

To: Interested Parties
From: Ed Goeas, *The Tarrance Group, Inc.*
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Re: Voter Opinion On Education In The State Of Texas

Despite A Tough Economy, Texas Voter Survey Shows Large Majorities of Voters Continue to Support Increased Financial Investment in Public Education – and a Growing Majority are Worried about Using State Standardized Tests to Decide Whether a Student Passes a Course

A recent statewide survey of Texans confirms that large bipartisan majorities of voters consistently believe the state is not investing enough in public education or teacher pay, and think Texas is at serious risk of over-emphasizing the role of state standardized testing.

- Despite a declining national and state economy, a majority of Texas voters still maintain that too little is being spent on education. A 60% majority of voters believe the state government is spending too little on education versus 10% who say too much and 24% who say the right amount. This perception of under-investment is held by majorities of Republicans, Independents and Democrats, and it is essentially unchanged from the view held throughout our polling from 2003 through 2007.
- Sixty-three percent (63%) of Texans think state funding for public schools should be increased. By contrast, just 6% believe state funding for schools should be decreased and 27% say it should be kept at the same level. This majority support for increasing state spending on schools is held by 54% of Republicans, 62% of Independents, and 76% of Democrats.

Despite the economic anxiety of voters, those who support increasing the funding of schools remains over 60%.

- Furthermore, 71% of voters – with no partisan bias (Republicans 69%, Independents 71% and Democrats 76%) – believe the state legislature has more work to do to properly fund public schools, versus 20% who say it has sufficiently addressed the issue. Although those saying the Legislature must do more has declined from 81% two years ago to 71% now, the current 7-to-2 sentiment remains overwhelmingly lopsided.

This statewide voter survey also underscores the widespread perception that teacher pay is inadequate and a preference for an across-the-board teacher pay raise over a targeted pay hike.

- Fully two-thirds of voters (66%) say that pay for Texas public school teachers falls short of what it should be compared to 2% who believe teacher pay is excessive and 25% who consider it about right. This support for higher teacher pay is virtually non-partisan, since it is shared by 62% of Republicans, 65% of Independents, and 74% of Democrats.

Although 66% of voters say that teacher pay falls short, this percentage is slightly lower than the cumulative average of 70% considering teacher pay inadequate from 2003 through 2007.

- If additional state money is provided for teacher pay raises, 57% of voters prefer a pay raise for *all* teachers to attract and retain better teachers, versus 35% who favor a pay raise targeted to those teachers whose students show improvement on state standardized test scores. This preference for an across-the-board pay raise is shared nearly alike by Republicans (by 56% to 35%) and Democrats (by 62% to 31%). This preference is identical to that measured in our 2007 and 2006 surveys.
- Not surprisingly, public school teachers continue to be held in high esteem by the electorate, with 77% voicing positive feelings toward teachers and just 10% negative.

Several questions about state standardized testing reveal a growing unease about over-emphasis on state testing of students and a pronounced resistance to standardized tests being a major factor in determining whether a student passes a course. These verdicts on state testing are non-partisan judgments shared by Republicans and Democrats alike.

- Nearly a two-thirds majority of Texans think there is too much emphasis (64%) in their community on state testing, compared to 23% who think there is the right amount of emphasis and 9% who say not enough emphasis.

Importantly, the proportion of voters who think there is too much emphasis on state testing has grown from 56% three years ago to 64% now – to the point where today twice as many hold this critical view as say there is the right amount or not enough emphasis on state testing.

- In a revealing new finding, only 18% of Texans believe the state test should be the *only* factor or a *major* factor in determining whether a student passes a course. Virtually as many (16%) take the opposite view that the state test should *not be considered at all* in passing. But 63% instead opt for this view among the spectrum of four choices given: “The state test should be *included* in determining if a student passes a course – but should *not* be more important than the work done during the school year.”

The telephone survey among 815 Texas voters was conducted by The Tarrance Group and Harstad Strategic Research from January 26 through 29, 2009. The results are subject to a statistical margin-of-error of plus-or-minus 3.4% about any one reported percentage.