



May 17, 2022

To: Texas Parent PAC
From: Ben Sullivan, Change Research
Re: Texas public schools, voucher programs, and charter schools

A poll from Change Research of 1,083 likely voters in Texas from May 3-6, 2022¹ shows:

Local public schools are more popular than both charter schools and private schools. A majority (58%) of voters have a favorable opinion of local public schools, compared to 46% for private schools and 41% for charter schools.

Almost all voters (above 90%) support hiring more teachers, increasing teacher salaries, and increasing funding for school supplies. Eight in 10 (80%) voters support offering teachers a retention stipend for all of their hard work over the last two years.

Texas voters are highly motivated to vote in the November election. Nine in 10 (91%) say they will definitely vote, and 79% rate themselves a 10 out of 10 on a motivation scale. While more than nine in 10 Democrats (93%) and Republicans (91%) say they will definitely vote, Democrats slightly edge out Republicans on the motivation scale (84% and 79% rate themselves 10 out of 10, respectively).

Three quarters (75%) of parents who do not currently send their children to private schools are unlikely to ever send their children to private schools. Just 16% of Democratic parents are likely to, compared to 28% of Republican parents.

Voters believe that students not receiving a quality education and teachers being underpaid are two top issues regarding Texas public schools. More than a third of voters believe that each of these is a top two issue.

A majority (53%) of likely Texas voters are against taxpayer-funded private school voucher programs after hearing that vouchers mean less money for their local public schools. A majority of Texas women (58%), young voters (65%), and Latinx voters (60%) are opposed or unsure, key groups that candidates will need to win in the coming elections.

Majorities of voters find each message against voucher programs concerning, particularly the idea that more vouchers will mean less money for public schools (82% concerning).

¹ Using its Dynamic Online Sampling Engine to attain a sample reflective of the population, Change Research polled 1,083 likely voters in Texas from May 3-6, 2022. The margin of error as traditionally calculated is 3.3%. Post-stratification weighting was performed on age, gender, race/ethnicity, education, region, and 2020 presidential vote. Weighting parameters were based on census data.

A majority (59%) of voters are either opposed to or unsure about expanding the number of charter schools in Texas (39% oppose, 20% not sure). However, 69% would support having an elected board to oversee charter schools (14% oppose), and more than **three quarters find every message about charter schools concerning.**

Vouchers

Voters are divided on having a school voucher program in Texas: 46% support, 43% oppose, and 11% are not sure. The most motivated voters are divided exactly 45% to 45%. Vouchers are most unpopular among Democrats (66% oppose) and college educated voters (51% oppose).

Despite voters' divided views on voucher programs, they strongly disagree with certain principles of them. Eight in 10 (80%) voters agree that publicly-funded schools should be open to everyone, should be overseen by an elected board, and that taxpayer money should not be given to private schools that pick and choose which students they accept. Two thirds (68%) of Republicans agree with this sentiment.

Another 80% of voters agree that lawmakers should focus on increasing funding for public schools in order to increase teacher pay and reduce class sizes. Again, two thirds (67%) of Republicans also agree.

Only 41% of voters agree that public schools can't get the job done for students and we should instead invest in charter schools that can. Republicans (63%) and White men (54%) are the only two groups with a majority agreement.

Majorities of voters find each of the messages about vouchers concerning. More than eight in 10 (82%) are concerned that voucher programs will take money away from public schools, leading to higher property taxes (57% very concerned). This message is particularly concerning for Black voters (90% concerning) and Democrats (93%). Still, 72% of Republicans find this concerning.

More than seven in 10 (71%) voters are concerned that vouchers will hand wealthy families money to continue sending their children to private and religious schools and that they won't do anything to help children who live in rural Texas. Interestingly, the rural message does not perform any better among rural voters than it does with suburban and urban voters and in fact performs better among suburban Republicans than with rural Republicans (73% to 67%, respectively).

Two thirds (66%) of voters are concerned that special needs students and those with bilingual requirements lose all federal and state protections when using a voucher to attend a private school. Almost nine in 10 (88%) Democrats find this concerning, compared to 49% of Republicans. Three quarters of Black (74%) and Latinx (76%) voters are concerned, and non-parents (67%) are actually slightly more concerned than parents (62%).

These are concerns that some people have about school voucher programs. Please indicate how concerning you find each statement.

● Very concerning ● Somewhat concerning ● Not too concerning ● Not concerning at all

"The creation of a school voucher program will mean less state funding for local public schools and lead to even higher local property taxes."



"A school voucher program will hand wealthy families money to keep sending their children to the private and religious schools they are already attending."



"These school vouchers don't do anything to help students in rural Texas where there are no private schools."



