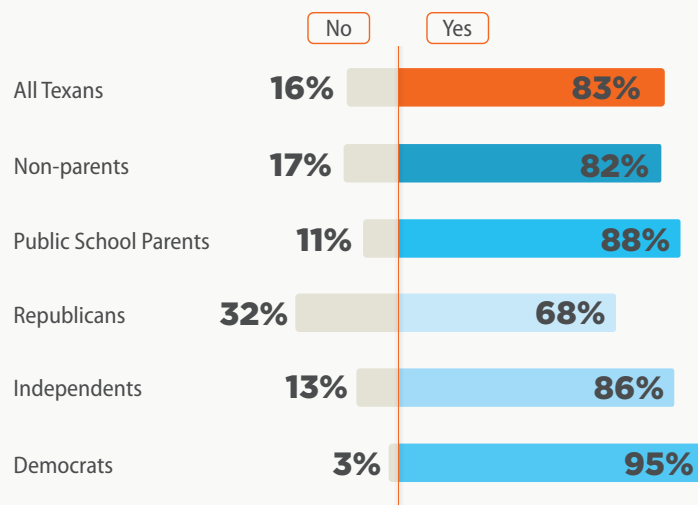


students' social-emotional and mental health supports and teachers' mental health supports. That said, roughly half or more Republicans think public schools need more funding for seven of the nine items.

There again are differences by race and ethnicity, particularly between Black Texans and White Texans. In the widest gap, Black Texans are 37 points more likely than White Texans to think more funding is needed for student nutrition support, 83 percent versus 46 percent. The gap ranges from 13 points to 23 points on all other items except one, student access to broadband internet.

Texans Support State-Provided Broadband

% who think the state should provide free broadband internet access to Texas public school students whose families can't afford it on their own



"I appreciate that schools have used resources available to feed, teach, and provide a positive educational experience to students."



Photo credit: Edgewood ISD

Broadband access

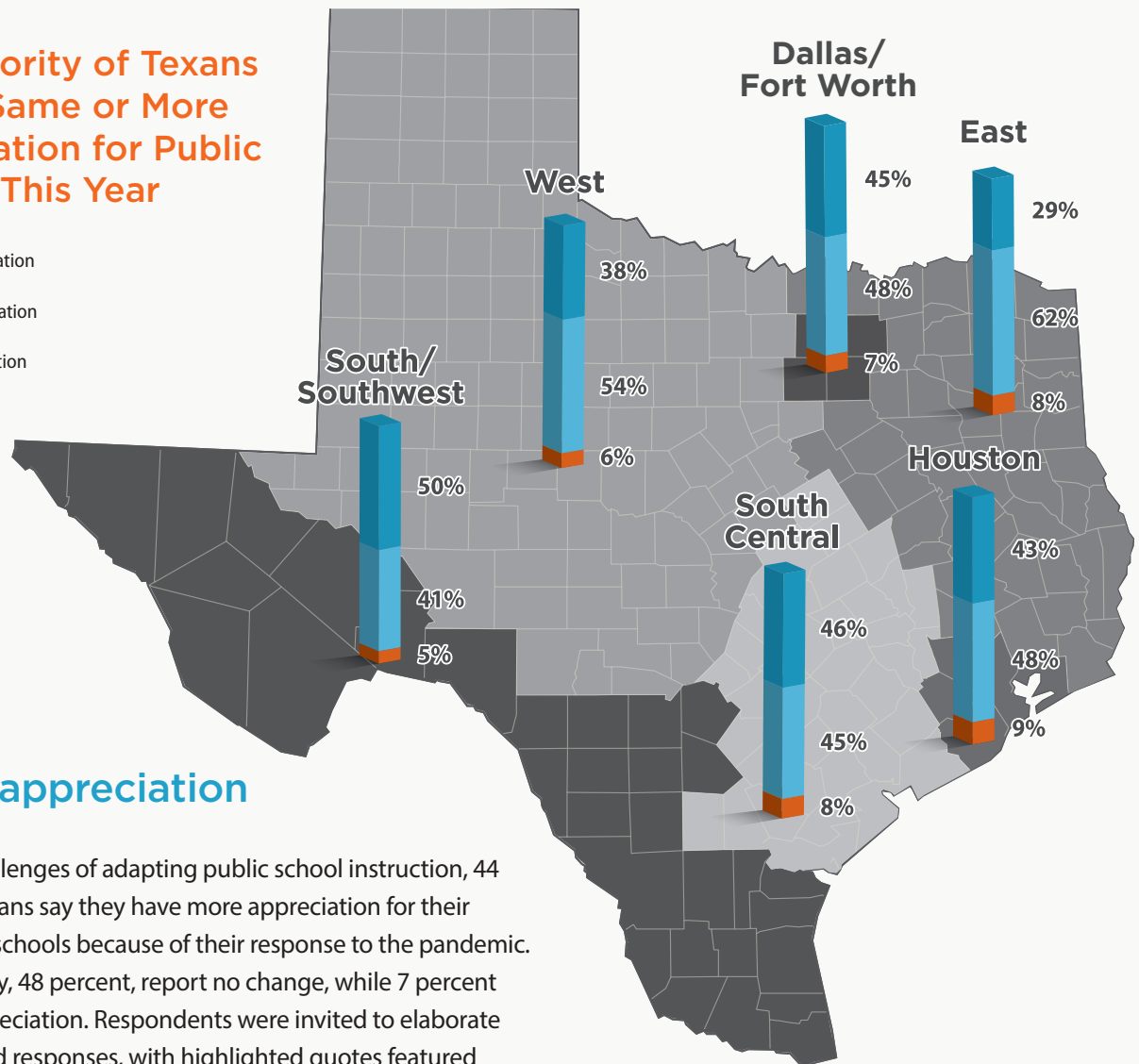
There's broad support, as noted, on a need to bridge the digital divide in internet access. More than 8 in 10 Texans support providing state-funded broadband internet access for public school students whose families can't afford it on their own. That includes 82 percent of non-parents, as well as 88 percent of public school parents.

