

Falling Behind: New Report Documents Texas' Growing Math Problem

A decade-long decline in math performance shows students falling behind other states.

AUSTIN, TEXAS, UNITED STATES, April 16, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- As Texas students begin taking the STAAR mathematics exams in the coming weeks, a groundbreaking new report highlights a concerning trend: Texas is falling behind other states in equipping students with mathematics, a critical skill for the future workforce.



While learning disruptions related to the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the problem, the report details a decade-long decline in math performance across Texas and shows that improving math outcomes is not an unsolvable problem. In *Solving for X: Math Trends, Challenges, and Opportunities for the Lone Star State*, the nonpartisan public policy organization Texas 2036 provides answers.

Key Findings:

- 55% of Texas students are below grade level in math. [1]
- A 21-point decline has been recorded in the percentage of Texas eighth-grade students at or above Basic in math since 2011.[2]
- Less than 50% of Texas high school graduates meet college readiness benchmarks in math.[3]
- Only 10% of parents believe their child is performing below grade level in math.[4]

Nearly [80 percent of the fastest-growing occupations](#) are in STEM fields—those related to science, technology, engineering, and math. Despite the economic imperative, this new report shows a significant gap between parents' perceptions of how their students are doing and their actual performance.

"No matter which data you examine, the same troubling trend emerges, Texas has a problem

with math proficiency. The challenge isn't new and has been worsening long before the pandemic," says Gabe Grantham, policy advisor at Texas 2036. "Alarming, too few parents are aware of this growing math crisis. Thankfully, Texas legislators have already begun to address the challenge, and in the next session, they will once again have the opportunity to adopt effective interventions that will improve student performance."

In recent years, Texas has started to take steps to address math performance, including a new bipartisan law passed last year that [accelerates math learning in middle school](#), regardless of students' socioeconomic background or geographic location. However, to improve our standing in mathematics and workforce readiness nationally, Texas must continue to build on these efforts. This means accelerating student interventions, further developing teacher training programs, and improving communication with parents about their children's status.

"The ability of Texas to lead and attract top industries hinges on equipping our workforce with essential STEM skills," says David Leebron, former Rice University president and incoming Texas 2036 President and CEO. "Math skills are essential to college success, and to realizing the aspirations students have in a wide variety of endeavors. While we've started to take steps to address declining math skills, the mission is far from complete. Our data and research demonstrate that we must escalate our efforts, drawing on proven strategies to ensure students and our state's workforce are ready for the jobs of the future."

The timing couldn't be better — or more urgent — as math skills are a key component of an innovative workforce that can produce strong, sustainable growth in the 21st-century economy.

The new report outlines a comprehensive array of policy options, inspired by successful strategies from other states and innovative local initiatives, including:

- Producing high-quality professional development and coaching to ensure teachers are equipped with tools to help struggling students.
- Utilizing math "screeners"—short diagnostics identifying who is struggling and what types of support they need to progress toward grade-level goals—in early grades and promptly notifying parents of identified difficulties.
- Providing parents with resources to support tailored "math-at-home" instruction.

"The gap between perception and reality in our children's math skills is a wake-up call for all Texans," says Mary Lynn Pruneda, senior policy advisor at Texas 2036. "Successful initiatives in other states demonstrate that significant improvement in math performance is possible. Texas has an opportunity to ensure that its students are equipped with the knowledge and skills they need to embrace the promise of the growing STEM economy."

To learn more about how Texas schools can reverse declines in math achievement among students, visit Texas2036.org/math.

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About Texas 2036

Texas 2036 is a nonprofit public policy organization committed to building long-term, data-driven strategies to ensure Texas' prosperity up to its bicentennial and beyond. Our solutions are nonpartisan, grounded in thorough research, and focus on critical issues that matter most to all Texans.

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Footnotes:

[1] 2023 STAAR Results accessed via TAPR Statewide Report

[2] NAEP Texas State Profile

[3] 2023 Statewide Texas Academic Performance Report (TAPR), Page 19

[4] Learning Heros and Gallup - B-Flation (2023)

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