

**To: Interested Parties**

**From: Ed Goeas, *The Tarrance Group, Inc.*  
Paul Harstad, *Harstad Strategic Research, Inc.***

**Date: January 31, 2005**

**Re: Voter Opinion On Education In The State Of Texas**

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**TEXANS SUPPORT INCREASED STATE FUNDING FOR THE EDUCATION STANDARDS  
AND ACCOUNTABILITY REFORMS THAT ARE IMPROVING OUR SCHOOLS –  
VOTERS OPPOSE SHIFTING PRIORITIES TO FUNDING BASED ON TEST PERFORMANCE**

Our latest survey shows that Texas voters continue to place the education of our children as the highest priority for state government. Voters – and even more so, parents – give rave reviews to the improvements in our schools owing to the education standards and accountability reforms passed by the state legislature. The survey results also show that Texans want the state to take more responsibility for the education of our children by continuing to increase state education standards and funding. Voters also affirm their willingness to invest more tax money in an education program they know is working, including spending money needed to get the best teachers.

**KEY SURVEY FINDINGS**

- Public education remains the top priority for the state government: 42% choose it as the most important issue for state government. Voters choose public education by 12% over *health care* (30%) and are more than three times as likely to choose *public education* as they are to choose *holding the line on taxes* (13%).
- Voters are seeing a return on their investment in our public schools. Two-thirds of Texas voters say our public schools are either *starting to improve* or *have improved and need to continue to do so*.

Schools are in pretty good shape	11%	} 66%
Schools have improved and need to continue to do so	50%	
Schools are in bad shape but are starting to improve	16%	
Schools are in bad shape and not getting better	20%	

This sentiment crosses partisan lines, shared by 63% of Republicans, 70% of Democrats and 67% of Independents. Additionally, 77% of public school parents say they have seen improvements.

- Proof the state's investment in our schools is working is indicated by the fact that 86% of parents with children in school give their child's school an A or B rating (A = 48% and B = 38%). These high marks show that overall parents are pleased with the current education standards.
- Voters see the returns on our investments in standards and accountability for our schools, and they would like to continue funding education improvements. In fact, when voters are asked to make a trade-off, 62% prefer to avoid cutting funding for public schools while 27% prefer to avoid raising state taxes.
- More than twice as many Texans want a larger state role in education, rather than a smaller role. Half the voters (51%) feel state government should take a larger role in education, 24% feel that the state government should maintain its current role, and just 22% want a smaller state role.
- Voters want to increase education standards and funding. Nearly two-thirds (65%) of Texas voters say they would like to see an *increase* in state education standards, while only 5% want state education standards *decreased*. Correspondingly, nearly three-fourths (72%) of voters would like to see state funding for public education increased, while only 5% want state education funding decreased.
- Voters would like to see the proven education reforms fully funded rather than trying alternative approaches such as performance based funding. When voters are given two statements regarding funding for Texas' education programs, 62% of voters choose the response of *"these reforms are working and we should fully fund them to further improve public education through smaller class sizes, higher state standards, and better teacher pay"* over a message stating, *"we should take a different approach and instead move to a system that gives funding and rewards for schools and teachers who show improved student performance as measured by tests"* (28% choosing this message).
- Throughout the survey, parents and voters repeatedly acknowledge the value of teachers as the single most important factor in determining the quality of our children's education. Fully 89% of parents rated their child's teachers as excellent or good. When asked to volunteer the most important factor in a good public school, a 59% majority of voters mention teachers first, compared to other factors such as curriculum, safety, materials, administration, test performance, and all other factors. And, when asked to choose the most important of four factors that contribute to a quality education, a decisive 45% plurality chose *paying teachers enough to attract quality, certified teachers*.

This survey was commissioned by the Texas State Teachers Association and conducted jointly by The Tarrance Group, Inc., and Harstad Strategic Research, Inc. It was conducted by telephone January 6-12, 2005 among 802 registered voters throughout Texas. The margin of error associated with a sample of this type is plus-or-minus 3.5% at the 95% confidence level.