TEXAS 2036

Counting on Texas: Rebuilding the State's Math Advantage

Trip Davis, K-12 Education Policy Advisor

November 17, 2026



CONTENTS

Inside this report

Executive Summary	1
Introduction	4
The Rise and Fall of Texas Math Performance	6
The Texas Economy Is Built on Math	17
The Skilled Trades Run on Math	20
What Texas Built, What Changed, and What It Has Begun to Rebuild	26
Four States Are Running the Texas Playbook	30
Seven Policy Opportunities for the 90th Legislature	36
A High-Return Investment Texas Has Made Before	42
Methodology	43

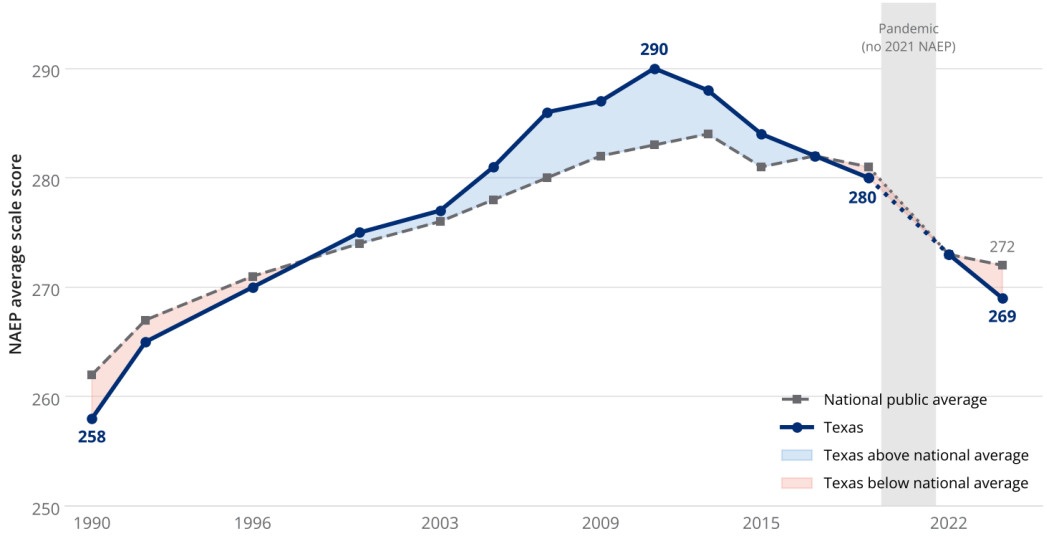
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Counting on Texas:

Rebuilding the State's Math Advantage

Texas has a math problem. On the 2024 National Assessment of Educational Progress, often called the Nation's Report Card, Texas' eighth-grade math performance was the lowest the state has recorded since 1996.[1] In 2024, a typical Texas eighth grader performed about two grade levels behind a Texas eighth grader in 2011. The state also has the nation's second-largest gap of any state between its fourth-grade math performance and its eighth-grade math performance, meaning that Texas' younger students are significantly outperforming its older ones.

Figure 1. Texas and national public average NAEP eighth grade mathematics scores, 1990–2024



Source: Texas 2036 analysis of NAEP Data Service, National Center for Education Statistics. Dotted segment spans the postponed 2021 administration.

The state's own tests show that math has not recovered from the pandemic. On the 2026 state math test, students in every grade from fifth grade through Algebra I performed below 2019 levels, and sixth graders performed below 2017 levels.

Early math skills predict later academic success more strongly than early reading, attention skills (the ability to focus and follow directions) or social skills.[2] Math is also cumulative: a student who misses fractions in third grade is building later math knowledge on an incomplete foundation.[3]

1 *National Center for Education Statistics, "2024 Mathematics State Snapshot Report: Texas, Grade 8," https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/subject/publications/stt2024/pdf/2024219TX8.pdf; NAEP Data Explorer, Texas grade 8 mathematics mean scale scores, 1990–2024. Texas scored 265 in 1992 and 270 in 1996; the 2024 score of 269 is below every result since 1996.*

2 *Duncan et al. (2007), "School Readiness and Later Achievement," Developmental Psychology 43(6); see the Introduction.*

3 *19 Texas Administrative Code Chapter 111, TEKS for Mathematics.*

To ensure our state's continued economic growth, Texas needs to address this challenge head-on. The industries powering the Texas economy rely heavily on mathematics-intensive skills and expertise.

Eight of the 10 fastest-growing high-wage occupations in Texas require STEM skills, and the state is a national leader in advanced manufacturing, energy and construction employment, all occupations built on mathematics.[4] The residential and commercial build-out supporting Texas' growth adds steady demand for skilled trades whose entry requirements include middle school and high school math.

More important than the state's ability to find qualified workers is whether everyday Texas students can fill those jobs. The state must make sure that Texas students have the academic skills they need to share in the state's future prosperity. Math is increasingly a component of both the state's and individual Texans' economic success.

This report gives particular attention to the skilled trades, an area where math demands have drawn far less analysis than four-year STEM pathways. Entry-level construction work runs on the standards Texas teaches in grades six through nine.[5] Higher-level, better-paying construction jobs require more.

Carpenters use the Pythagorean theorem to square a foundation. HVAC technicians use one-variable equations to size a duct. Machinists calculate dimensions and tolerances to plan every cut.[6] Master electricians must run the service-load calculations that decide whether a home's electrical system is safe. But for licensed trades, math can be the barrier to career advancement: four in five attempts at the master electrician exam receive failing scores in the calculations section.[7]

Texas has improved its math scores before. From 1990 to 2011, Texas posted the second-largest eighth-grade math gain in the nation: 32 points, or roughly three grade levels of learning, while the national public-school average rose 21 points.[8] Texas education policy in that period was defined by rigorous standards, consistent measurement and consequences tied to results. Toward the end of the first decade of the 2000s, Texas set several of those policies aside, and the ensuing decline in math performance coincided with that retreat.

Four Southern states are now making concerted efforts to improve math instruction: Alabama, Tennessee, Louisiana and Mississippi.

4 *Texas Workforce Commission, "Report on Texas Growth Occupations, 2025"; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Employment Statistics, state construction employment. See Section 2.*

5 *Texas 2036 analysis of TEKS mathematics standards; see Section 3.*

6 *19 Texas Administrative Code Chapter 111, TEKS for Mathematics: §111.28(b)(7)(C) (Pythagorean theorem, grade 8), §111.26(b)(9)(A) and §111.28(b)(8)(C) (one-variable equations, grades 6 and 8).*

7 *Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation, "Electrician Exam Statistics, Fiscal Year 2025" (Sept. 1, 2024–Aug. 31, 2025), https://www.tdlr.texas.gov/electricians/elecExamStats2025.htm: 19.1% of attempts at the master electrician calculations portion passed. See Section 3.*

8 *Texas 2036 analysis of NAEP Data Explorer, National Center for Education Statistics, unrounded state mean scale scores, accessed Aug. 2026. North Carolina posted the period's largest gain, 36 points.*

Texas has passed several of the same building blocks but has not yet connected them into a cohesive mathematics strategy. Alabama has placed trained math coaches in its elementary schools. Tennessee has focused on high-dosage tutoring, small-group tutoring several times a week during the school day. Louisiana has invested in high-quality instructional materials and supports for over 10 years. All three are already seeing math scores rise while Texas' scores have stalled. Mississippi, which has the same eighth grade NAEP score as Texas, joined its Southern state peers in April 2026 with a Math Act modeled on its 2013 literacy law.[9]

A national playbook for improving math performance exists, and Texas helped write its first chapters in the 1990s and early 2000s. Solving Texas' math problem will require looking to our own past as well as other states' present.[10]

The report closes with seven recommendations to rebuild Texas' math skills:

- Establish and fund a Texas Math Coaching Corps to provide math coaches at struggling campuses.
- Extend the HB 2 Mathematics Achievement Academies through eighth grade.
- Create a specialized math academy track for accelerated math teachers.
- Fund high-quality instructional materials implementation.
- Extend the Parent Access to Supplemental Supports (PASS) tutoring accounts to mathematics.
- Update the state's math standards.
- Provide parents with better tools to monitor student math performance.

None of these proposals require Texas to invent anything. Each scales a program already on the books, adds a reporting requirement to data the state already collects, or adapts an approach another state is running now.

The 2026 NAEP results are scheduled for release in early 2027.[11] Statewide numeracy screeners will soon come online, and the Student Success Tool replaces STAAR beginning with the 2027–28 school year, measuring math achievement three times a year.[12] Texas is about to have more and better information on math performance than it has ever had before. What the state should do with that information is the question this report answers.

The sections that follow lay out how Texas rebuilt its math performance once and what it would take to do so again.

---

9 *Section 5 documents each state's program and sources. National Center for Education Statistics, 2024 NAEP mathematics state results; Mississippi Math Act, SB 2294, 2026 Regular Session.*

10 *Sections 4 and 5 document the Texas record and the four state programs.*

11 *National Center for Education Statistics, NAEP 2026 letters to state chiefs; Institute of Education Sciences, "What's on the Horizon for the 2026 Nation's Report Card." The 2026 mathematics and reading assessments were administered Jan. 26 through March 20, 2026, with results scheduled for release in early 2027.*

12 *Texas Education Agency, "Overview of House Bill 8," Oct. 23, 2025, https://tea.texas.gov/about-tea/news-and-multimedia/correspondence/taa-letters/overview-of-house-bill-8-0.*

INTRODUCTION

Math Is the Foundation of Texas Growth

Texas is adding jobs more quickly than it is producing the math skills those jobs require.