Politically, state-funded broadband internet access is supported by vast majorities of Democrats (95 percent), liberals (94 percent), moderates (90 percent) and independents (86 percent). It's also supported by 69 percent of conservatives and 68 percent of Republicans.

Demonstrating its appeal, state-funded broadband internet for those who need it is supported by 90 percent of people who think Texas public schools have too little funding, by 77 percent of those who think they have the right amount of funding, and even by 61 percent of the few who think the schools have too much funding.

Vast Majority of Texans Report Same or More Appreciation for Public Schools This Year

- More appreciation
- Same appreciation
- Less appreciation



School appreciation

Given the challenges of adapting public school instruction, 44 percent of Texans say they have more appreciation for their community's schools because of their response to the pandemic. About as many, 48 percent, report no change, while 7 percent have less appreciation. Respondents were invited to elaborate in open-ended responses, with highlighted quotes featured throughout this report.

Public school parents are more apt than non-parents to report an increase in appreciation, 51 percent versus 41 percent. And their child's learning model matters. Those with an in-person or hybrid model are 20 points more apt to report more appreciation than those with a child learning entirely remotely, 62 percent versus 42 percent.

With regard to partisan views, 58 percent of Democrats report more appreciation for their community's schools, versus 36 percent of Republicans and 39 percent of independents. In a regional gap, half in South/Southwestern Texas report more appreciation, compared with a low of 29 percent in East Texans. It's 38 percent in West Texas and 43 percent to 46 percent in Houston, Dallas/Fort Worth and the South Central region.

"Schools provide a sense of community, especially for kids. The lack of them would be catastrophic."

Pandemic Response Questions

- Q. What is your (oldest) child's current learning model for school - remote virtual (online); remote paper packets (not online); in-person; or hybrid (some days remote and some days in-person)?
- Q. As far as you've seen so far, how effective is this learning model?
- Q. How big a problem has the pandemic created for your (oldest) child in each of these areas - missing a personal connection with their teachers; missing social interactions at school or with friends; missing sports, music, arts or other after-school activities; keeping up academically; issues with emotional health and well-being; staying occupied during the day; not having access to special education services; and not having access to food and additional school support services? If you had to choose one, which of the following has been the single biggest problem for your (oldest) child?
- Q. How important is it for schools to address each of the following items in response to the coronavirus pandemic - learning loss caused by the move to remote learning; providing a safe, sanitized environment for in-person learning; supporting students' and teachers' emotional health and well-being; remote learning support, such as teacher training and student technology needs; and student nutrition support, such as free meals (at school or to-go)?
- Q. Do you believe public schools need more, less, or the same amount of funding to address these COVID-related challenges - safety for school staff, such as personal protective equipment (PPE) and social distancing procedures; additional cleaning and sanitization of facilities and buses; teacher training for remote teaching; teacher mental health supports; student technology devices such as tablets or laptops; student access to broadband internet; addressing learning loss with small group tutoring or one-on-one supports; student social-emotional and mental health supports; and student nutrition support, such as free meals (at school or to-go)?
- Q. Do you think the state should or should not provide free broadband internet access to Texas public school students whose families can't afford it on their own?
- Q. Has the pandemic given you more appreciation of your community's schools, less appreciation, or hasn't it changed this?
- Q. Briefly, in your own words, can you describe in what way the pandemic has given you more, less or the same appreciation of your community's schools?

To dive deeper, respondents were invited to describe in their own words how the pandemic has impacted their appreciation for their community's schools. Among those who responded, 314 indicated the pandemic had given them more appreciation for the schools, and 52 reported less appreciation; 313 reported no change.

Of the comparatively few who expressed less appreciation for their community's schools, many disagreed with schools' pandemic learning model,

whether in-person or remote. Among those who reported greater appreciation for their community's public schools, some noted appreciation for teachers' efforts in the challenging transition to virtual instruction. Others highlighted appreciation for teachers' sacrifices in returning to in-person instruction amid the safety risks of the pandemic. Further remarks spoke of new appreciation for the role that teachers and schools provide for children, families and the community.