"Students with special needs, bilingual education students, and parents are guaranteed certain protections by the state and federal government when attending a public school, but they lose these protections when using a school voucher to attend a private school."



"A school voucher program is likely to reduce home values. Home values are closely tied to neighborhood school quality and local schools will suffer if funds are diverted to vouchers for private schools."



School Policies

More than six in 10 (62%) voters support allowing parents to opt their children out of standardized testing without penalty. A quarter (26%) oppose this measure, and 11% are not sure. White voters are the most supportive (64%), followed by 60% of Latinx voters and 52% of Black voters. About half of Democrats (51%) and Independents (52%) are in favor, compared to nearly three quarters of Republicans (73%). Rural Republicans are significantly more in favor of allowing parents to opt their children out of standardized testing than are urban Republicans (78% to 68% respectively).

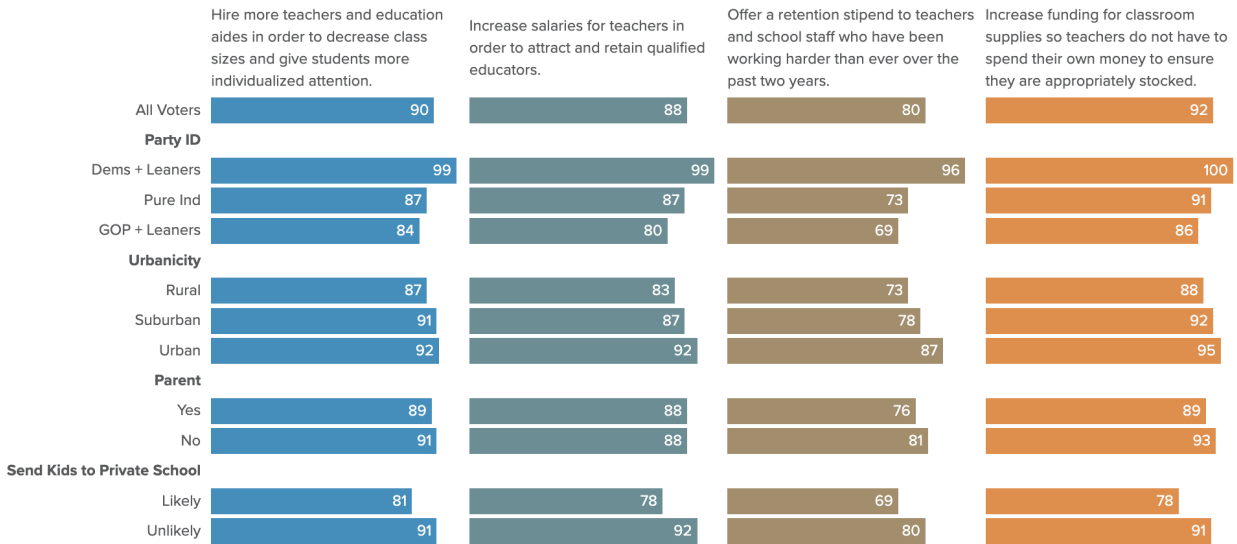
Each of the policies that suggest increasing funding to public schools and paying teachers and school staff are overwhelmingly popular with Texas voters. More than nine in 10 (92%) voters support increasing funding for classroom supplies so teachers don't have to pay out of pocket. 100% of Democrats, 91% of Independents, and 86% of Republicans support this. Nine in 10 voters (90%) support hiring more teachers to decrease class sizes and give students more individualized attention, including 99% of Democrats, 87% of Independents, and 84% of Republicans.

Almost nine in 10 (88%) voters support increasing salaries for teachers in order to attract and retain qualified educators. Democrats almost unanimously (99%), 87% of Independents, and 80% of Republicans support this policy. Lastly, 80% of voters support offering a retention stipend for teachers and school staff who have been working harder than ever over the past two years. Almost all Democrats (96%), 73% of Independents, and 69% of Republicans support this policy.

Each of these four policies has broad bipartisan support.

Do you support or oppose each of the following proposals for Texas Public Schools?

Total Support



Charter Schools

Similar to school vouchers, Texas voters are split on expanding the number of charter schools: 41% support, 39% oppose, and one in five (20%) are not sure. White and Black voters are both evenly divided, while Latinx voters oppose expanding charters by 12 points (34% support, 45% oppose).

More than two thirds (69%) of voters support creating an elected board to oversee charter schools and keep them accountable to taxpayers. Just 14% oppose and 16% are not sure. Three quarters (75%) of Democrats and 66% of Independents are in favor of creating an elected board. It is the least popular with Republicans at 65% support, so this is a universally popular idea.