Consider what a single semiconductor fabrication plant needs. Process engineers who work in statistics. Equipment technicians who work to precise tolerance specifications. And, before any of them arrive, the pipefitters, electricians, welders and drywall installers who build the facility. Those are different jobs at different wages requiring different credentials, but they all draw on the same mathematics foundation taught in Texas classrooms.

In the 1990s and early 2000s, Texas' mathematics foundation was strong. Between 1990 and 2011, the state climbed from the bottom half of national rankings to its top 10 in eighth grade math. Since 2011, that foundation has developed cracks. Texas eighth grade math scores have fallen on the national assessment while fourth grade scores have held steady. The state's post-pandemic recovery is weaker in math than in reading.[13] These issues are most concerning for older students, who have the least time left to close the gap.[14]

Math performance predicts more than math outcomes. In a six-study analysis of school readiness, math skills at school entry predicted later academic achievement more strongly than early reading skills, attention skills or social-emotional skills.[15]

Math is also cumulative. Fractions are introduced in third grade and never go away. Fourth and fifth grade add operations with fractions, sixth grade extends them into ratios and rates, and seventh grade folds them into proportionality and percent.[16] When a student misses fractions, everything built on them weakens, from ratios and rates to proportionality and, eventually, algebra. The same pattern holds for equations, which resurface in science courses, on trade licensing exams and in everyday financial decisions. Gaps compound, and with each passing year they are harder to close.

In Texas, students who fall behind in math rarely catch up on their own. Of Texas third graders below grade level in math in 2019, 13% were on grade level three years later, a window dominated by the pandemic and its associated learning loss.[17]

This report makes four arguments about the nature of Texas' current math problems and potential solutions.

13 *NAEP Data Explorer, Texas grade 8 mathematics; Texas Education Agency, Texas Assessment Research Portal, https://txresearchportal.com, accessed Oct. 2026. Later citations of the Research Portal refer to the same retrieval.*

14 *See Section 1, "Four cohorts, one uneven recovery,".*

15 *Duncan et al. (2007), "School Readiness and Later Achievement," Developmental Psychology 43(6).*

16 *19 Texas Administrative Code Chapter 111, TEKS for Mathematics.*

17 *Commit Partnership analysis, 2019–2022, built from student-level data received from TEA through a public information request. Reflects spring first-time testers with a unique scrambled ID present in all three years and single-grade year-to-year progression.*

1. Texas math performance began its decline in the early 2010s, not with the pandemic. National assessments show that Texas eighth grade math scores fell between 2011 and 2019, before the pandemic, and fell again after it. Section 1 describes Texas' decline on the national test and what the state's own tests can and cannot show, then follows with an analysis of four recent high school cohorts from third grade through Algebra I.[18]

2. The Texas economy runs on math. Section 2 covers the industries driving the state's growth and the math those industries require. Section 3 focuses on the skilled trades, showing why math is particularly in demand for those professions. Texas 2036 mapped the math skills used in construction to the specific K–12 academic standards that teach them, then it examined how Texas students performed on test questions aligned to those standards. Statewide, the shares of students missing those questions ranged from roughly 30% to more than 70%.[19]

3. Texas has solved its math problems before. Section 4 documents the policies behind the state's 1990s and 2000s mathematics improvements, which were dismantled late in the first decade of the 2000s, and the steps taken to rebuild since 2015, which are real but so far incomplete.

4. Other states are making mathematics reforms and getting results. Section 5 examines Alabama, Tennessee, Louisiana and Mississippi, four states that have demonstrated a strong commitment to improving math outcomes. Alabama, Tennessee and Louisiana are already seeing math scores rise, and Mississippi enacted its version of math reform in April 2026. Section 6 sets out seven policy opportunities for the 90th Legislature.

> Improving Texas math outcomes is critical to the state's economic future, and, more importantly, to individual students' futures. Regardless of whether students enter college or a career after high school, they should be equipped with the math needed to succeed. The algebra a student needs for college is the same kind of algebra used on the journeyman electrician exam. The focus for state policymakers should be on raising math proficiency, so all students are prepared for whatever path they choose.[20]

18 *NAEP Data Explorer; Texas Education Agency, Texas Assessment Research Portal; see Section 1.*

19 *Texas 2036 analysis of released STAAR mathematics items mapped to TEKS student expectations. See Section 3 and the methodology note.*

20 *Texas 2036 analysis of Texas journeyman electrician examination content (TDLR/PSI) and TEKS mathematics standards; see Section 3.*

SECTION 1

The Rise and Fall of Texas Math Performance:

What National and State Tests Show

Key Takeaways

- **Texas Lost Two Grade Levels on the National Test Since 2011:** Texas eighth graders gained 32 points on NAEP math from 1990 to 2011, then lost 21 of them by 2024. The state's 2024 score of 269 is the lowest since 1996. Twenty-five other jurisdictions now score significantly higher than Texas, up from five in 2011.
- **Fourth Graders Held Their Ground:** Texas fourth graders have scored at or above the national public average in every NAEP administration since 1996 and ranked seventh in 2024, which leaves Texas with the nation's second-largest gap between its fourth and eighth grade rankings.
- **The State Test Shows a Recovery That Stalled in the Middle Grades:** By 2026, none of the middle grade math tests or Algebra I had returned to its 2019 result on the state test.

This section traces the decline on the national test, then turns to what the state's own assessments can and cannot show about performance over the past several decades. Then this section finishes with an analysis of the four cohorts of students most recently in Texas high schools.[21]

> Six years after the pandemic closed schools, Texas math performance on the state test remains below where it was in 2019.[22]

The National Test: NAEP

What is NAEP?

The National Assessment of Educational Progress is the only nationally standardized assessment that tracks academic performance across states. NAEP ranks its 52 jurisdictions, the 50 states, the District of Columbia and Department of Defense schools, against each other and provides performance trends over time.[23] All 52 jurisdictions have been participating in the NAEP since 2003.

21 *NAEP Data Explorer, Texas grade 8 mathematics, 2011 and 2024; Texas Education Agency, Texas Assessment Research Portal.*

22 *Texas 2036 analysis of Texas Education Agency, Texas Assessment Research Portal.*

23 *National Center for Education Statistics, "An Overview of NAEP." NAEP has assessed representative samples of students in mathematics on a common scale since 1990.*

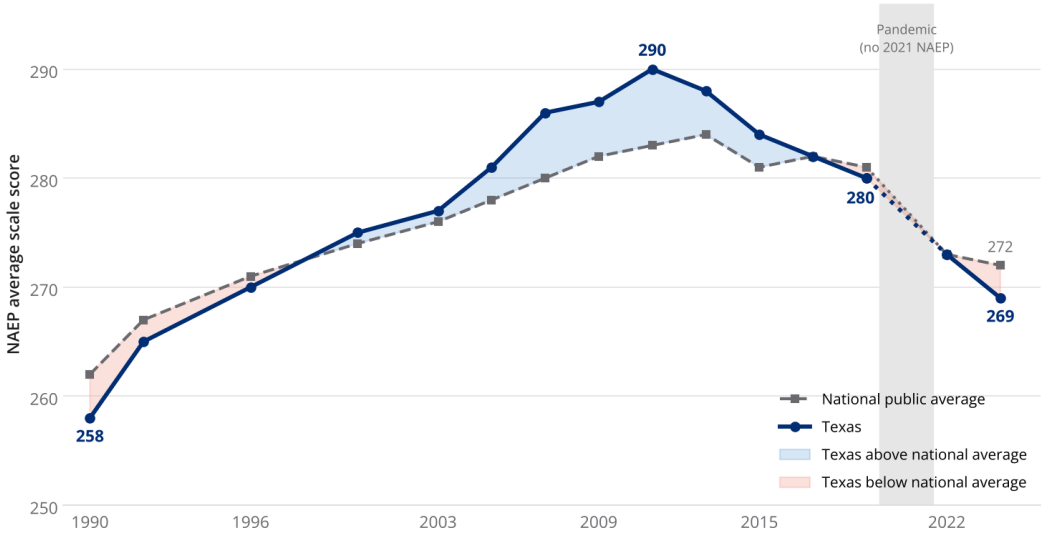
Texas eighth grade results, 1990–2024

On the NAEP, Texas eighth graders gained 32 points in math between 1990 and 2011, rising from 258 to 290. That was the second-largest gain among the 38 states and other jurisdictions tested over this time period. Over the same period, the national public-school average rose 21 points.[24] For context, a common convention among researchers treats 10 NAEP points as roughly one year of learning.[25] This means that a typical Texas eighth grader in 2011 was performing about three grade levels ahead of a Texas eighth grader in 1990.

> A typical eighth grader in 2011 was performing about three grade levels ahead of a Texas eighth grader in 1990.

