

Texans' Views of the State Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR)

Table of Contents

List of Figures	1
Introduction	2
Teacher Quality	3
School Quality	5
Perceptions of STAAR	7
Perceptions of Teacher Focus	9
Perceptions of Test Measurement.	10
Teachers' Voices on STAAR	12
School Grading	15
Student Standardized Test Performance.	17
Student STAAR Testing Experiences	18
Disparate Views of STAAR	20
Conclusion	23
References	24
Appendix	25



List of Figures

Figure 1: Texans Valued a Variety of Factors for Rating Teacher Quality.	1
Figure 2: Parents and Non-Parents Valued a Variety of Factors for Rating Teacher Quality.	4
Figure 3: Texans Valued a Variety of Factors for Rating School Quality.	5
Figure 4: Parents Were More Likely Than Non-Parents to Consider Standardized Test Preparation in Rating School Quality	6
Figure 5: Texans Identified More With Negative Perceptions of the STAAR	7
Figure 6: Slight Differences in Perceptions of the STAAR Test Between Parents and Texans	8
Figure 7: Texans Divided on Perceptions of Teacher Focus	9
Figure 8: Parents Were More Likely Than Non-Parents and Teachers to Have Confidence in STAAR	11
Figure 9: Teachers Reported Significant Barriers to Good Teaching	12
Figure 10: Texans Prioritized Experience and Living Costs Over Test Scores for Teacher Salary Increases	15
Figure 11: Standardized Test Pressure Topped The List of Challenges for Teachers	17
Figure 12: Parents' Descriptions of their Child's STAAR Test Experience.	18
Figure 13: Confidence in STAAR Varied by Education and Income Level	21

Introduction

The [Charles Butt Foundation](#) facilitates public opinion research that primarily encompasses large-scale public perception polling, issue and audience specific polling, and focus groups to hear from Texans about their experiences, perspectives, and needs relating to Texas public, pre-kindergarten through twelfth (PK-12) grade education. This research informs the development of the Charles Butt Foundation’s initiatives and serves as a resource for the state and nation to learn about Texas public education through the lens of Texans with the intent to inform recommendations on strengthening the state’s public education system. The Charles Butt Foundation facilitates two public opinion polls yearly: the [Texas Education Poll](#) and the [Texas Teacher Poll](#). The Texas Education Poll provides insight into the perceptions and trends in Texans’ attitudes toward public education and asks 1,000 Texans, including public school parents, to share their attitudes and experiences regarding Texas public schools. The Texas Teacher Poll provides insights into the challenges teachers face and their experiences as professionals – all through the voices of teachers. The Texas Teacher Poll asks 1,000 teachers, a representative sample of the state’s public school teachers, to share their thoughts on strengthening and improving the profession.

The findings in this paper are from four annual Texas Education Polls and three annual Texas Teacher Polls conducted by Langer Research Associates, and produced for the Raise Your Hand Texas Foundation from 2020 to 2021, and the Charles Butt Foundation from 2022 to 2023.¹ The Texas Education Polls were conducted in English and Spanish among random statewide samples of Texas adults via the Ipsos KnowledgePanel®, a probability-based online survey panel. The Texas Teacher

Polls were conducted among a random sample of teachers drawn from the Texas Education Agency’s (TEA) roster of all public school teachers in the state, with data collected via a secure online questionnaire.

This paper aims to provide valuable insight into how Texans and teachers view and experience the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR). The STAAR remains a topic of interest and concern among stakeholders and Texans across the state. Four years of research by the Charles Butt Foundation found that most Texans hold negative perceptions of STAAR. **Given the many doubts surrounding standardized tests, parents and Texans overall disagreed with using student scores on STAAR exams as the primary factor in school accountability ratings or determining how much a teacher’s salary increases over time.** Instead, a comprehensive approach that accounts for non-test factors was preferred. While most saw standardized test preparation as an important factor in school and teacher quality, it was far overshadowed by other objectives, such as assessing and planning for students’ individual learning needs; job and college preparation; and supporting students’ self-management, interpersonal skills, and decision-making skills.

Detailed findings of Texans’ and Texas teachers’ attitudes toward STAAR follow. Throughout the paper, the term “parents” will refer to Texans with a child enrolled in public Kindergarten-12th (K-12) grade schools in the 2020, 2021, and 2022 Texas Education Polls and PK-12 in the 2023 Texas Education Poll. The term “non-parents” refers to Texans without a child enrolled in Kindergarten-12th or PK-12th public, private, or religious schools. These opinions were elicited in polls that did not inform respondents of STAAR’s high financial cost to the state.

¹ See public opinion surveys published by the Charles Butt Foundation at <https://charlesbuttfdn.org/what-were-learning/public-opinion-research/>

Teacher Quality

Fewer than half of Texans considered preparation for standardized testing as highly important in determining teacher quality.

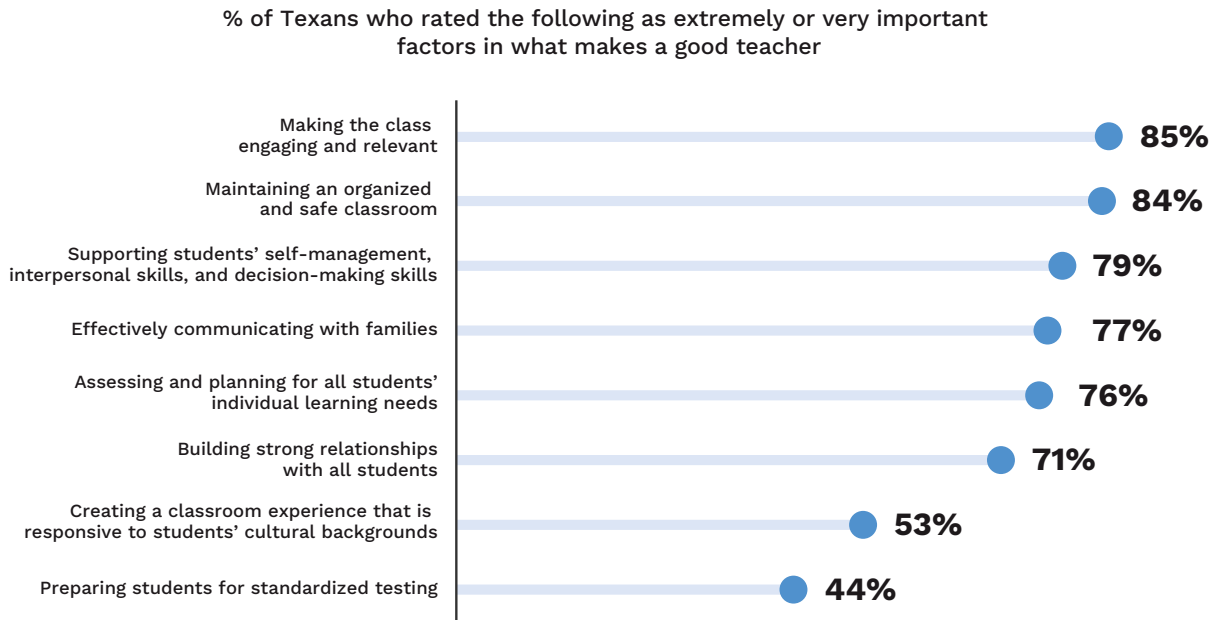
2021 Texas Education Poll: In the [2021 Texas Education Poll](#), 44% of Texans indicated that preparing students for standardized testing was an “extremely or very important” factor in what makes a good teacher.² As seen in Figure 1, most Texans identified making the class engaging and relevant (85%) and maintaining an organized and safe classroom (84%) as “extremely or very important” to being a good teacher. Broad majorities said the same for supporting

students’ self-management, interpersonal skills, and decision-making skills (79%); effectively communicating with families (77%); assessing and planning for students’ individual learning needs (76%); and building strong relationships with all students (71%).

When asked which of these factors was the “single most important” in being a good teacher, 5% of Texans polled cited preparing students for standardized testing, tied for

² Here and throughout, surveys are denoted by the year in which they were released. The four annual Texas Education Polls fielded during the previous winter or fall.

Figure 1: Texans Valued a Variety of Factors for Rating Teacher Quality



Source: 2021 Texas Education Poll Report.

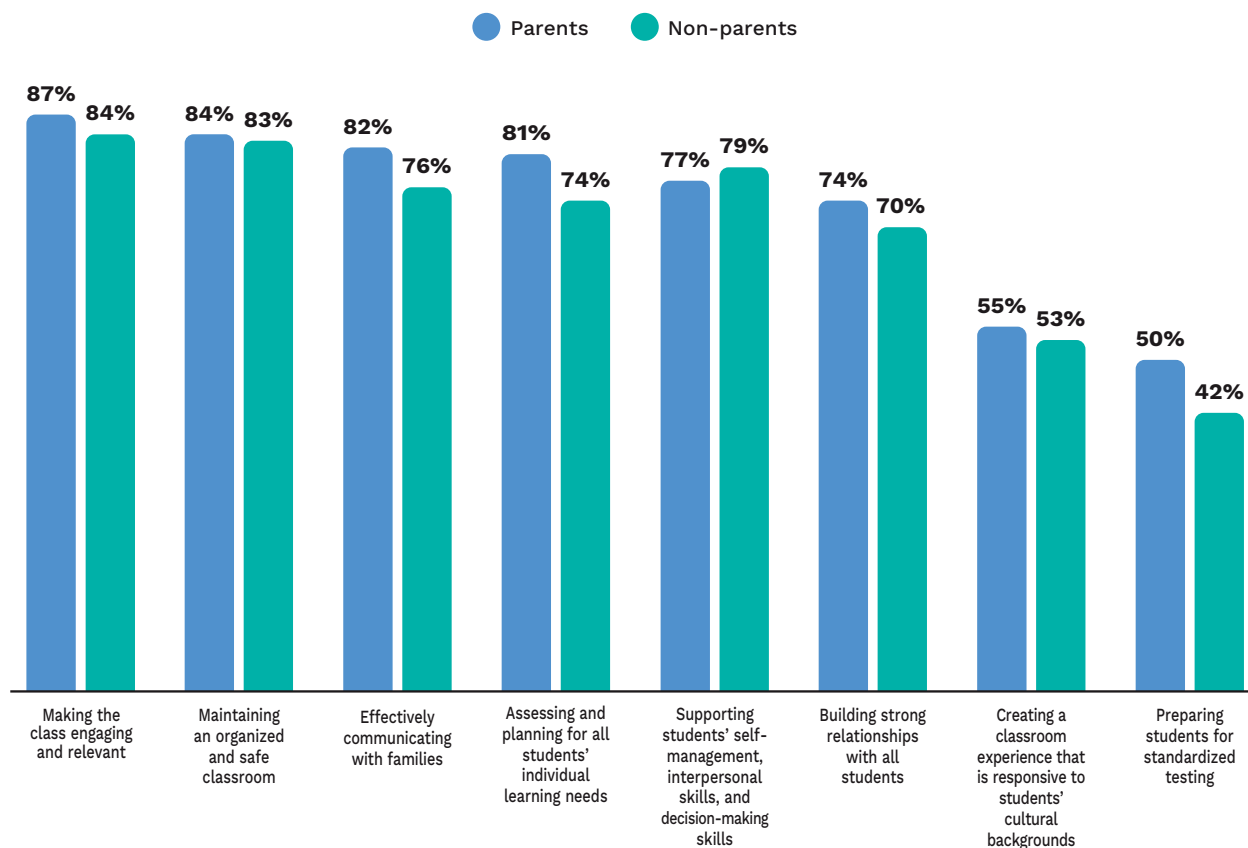
sixth out of the eight items listed. That compares with 26% who saw assessing and planning for students’ individual learning needs as the “single most important” factor as well as 18% for making the class engaging and relevant, and 17% for supporting students’ self-management, interpersonal, and decision-making skills and maintaining an organized and safe classroom.