Equity Barriers

Texans perceive equity as a key issue facing schools and note a number of barriers to learning for Black and Hispanic students, and students from low-income families.

On barriers for students from low-income families, lack of resources and support around early childhood development best practices tops the list; 77 percent call this a barrier to learning, including 43 percent who call it a significant barrier.

About as many see barriers to learning in low-income students not consistently being placed with experienced or well-trained teachers and lacking access to additional tutoring and academic supports. Food insecurity, lack of access to medical care, lack of access to social-emotional and/or mental health support and ineffective or biased disciplinary practices are rated as barriers to low-income students by about 7 in 10 Texans.

Last on the list is a lack of access to advanced classes/gifted and talented programs, but a substantial two-thirds see this as a barrier as well. Results are similar among public school parents.

Those with annual household incomes of less than \$100,000 are especially apt to see lack of access to medical care as a barrier for low-income students, 73 percent versus 59 percent of better-off Texans. They're also 14 points more likely to call lack of access to advanced classes/gifted and talented programs a barrier. The other items show few or no differences by income.

In terms of barriers to learning on the basis of race or ethnicity, Texans' attitudes are informed by their own racial and ethnic identities and experiences. Other racial and ethnic subgroups are 8 points to 19 points more apt than White Texans to see each of seven items (in a separate question) as a racial or ethnicity-based learning barrier.

Black Texans, in particular, are 24 points to 30 points more apt than White Texans to see a barrier on six of the seven items, and about two to three times more apt to see each of them as a "significant" barrier. Attitudes among Hispanic Texans fall between those of White Texans and Black Texans on each of the items tested.

Among Texans overall, majorities (from 60 percent to 69 percent) see five of seven items as racial or ethnicity-based barriers to learning:

- Students not consistently being placed with experienced or well-trained teachers;
- Ineffective or biased disciplinary practices;
- Lack of access to social-emotional and/or mental health supports and programming;
- A school or district environment where teachers or students can't speak up about racism; and
- Lack of access to advanced classes/gifted and talented programs.

Equity Barriers Questions

- Q.** How much if at all do you see these as barriers to learning for low-income students - food insecurity; lack of access to medical care; lack of access to social-emotional and/or mental health supports and programming; lack of access to advanced classes/gifted and talented programs; ineffective or biased disciplinary practices; students not consistently being placed with experienced or well-trained teachers; lack of access to additional tutoring and academic supports; and lack of resources and support around early childhood development best practices (such as reading to your child, talking with your child, regular pediatric visits)?
- Q.** How much if at all do you see these as barriers to learning on the basis of students' race or ethnicity - lack of access to advanced classes/gifted & talented programs; a school or district environment where teachers or students can't speak up about racism; lack of access to social-emotional and/or mental health supports and programming; curriculum that is not reflective of students' cultural backgrounds; lack of access to teachers who are the same race/ethnicity as their students; ineffective or biased disciplinary practices; and students not consistently being placed with experienced or well-trained teachers?

On the remaining items, half see a barrier in curriculum that is not reflective of students' cultural backgrounds. Forty-three percent say the same about lack of access to teachers who are the same race/ethnicity as their students.

Notably, on the four common items in these questions, majorities of Texans see both income-based and racial or ethnicity-based barriers to learning. Those include students not consistently being placed with experienced or well-trained teachers, ineffective or biased disciplinary practices, lack of access to social-emotional and/or mental health support and lack of access to advanced classes or gifted and talented programs.

Hispanic and Black Texans More Likely to Identify Learning Barriers Based on Student Race or Ethnicity

% Texans who see each item as a barrier or significant barrier

	All Texans	White Texans	Hispanic Texans	Black Texans
Students not consistently being placed with experienced or well-trained teachers	69%	65%	72%	77%
Ineffective or biased disciplinary practices	67%	59%	69%	83%
Lack of access to social-emotional and/or mental health supports and programming	64%	57%	65%	81%
A school or district environment where teachers or students can't speak up about racism	62%	53%	67%	80%
Lack of access to advanced classes/gifted and talented programs	60%	51%	64%	77%
Curriculum that is not reflective of students' cultural backgrounds	50%	40%	56%	69%
Lack of access to teachers who are the same race/ethnicity as their students	43%	33%	46%	63%

<40% 40% 50% 60% 70% >80%

School Funding

As the state approaches its 87th legislative session facing billions of dollars in lost revenue because of the pandemic, the vast majority of Texans are concerned about the impact of a funding cut on school quality. Eighty-four percent overall, including 88 percent of public school parents, are very or somewhat concerned about this. As noted, that includes 54 percent of all Texans, and 66 percent of parents, who are “very” concerned about it.