Today, most of Texas' mathematics score gains from that time period are gone. Eighth graders fell 10 points between 2011 and 2019, before the pandemic, while the national public average fell two points. Texas scores then kept falling to 269 in 2024, the state's lowest score since 1996.[26] Put in grade-level terms, a typical Texas eighth grader in 2024 performed about two grade levels below a Texas eighth grader in 2011.

Figure 2. Texas and national public average NAEP eighth grade mathematics scores, 1990–2024



Source: Texas 2036 analysis of NAEP Data Service, National Center for Education Statistics. Dotted segment spans the postponed 2021 administration.

24 *NAEP Data Explorer, Texas grade 8 mathematics mean scale scores, 1990 and 2011.*

25 *Matthew M. Chingos, "What Can NAEP Tell Us About How Much U.S. Children Are Learning?" Brookings Institution, Evidence Speaks Reports (2018). The conversion is a rough convention; learning gains are not uniform across grades or points on the scale.*

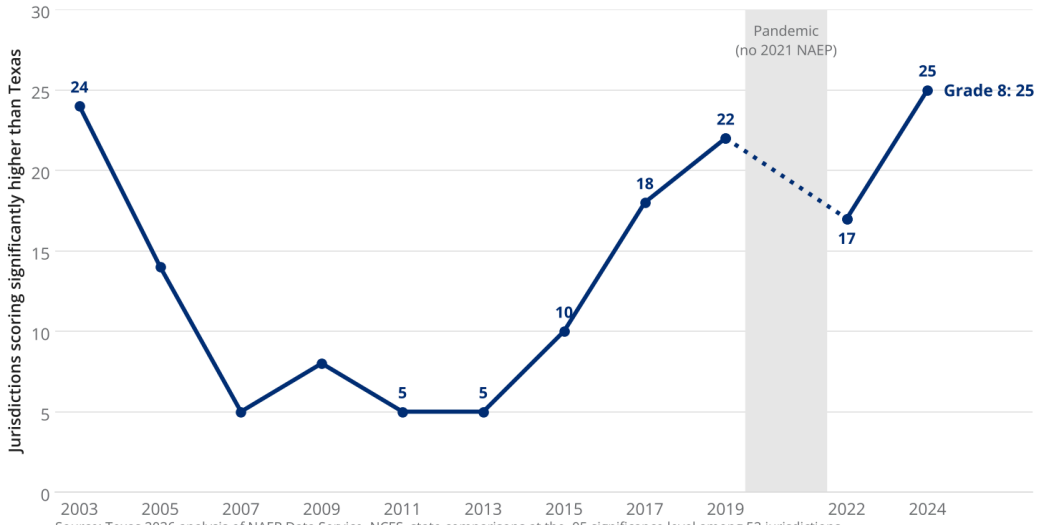
26 *NAEP Data Explorer, Texas grade 8 mathematics mean scale scores, 2011, 2019, and 2024. NAEP results from the 1990s carry caveats: the 1990, 1992, and 1996 mathematics assessments did not offer testing accommodations, the 2000 assessment was administered both with and without accommodations, and early administrations were less frequent.*

Texas' national ranking

Comparing Texas' performance against other states over this time period makes the decline even starker. In 1990, Texas ranked 27th of the 38 states tested. By 2011, it had climbed to 10th of 52. By 2024, it had fallen to 35th of 52, its lowest rank since every state began taking the test in 2003.[27]

NAEP tests a sample of students in each state rather than every student, and it calls one state's score "significantly higher" than another's only when the gap is too large to be explained by that sampling. For eighth-grade scores, for example, this usually means a difference of about three points or more. Looking at Texas' results this way, five jurisdictions were clearly ahead of Texas in eighth-grade math in 2011. By 2024, 25 were.[28]

Figure 3. Jurisdictions scoring significantly higher than Texas on NAEP eighth grade mathematics, 2003–2024



Source: Texas 2036 analysis of NAEP Data Service, National Center for Education Statistics, state comparisons at the .05 significance level among 52 jurisdictions (50 states, D.C., and DoDEA). Dotted segment spans the postponed 2021 administration.

Fourth grade results

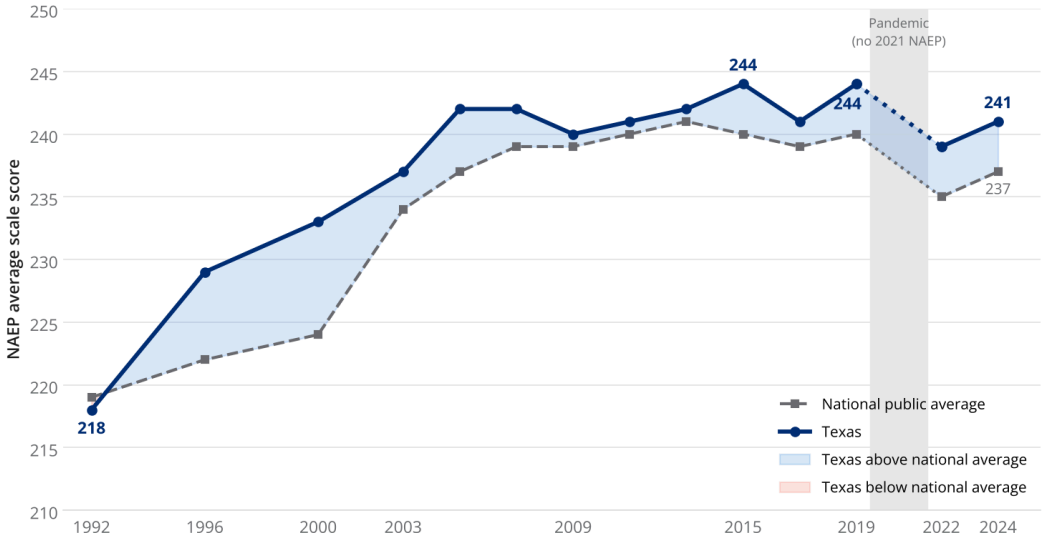
Texas fourth-grade math performance on NAEP follows a different trajectory. Texas fourth graders have scored at or above the national public average in every NAEP administration since 1996, and significantly above it in 2019, 2022 and 2024.[29]

27 *Texas 2036 analysis of NAEP Data Service rounded state average scale scores as published by NCES; tied scores share a rank, and with unrounded scores Texas ranks 9th in grade 4 and 35th in grade 8 in 2024. Rankings cover the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Department of Defense schools. Puerto Rico participates in NAEP mathematics but is reported separately and excluded from these rankings. NCES does not publish official state rankings.*

28 *Texas 2036 analysis of NAEP Data Service, National Center for Education Statistics, state comparisons, retrieved Oct. 22, 2026. Counts are jurisdictions whose average score was higher than Texas' at the .05 significance level, among the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Department of Defense schools. The 2024 counts match the NCES Texas state snapshot reports.*

29 *NAEP Data Service, National Center for Education Statistics, Texas and national public grade 4 mathematics average scores, 1992–2024, retrieved Oct. 22, 2026. In 1992, Texas (218) scored slightly below the national public average (219); in 2009, 2011, 2013, and 2017 the difference was not statistically significant. The state-level NAEP mathematics assessment was first given to fourth graders in 1992; the 1990 state administration covered only eighth grade.*

Figure 4. Texas and national public average NAEP fourth grade mathematics scores, 1992–2024



Source: Texas 2036 analysis of NAEP Data Service, National Center for Education Statistics. Dotted segment spans the postponed 2021 administration.

In 2024, Texas fourth graders ranked seventh nationally, and only two, Massachusetts and the Department of Defense schools, scored significantly higher.[30] This is an even stronger showing than it first appears, because Texas serves the nation's highest share of emergent bilingual students and serves a share of low-income students well above the national average.[31]

The gap between fourth and eighth grade

The strong performance of Texas fourth graders makes the lower performance of its eighth graders all the more striking. From 2007 to 2013, Texas eighth graders outranked the state's fourth graders on NAEP. In those years, Texas eighth-grade scores rose to a peak of 290 in 2011, while Texas fourth-grade scores held between 240 and 242. Other states' performance improved in fourth grade during this time, so Texas' relative fourth grade ranking fell as well.[32] Since 2015, the gap between the fourth grade and eighth grade rankings has generally grown. The 2024 gap was the largest since 2003, when every state began taking NAEP, and nearly three times its 2015 size.[33]

30 *National Center for Education Statistics, "2024 Mathematics State Snapshot Report: Texas, Grade 4," https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/subject/publications/stt2024/pdf/2024219TX4.pdf: Texas scored lower than 2 jurisdictions, higher than 20, and not significantly different from 29. Rank from Texas 2036 analysis of NAEP Data Service rounded state average scores; tied scores share a rank.*

31 *In fall 2021, 20.2% of Texas public school students were identified as English learners, the highest share of any state and nearly double the national rate of 10.6%. In 2024–25, the Texas Education Agency reported that 24.3% of the state's 5.5 million public school students were emergent bilingual and 60.4% were economically disadvantaged, compared with 53.3% of students nationally eligible for free or reduced-price lunch in 2022–23 under a related but not identical measure. National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics, Tables 204.20 and 204.10 (2023); Texas Education Agency, Enrollment in Texas Public Schools 2024–25.*

32 *Texas 2036 analysis of National Center for Education Statistics, NAEP Data Explorer, grade 4 and grade 8 mathematics, 1992–2024.*

33 *Ibid.*

In 2024, Texas eighth graders ranked 35th nationally, a 28-place difference from Texas fourth graders. **Texas' gap was the second largest in the nation, surpassed only by Florida, which had a 39-place difference.**[34] **It might seem natural for performance to slip between fourth and eighth grade as learning gaps compound, particularly in math, but in more than two dozen states it does not: in 2024, 28 of the 52 jurisdictions matched or beat their fourth-grade rank in eighth grade.**

The state's tests: TAKS to STAAR

Texas' own assessments can be compared only across shorter time periods. Changes to the state assessment over time have meant that the same type of longitudinal analysis is not possible. However, the results within an assessment can be compared. The following outlines how Texas students have performed on the mathematics portion of the state test over the same time frame as the above NAEP analysis.