Figure 2 illustrates responses to teacher quality items between parents and non-parents. Fifty percent of parents saw preparing students for standardized testing as “extremely or very important” in determining teacher quality, slightly more than the 42% of non-parents.³ Compared to other teacher quality items on the list, preparation for standardized testing ranked low. Only 6% of parents indicated it is the “single most important” factor in being a good teacher.

³ Differences that are significant at the 95% confidence level (or higher) are reported without qualification. Those that are significant at 90–94% confidence are described as “slight” differences. Those that are significant at less than 90% confidence are not reported as differences.

Figure 2: Parents and Non-Parents Valued a Variety of Factors for Rating Teacher Quality

% of public school parents and non-parents who rated the following as extremely or very important factors in what makes a good teacher



Source: 2021 Texas Education Poll Report.

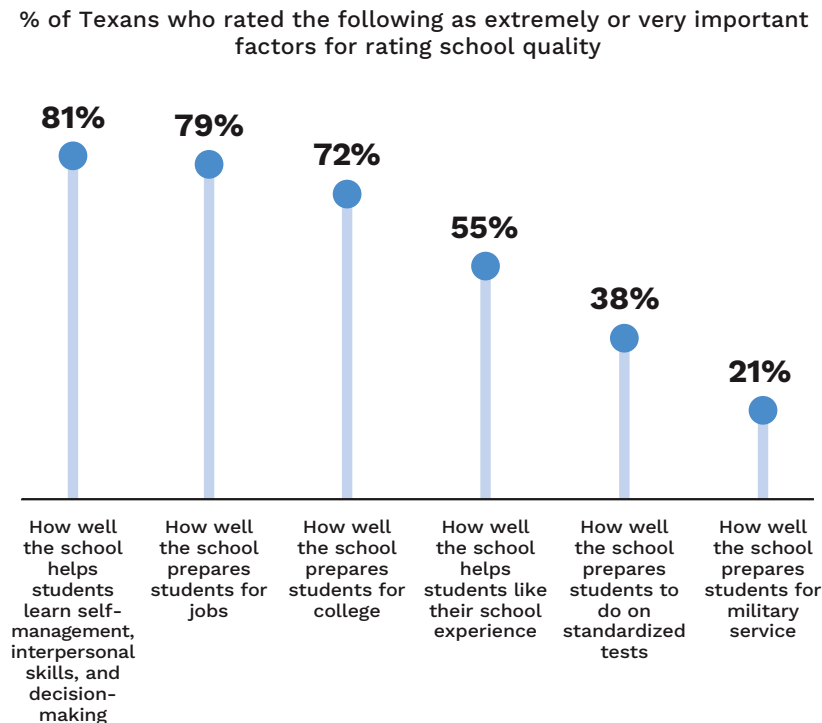
School Quality

Fewer than half of Texans considered preparation for standardized testing as highly important in school quality.

2020 Texas Education Poll: In the [2020 Texas Education Poll](#), 38% of Texans indicated that how well a school prepares students to perform on standardized tests was “extremely or very important” in overall school quality. Most Texans identified other factors as highly important in school quality, including how well a school helps students learn self-management, interpersonal

skills, and decision-making (81%); prepares students for jobs (79%) and college (72%); and helps students like their school experience (55%). Only one item – how well the school prepares students for military service – was less likely than standardized testing to be seen as important to school quality.

Figure 3: Texans Valued a Variety of Factors for Rating School Quality



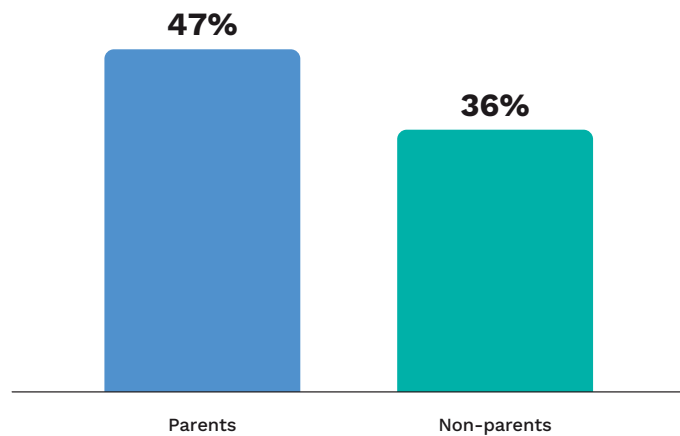
Source: 2020 Texas Education Poll Report.

When asked which item was the “single most important” factor in school quality, 3% of Texans selected how well a school prepares students for standardized tests while 53% selected how well the school helps students learn self-management, interpersonal skills, and decision-making skills.

Forty-seven percent of parents considered standardized test preparation as highly important in determining school quality, compared to only 36% of non-parents. Similar to determining teacher quality, standardized test preparation ranked low on the list of items and just 4% called it the “single most important” factor in determining school quality.

Figure 4: Parents Were More Likely Than Non-Parents to Consider Standardized Test Preparation in Rating School Quality

% of public school parents and % of non-parents who considered standardized test preparation as extremely or very important in rating school quality



Source: 2020 Texas Education Poll Report.

Perceptions of STAAR

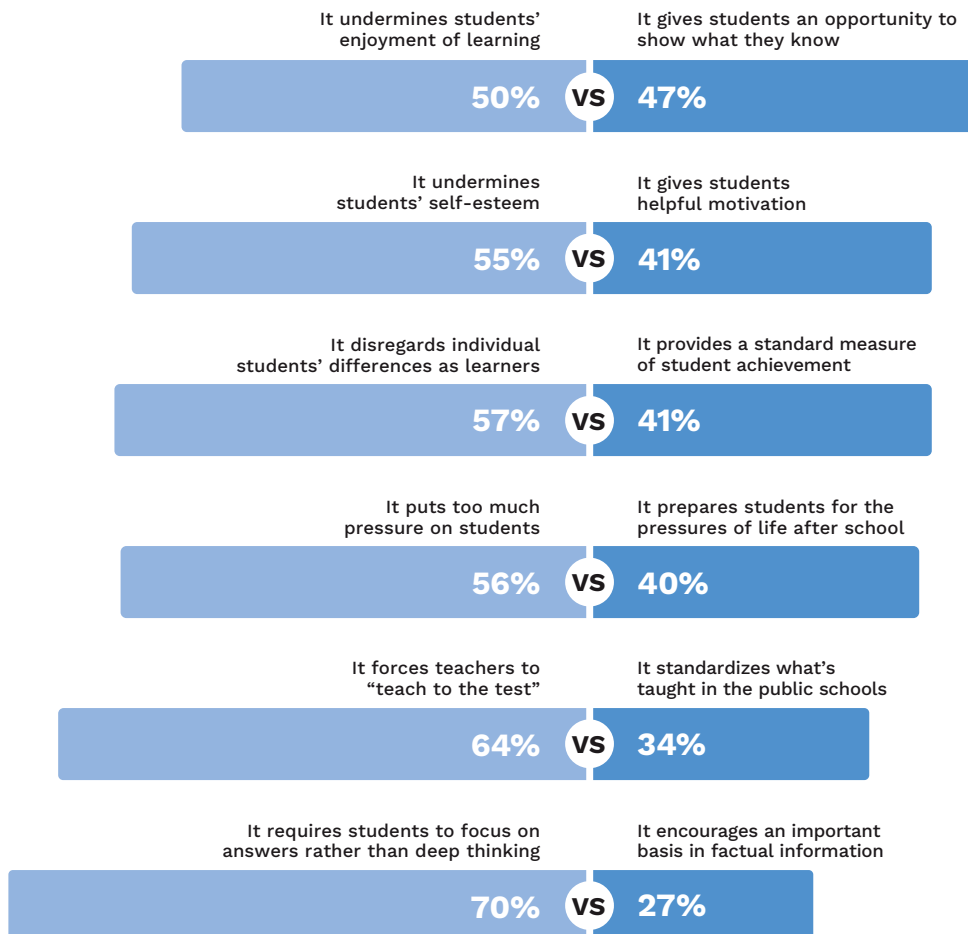
Most Texans believed the STAAR exam has more of a negative than a positive impact on students.

When asked to consider a series of paired arguments for and against the STAAR tests, most Texans perceived the STAAR exam to be negatively associated with teaching and learning.

2022 Texas Education Poll: Seventy percent of Texans in the [2022 Texas Education Poll](#) said the STAAR tests require students to focus on answers rather than deep thinking, while 27% instead said they encourage an important basis in factual information.

Figure 5: Texans Identified More With Negative Perceptions of the STAAR Test

% Texans who thought one option better described the STAAR test



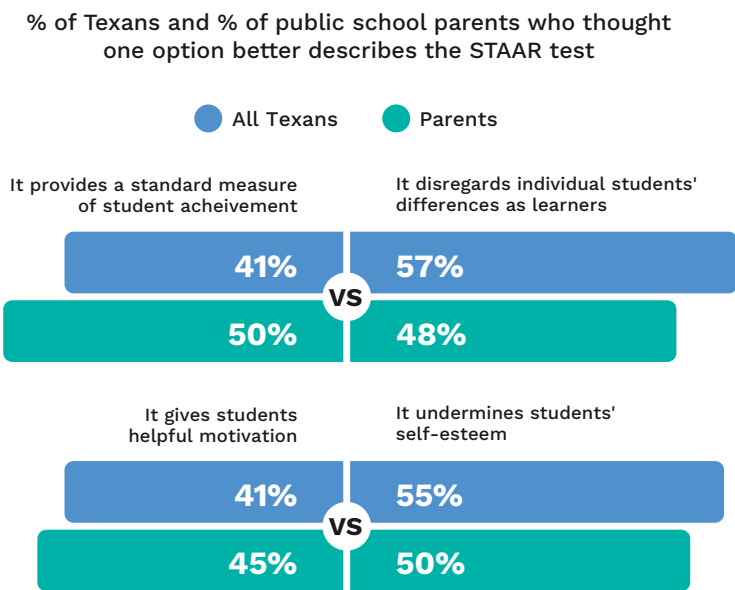
Source: 2022 Texas Education Poll Report.

Sixty-four percent of Texans said STAAR forced teachers to teach to the test, compared with a third who said STAAR exams standardize what is taught in public schools. Fifty-seven percent said the tests “disregard individual students’ differences as learners,” versus 41% who reported, “they provide a standard measure of student achievement.” Fifty-six percent said STAAR puts too much pressure on students, compared with 40% who instead stated it prepares students for the pressures of life after school. Fifty-five percent reported that STAAR undermines students’ self-esteem, compared with 41% who instead stated the tests give students helpful motivation.

Texans were closely divided on one other item: Half reported the tests undermine students’ enjoyment of learning, while 47% stated that tests allow students to show what they know.

Views among parents were generally aligned with those of all Texans, with two exceptions. Parents were closely split between thinking the exams disregard individual students’ differences as learners (48%) versus providing a standard measure of student achievement (50%). Parents were also divided on whether the exams undermined students’ self-esteem (50%) or gave them helpful motivation (45%).