Indeed, as things stand, 57 percent of Texans think the public schools in their community have too little money, as do 54 percent of public school parents, both essentially unchanged from their levels in December 2019. Just 1 in 10 in either group says the schools have too much money.

As in many views on the public purse strings, partisanship is considerable. Three-quarters of Democrats think the public schools in their community have too little funding; it’s 54 percent among independents and 39 percent among Republicans. Seventy-four percent of Black Texans see too little school funding; it’s 58 percent among Hispanic Texans and 52 percent among White Texans.

Gaps also appear regionally. Views that local schools have too little funding peak at 66 percent in South Central Texas, 60 percent in Dallas/Fort Worth, and 58 percent South/Southwestern Texas, compared with a low of 41 percent in East Texas. Just over half, 53 percent, in both Houston and West Texas see their community’s schools as underfunded.

Texans and Parents Concerned Funding Cuts Would Impact School Quality

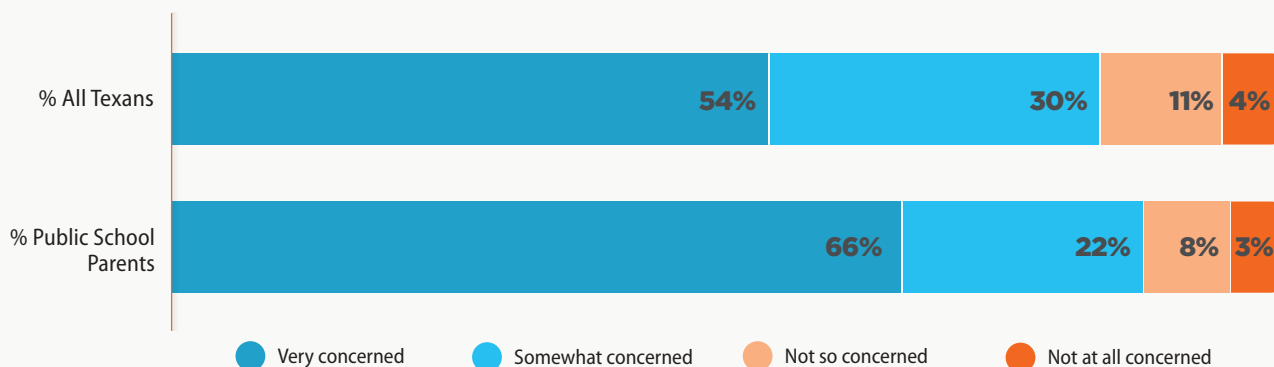




Photo credit: Van ISD

Additionally, perhaps reflecting their local tax base, 61 percent of Texans with annual household incomes of less than \$50,000 say their community's public schools are underfunded, compared with 51 percent of those with incomes of \$100,000 or more.

Funding views tie in with perceptions of school quality. People who think their local schools have the right amount of funding are especially likely to give them a high grade on the A-F scale.

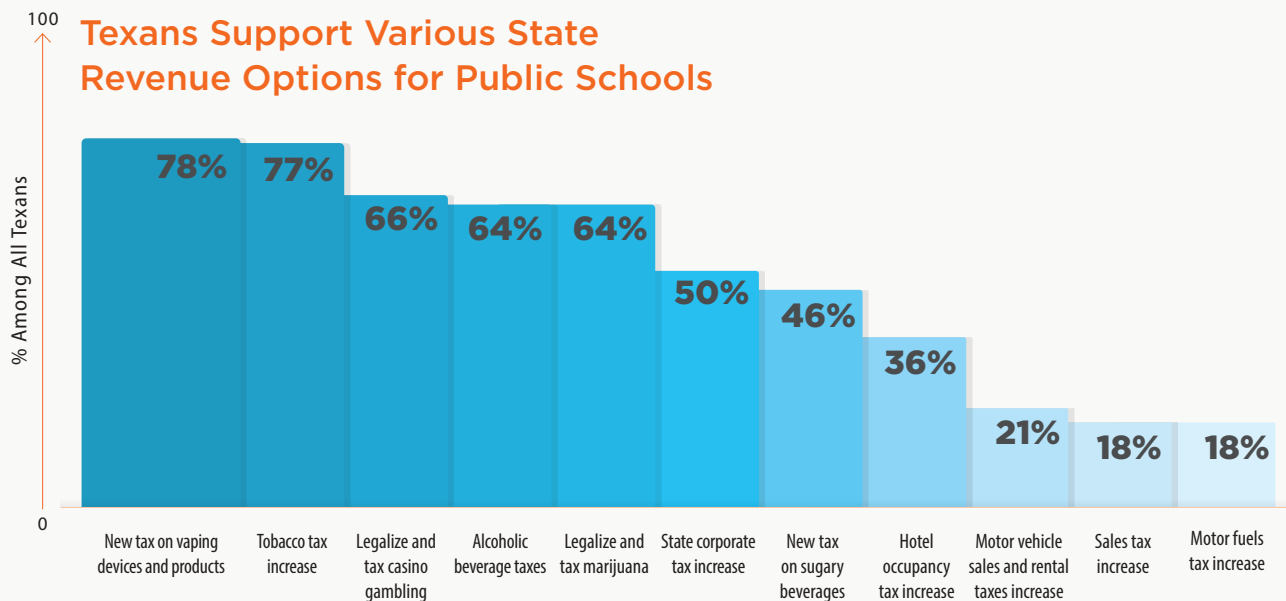
“I see everybody coming together – the teachers, the parents, the grandparents. Everybody has to be one in this pandemic. It takes a village to raise these children nowadays.”