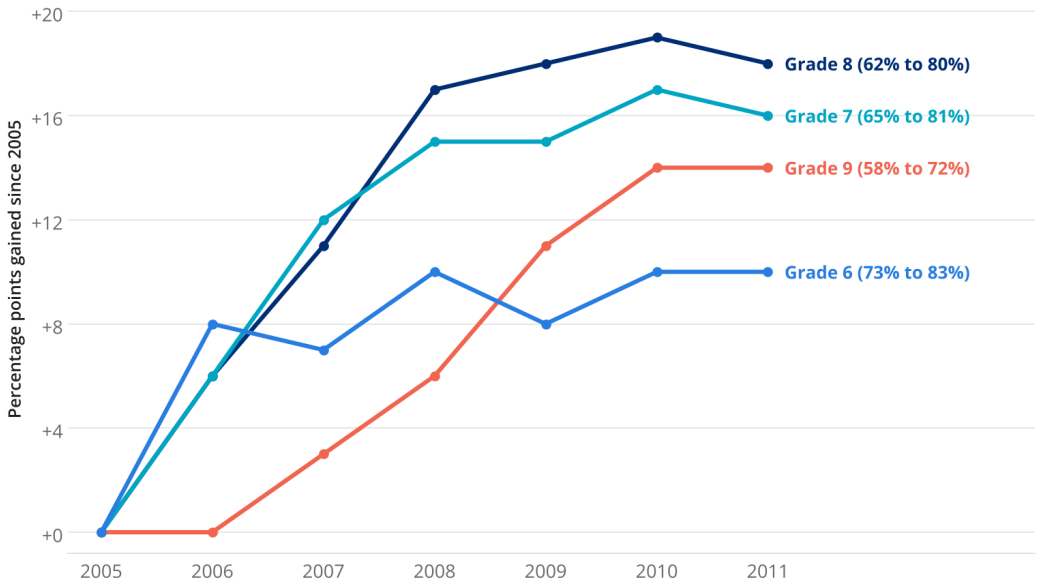
TAKS, 2003–2011

From 2003 to 2011, Texas tested students with the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), which reported two passing levels, Met Standard and Commended Performance. Between 2005 and 2011, the share of students meeting the TAKS math standard rose by 10 to 18 percentage points in each of grades six through nine.[35] This follows a similar trend to the NAEP analysis above.

34 *Texas 2036 analysis of National Center for Education Statistics, NAEP Data Service, grade 4 and grade 8 mathematics, 2024, using rounded state average scale scores as published by NCES; tied scores share a rank.*

35 *Texas Education Agency, Academic Excellence Indicator System, TAKS mathematics results, 2005 through 2011 administrations, https://rptsvr1.tea.texas.gov/. TAKS was first administered in 2003; 2005 is the baseline because the first two administrations phased in new standards and retest rules. The comparison covers grades 6 through 9 and runs from 2005 through 2011; it does not include 2012. AEIS reported the grade 5 and grade 8 rates as cumulative across the first administration and retest once the grade-advancement requirements applied, which contributes to the grade 8 increase after 2007.*

Figure 5. TAKS mathematics, percentage-point change since 2005 in the share meeting the standard, grades 6–9, 2005–2011



Source: Texas Education Agency, Academic Excellence Indicator System. TAKS was retired after 2011; STAAR began in 2012, so the series ends here.

The 2012–2016 gap

Texas replaced TAKS with the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) in 2012. It is not possible to cleanly track Texas math performance on the STAAR from 2012 to 2016, because the state changed the math standards and created new questions, new score scales and new passing standards. Texas schools began teaching revised math standards in 2014–15, and TEA set new passing scores for the grades 3–8 math tests in 2015. TEA also reported results against a temporary passing bar that it planned to raise in steps, so passing rates in these years measured a moving target. In 2017, TEA renamed and finalized the score levels, with Meets Grade Level marking the grade-level standard on the test.[36]

The STAAR results TEA reported in those years cannot be read as a trend on their own, because a change in the share of students passing could reflect a change in performance, a change in the passing score, or both.

36 *STAAR was first administered in 2012, but uniform reporting of Does Not Meet, Approaches, Meets, and Masters was not fully implemented until the 2017 administration. From 2012 to 2016, results were reported under phase-in standards that changed year to year, which makes those years difficult to compare directly.*

The passing standards that TEA used from 2013 to 2016 were temporary and lower than today's Meets Grade Level bar, which is why reported pass rates stayed above 70%. Measured against the final standard, only 34% of students were on grade level in 2013 and 40% in 2016.[37] Over the same years, the Texas eighth-grade NAEP score fell from 288 to 284 to 282.[38]

STAAR since 2017

2017–2019

Between 2017 and 2019, Texas math scores went up on the STAAR exam. Sixth graders rose from 43% to 45% on grade level, seventh graders from 40% to 41%, eighth graders from 45% to 55%, and Algebra I from 48% to 62%.[39] Texas eighth-grade NAEP scores did not rise over the same period (282 in 2017 and 280 in 2019), so the two tests point in different directions for these years.

2021–2026

The percentage of students on grade level in math in sixth grade, seventh grade, eighth grade and Algebra I all fell during the pandemic. By 2026, sixth graders were at 39% on grade level, seventh graders at 29%, eighth graders at 47%, and Algebra I at 54%.[40] In 2026, all four were still below their 2019 results, and sixth grade sits below even its 2017 score.[41]

One important caveat applies to seventh grade. Senate Bill 2124 (88R, 2023) requires districts to enroll students who score in the top 40% on the fifth-grade math test in advanced sixth-grade math unless a parent opts out. That puts these students on track to take the eighth-grade math test as seventh graders. As that policy took effect, the share of seventh graders who took the eighth-grade test instead of the seventh-grade test doubled, from 16% in 2023 to 32% in 2026.[42] The seventh-grade test now excludes many of the state's strongest seventh grade math students, so part of the seventh-grade decline since 2023 reflects that shift rather than a change in performance.[43]

37 *Texas Education Agency, Federal Report Card and Texas Performance Reporting System state reports, 2013–2017 (all students tested), https://rptsvr1.tea.texas.gov/perfreport/tprs/. From 2012 through 2016 TEA reported STAAR results against a phase-in Level II standard scheduled to reach the final standard in 2021–22; grades 3–8 mathematics were first assessed on revised TEKS in 2015 and were excluded from 2015 accountability ratings; grade 8 figures from 2014 onward are cumulative across first and second administrations. The all-grades figures at the final Level II standard (labeled Meets Grade Level from 2017) are from the same reports.*

38 *NAEP Data Service, Texas grade 8 mathematics average scale scores, 2013, 2015, and 2017.*