Figure 6: Slight Differences in Perceptions of the STAAR Test Between Parents and Texans



Source: 2022 Texas Education Poll Report.

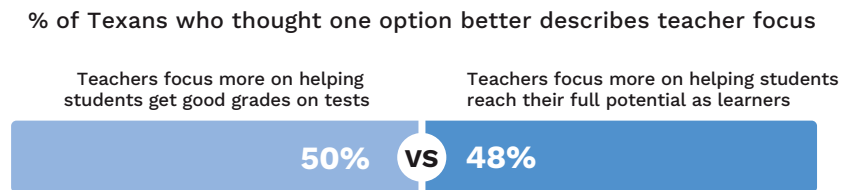
Perceptions of Teacher Focus

Texans had mixed perceptions of what teachers prioritize in the classroom.

2020 Texas Education Poll: In the [2020 Texas Education Poll](#), Texans divided about evenly between thinking that teachers focus more on helping students get good grades on tests (50%) versus assisting students to reach their full potential as learners

(48%). Of those who thought teachers focus more on test preparation, 93% said it was because it is the way the Texas education system requires them to teach rather than how teachers prefer to teach.

Figure 7: Texans Divided on Perceptions of Teacher Focus



Source: 2020 Texas Education Poll Report.

Perceptions of Test Measurement

Texans had mixed views of test effectiveness in measuring student learning.

2020-2023 Texas Education Polls: Parents were divided on the STAAR tests' evaluative ability. Fifty-three percent in the [2023 Texas Education Poll](#) were “very” or “somewhat confident” that the test effectively measures student learning, with just 10% “very confident.” Forty-five percent instead were “not so or not at all confident” in the tests' effectiveness.

Results on this question have been similar across all four years of annual polls by the Foundation. In one exception, the percentage of parents who were “very” confident the STAAR tests effectively measure student learning increased to 20% in the [2022 Texas Education Poll](#). It has since returned to about 10%, similar to its levels in both the 2020 and 2021 [Texas Education Polls](#).

Skepticism was higher among non-parents. Fifty-eight percent of non-parents lacked confidence in STAAR's ability to measure student learning, surpassing the share who expressed confidence (39%). The lack of confidence of non-parents brings the share of all Texans who are “not so or

not at all confident” in the STAAR tests to 56%, versus 42% who expressed at least some confidence in them. Again, results have held roughly steady in the four consecutive annual [Texas Education Polls](#).

2022 Texas Teacher Poll: Among teachers, in the [2022 Texas Teacher Poll](#), a broad 83% were “not so or not at all confident” that STAAR effectively measures how well a student is learning. Only 16% expressed confidence, including 1% who indicated that they were “very” confident in STAAR's effectiveness to measure student learning.

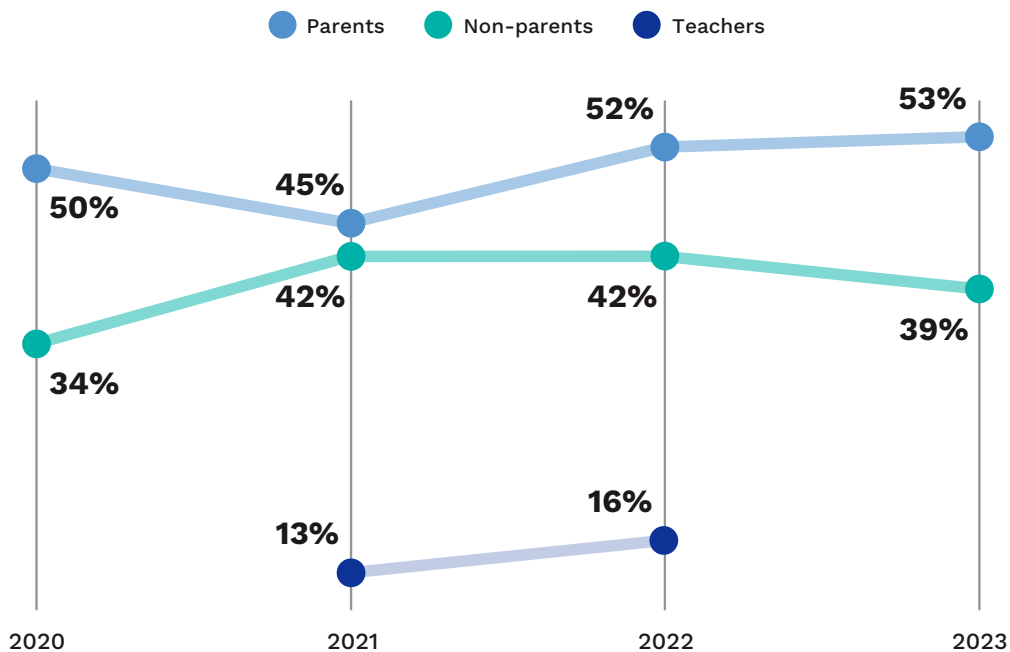
Other results underscored questions about STAAR's effectiveness. While 66% in the [2021 Texas Education Poll](#) viewed STAAR test scores as at least somewhat effective in measuring student learning over the previous year, only 14% considered them “very effective” at this. Similarly, 58% of Texans said student scores on STAAR tests were at least somewhat effective at measuring the quality of the student's teacher. Still, just 16% saw them as very effective.

More than half of Texans (53%) saw STAAR scores as at least “somewhat effective,” and 13% as “very effective,” in measuring how well students are prepared for college, a career, or the military.

When asked how best to measure student learning, an overwhelming 85% of Texans in the [2020 Texas Education Poll](#) preferred an approach that measured growth, compared with just 12% who preferred “a single standardized test at one point in time.”

Figure 8: Parents Were More Likely Than Non-Parents and Teachers to Have Confidence in STAAR

% of public school parents, non-parents, and teachers who were very or somewhat confident STAAR effectively measures learning



Source: Texas Education Poll Report, 2020-2023; Texas Teacher Poll Report, 2021-2022.

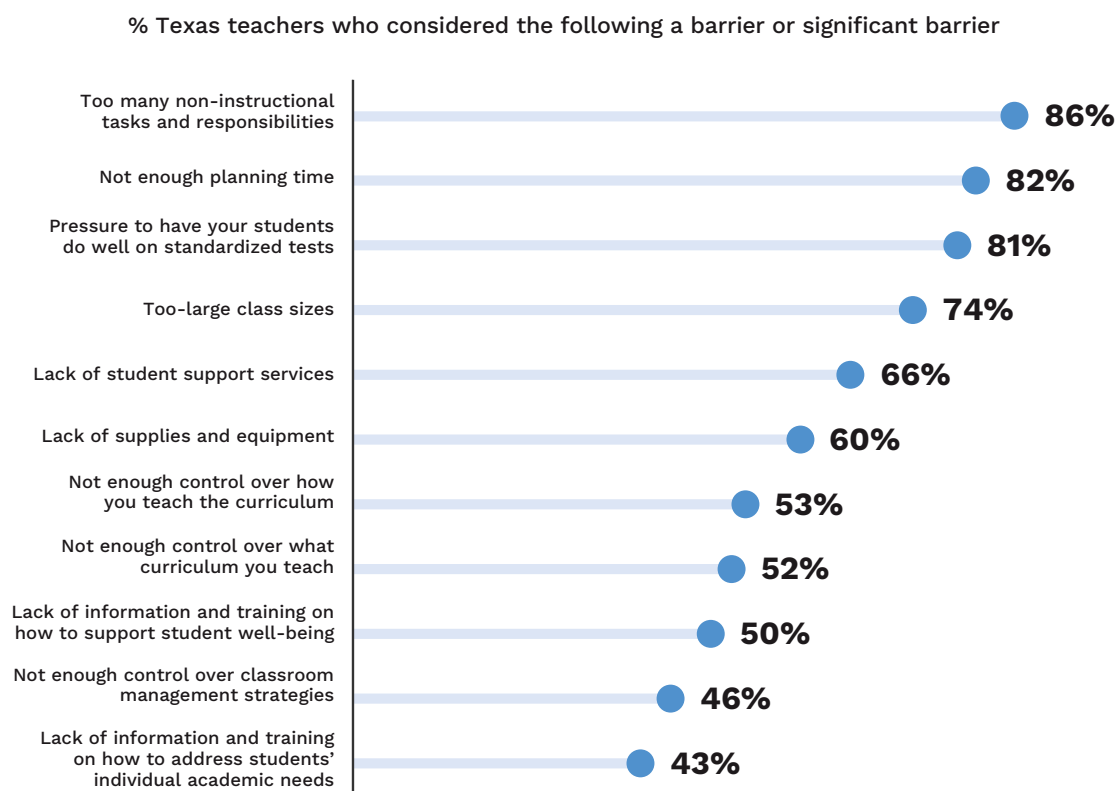
Teachers' Voices on STAAR

Teachers overwhelmingly said preparation for STAAR is not a good use of instruction time; most saw test pressure as a significant barrier to good teaching.

2021 Texas Teacher Poll: In the Charles Butt Foundation's [2021 Texas Teacher Poll](#), 83% of teachers said the time they spent preparing students for the STAAR test was not a good use of instruction time; in contrast, just 16% considered it a good use of time.

Furthermore, 81% of teachers in the [2022 Texas Teacher Poll](#) said pressure to have their students do well on standardized tests was a barrier to being as good a teacher as possible, including 56% who called it a significant barrier. Out of 11 potential obstacles, as seen in Figure 9, just one – too many non-instructional tasks and responsibilities – was more-cited as a significant impediment, by 65%.

Figure 9: Teachers Reported Widespread Barriers to Good Teaching



Source: 2022 Texas Teacher Poll Report.

2021 Texas Teacher Poll Open Ended

Question: Teachers were asked to respond to an open-ended question on why they consider preparation for the STAAR exam not a good use of instruction time. Many teachers said that it forces them to “teach to the test” rather than help students gain a deeper understanding of concepts or explore other topics. Other teachers were skeptical of the test’s ability to measure how well students are learning; some teachers pointed specifically to differences in students’ learning abilities, with many considering it ineffective to prepare students for tests outside of their grade level or ability. Below are a few examples from teachers’ statements:

The STAAR test is simply a test of memory recall and strategy retention. We teach differentiation and allow students to learn in a way that fits them best, yet we give them all a cookie-cutter-style assessment. I spend more time teaching test-taking strategies than I do actually having fun with my students. They lack life lessons, social skills, conflict resolution, problem-solving, etc. due to so much emphasis on testing.⁴

The test is an anecdotal window into how the students performed on one assessment. The test is a matter of endurance rather than understanding or comprehension.

Studies have indicated there is a large margin of error in the validity of the scores and time spent preparing for the test does not leave enough room for project- and problem-based learning opportunities.

Students come to us on all different ability levels, and they learn at different rates. Prepping a student for STAAR when he is a year or more behind is not an effective use of time. We are looking for growth

in students who are behind, not mastery of grade level TEKS (Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills).

The high-stakes nature of the test also was a point of concern. Many teachers argued that attaching it to teacher pay or whether a student can move on to the next grade causes unnecessary stress and undermines the enjoyment of learning:

Students and teachers get stressed, and their self-esteem gets lower if they get failing grades.