Potential revenue sources

"Sin taxes" lead the way as preferred revenue sources for new K-12 public school funding. Seventy-eight percent of Texans support a new tax on vaping devices and products for this purpose, and 77 percent favor a tobacco tax increase. Sixty-six percent support legalizing and taxing casino gambling, 64 percent favor an alcoholic beverage tax and as many support legal, taxed marijuana.

Views are divided on other potential funding sources – a state corporate tax increase (50 percent in favor, 48 percent oppose) and a new tax on sugary beverages (46 percent in favor, 53 percent opposed). Six in 10 oppose a hotel occupancy tax increase. Opposition peaks, at about 8 in 10, on a sales tax increase or higher taxes on motor fuels or motor vehicle sales and rentals.

Respondents were asked whether knowing that "about 80 percent of K-12 public school funding is used to pay teachers and staff" makes them more or less likely to support creating or raising taxes to fund the public schools. About half say it makes no difference; 35 percent say this makes them more likely to support increased taxes; and 14 percent, less likely.



School Funding Questions

- Q.** What do you think of the funding level for public schools in your community - they have the right amount of money; they have too much money; they have too little money?
- Q.** To provide additional funding for Texas K-12 public schools, would you support or oppose the following state revenue options - tobacco tax increase; new tax on vaping devices and products; motor fuels tax increase; sales tax increase; new tax on sugary beverages; legalize and tax marijuana; motor vehicle sales and rental taxes increase; hotel occupancy tax increase; alcoholic beverage taxes; state corporate tax increase; and legalize and tax casino gambling?
- Q.** In Texas, about 80 percent of K-12 public school funding is used to pay teachers and staff. Does knowing this make you more likely to support creating or increasing taxes to fund K-12 public schools, less likely, or does it make no difference?
- Q.** If state funding for K-12 public schools is cut, how concerned are you about the impact on the quality of public school education in the state?

Those more apt to support taxes given this information were more inclined to express support in the first place.

Democrats and liberals are more apt than Republicans and conservatives to support each of the 11 potential revenue sources tested, with more varied results among independents and moderates. Still, there's broad backing among Republicans (75 percent) and conservatives (73 percent) for a tax on vaping devices and products, and two-thirds in both groups support a tobacco tax increase.

More than half of Republicans and conservatives also support alcoholic beverage taxes and legalizing and taxing casino gambling. Half in both groups support legalizing and taxing marijuana as an additional source of funding for public schools; that rises to 66 percent of moderates, 71 percent of independents and three-quarters or more of Democrats and liberals.

The largest partisan divide is on a state corporate tax increase. Sixty-eight percent of Democrats support this as an option for additional public school funding, compared with 32 percent of Republicans. Independents are in the middle, splitting 50 percent–48 percent.

Among other differences, those who are worried about the consequences of a funding cut on school quality are especially apt to support each of the potential funding sources tested in this survey. Illustratively, raising tobacco taxes is supported by 87 percent of Texans who are very concerned about the impacts of a funding cut versus 71 percent of those who are somewhat concerned about it and 52 percent of those who are less concerned about school quality impacts.

Rating the Schools

As noted, a majority of Texans, 56 percent, give the public schools in their community an A or B grade – a significant increase from 48 percent last year.

These ratings are associated with positive views of the schools' pandemic response. Among Texans who say the pandemic response has given them more appreciation of their communities' schools, 69 percent give those schools a grade of A or B. By contrast, among those who say their view of the schools hasn't changed, just 51 percent offer As or Bs.

In terms of differences from a year ago, As and Bs for the schools are essentially unchanged among public school parents, who account for 20 percent of adults in the state. Instead, it's non-parents who give the schools higher ratings – 56 percent As and Bs versus 46 percent a year ago.

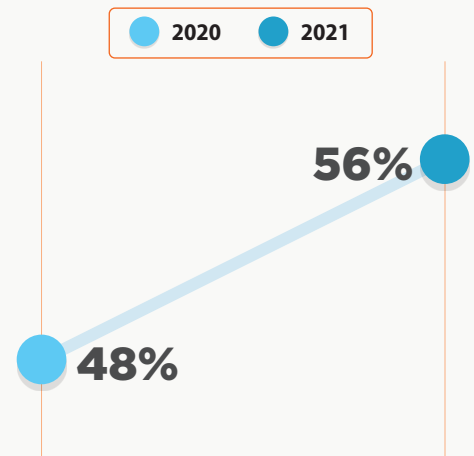
A or B grades for local schools also show a sharp increase among Black Texans (up 18 points to 55 percent) and a 9-point gain among Hispanic Texans (to 55 percent), while remaining essentially unchanged among White Texans (57 percent) – creating virtual parity among racial and ethnic groups in these views. A or B grades are also up 10 points among moderates, to 60 percent As and Bs, and 9 points among conservatives, to 55 percent, while little changed among liberals (54 percent).