39 *Texas Education Agency, Texas Assessment Research Portal.*

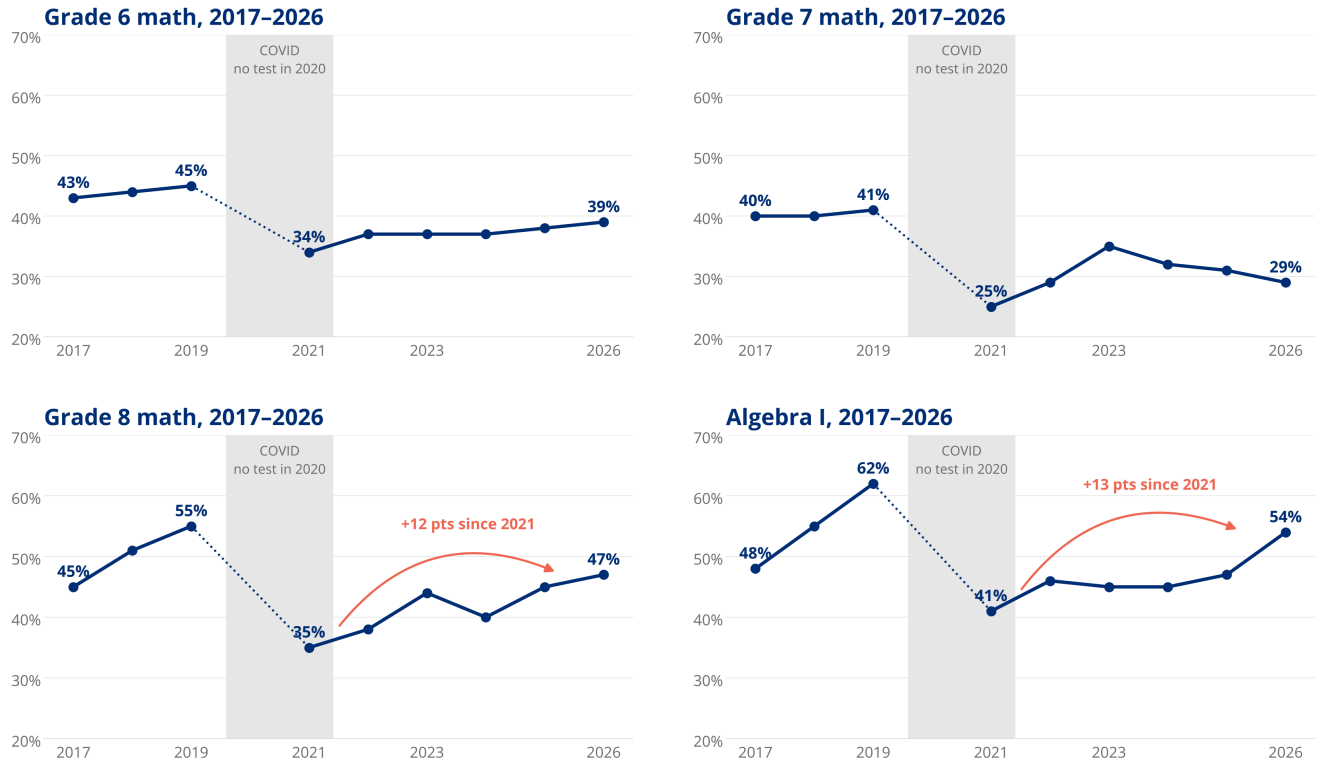
40 *Ibid.*

41 *Texas 2036 analysis of Texas Education Agency, Texas Assessment Research Portal, grades 6–8 mathematics and Algebra I, Meets Grade Level or above, 2017–2026.*

42 *Texas 2036 analysis of Texas Education Agency, Texas Assessment Research Portal, grade 7 students taking the grade 8 mathematics STAAR, 2023 and 2026.*

43 *Texas Education Agency, "2026 STAAR Results," pp. 64–66 (STAAR mathematics results by enrolled grade level and advanced course participation); Texas Education Agency, Texas Assessment Research Portal. Statewide results by test count students by the test taken; a seventh grader taking the eighth grade test is counted in the eighth grade result.*

Figure 6. STAAR mathematics, share on grade level: grades 6, 7, 8 and Algebra I, 2017–2026



Source: Texas 2036 analysis of Texas Education Agency, Texas Assessment Research Portal. Share at Meets Grade Level or above.

Math compared with reading and science in 2026

Texas math recovery on the STAAR test is much slower than its recovery in other subjects. In reading, every tested grade performed above its 2019 level on the 2026 STAAR; sixth grade gained the most, rising 19 percentage points, and eighth grade performance rose to 59% of students reading on grade level, up from 53% in 2019.[44]

Science was mixed: eighth grade and Biology finished above their 2019 shares on grade level, while fifth grade finished below.[45] Both social studies tests finished a few points below 2019.[46] Math moved the other way. On the 2026 STAAR, sixth grade scored six percentage points below its 2019 result, seventh grade 12 points below, and eighth grade and Algebra I eight points below. Across the core four subjects, math showed the weakest recovery.[47] Figure 7 describes these trends further.

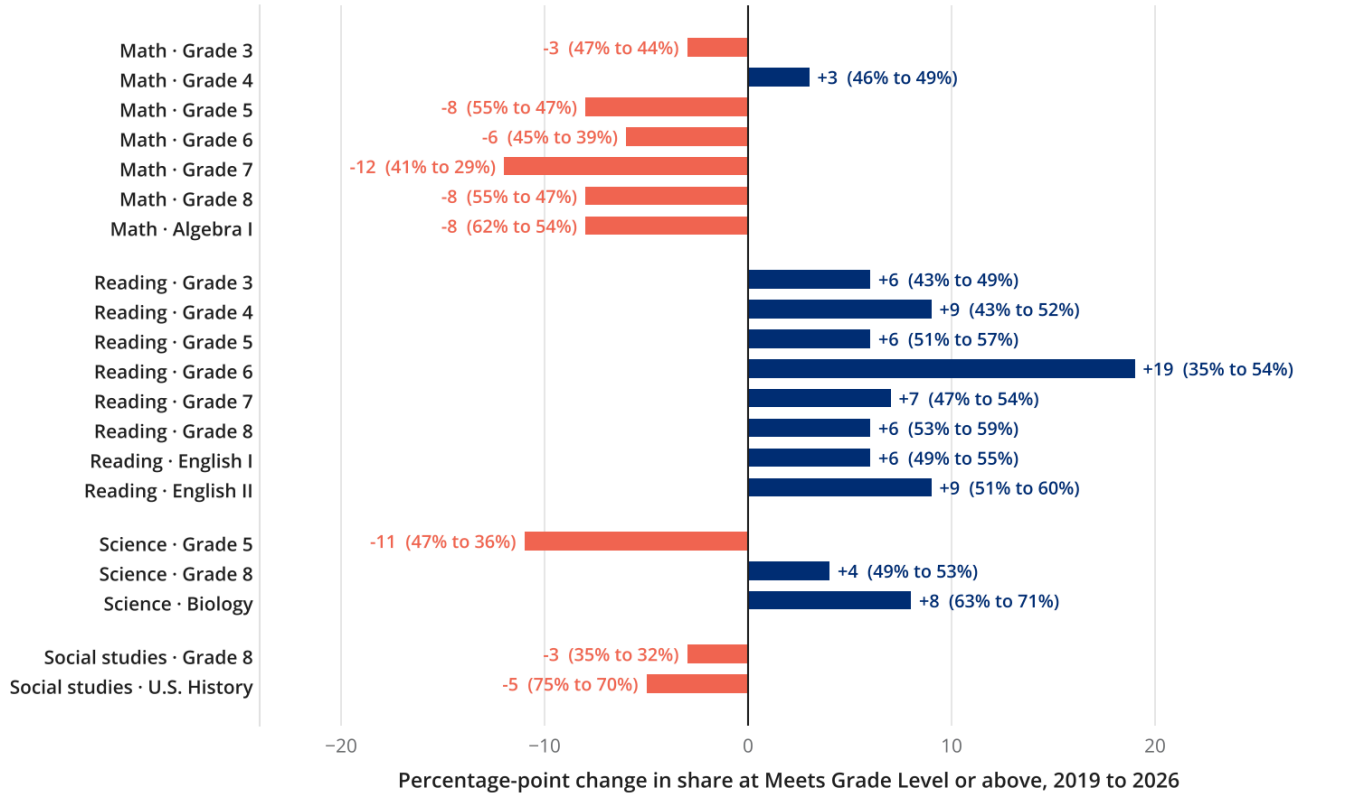
44 *Texas 2036 analysis of Texas Education Agency, Texas Assessment Research Portal, spring 2026 STAAR reading results, grades 3–8, Meets Grade Level or above.*

45 *Ibid.*

46 *Ibid.*

47 *Ibid.; Texas Education Agency, spring 2026 STAAR end-of-course results, Algebra I.*

Figure 7. STAAR 2026 compared with 2019: percentage-point change in the share on grade level, by test



Source: Texas Education Agency, 2026 All Combined STAAR Results. TEA notes the 2023 redesign "necessitated re-setting of standards and scales from 2022 to 2023," so the comparison with 2019 spans a change in the test. The grade 5 and 8 science and Biology tests were also redesigned in 2026 to assess revised science TEKS.

Four cohorts, one uneven recovery

While grade level averages are important, they describe the system as a snapshot in time. They do not tell the story of the *same group of students* over time. The following analysis looks at cohort-level performance for the students who were in Texas high schools in 2025–26. For example, for students who were sophomores in the 2025–26 school year, the chart starts with their third grade STAAR scores in 2019. Each cohort is named for its high school graduation year.