As a reading teacher, my job is to teach students to love reading. When all we do is practice STAAR at the end, all of the hard work I put in throughout the year is thrown out because they begin to dislike reading again.

Too often teachers are pressured to focus on the test instead of finding interesting and innovative ways to just teach the kids and excite them about the content.

Additionally, many teachers in the [2021 Texas Teacher Poll](#) said the STAAR test was not a good use of instruction time, given other student life challenges. Teachers expressed the COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted students beyond learning:

The pandemic created a learning gap with students, and they are coming in absolutely unprepared even for their own grade-level work. Reading STAAR is 2 years above grade level. Math questions are all wordy too, and likely above grade level as well. If I have students at first and second-grade level and trying to catch up to 3rd-grade level, why on earth would I give them a 5th-grade test? It sets them up to fail.

⁴ Italics are used throughout this paper to represent a participant’s direct quote.

Students came into the 2020-2021 school year behind. They've faced the loss of parents and loved ones. Some are concerned with their next meal since parents are losing jobs.

Students are currently grappling with food insecurity, housing insecurity, accessibility to internet issues, and many more pressing matters. When they are able to show up to class, it's more of a place to socialize and decompress from their home life. Adding the pressures of testing to their already full plate is asking too much of our students.

As noted, relatively few teachers – 16% – said STAAR preparation was a good use of instruction time. Among them, many saw the curriculum and content of the test as useful for students and considered test-taking an important skill. Others called STAAR an effective measurement of student progress that can help teachers know what to focus on:

Preparing students for STAAR allows teachers to make connections between concepts that may have been taught in isolation. It allows time to explicitly teach test-taking strategies that will help them with post-K12 education such as SAT, ACT, GRE, LMAT, etc. Preparing also gives students a refresher of content that might have been taught in the fall; it provides teachers with data to know where gaps

in learning are and time to address them prior to testing.

I am teaching them accountability. They will have to show their learning all throughout their lives and they will have to pass all kinds of tests throughout their lives. Since the test isn't going anywhere, I try to find the positives in it.

STAAR measures some basic understanding and expectations of student knowledge to make sure they are ready and prepared for advanced knowledge. Different students learn at different paces. STAAR allows teachers to understand the learning pace of a student.

Still, some teachers who said preparing students for the test was a good use of instructional time did not necessarily think the STAAR test was useful – rather, they considered it a good use of time because the Texas Education system requires it:

As long as it is a requirement to graduate, we are to prepare our students to do just that so it is never a waste of time to prepare students for graduation.

The whole say-so on whether or not they move on to the next grade is dependent on the score of their STAAR test, so yes, it is important to prepare for the test during instructional time.

School Grading

Most Texans believed schools should be graded by other factors alongside STAAR.

2021-2023 Texas Education Polls: In the [2021 Texas Education Poll](#), 52% of Texans saw student scores on STAAR tests as at least “somewhat effective” at measuring the quality of a student’s campus, and 54% saw the same of the school district. Only 12% and 13% of Texans saw the scores as very effective at measuring quality.

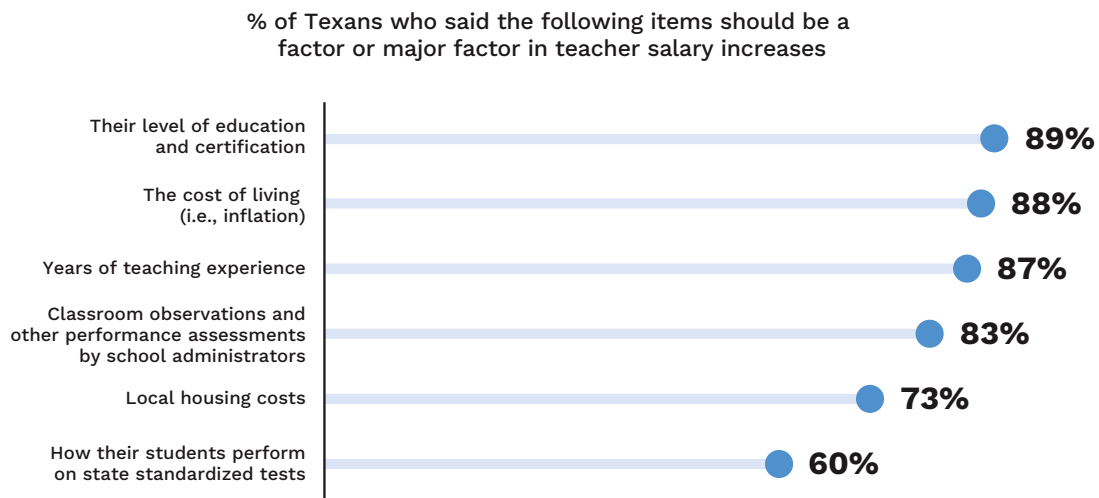
Given lukewarm views on STAAR’s effectiveness at measuring school quality, Texans were divided on how well the TEA’s A-F ratings of public schools, which are based on STAAR test scores, reflect school quality. Forty-seven percent of Texans were at least “somewhat confident” the TEA’s A-F grades accurately reflected school quality. At the same time, 51% were “not so or not at all

confident.” Among parents, confidence in the TEA grades was higher (57%).⁵

Texas schools are rated on an A-F scale based on three criteria: student achievement, school progress, and closing the gaps. Student test scores on the STAAR test determine student achievement for elementary and middle schools. High school student achievement includes STAAR test scores, graduation rates, and how well schools prepare students for college, career, or the military. The second criterion, school progress, is calculated based on academic growth and relative performance. The third criterion, closing the gaps, is measured by student achievement and school progress, specifically from marginalized communities.

⁵ 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>

Figure 10: Texans Prioritized Experience and Living Costs Over Test Scores for Teacher Salary Increases



Source: 2023 Texas Education Poll Report.

Sixty-eight percent of Texans said the TEA's A-F grades should be based on a combination of student scores on state standardized tests and non-test factors, such as the programs and services schools have available. Fewer than 2 in 10 Texans thought schools should be graded based entirely on student scores on standardized tests (17%) or entirely on non-test factors (12%). Parents have similar views, 64% said TEA A-F letter grades should be based on a combination of student scores on state standardized tests and other factors. Nineteen percent of parents thought schools should be graded entirely on students' standardized test scores, and 14% said schools should be graded entirely on non-test factors.

Parents in the [2022 Texas Education Poll](#) were asked if they would move their child if given other public school choice options, and 80% of parents said they would keep their child in their current school.⁶ Among those parents, 74% said the school's A-F grade based on STAAR test scores was a factor in preferring to keep their child in their current public school, and 37% of parents called it a major factor. Performance on STAAR trailed several other factors in parents' preference to keep their child at their current school, including the quality of the school's teachers (96%), the availability of advanced academic classes (91%), the school's location (89%), the condition of the school facilities (87%), and others.

Additionally, 60% of Texans said students' performance on state standardized tests should be a factor in determining how much a teacher's salary increases over time, though just 26% of Texans said it should be a major factor. As seen in Figure 10, Texans in the [2023 Texas Education Poll](#) considered a teacher's level of education and certification (89%), cost of living (88%), years of teaching experience (87%), classroom observations by school administrators (83%), and housing costs (73%)

all higher than how students perform on standardized tests to determine a teacher's salary increase.

Regarding parents, 68% said standardized tests should determine how much a teacher's salary increases over time, and 31% said it should be a major factor. More parents said a teacher's level of education and certification (91%), the cost of living (91%), years of teaching experience (87%), classroom observations by school administrators (87%), and housing costs (80%) should be a factor in determining how much a teacher's salary increases over time.

According to parents, STAAR does help them learn about their child's progress in school. Eighty-nine percent of parents in the [2022 Texas Education Poll](#) said their child's STAAR scores were at least a minor source of good information about their child's progress, and 51% called it a major source. STAAR though trailed other items as major sources of good information on student progress, such as talking with their child (83%), reading their child's report card (80%), parent-teacher conferences (68%), and communicating with teachers outside of conferences (65%). STAAR scores were seen as slightly more useful than communication with the principal or other school administrators (42%). On the bottom of the list, 27% said talking with other parents was a major source of good information to learn about student progress.

2020 Texas Teacher Poll: Teachers, in the [2020 Texas Teacher Poll](#), similarly preferred a more comprehensive approach to rating schools. Sixty-three percent of teachers said A-F grades should be based on a combination of test scores and non-test factors. Teachers (36%) were more apt than Texans overall (12%) to prefer a system based entirely on non-test factors. Only 2% of teachers said school grades should be based entirely on scores from state standardized tests.

⁶ Here and elsewhere, parents with multiple children were asked about their oldest child.

Student Standardized Test Performance

Parents described mixed experiences for their child.

2022 Texas Education Poll: Texans and parents, in the [2022 Texas Education Poll](#), had similar perceptions when it comes to the pressure standardized tests have on teachers. About 9 in 10 Texans and parents said pressure to have their students do well on standardized tests was challenging for teachers. More specifically, 54% of Texans and 58% of parents called standardized testing a major challenge for teachers. The results of the 2022 poll were similar to the results from the [2020 Texas Education Poll](#).

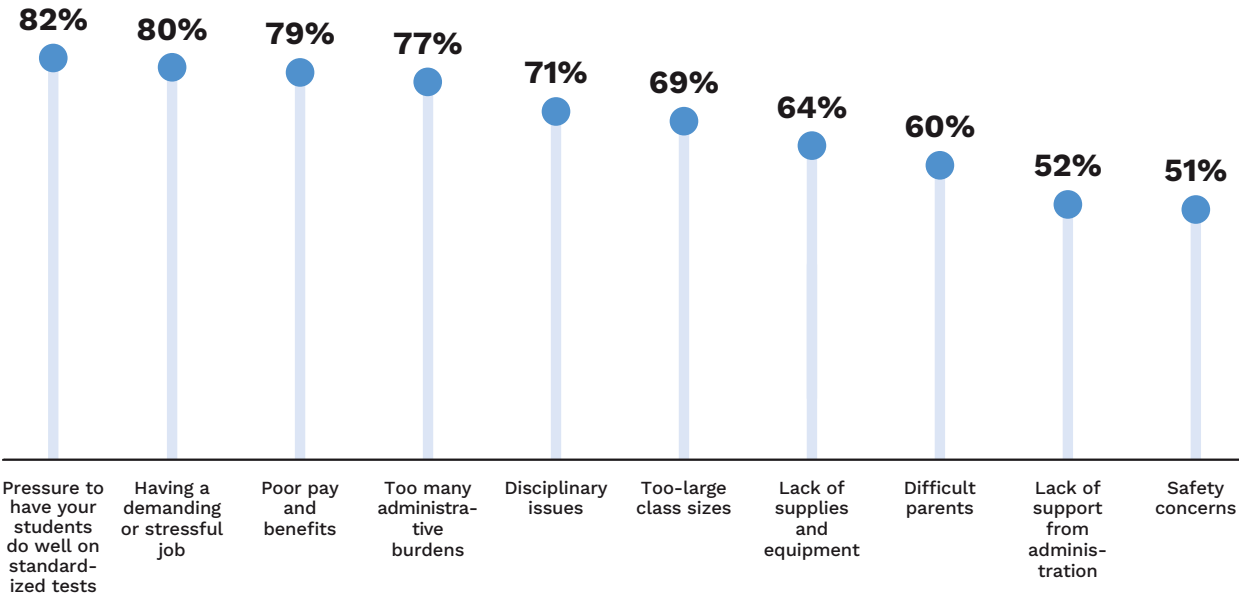
Pressure to have students do well on standardized tests led 12 other potential challenges listed in the 2022 poll; no other item was considered a major challenge by majorities of Texans and parents alike. It surpassed the share of Texans who saw

disciplinary issues (47%), poor pay and benefits (44%), and feeling undervalued (43%) as major challenges.