Among other factors are perceptions of testing and funding. Seventy-one percent of those who are very or somewhat confident that STAAR tests effectively measure student learning give an A or B rating to schools in their community; for those less confident, it's 46 percent. And it's 69 percent among those who think their local public schools have the right amount of funding, dropping among those who think they have too little funding (to 53 percent) or too much (38 percent).

Consistent with last year, group differences emerge by income, possibly shaped by the role of property taxes. Among Texans with household incomes of \$100,000 or more, 64 percent give their public schools an A or B grade, compared with 54 percent of those in the \$50,000-\$99,999 bracket and 51 percent of those in households with incomes of less than \$50,000.

Significant Increase in Texans' Grades for Public Schools

% Texans who give their community's public schools an A or B grade



There also are differences by educational attainment, which is related to income. As and Bs are awarded by 64 percent among those with at least a four-year degree, versus 53 percent of those without a college degree. And rural (64 percent) and suburban (61 percent) residents are more apt than city dwellers (51 percent) to rate their community's public schools highly.

Regionally, As and Bs peak in South Central Texas (64 percent), despite funding concerns there. Top grades are lowest in Houston (52 percent), while ratings in Dallas/Fort Worth, West, East and South/Southwest Texas fall in between, at 54 percent to 59 percent As and Bs.

“Schools are struggling with a really unusual situation and are facing significant, conflicting pressure from state and local governments, their communities, and parents. I think we’re seeing a heroic level of effort and creativity from schools as they navigate this.”

Photo credit: Edgewood ISD



Problems facing schools

Texans acknowledge the unique obstacles facing public schools this year. In an open-ended question on the biggest problems facing the public schools, challenges related to the coronavirus top the list, cited by 25 percent of all adults. Six percent specifically mention online and remote learning as one of the biggest problems facing schools, the fourth-most mentioned issue.

Sixteen percent cite lack of funding, and 7 percent mention concerns about educational standards and quality, with other items mentioned by 5 percent or less. Results are similar among public school parents.

Possibly reflecting the widespread transition to remote learning, bullying and lack of discipline have declined as concerns. Both received double-digit mentions in December 2019, compared with 4 percent and 3 percent in this year's survey, respectively.

Regional differences appear here as well: Lack of funding is cited by a quarter of South Central Texans as a top problem, as many as mention the coronavirus. By contrast, funding is cited as a top problem by about 1 in 10 in West and East Texas alike, with the rest falling in between.

As elsewhere, views are colored by students' learning models and by Texans' partisan preferences. A third of public school parents whose child's learning model is fully remote cite the coronavirus as one of the biggest problems facing schools, versus 1 in 10 of those whose child is attending in-person or hybrid classes. And among all Texans, the virus is mentioned by 18 percent of Republicans as a top problem, rising to 30 percent of Democrats and 29 percent of independents.

Rating the Schools 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. What do you think are the biggest problems facing the public schools in your community?



Photo credit: Waco ISD

Attitudes Toward Teachers

Texans' ratings of their community's public schoolteachers held steady from last year and remained higher than ratings for local schools. Sixty-eight percent give teachers an A or B grade, about the same as in December 2019 (66 percent).

A or B ratings of teachers have gained 10 points since late 2019 among Democrats, to 80 percent. As noted, Democrats are disproportionately likely to report greater appreciation for their schools because of the pandemic. Teachers get As and Bs from majorities of Republicans and independents as well, but by lower numbers – 66 percent and 63 percent, respectively.

As with ratings of the schools, local teachers are rated better by wealthier Texans and those with a college degree. And their ratings fall among the relatively few respondents (again, 10 percent) who think the schools are overfunded.



Factors in teacher quality

What informs perceptions of teacher quality? Texans were given eight options for the single most important factor that makes a good teacher. The top finisher, selected by 26 percent, is assessing and planning for all students' individual learning needs.

Three others follow: Making the class engaging and relevant (selected by 18 percent); supporting students' self-management, interpersonal skills and decision-making skills (17 percent); and maintaining an organized and safe classroom (17 percent).

Other items received single-digit mentions as the most important: building strong relationships with all students; preparing students for standardized testing; effectively communicating with families; and creating a classroom experience that is responsive to students' cultural backgrounds.

“La pandemia me hizo apreciar la pasión de los trabajadores, maestros y personal de las escuelas de mi comunidad para proveer acceso a una educación de la manera más segura posible para los estudiantes.”

