

Penta Policy Insiders

Texas Insights Review

Education

December 2023
policyinsiders.pentagroup.co

Executive summary

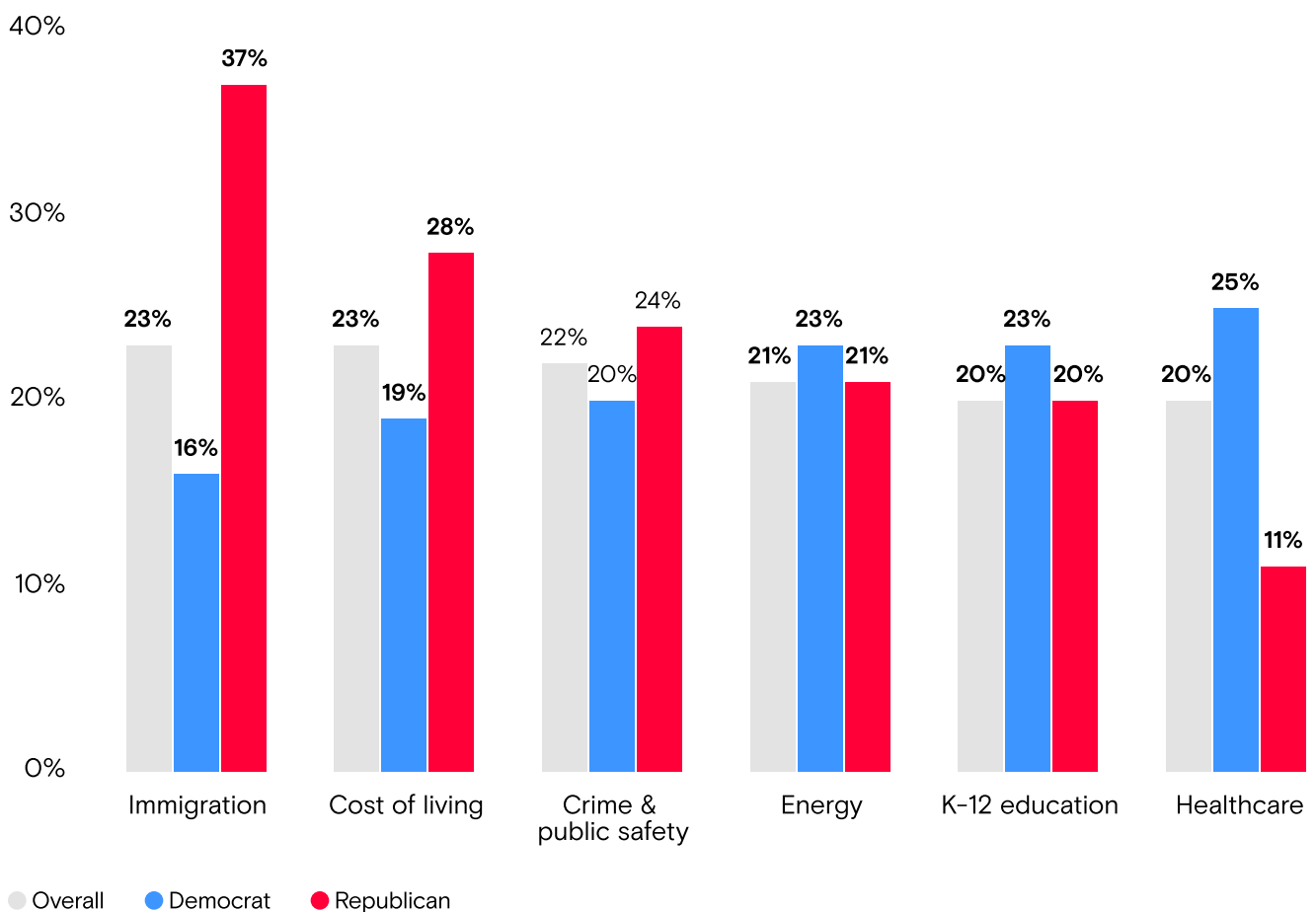
We are pleased to share our findings in this year's Texas Insights Review. From May to July 2023, we spoke to over 240 policymakers in the state to learn about their policy priorities and the top issues facing their communities.