2020 Texas Teacher Poll: As seen in Figure 11, 82% of teachers in the [2020 Texas Teacher Poll](#) said pressure to have their students do well on standardized tests was a challenge for them, including 56% who called it a major challenge. Fewer teachers said the other nine items listed were major challenges, including too many administrative burdens (47%), having a demanding or stressful job (46%), poor pay and benefits (41%), disciplinary issues (40%), too-large class sizes (36%), lack of supplies and equipment (30%), lack of support from the administration (27%), difficult parents (26%), and safety concerns (17%).

Figure 11: Standardized Test Pressure Topped The List of Challenges for Teachers

% of Texas teachers who considered the following a challenge or major challenge

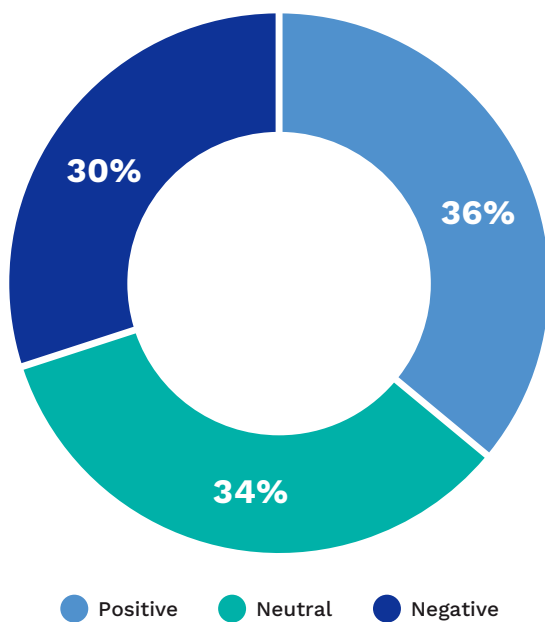


Source: 2020 Texas Teacher Poll Report.

Student STAAR Testing Experiences

Parents described mixed experiences for their child.

Figure 12: Parents' Descriptions of their Child's STAAR Test Experience



Source: 2022 Texas Education Poll Report.

2022 Texas Education Poll: Eighty-six percent of parents in the [2022 Texas Education Poll](#) said their child had taken the STAAR test. Thirty-six percent of parents described the test as a positive experience for their child, 30% said it was a negative experience, and 34% described it as neutral.

Forty percent of Hispanic parents described the STAAR exam as a positive experience for their child, which was double the positive response from White parents (20%).⁷ Those who gave A or B ratings to their community's public schools were also more likely to report positive experiences, 42% versus 21% of those who rated their schools less highly.⁸

There were also gender-based differences in the findings. Thirty-seven percent of parents whose oldest child is a girl described the STAAR test as a negative experience, compared with 22% of parents whose oldest child is a boy.⁹ Parents of boys (43%) were more likely than parents of girls (26%) to describe the test experience as neutral.

⁷ The sample size for White public school parents with a child that has taken the STAAR tests is small, n=87, though the difference with Hispanic parents is statistically significant. The sample size of Black public school parents is too small for reliable analysis, n=19.

⁸ The sample size for public school parents who gave their community's public schools a C, D, or F rating is small, n=89.

⁹ The difference is marginally significant, given sample sizes.

Parents were asked to describe their child’s experiences with the STAAR exam in an open-ended question. Those who said their child had a positive experience offered various explanations. Some parents shared that STAAR was a helpful challenge requiring their child to take responsibility, prepare and study. Others shared that their child excelled or performed better than expected. Several parents also felt STAAR was a good way for their child to learn about their academic strengths and weaknesses. Below are responses to the open-ended question:

“El sacó muy buenos resultados y le ayudó a tener mas confianza en sí mismo. Pero si no le hubiera ido bien, tal vez las cosas serían diferentes.” [He produced very good results and it helped him to have more confidence in himself. But if it hadn’t gone well, maybe things would be different.]

“She was able to see where she stood amongst her peers and was doing quite well.”

“It was positive in the sense that it made my son concentrate on doing well on the test and study and prepare for it.”

“Se dio cuenta de las fortalezas en las materias así como las que debe poner más empeño.” [He realized his strengths in subjects as well as the ones he should put more effort into.]

Conversely, nearly half of the parents whose child had a negative experience with the STAAR test said their child felt anxious, nervous, stressed, or worried about the exam. Others said their child lost self-esteem because they underperformed expectations, while others thought the test was ineffective at measuring student learning or a poor use of instruction time.

“My daughter struggles with dyslexia. Reading and writing are already stressful, high-pressure activities and the added stress of test performance makes those struggles more difficult.”

“It provides no real measurement of what the child may or may not have learned. It does not follow the curriculum and the pattern that a child recognizes, the teachers are forced to try to teach the children and then teach to the test because they are not aligned.”

“Preparation forced teachers to do repetitive activities that rarely allowed time for ‘why’ questions.”

“It made her so anxious she threw up and started crying over a pencil. She’s a good student who works hard but there was so much pressure from teachers and administrators to do well. She thought, ‘if I didn’t do well then I’m stupid’ and it undermines her and makes her second guess.”

Disparate Views of STAAR

Views of STAAR vary between race, ethnicity, education, and income.

Race and Ethnicity

2020–2023 Texas Education Polls: Texans of color, particularly Hispanic Texans, tend to hold more positive views of the state standardized tests than White Texans. Across all four years of the [Texas Education Poll](#), Hispanic Texans were more likely than White Texans to express confidence in the effectiveness of the STAAR test at measuring student learning. For example, in the [2020 Texas Education Poll](#), 50% of Hispanic Texans were at least somewhat confident that STAAR effectively measured student learning compared to 25% of White Texans. There was a similar difference in the latest [2023 Texas Education Poll](#), in which 48% of Hispanic Texans were at least somewhat confident in STAAR compared to 36% of White Texans. Except for the most recent [2023 Texas Education Poll](#), Black Texans were also more likely than White Texans to express confidence in STAAR.

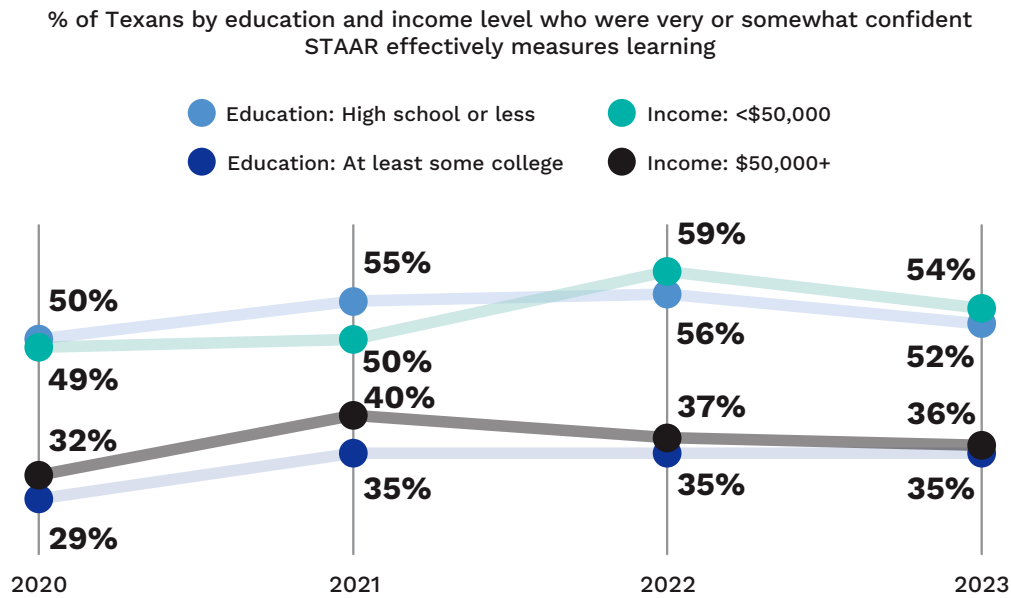
Similarly, in the [2021 Texas Education Poll](#), both Hispanic Texans and Black Texans were more likely than White Texans to say that STAAR tests were at least somewhat effective at measuring the quality of a student’s teacher, school campus, or school district; or how well-prepared students are for college, a career, or the military. Sixty-seven percent of Hispanic Texans and 68% of Black Texans said STAAR was effective at measuring teacher quality compared to 49% of White Texans. In the same [2021 Texas Education Poll](#), Hispanic Texans (73%) were more likely than White Texans (60%) to say student scores on STAAR tests effectively measured

student learning over the past year. When asked about college, career, or military preparation, Hispanic Texans (59%) and Black Texans (71%) were more likely than White Texans (43%) to say STAAR effectively prepared students for those fields.

Fifty-eight percent of Hispanic Texans and 53% of Black Texans in the [2021 Texas Education Poll](#) thought preparing students for standardized testing was an “extremely or very important” factor in “what makes a good teacher,” compared with 30% of White Texans. Likewise, roughly half of Hispanic and Black Texans in the [2020 Texas Education Poll](#) said how well a school prepares students to do on standardized tests is highly important in school quality which is double the response of White Texans (24%). In the [2022 Texas Education Poll](#), 38% of Hispanic Texans saw STAAR tests as a way to standardize what’s taught in public schools, compared with 25% of White Texans.

Among parents, 62% of Hispanic parents in the [2022 Texas Education Poll](#) said their child’s STAAR test scores were a major source of good information about their progress in school, compared with 24% of White parents. As previously noted, Hispanic parents (40%) were twice as likely as White parents (20%) to describe the STAAR exam as a positive experience for their child. In the same [2022 Texas Education Poll](#), 83% of Hispanic parents said A-F rankings based on STAAR tests were a factor in preferring to keep their child in their current school, compared with 54% of White parents.

Figure 13: Confidence in STAAR Varied by Education and Income Level



Source: Texas Education Poll Report, 2020-2023.

Education and Income

2020-2023 Texas Education Polls: Texans’ views of the STAAR test were also associated with income and education. Across all four [Texas Education Polls](#) from 2020 to 2023, Texans with a high school diploma or less have been more likely than those with at least some college experience to express confidence in the tests’ effectiveness at measuring student learning. Likewise, Texans with household incomes less than \$50,000 were consistently more likely to express confidence than those with higher incomes.

In the [2020 Texas Education Poll](#), 49% of Texans with a high school diploma or less saw standardized test preparation as highly

important in school quality, compared with 37% of Texans with some college experience and 25% of college graduates. Similar gaps emerged by income, with lower-income earners more likely to call standardized test preparation highly important.

Parents without college degrees and those with lower incomes were more likely than their counterparts to have confidence in the test’s ability to measure student learning and consider them important in school and teacher quality. Parents without a college degree or with household incomes less than \$50,000 were also more likely than others to see STAAR as a major source of good information in learning about their child’s progress.