“The pandemic made me appreciate the passion of my community's school staff, teachers, and personnel to provide access to an education that is as safe as possible for the students.”

Items not selected as the single most important are telling, nonetheless. Indeed, evaluating each separately, seven of the eight items are seen by majorities of Texans as extremely or very important in making a good teacher. In this formulation, more than 8 in 10 say it's highly important to make the class engaging and relevant and to maintain an organized and safe classroom. For both of these, this includes at least 8 in 10 respondents across groups categorized by race and ethnicity, partisanship, ideology, income, sex, age and urbanicity.

Seventy-one percent to 79 percent place high importance on supporting students' self-management, interpersonal skills and decision-making skills; effectively communicating with families; assessing and planning for all students' individual learning needs; and building strong relationships with all students. Again, that includes majorities across demographic groups.

Fewer respondents, 53 percent, place high importance on creating a classroom experience that is responsive to students' cultural backgrounds. Here, differences emerge by race and ethnicity, from 71 percent of Black Texans to 58 percent of Hispanic Texans and 46 percent of White Texans. It's 72 percent among Democrats, 48 percent among independents and 39 percent among Republicans.

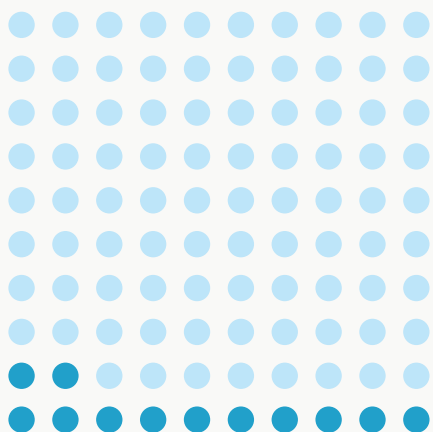
Last on the list, just 44 percent select preparing students for standardized testing as highly important in teacher quality, the only item not to reach a majority.

In other group differences, public school parents are slightly more likely to identify standardized test preparation as highly important in teacher quality than non-parents, 50 percent versus 42 percent. And those with household incomes of less than \$50,000 a year (61 percent) are about twice as apt as those with incomes of \$100,000 or more (30 percent) to say so. The numbers are similar for other racial and ethnic subgroups (56 percent) versus White Texans (30 percent). That includes similar shares of Hispanic Texans (58 percent) and Black Texans (53 percent).

Attitudes Toward Teachers Questions

- Q. Thinking about public schoolteachers in your community, using the A, B, C, D, Fail scale, what grade would you give them as a group?
- Q. Thinking now about what makes a good teacher, how important are these - building strong relationships with all students; supporting students' self-management, interpersonal skills and decision-making skills; maintaining an organized and safe classroom; assessing and planning for all students' individual learning needs; effectively communicating with families; making the class engaging and relevant; creating a classroom experience that is responsive to students' cultural backgrounds; and preparing students for standardized testing? Which of these would you say is the single most important?

The Role of Testing



only
12%
of Texans think public schools
should be graded entirely on
state standardized tests

Another result aligns with the comparatively low rating for standardized test preparation as a factor in teacher quality: Many Texans are skeptical about how well the state's standardized tests capture student learning. Fifty-six percent (including 55 percent of public school parents) lack confidence that STAAR effectively measures how well a student is learning. Results are essentially unchanged from a similar question in last year's study.

Strength of sentiment is low across the five items tested. Fewer than 2 in 10 call STAAR "very" effective at measuring student learning over time; the quality of the student's teacher, school campus or district; or how well-prepared a student is for next steps after high school.

Reflecting this skepticism, only about 1 in 10 thinks the public schools should be graded entirely on student scores on state standardized tests. Instead, 68 percent say school grades should be determined partly on standardized tests and partly on non-test factors such as the range of school programs and services that are available to students and families. Roughly 2 in 10 think school grades should be based entirely on non-test factors.

The perceived effectiveness of STAAR differs by educational attainment. Texans who've been to college are less confident in the test than those who haven't gone beyond high school. Also, reflecting the close connection of education and income, 68 percent of Texans with \$100,000-plus incomes are skeptical of STAAR, compared with 50 percent of those with lower incomes.

Among other differences, White Texans are more apt to lack confidence in STAAR than other racial and ethnic subgroups, 66 percent versus 49 percent, including a similar 52 percent of Black Texans and 46 percent of Hispanic Texans. And women are 12 points more skeptical of the test than are men, 62 percent versus 50 percent. Partisan differences do not play a part in perceived effectiveness of the STAAR test, with similar shares of Republicans (57 percent) and Democrats (55 percent) expressing little or no confidence in it.

Texans do find some value in assessing students. Though just 43 percent are at least somewhat confident that the tests effectively measure how well a student is learning overall, more see STAAR's value in measuring progress, with two-thirds saying it's at least somewhat effective in measuring student learning over the previous year.