More than three quarters of voters find each of the six statements about charter schools concerning. Voters are most concerned that charter school owners are not accountable to anyone and can spend money on luxuries like private jets (86% concerning, 69% very concerning). Eight in 10 (80%) voters are concerned that charter schools contract out all their services to for-profit organizations who do not care about students and that teachers do not need to be certified. Another 80% are concerned that charter schools don't accept all students who apply but still receive public funding to build very nice facilities, while public schools who do accept all students are left to crumble.

More than three quarters (78%) are concerned that pro-charter billionaires are pouring money into local elections to assist anti-public education candidates, and 76% are concerned that charter schools are taking money away from public schools. These six messages target charter schools from very different angles, and the fact that large majorities of voters find every message concerning shows that there is plenty of room to target charters that will resonate with the public.

The following statements are concerns that critics have of charter schools. Please indicate how concerning you find each statement.

● Very concerning ● Somewhat concerning ● Not too concerning ● Not concerning at all

“Charter school owners don’t have to answer to anyone in the community. Charter CEOs have a blank check to spend taxpayer money on private jets and other expensive luxuries.”



“Charter schools are allowed to contract out all their services out to for-profit organizations that do not have students’ best interests in mind.”



“Charter school teachers do not need to be certified in order to teach (unless teaching bilingual or special education). There is a lack of regulation that is not putting our children’s education first.”



“Charter schools don’t accept all students who apply yet receive public funding to build nice modern facilities without having to seek voter approval. Meanwhile, public schools that serve all students are not able to build new facilities or renovate old schools if local bond elections fail.”



“Pro-charter billionaires are pouring money into local elections in order to elect anti-public education candidates.”



“There is only one pot of taxpayer money to fund schools. Texas charter schools take \$3.6 billion of taxpayer money each year, and the more money charter schools take, the less public schools get.”



Motivation

Overall, Texas voters are very motivated to vote in the November midterm elections. Nine in 10 (91%) voters say they will definitely vote, and 79% rate themselves a 10 out of 10 on a motivation scale. White and Latinx voters are more motivated than Black voters (eight in 10 White and Latinx voters rate themselves a 10 out of 10 compared to 73% of Black voters). Democratic voters actually express a slightly higher level of motivation – a surprising finding for a midterm year where Democrats have unified control in the federal government. While more than nine in 10 Democrats (93%) and Republicans (91%) say they will definitely vote, Democrats slightly edge out Republicans on the motivation scale (84% and 79% rate themselves 10 out of 10, respectively).

Favorability Ratings

How favorable are your feelings about each of the following?

	Very favorable	Somewhat favorable	Neutral	Somewhat unfavorable	Very unfavorable	Never heard of them	Favorable	Unfavorable	Net Favorable
Teachers at local public schools	38	24	19	12	5	1	62	17	45
Private schools	23	24	37	9	7	1	46	16	30
Local public schools	30	28	18	14	9	0	58	24	34
School voucher programs	28	17	24	8	17	6	45	25	20
Charter schools	18	23	36	11	11	2	41	21	19
Teachers unions	30	15	16	9	29	2	45	38	7
Greg Abbott	25	16	8	7	44	0	41	51	-10

More than six in ten voters (62%) have a favorable view of teachers at local public schools (38% very favorable and 24% somewhat favorable), and the majority of voters (58%) have a favorable opinion of local public schools. Local public schools have the highest net favorability rating (+34) among the three types of schools tested, followed by private schools (+30) and charter schools (+21). Notably, public schools are the only type of school where a majority of voters have a favorable opinion.

Just under half (45%) of voters and 47% of public school parents have favorable views of voucher programs.

Greg Abbott is the only person or group tested that has a net negative rating (-10). He is most unpopular with Black voters (-71), Latinx voters (-30), 18 to 34 year olds (-30), college-educated voters (-26), and women (-19).

Top School Issues

Texas voters believe that students aren't receiving a quality education and that teachers and support staff aren't paid well enough. More than a third of voters picked both of these issues as a top two issue (37% and 36%, respectively).

A majority (51%) of Democrats believe that teachers aren't being paid enough, their top issue by 23 points. After that, Democrats are split on what is a top issue, with five other issues reaching at least 20%. Almost three in 10 (28%) Democrats say schools are not receiving enough state funding, and 20% say discrimination against LGBTQ students is a top issue.

More rural and suburban voters think students aren't receiving a quality education than do urban voters (42% and 43% compared to 29%). Twice as many urban voters believe discrimination against LGBTQ students is a top issue compared with rural and suburban voters (13% compared to 6%).

Which TWO of the following are the most important issues regarding Texas public schools right now?