In the [2021 Texas Education Poll](#), Texans with a high school diploma or less (74%) were more likely than those with at least some college experience (60%) to think student scores on the STAAR test were at least somewhat effective at measuring student learning over the previous year. When looking at school quality, more Texans with a high school diploma or less (62%) said that STAAR scores were at least somewhat effective at measuring school quality than those with a college degree (44%). Texans with a high school diploma or less (72%) were also more likely than those with at least some college experience (48%) to say STAAR effectively measured teacher quality. Texans with a high school diploma or less were also more likely than those with higher levels of educational attainment to say the STAAR test was at least somewhat effective at measuring how well-prepared students are for college, a career, or the military. When considering income, Texans earning less than \$50,000 (75%) were more likely than those earning \$100,000 or more (56%) to say STAAR was effective at measuring student learning. Texans earning less than \$50,000 (69%) were also likelier than those earning \$100,000 or more (44%) to say STAAR effectively measured teacher quality.

In the same [2021 Texas Education Poll](#), 60% of Texans with a high school diploma or less thought preparing students for standardized testing was highly important to “what makes a good teacher,” compared with 36% of those with some college experience and 29% of college graduates. When considering income, Texans earning less than \$50,000 (61%) were twice as likely as those earning \$100,000 or more (30%) to consider standardized test preparation as highly important to good teaching.

Views Among Parents

2020-2023 Texas Education Polls: There were several instances in which parents were less critical than non-parents of STAAR’s effectiveness and potential benefits.

In the [2020, 2022, and 2023 Texas Education Polls](#), parents were more likely than non-parents to express confidence that STAAR tests effectively measure how well a student is learning. For instance, in the [2020 Texas Education Poll](#), confidence in the test was 50% among parents, compared with 34% among non-parents. In the [2023 Texas Education Poll](#), confidence in STAAR among parents was 53%, compared with 39% of non-parents. The exception is in the [2021 Texas Education Poll](#), in which similar shares of parents and non-parents considered the tests effective.

When assessing school quality, 47% of parents in the [2020 Texas Education Poll](#) were more likely than non-parents (36%) to say test preparation was highly important in school quality. In the [2021 Texas Education Poll](#), 50% of parents were more likely to say preparing students for standardized testing is highly important in “what makes a good teacher” than non-parents (42%).

Among other instances, parents (50%) in the [2022 Texas Education Poll](#) were likelier than non-parents (39%) to agree that STAAR tests provide a standard measure of student achievement. Parents (40%) were also slightly more likely than non-parents (32%) to say the STAAR test standardizes what is taught in public schools.

Conclusion

While Texans were not unanimous or entirely dismissive of STAAR testing, this review shows that the public has been broadly skeptical. Texans' negative views of STAAR were particularly true when results were placed in the context of other attitudes on school quality, teacher quality, and other options for educational assessment. Notably, results from the [Charles Butt Foundation's polls](#) mirrored those of national polls. In a national survey by the educational technology nonprofit Digital Promise in 2021, 48% of Americans surveyed called standardized test preparation extremely or very important in Kindergarten-12th grade education – trailing eight other items in perceived importance by anywhere from 14 to 43 percentage points (Digital Promise, 2021). In the 2020 Digital Promise Survey, standardized test scores widely trailed other assessments as very or somewhat effective at measuring what students learned, and fewer than 2 in 10 called such scores an extremely or very good indicator of a student's future success, academic or otherwise (Digital Promise, 2020). In a 2017 survey by Phi Delta Kappa International, an association of education professionals, 42% called standardized test scores extremely or very important in school quality – far trailing the five other items tested (PDK International, 2017). The Digital

Promise surveys included samples of public school teachers, who, as in Texas, were especially dubious of standardized testing.

The findings discussed throughout this paper highlight that from 2020-2023 most Texans doubted STAAR's ability to measure student learning and had higher priorities for using instructional time. Very few Texans saw standardized test preparation as the single most important indicator of school or teacher quality. The criticism of STAAR peaked among teachers. Teachers saw the impacts of STAAR testing on their students and classrooms. Concerns, as seen in this paper, were also widespread among Texans and parents.

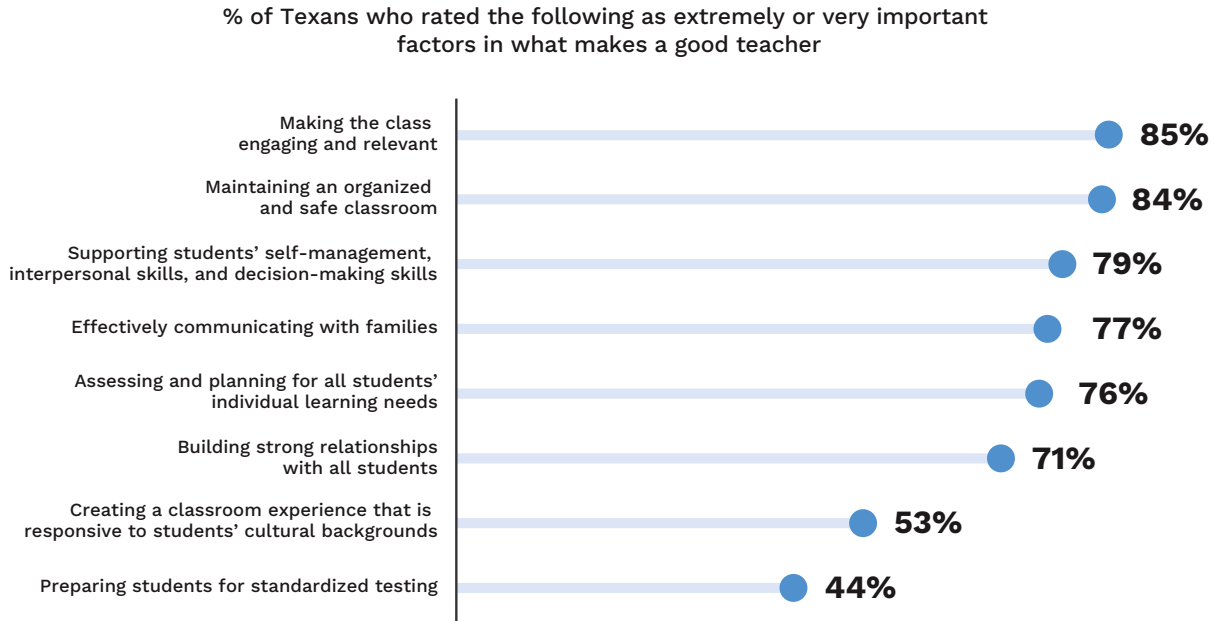
The Charles Butt Foundation polling provides a new context to standardized testing concerning Texas. For example, in Texas, a proponent of STAAR may note that 89% of parents said STAAR scores are a source of good information about their child's progress in school. The context is that 51% called it a "major" source of good information, significantly trailing other major sources. The context provided in this paper indicates that sources such as report cards, parent-teacher conferences, and parents talking with their children are substantially higher valued than STAAR.

References

- Charles Butt Foundation. (2020). *2020: A survey of Texas teachers*. Charles Butt Foundation. https://charlesbuttdfn.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/2020_A-Survey-of-Texas-Teachers.pdf
- Charles Butt Foundation. (2021). *How Texas teachers experience pandemic challenges*. Charles Butt Foundation. https://charlesbuttdfn.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/2021_How-Texas-Teachers-Experience-Pandemic-Challenges.pdf
- Charles Butt Foundation. (2022). *Connected through our schools*. Charles Butt Foundation. <https://charlesbuttdfn.org/what-were-learning/2022txedpoll/>
- Charles Butt Foundation. (2022). *Persistent problems and a path forward*. Charles Butt Foundation. <https://charlesbuttdfn.org/what-were-learning/2022txteacherpoll/>
- Charles Butt Foundation. (2023). *Strong support, clear challenges*. Charles Butt Foundation. <https://charlesbuttdfn.org/what-were-learning/2023txedpoll/>
- Digital Promise. (n.d.). *Our reports*. <https://digitalpromise.org/our-reports/>
- Digital Promise. (2020). *Learning in the 21st century: How the American public, parents, and teachers view educational priorities and how to achieve them*. https://digitalpromise.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/NationalSurvey_Yr2-FINAL.pdf
- Digital Promise. (2021). *Learning in the 21st century: How the American public, parents, and teachers view K-12 teaching and learning in the pandemic*. <https://digitalpromise.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/NationalSurveyYear-3-final.pdf>
- Phi Delta Kappan. (2017). *The 49th annual PDK poll of the public's attitudes toward the public schools*. PDK International. https://pdkpoll.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/pdkpoll49_2017.pdf
- Raise Your Hand Texas. (2020). *Texans trust teachers*. Raise Your Hand Texas. <https://charlesbuttdfn.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/2020-Foundation-Poll.pdf>
- Raise Your Hand Texas. (2021). *Perceptions in a pandemic: Texans' support for public schools grows*. Raise Your Hand Texas. <https://charlesbuttdfn.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/2021-Foundation-Poll.pdf>
- Texas Education Agency. (2022). *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>

Appendix

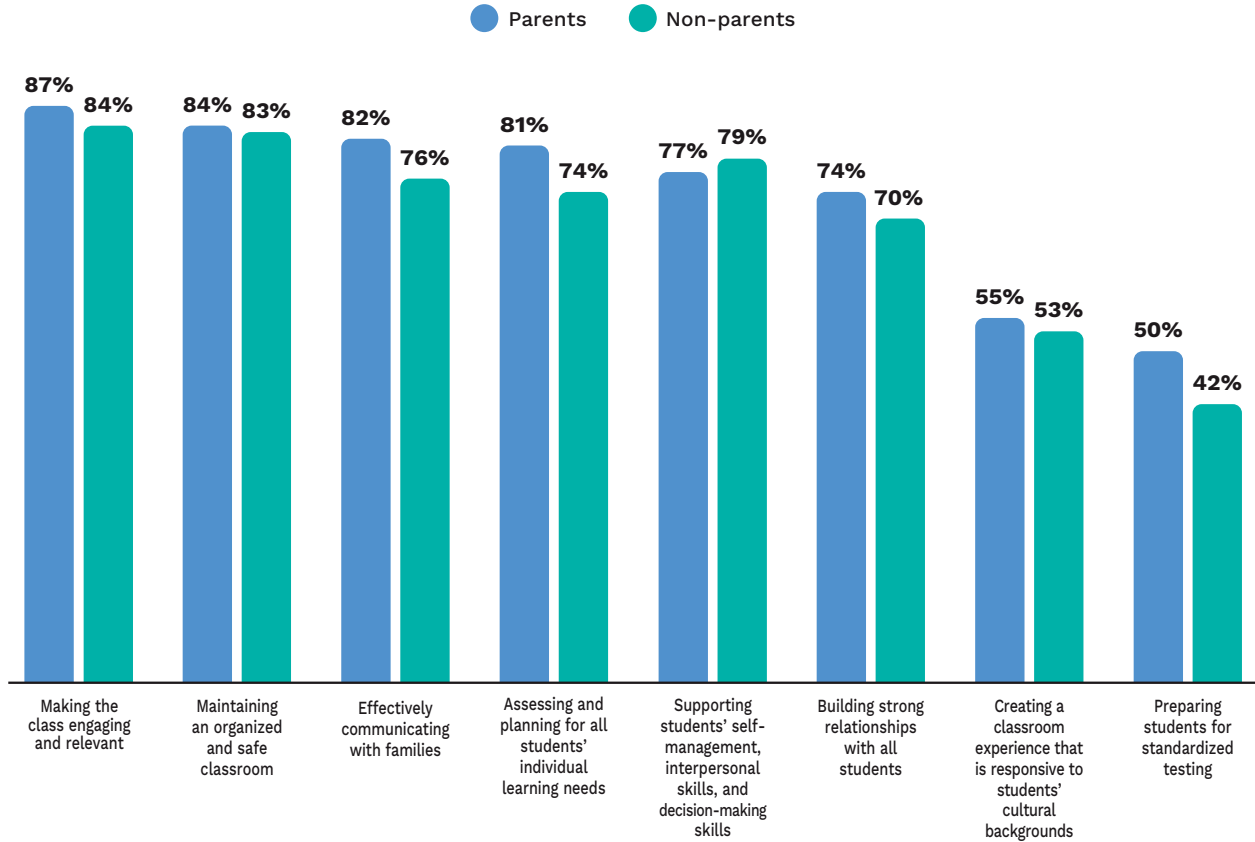
Figure 1: Texans Valued a Variety of Factors for Rating Teacher Quality



Source: 2021 Texas Education Poll Report.