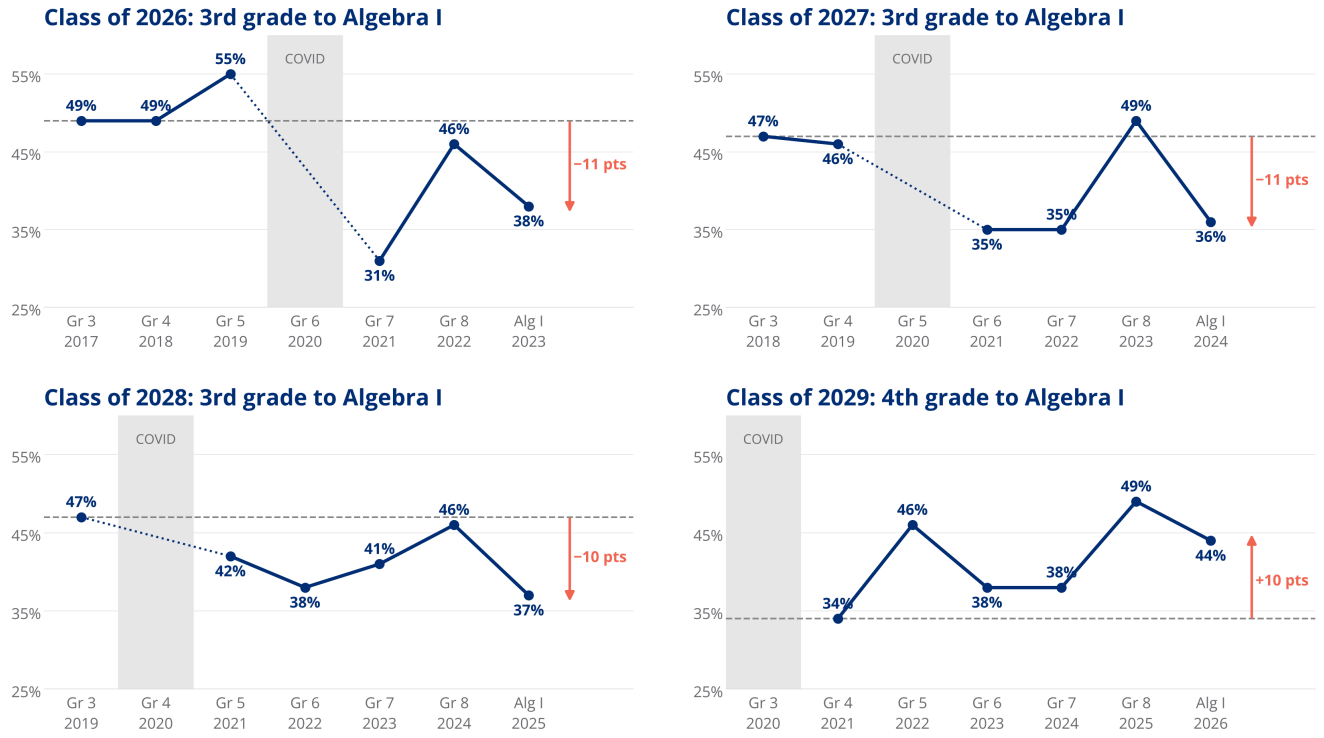
How to read this data

Two cautions apply to these cohorts. First, each line is built from statewide results for whoever was enrolled in a grade in a given year, not from the same students followed individually. It includes students who took a test above their enrolled grade (a seventh grader who took the eighth-grade math test is counted in the eighth-grade result).

Second, the Algebra I point counts only students who took Algebra I in ninth grade. The roughly one-third of each class who took it in middle school, mostly strong math students, are not in that data point. Third grade STAAR and the Algebra I end-of-course exam are different tests with different passing standards, so part of each drop from third grade to Algebra I reflects the change in test rather than a loss of ground.[48] Because districts moved a growing share of strong students into eighth-grade math and Algebra I early across these years, the final points of each line reflect both changes in performance and changes in who took each exam.[49]

The four cohorts

Figure 8. STAAR mathematics by cohort: percentage on grade level from third grade through Algebra I



Source: Texas 2036 analysis of Texas Education Agency, Texas Assessment Research Portal. The 2029 cohort has no third grade score because the spring 2020 administration was canceled. Values are statewide shares at Meets Grade Level or above for students enrolled in each grade; the Algebra I point covers students taking Algebra I in ninth grade. Dotted grey line: the class's first score, extended to Algebra I.

- **2026 cohort.** About half of these students were on grade level in third grade, and 55% were on grade level by fifth grade.[50] The pandemic arrived in their sixth-grade year, and their performance bottomed out at 31% in seventh grade. On Algebra I, 38% met grade level, 11 percentage points below the cohort's third-grade result.

48 *Texas 2036 analysis of Texas Education Agency, Texas Assessment Research Portal. The two figures measure different populations: the statewide Algebra I rate (54% in 2026) includes accelerated eighth graders, who pass at higher rates, while the 2029 cohort figure (44%) follows only students taking Algebra I in ninth grade. As accelerated cohorts advance, the tested populations of grades 6–8 math and Algebra I shift; comparisons across that boundary reflect population change as well as performance.*

49 *Texas 2036 analysis of Texas Education Agency, Texas Assessment Research Portal; Section 4 describes the growth of accelerated enrollment.*

50 *Texas 2036 analysis of Texas Education Agency, Texas Assessment Research Portal.*

- **2027 cohort.** These students followed a similar path. They stood at 46% on grade level in 2019 and fell to 35% by 2021. By eighth grade, they had rebounded to 49%, the cohort's best result. A year later, 36% met grade level on Algebra I, a 13-point drop.[51]
- **2028 cohort.** These students scored 42% in fifth grade, their first test after schools closed, dipped further in sixth grade, then climbed back to 46% by eighth grade, just short of their pre-pandemic mark. From third grade to Algebra I, the share on grade level fell 10 points, from 47% to 37%.[52]
- **2029 cohort.** These students were third graders when the pandemic closed schools, and the canceled spring 2020 STAAR left them with no third-grade score. Their record begins in fourth grade at 34%, a starting line already depressed by the pandemic, which makes comparisons with the three older cohorts indirect. From there, the path was uneven. They reached 46% in fifth grade, slid to 38% in sixth and seventh grades, climbed to 49% in eighth grade, and finished at 44% on Algebra I, a 10-point gain across five years and the only net improvement among the four cohorts.[53]

The 2029 cohort was the youngest when the pandemic hit and the youngest when Texas began its pandemic-era interventions, including the accelerated instruction required under House Bill 4545 (87R, 2021). Whether the interventions worked better on younger students, or this cohort simply had less ground to make up, cannot be determined from this data. The 2029 cohort is the only one of the four to finish above the first score and even this group ended Algebra I with 56% of its students below grade level. Among the four cohorts in Texas high schools in 2025–26, the best result still left more than one student in two not yet ready for the next grade.[54]

The next two sections turn from how Texas students are performing to why it matters, first for the industries driving the state's growth, and then for the skilled trades those industries depend on.

51 *Ibid.*

52 *Ibid.*

53 *See note 48.*

54 *Texas 2036 analysis of Texas Education Agency, Texas Assessment Research Portal.*

SECTION 2

The Texas Economy Is Built on Math:

The Industries Driving Growth Run on Numbers

Key Takeaways

- **Texas Growth Is Concentrated in Math-Intensive Industries:** Eight of the 10 fastest-growing high-wage occupations in Texas require STEM skills, and the state leads the nation in advanced manufacturing, energy and construction employment.
- **The Newest Growth Is Focused in the Most Math-Intensive Job Sectors:** In 2025, Texas led the nation in economic development project wins, with roughly 1,400 projects, more than 42,000 jobs and $75 billion in new capital investment, led by semiconductors, aerospace, artificial intelligence and finance.
- **Growth Hinges on Robust Home and Office Construction:** Texas issues more single-family home permits and employs more construction workers than any other state, and the trades that build all those new homes and offices run on the math of the middle grades and Algebra I.

The jobs driving Texas growth are concentrated in math-intensive industries. Texas built its economy on a base of land, energy and trade. Since the 1960s, Texas has layered new industries on top of that base, including commercial spaceflight in South Texas, semiconductor plants outside Austin, and financial firms in Dallas. This industrial growth has been accompanied by a residential surge, with homes, schools and shopping centers going up every day to support Texas' population growth.[55]

From advanced manufacturing to building homes, Texans need math skills to succeed. A weak foundation there can show up as longer hiring timelines, slower project delivery and higher costs in the industries the state is counting on for growth.

Texas' newest growth is very math intensive. In 2025, Texas led the nation in economic development, with roughly 1,400 projects tied to more than 42,000 jobs and $75 billion in new capital investment.[56] Semiconductors, aerospace, artificial intelligence and finance account for a substantial share of these projects.[57]

Semiconductor manufacturing illustrates this pattern. Samsung's Taylor facility began as a $17 billion commitment, and the company has since described total Texas investment plans reaching into the tens of billions across its Taylor and Austin operations.[58]

55 *Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas, "Your Texas Economy"; Texas Economic Development and Tourism Office, Office of the Governor.*

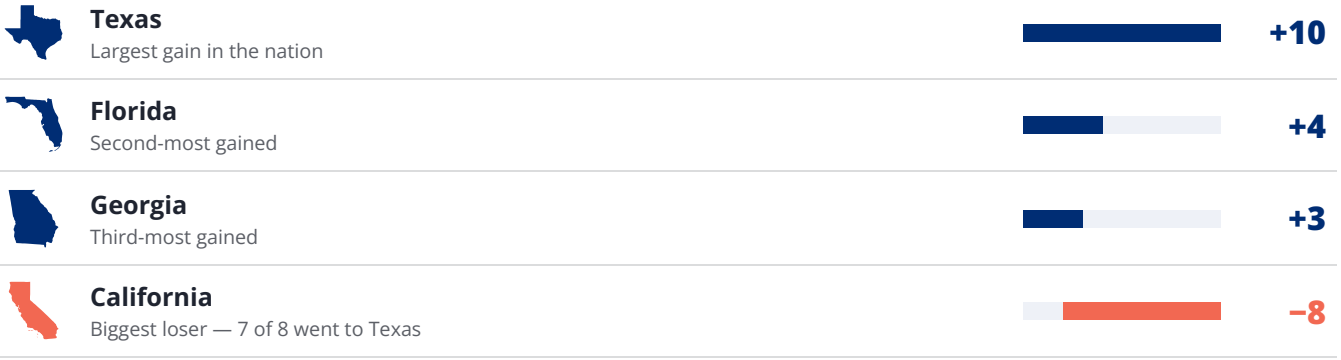
56 *Office of the Texas Governor, "Texas Wins Governor's Cup for Record-Smashing 14th Year in a Row," March 2, 2026 (more than 1,400 projects, more than 42,000 new jobs, more than $75 billion in capital investment); Site Selection, Governor's Cup rankings, 2026.*

57 *Ibid.*

58 *Office of the Texas Governor; National Institute of Standards and Technology, "CHIPS for America: Samsung Electronics, Taylor and Austin, Texas." The $17 billion figure is the original 2021 Taylor commitment; larger totals reported by the company and Commerce cover both Taylor and Austin over multiple years and should not be added to it.*

Figure 9. Texas is winning the Fortune 500 relocation race

Net change in Fortune 500 headquarters by state, 2018–2023



57
Fortune 500 HQs in Texas today — the most of any state

7 of 8
California departures that landed in Texas

Source: CBRE, "Change Among the Fortune 500," 2018–2023; Fortune 500 (2026).