Immigration and the cost of living are the top concerns among Texas policymakers, with almost a quarter of policy staff identifying the issues as individual leading priorities. Both issues are higher priorities for Republicans in the state. Crime and public safety is also a significant issue for the Lone Star state, with policymakers on both sides of the aisle identifying challenges, particularly in relation to immigration concerns. Energy, K-12 education, and healthcare are other top priorities for policymakers across the state of Texas.

This report is the first in a series that examines four of Texas policymakers' top priorities, which include (i) crime and immigration (ii) cost of living (iii) energy and (iv) K-12 education.

Top policy priorities in Texas

Multiple selections permitted



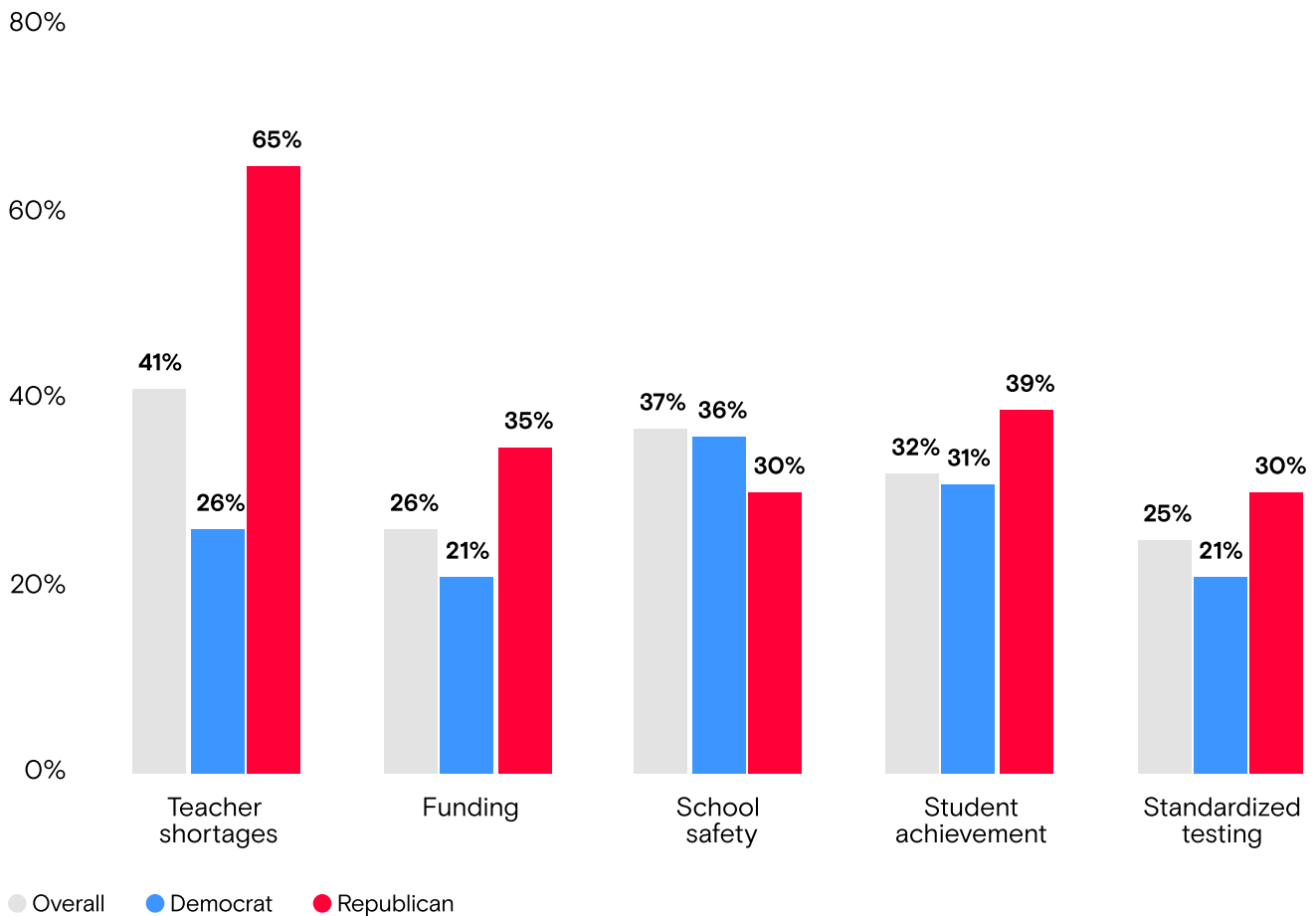
Education in Texas

Texas policymakers - 20 percent - say improving K-12 education is a top policy priority, with 41 percent of policy leaders agreeing that teacher shortages are the most pressing issue regarding education in the state.