Figure 2: Parents and Non-Parents Valued a Variety of Factors for Rating Teacher Quality

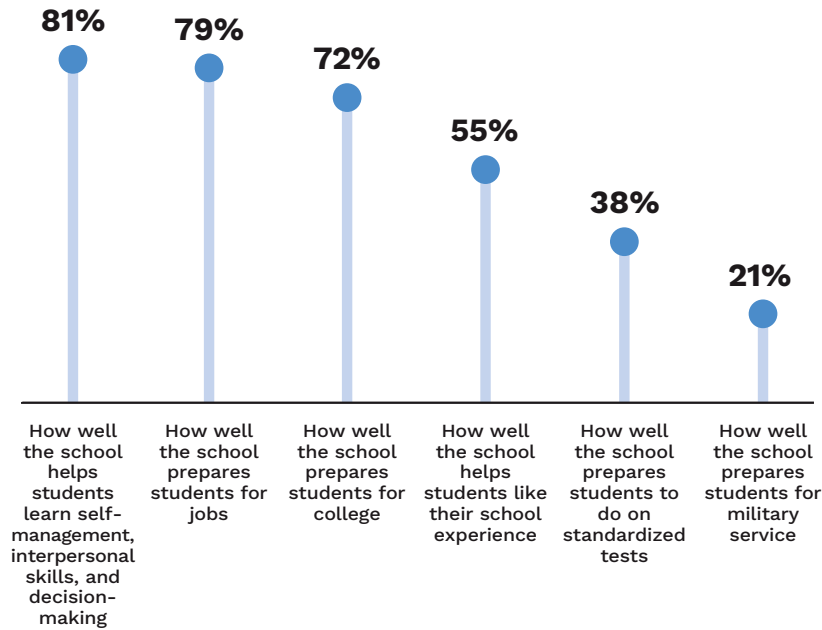
% of public school parents and non-parents who rated the following as extremely or very important factors in what makes a good teacher



Source: 2021 Texas Education Poll Report.

Figure 3: Texans Valued a Variety of Factors for Rating School Quality

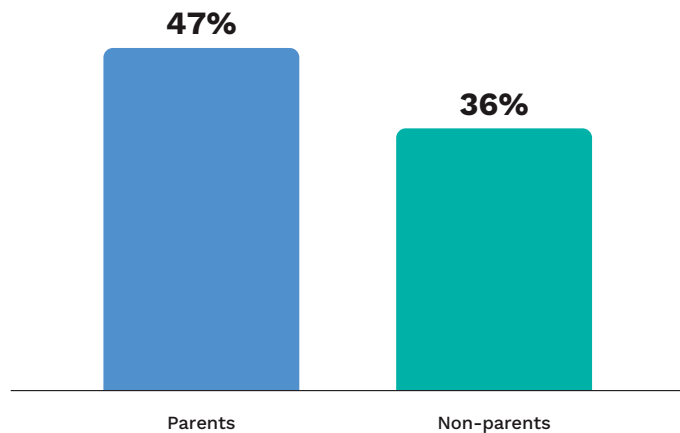
% of Texans who rated the following as extremely or very important factors for rating school quality



Source: 2020 Texas Education Poll Report.

Figure 4: Parents Were More Likely Than Non-Parents to Consider Standardized Test Preparation in Rating School Quality

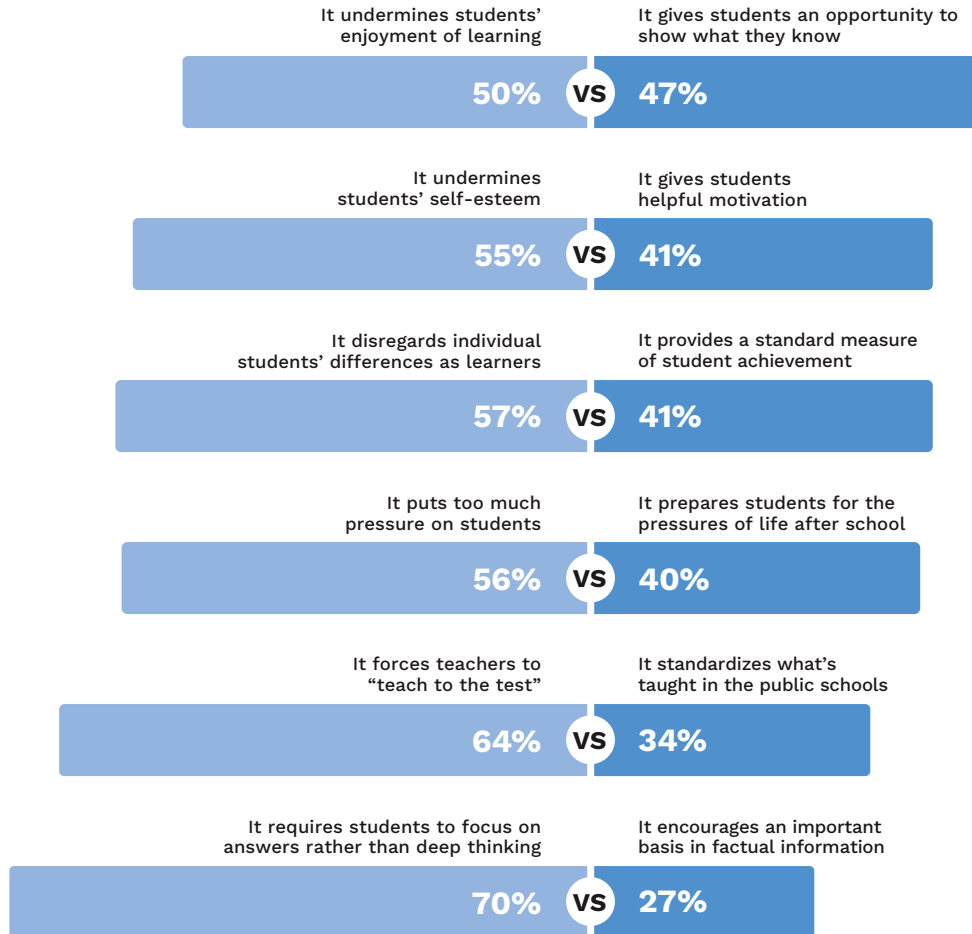
% of public school parents and % of non-parents who considered standardized test preparation as extremely or very important in rating school quality



Source: 2020 Texas Education Poll Report.

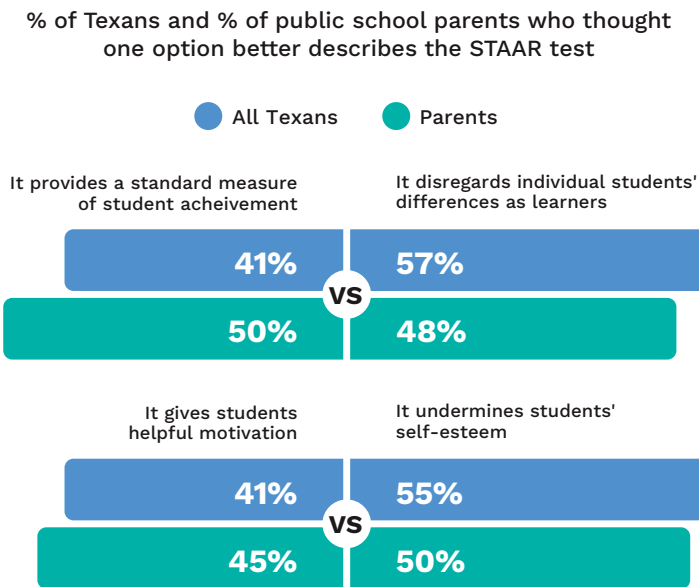
Figure 5: Texans Identified More With Negative Perceptions of the STAAR Test

% Texans who thought one option better described the STAAR test



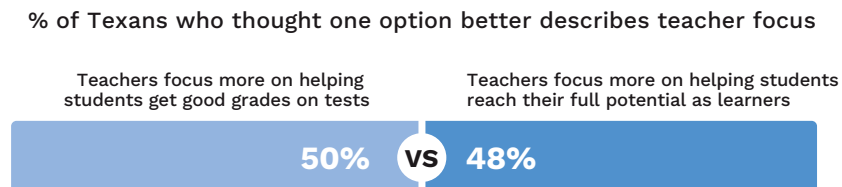
Source: 2022 Texas Education Poll Report.

Figure 6: Slight Differences in Perceptions of the STAAR Test Between Parents and Texans



Source: 2022 Texas Education Poll Report.

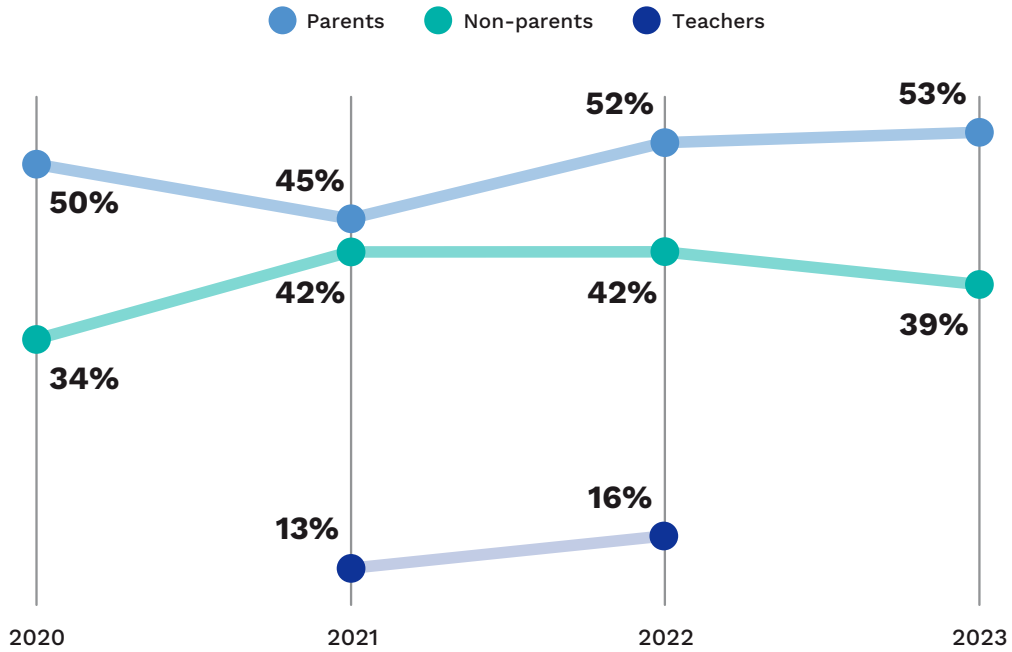
Figure 7: Texans Divided on Perceptions of Teacher Focus



Source: 2020 Texas Education Poll Report.