More than 51,000 Texans already work in semiconductors, the second largest such workforce in the country.[59] The process engineers work in statistics and applied mathematics; the equipment technicians work to precise tolerance specifications; and, before a single chip ships, pipefitters, welders, electricians and drywall crews have to raise the building itself.[60]

The pattern repeats across sectors. At Starbase on the Gulf Coast, more than 3,000 people design, build and launch orbital-class rockets.[61] In Dallas, Goldman Sachs is building its largest U.S. campus outside New York.[62] High-tech employment overall has grown at more than double the state's rate for a decade.[63] Each of those workplaces runs on applied mathematics.

And all of that growth has to be built. Texas issues more single-family home permits and employs more construction workers than any other state.[64]

59 *Texas Economic Development Corporation, "Texas's Drive for Semiconductor Chip Production Fuels Tens of Thousands of Job Opportunities."*

60 *Ibid. Job postings for Samsung Austin Semiconductor process-engineering roles at the Taylor and Austin operations list statistical process control among core requirements (e.g., "CVD Process Engineer," posting accessed Aug. 2026), and the company posts equipment-technician roles at the Taylor site.*

61 *Texas Public Radio, "City of Starbase becomes official at Elon Musk's SpaceX rocket site in South Texas." Figure reflects site employment, not city population.*

62 *WFAA, "Goldman Sachs reveals plans for new Dallas campus."*

63 *Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas, "Texas high tech shakes off post-pandemic slump, readies new growth path."*

64 *U.S. Census Bureau, Building Permits Survey (2025); National Association of Home Builders, "Building Permits by State"; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Employment Statistics, state construction employment, and "Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics, May 2024."*

Figure 10. Math-intensive industry growth in Texas

25 of 40

Fortune 500 companies that moved to Texas are in math-heavy industries

140,002

Single-family homebuilding permits, No. 1 in the nation

47.8M sq ft

Industrial space under construction statewide, mid-2025

121%

Growth in financial services GDP in a decade, vs. 72% in New York, with as many stock exchanges as New York City

$9.3B

Semiconductor capital investment since 2023

+177,900

Jobs added in a year, led by professional services

1 in 3

Texas jobs is already in a math-intensive sector. The jobs of Texas' future will depend on math proficiency today's students do not have.

Source: National Association of Home Builders analysis of U.S. Census Bureau Building Permits Survey, 2025 (single-family permits); Partnership for New York City, Texas's Competitive Edge, analysis of Lightcast data (financial services GRP growth); Office of the Governor, Texas Semiconductor Innovation Fund, as reported by the Texas Tribune, July 2026 (semiconductor capital investment); Texas Workforce Commission, June 2026 employment release (jobs added over the year); Fortune 500 relocations: Texas 2036 analysis of Fortune 500 (2026) and CBRE headquarters data; industrial space under construction: CBRE, Texas industrial market figures, Q2 2025, as reported by Realty News Report, "The Texas Industrial Revolution," Aug. 21, 2025.

The common thread throughout this growth is the demand for math, from the engineers designing new plants to the crews building the homes and offices Texans spend their lives in.

The fastest-growing high-wage jobs run on math

The Texas Workforce Commission projects that eight of the 10 fastest-growing high-wage, high-demand occupations in Texas are in STEM fields, and that computer and mathematical occupations alone will add nearly 100,000 positions between 2022 and 2032.[65]

Those projections were made before the current wave of AI adoption, and no occupation-level forecast is certain. The demand itself is broad. Growing occupations require math at every credential level, from four-year engineering degrees to short-term construction and manufacturing certificates.

The growth is already here. Whether the next generation of Texans gets to work in these industries depends in large part on the state's math classrooms.

65 *Texas 2036 analysis of Texas Workforce Commission, "Report on Texas Growth Occupations, 2025," ranking high-wage, high-demand occupations by projected percent growth 2022–2032 using TWC/TEA STEM designations; Texas Workforce Commission, Texas Labor Analysis, 2022–2032 statewide occupational projections, computer and mathematical occupations.*

SECTION 3

The Skilled Trades Run on Math:

From the First Job to the Master License

Key Takeaways

- **Entry-Level Trade Work Runs on Middle School Math:** The electrician, carpentry and HVAC tasks in this section draw on standards Texas teaches in grades six through nine: one-variable equations, the Pythagorean theorem, slope, and proportional reasoning.
- **Many Texas Students Miss Exactly Those Skills:** On released STAAR items aligned to the standards the trades use, the share of Texas students missing the item ranged from roughly 30% to more than 70%.
- **Advancement Sits Behind Math-Heavy Exams:** About one in five attempts at the calculations portions of the Texas journeyman and master electrician exams succeed, and those exams separate a $37,920 entry-level wage from the $80,300-plus top of the ladder.

Math is core to Texas' economic growth, and math's role in college STEM programs has drawn wide attention. Less discussed is the importance of math in the skilled trades. Entry-level trade work requires math taught in grades six through nine, and advancement in the trades requires even higher-level math. The skilled trades are a strong career option for many Texas students, and state policymakers and school administrators are increasingly focused on them as a path to high-wage, high-demand work without a four-year degree.

Some proposals for moving more students into the trades call for alternative and less demanding academic standards for those students. That approach misreads what the trades require, and it undervalues the professions it means to promote. Lowering academic standards or benchmarks for career-oriented students leaves them underprepared for what their career success actually requires.

This section makes two points. Many entry-level trades jobs require middle and high school math that a large share of Texas students do not currently have. Secondly, advancing in the trades requires passing difficult licensing exams that require high levels of math proficiency.

Construction contributes about 5.1% of Texas GDP, and in the Associated General Contractors' national workforce survey, 92% of contractors reported difficulty filling open positions.[66] That shortage constrains how fast Texas can build.

66 *U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, GDP by state, construction share, Texas; Associated General Contractors of America, 2025 Workforce Survey. The 92% figure is national, not Texas-specific.*

What math is needed to enter the trades

Entry-level construction work rests on the standards Texas teaches in middle and high school. The pages that follow track one trade, the electrician, from first job to master license, with carpentry and HVAC alongside to show the breadth of the pattern.[67]

Figure 11. The job site runs on math: trade tasks and the Texas standards that teach them

On the job site…	…the math being used	…where Texas teaches it
Carpenter squares a foundation with the "3-4-5 rule"	Pythagorean theorem	Grade 8 TEKS 8.7(C)
Plumber grades a vent to its required fall	Slope, "rise over run"	Grade 8 TEKS 8.4(B)–(C) Algebra I TEKS A.3(A)
HVAC tech runs a Manual J load calculation	Substituting knowns, solving for the unknown variable	Grade 8 TEKS 8.8(C) Algebra I TEKS A.5(A)
Concrete order for a slab pour	Volume, unit conversion (cubic yards), percentages	Grade 6 TEKS 6.5(B) Grade 7 TEKS 7.9(A)

Source: Texas 2036 analysis of TEKS mathematics standards.

An electrician's working math is the math of the middle grades and Algebra I. Ohm's law and voltage-drop checks are one-variable equations, and the service-load calculation, the arithmetic that decides how much demand a home's electrical system can safely carry, is multiplication, percentages, and the same kind of one-step equation Texas teaches in sixth grade.[68]

The same standards surface across the trades. Carpenters square a foundation using the "3-4-5 rule," which eighth grade math teachers refer to as the Pythagorean theorem.[69]

67 *Texas 2036 analysis of TEKS mathematics standards (Figures 11 and 12).*

68 *Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation, Electrician Candidate Information Bulletin (PSI examination content outlines); 19 Texas Administrative Code §111.26(b)(9)(A) and (b)(10)(A) (grade 6 TEKS 6.9(A) and 6.10(A): writing and solving one-variable, one-step equations).*

69 *TEKS 8.7(C), Pythagorean theorem.*

HVAC technicians size ducts, determine static pressure, and run Manual J load calculations to cool a house through a Texas summer. Those calculations come down to substituting known values and solving for an unknown, the same work eighth grade math and Algebra I require.[70] Figure 12 pairs each trade's task with the standard Texas teaches and the STAAR question that measures it.