Policymakers also detail other challenges that need to be addressed, such as funding, school safety, student achievement, and standardized testing.

Top education priorities for policymakers in Texas

Which of the following do you view as the most pressing issues in regards to education in your state?



More funding is necessary

Both Democrat and Republican policy leaders in Texas want to see more funding for the state's schools, with 21 percent of Democrats saying they want to see more funding compared to 35 percent of Republicans.

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During a recent special session convened by Governor Abbott, a senate committee unveiled legislation that would provide education savings accounts that families could use in order to pay for private school education.¹ The bill also included increased funding for public schools in order to pay for teacher raises and security upgrades.



We're the eighth largest economy in the world. We should be able to figure out how to fund the entire education path. Because without education, we aren't anything, I think you see a lot of parental involvement, people are involved because they want to see their kids at the seat.

Representative, Texas House of Representatives, R



The public school system in Texas is withering. With not enough resources from the state, as opposed from local property owners to front the bill for the local school funding, I think it's only going to get worse and worse, which is why we see a big rise in the charter school movement.

Executive Director, Texas House of Representatives, D



We definitely have to look at how we fund our schools, our neighborhood schools, putting more money from the state to bring some relief to our families and homeowners and consumers.

Representative, Texas House of Representatives, D



"We need to be financially supporting schools more. So much of our school finance system is based on property taxes. It's a very complicated system here in Texas because we have independent school districts. And a lot of the — Texas had a \$33 billion surplus a few months ago, and really none of ended up going toward significant school finance funding, and **the burden is still on local communities to be able to financially support their schools.** And wealthier communities that are more property tax wealthy, like what Austin is, end up sending — I think we're sending \$1 billion a year now in Austin to other school districts. It's like a Robin Hood system.

Chief of Staff, House of Representatives, Democrat

Democrats want pay raises for teachers



Teachers have not gotten a pay raise in years or a minimum pay raise. And yeah, I mean, you can see the outcomes directly when you compare it to other states like Massachusetts and New Jersey who have highly invested both in their teachers and in their education system. They view it as a priority in both of those states.

Chief of Staff, Texas State House, Democrat



I mean, I think the education one is the most urgent one [policy priority], and I mean, there's a variety of proposals that didn't make it through ranging from raising the per-student funding by \$1,000 to keep up with inflation to giving every Texas teacher a \$10,000 raise. **I think the need is massive and anything that infuses cash immediately is a good place to start.**

Chief Strategist, House Democratic Caucus, D

Mixed support for school vouchers

School vouchers are a hot-button topic when it comes to education in the state, garnering varying perspectives from policymakers and communities alike. Some policy leaders express that taxpayer money for school vouchers should be spent on supporting public schools, while proponents of vouchers argue that they allow for more parental choice regarding where families choose to send their children.



Within our community, our constituents are not supportive of it [school vouchers] and neither are we. So it's important for us, and I think it's a priority for certain leadership, right? So it's about making sure that our constituents are heard.

Chief of Staff, Texas House of Representative, Democrat



I just don't think it's [school vouchers] a good idea. I think all kids should go to public schools unless they're parents have enough money, and they want to send their kids to private school, that's on them. Hopefully, that money [taxpayer money for school vouchers] can be spent to improve the public schools rather than taking the money away from them, making it worse, and then it's all going to private schools that don't really need that assistance.

Chief of Staff, Texas House of Representative, Democrat

Conclusion

Policymakers in Texas detail several priorities when it comes to improving the state's K-12 education system, ranging from addressing the need for more funding to addressing teacher shortages. In addition to these objectives, it remains to be seen whether or not policy leaders will come to an agreement regarding the recent proposals for school vouchers, an initiative that has been met with varying degrees of support.



About Penta Policy Insiders

Penta Policy Insiders provides direct feedback from policymakers to government relations professionals, improving advocates' ability to understand, validate, and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their engagement.

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Citation

1. <https://www.dallasnews.com/news/education/2023/10/10/texas-senates-education-savings-account-proposal-kicks-off-school-choice-debate/>

Qualitative n: 25 | Quantitative n: 221

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