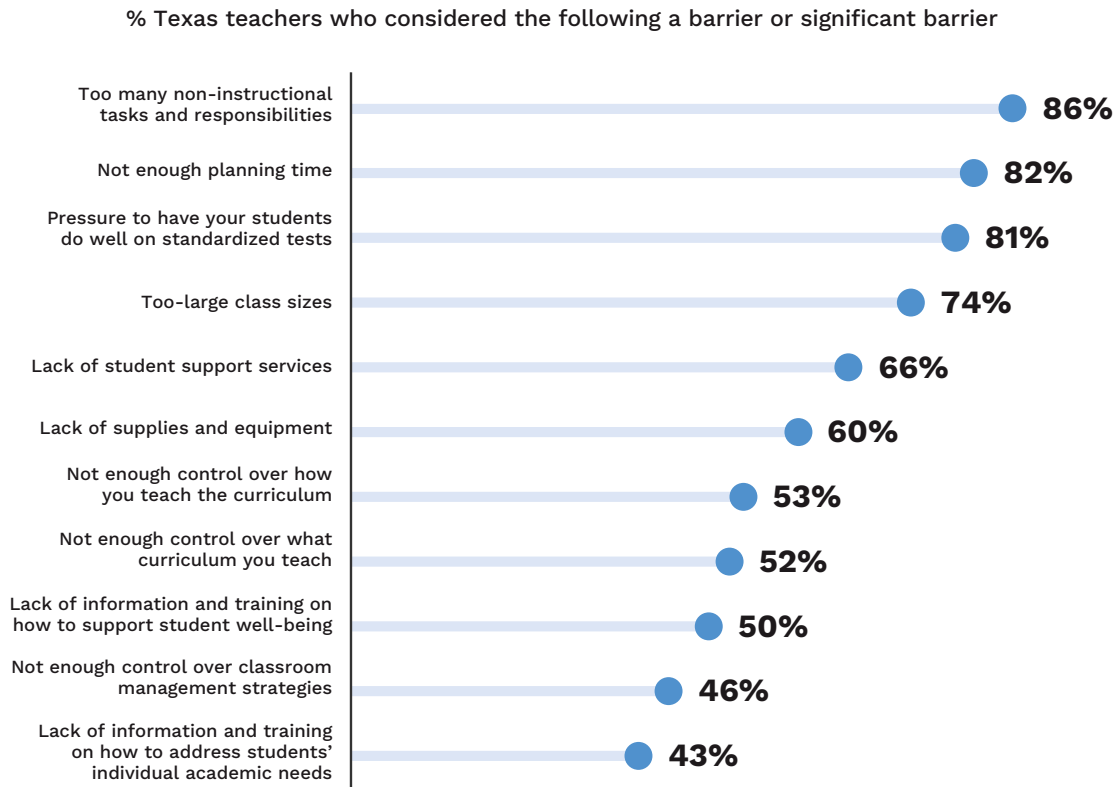
Figure 8: Parents Were More Likely Than Non-Parents and Teachers to Have Confidence in STAAR

% of public school parents, non-parents, and teachers who were very or somewhat confident STAAR effectively measures learning



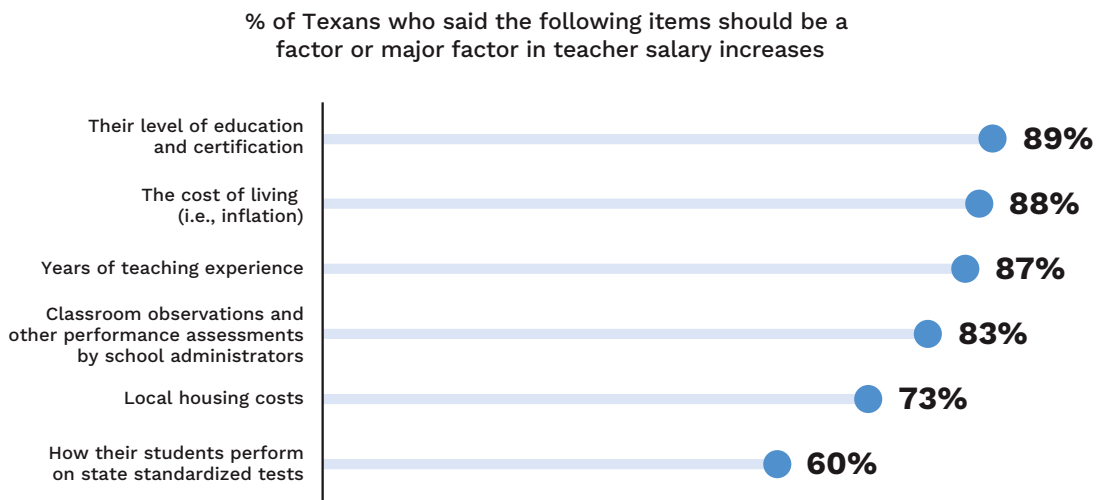
Source: Texas Education Poll Report, 2020-2023; Texas Teacher Poll Report, 2021-2022.

Figure 9: Teachers Reported Widespread Barriers to Good Teaching



Source: 2022 Texas Teacher Poll Report.

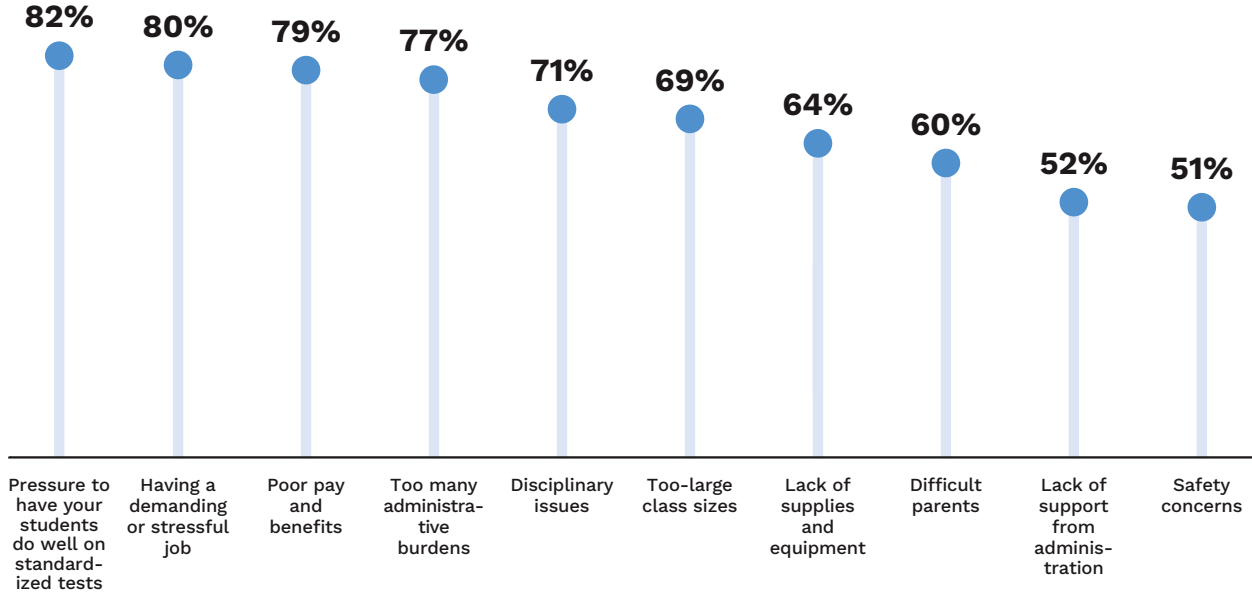
Figure 10: Texans Prioritized Experience and Living Costs Over Test Scores for Teacher Salary Increases



Source: 2023 Texas Education Poll Report.

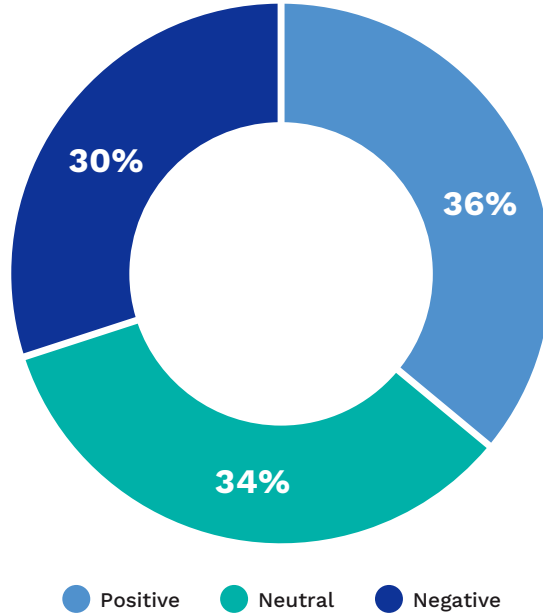
Figure 11: Standardized Test Pressure Topped The List of Challenges for Teachers

% of Texas teachers who considered the following a challenge or major challenge



Source: 2020 Texas Teacher Poll Report.

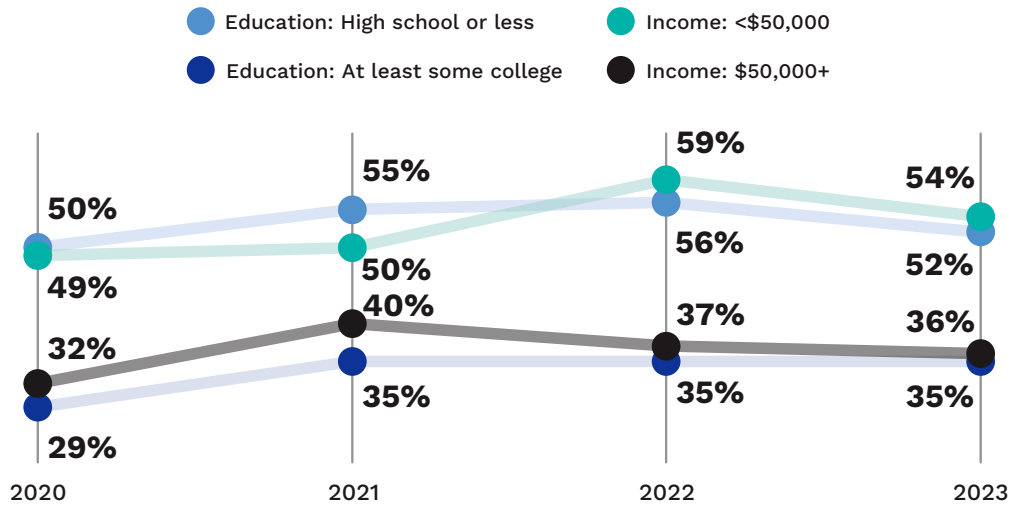
Figure 12: Parents' Descriptions of their Child's STAAR Test Experience



Source: 2022 Texas Education Poll Report.

Figure 13: Confidence in STAAR Varied by Education and Income Level

% of Texans by education and income level who were very or somewhat confident STAAR effectively measures learning



Source: Texas Education Poll Report, 2020-2023.