About 6 in 10 also think STAAR is very or somewhat effective at measuring the quality of a student's teacher. However, that doesn't mean most think it is how teachers should be evaluated, given other metrics. As noted above, preparing students for standardized tests ranks lowest in importance for teacher quality when compared with other gauges.

Six in 10 public school parents also think the tests gauge the quality of the student's school district at least somewhat effectively (as do 54 percent of Texans overall). Roughly half of Texans say the tests effectively capture the quality of the student's school campus or how well-prepared students are for college, career or the military.

The Role of Testing Questions

- Q. Now 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. In terms of these specific areas, how effective are student scores on the STAAR test for measuring the following - student learning over the previous year; the quality of the student's teacher; the quality of the student's school campus; the quality of the student's school district; and how well-prepared students are for college, career or the military?
- Q. The Texas Education Agency gives an A-F letter grade to each public school in the state. How do you think this grade should be determined - entirely on student scores on state standardized tests; partly on student scores on state standardized tests and partly on other factors, such as the range of school programs and services for students and families; or entirely on non-test factors, such as the range of school programs and services for students and families?

Charters and Vouchers

A slim majority of Texans, 53 percent, oppose establishing or adding charter schools in their community if it means reducing the amount of funds distributed to their local schools, with 46 percent in support. Likewise, 55 percent oppose a voucher program that allows for tax money to partly pay for tuition at private and religious schools, with no state educational oversight; 43 percent support this. Results in both cases are similar among public school parents.

Views of current funding relate to these attitudes. Opposition to charter schools, and a voucher program rises among the majority of Texans who think their community's public schools are underfunded – 60 percent in this group oppose adding charter schools, and 63 percent oppose a voucher program. Support rises among those who think the public schools have about the right amount of funding, and peaks among the relatively few who think they're overfunded.

Perceptions of the quality of the public schools also play a role. Among Texans who give their local public schools a D or F rating, 58 percent support establishing or adding charter schools, compared with 33 percent of those who give their schools an A grade. Similarly, half of those who grade their public schools poorly support a voucher program, dropping to 30 percent of those who rate their public schools highly.

Support for a voucher program reaches majority support in one region, East Texas (54 percent). That compares with 4 in 10 in Dallas/Fort Worth, South/Southwestern and South Central Texas alike, 43 percent in West Texas and 47 percent in Houston.

Charters and Vouchers Questions

- Q. Charter schools are publicly funded schools that are run outside of the local school district system. Would you support or oppose establishing or adding charter schools in your community if that meant reducing the amount of funds distributed to your local school?
- 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?

Survey Methodology

The 2021 Raise Your Hand Texas Foundation Poll was conducted using the nationally representative Ipsos KnowledgePanel®, in which participants are randomly recruited via address-based sampling to participate in survey research projects by responding to questionnaires online. Households without internet connections are provided with a web-enabled device and free internet service.

The survey was designed to consist of approximately 1,000 adults in Texas, including about 950 from the general population and an oversample of about 50 additional K-12 public school parents for more granular analysis of this population. The full sample was weighted to reflect the correct the proportion of K-12 public school parents.

The questionnaire was pretested Oct. 6-7, 2020, and field work was conducted Oct. 9-20, 2020, in English and Spanish. After initial invitations, reminder emails were sent on the third, sixth and ninth days of the field period, with additional reminders sent to the K-12 public school parent oversample and Black respondents on days five, seven, and 10. Out of 2,083 panel members invited to participate, completed, qualified surveys were provided by 1,055. 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 21 cases (16 non-parents, five K-12 public school parents) were deleted. The final sample included 1,034 Texans in the general population, including an oversample of 45 K-12 public school parents for a total of 231.

Data were weighted via iterative proportional fitting to the following benchmark distributions of the general population of Texas adults from the U.S. Census Bureau's March 2018 Current Population Survey Supplement.

- Gender (male, female) by age (18-29, 30-44, 45-59, 60+)
- Race/ethnicity (White, Black, other, Hispanic, 2+ races)
- Education (less than high school, high school, some college, bachelor's degree or higher)
- Household income (\$0-\$24,999, \$25K-\$49,999, \$50K-\$74,999, \$75K-\$99,999, \$100K-\$149,999, \$150K+)
- Marital status (married, not married)
- Language proficiency (English-proficient Hispanic, bilingual Hispanic, Spanish-proficient Hispanic, non-Hispanic)
- Hispanic nativity (U.S.-born Hispanic, not U.S.-born Hispanic, non-Hispanic)

A post-weight to recent estimates of political party identification in the general population was applied (29 percent Democrats, 31 percent Republicans, 38 percent independents, other party, or don't know). Data also were weighted to correct for the K-12 public school parents oversample.

General population weights were trimmed at 1 percent and 99 percent of their distribution (minimum 0.156, maximum 4.569). Given oversampling, the survey has a design effect due to weighting of 1.67, for a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 3.9 percentage points for the full sample and 8.2 points for K-12 public school parents. Error margins are larger for subgroups.



RaiseYourHandTexas.org/Research