Figure 12. Three trades, one set of standards: what Texas teaches, what it measures, and what the trade requires

ELECTRICIAN

WHAT TEXAS TEACHES
Grade 6 TEKS 6.9(A)

Write one-variable, one-step equations to represent constraints or conditions within problems.

19 TAC §111.26(b)(9)(A)

▼

WHAT TEXAS MEASURES
STAAR Grade 6 Math — Q27 (May 2022)

There are 18 floors in a building. Each floor has the same number of offices. Altogether there are 396 offices in the building. Which equation can be used to find f, the number of offices on each floor?

A 18 − f = 396 · B 18f = 396 · C f/18 = 396 · D 18 + f = 396

Answer: B

▼

WHAT THE TRADE REQUIRES
Master exam load calculation: the service-current line

A 240-volt residential service carries a computed load of 45,600 watts. Which equation can be used to find I, the service current in amps?

A 240 + I = 45,600 · B 240I = 45,600 · C I/240 = 45,600 · D 240 − I = 45,600

Answer: B — so I = 190 amps

TDLR, FY2025: 19.1% of candidates pass the master exam calculations portion.

CARPENTER

WHAT TEXAS TEACHES
Grade 8 TEKS 8.7(C)

Use the Pythagorean theorem, and its converse, to solve problems.

19 TAC §111.28(b)(7)(C)

▼

WHAT TEXAS MEASURES
STAAR Grade 8 Math — Q25 (May 2022)

Which measurements could represent the side lengths in feet of a right triangle?

A 10 ft, 24 ft, 26 ft · B 14 ft, 14 ft, 14 ft · C 3 ft, 3 ft, 18 ft · D 2 ft, 3 ft, 5 ft

Answer: A

▼

WHAT THE TRADE REQUIRES
Squaring a foundation (the "3-4-5 rule")

A carpenter marks 6 feet along one wall line and 8 feet along the other. What must the diagonal measure for the corner to be square?

A 9 ft · B 10 ft · C 12 ft · D 14 ft

Answer: B

HVAC TECHNICIAN

WHAT TEXAS TEACHES
Algebra I TEKS A.3(A)

Determine the slope of a line given two points, a table, a graph, or an equation.

19 TAC §111.39(b)(3)(A)

▼

WHAT TEXAS MEASURES
STAAR Algebra I — Q48 (May 2022)

The graph of a line passes through the points (−3, 1) and (5, 8). What is the slope of the line?

F 9/2 · G 7/8 · H −9/2 · J −7/8

Answer: G

▼

WHAT THE TRADE REQUIRES
Condensate drain slope ("rise over run")

A condensate drain line must fall 1/4 inch for every foot of horizontal run. The drain runs 18 feet from the air handler to its termination. How much lower must the termination end be?

A 2.5 in. · B 4.5 in. · C 6 in. · D 18 in.

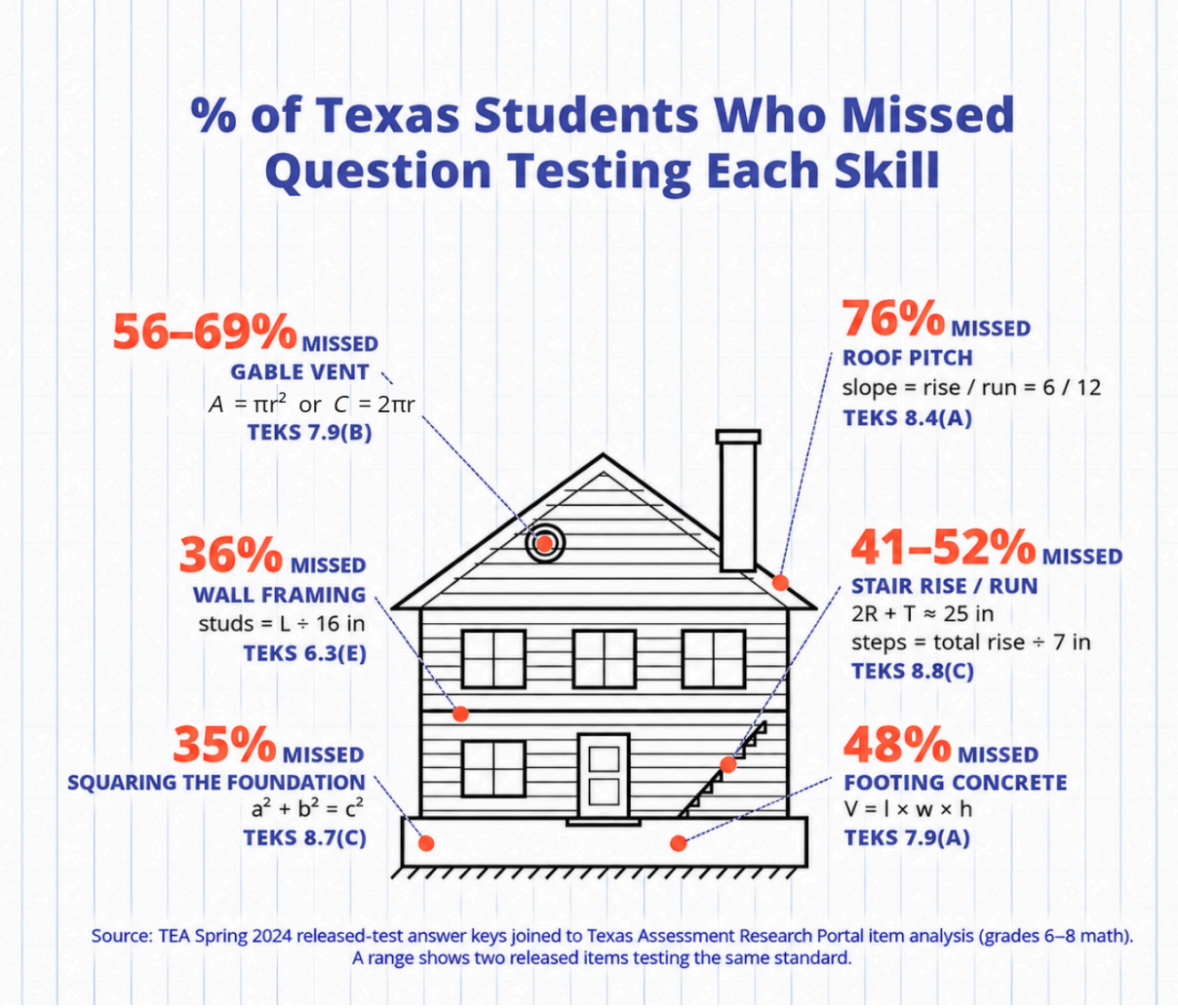
Answer: B

Source: Texas 2036 analysis of TEKS mathematics standards, TEA released STAAR items (May 2022), and Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation examination content.

70 *TEKS 8.8(C), one-variable equations.*

Texas 2036 mapped the math skills used across trades in building a house to the state standards that teach them, then examined student performance on released STAAR items aligned to each standard. Performance varied widely by skill. On some standards, roughly 30% of Texas students missed the aligned released item. On others, more than 70% did.[71] Figure 13 maps the standards to the trades that use them.

Figure 13. Mathematics standards used by trade in residential construction, with Texas student performance on aligned released STAAR items



Source: Texas 2036 analysis of TEA Spring 2024 released-test answer keys joined to Texas Assessment Research Portal item analysis, grades 6–8 mathematics. A range shows two released items testing the same standard.

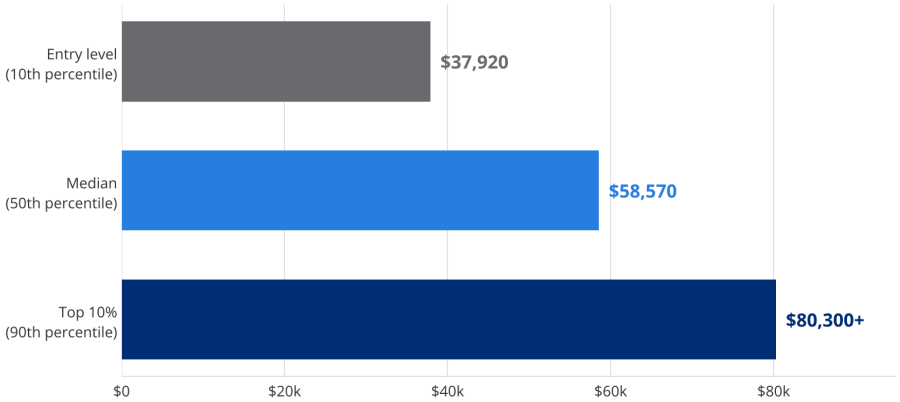
71 *Texas 2036 analysis of Spring 2024 released STAAR mathematics items, grades 6–8, mapped to TEKS student expectations using released-test answer keys joined to Texas Assessment Research Portal item analysis. Where two released items test the same standard, a range is shown.*

What math is needed to advance in the trades

For an electrician, licenses define the career ladder. Each exam passed unlocks higher-value work, and the range of earnings within the trade is wide.[72]

The lowest-paid 10% of Texas electricians earn about $37,900 a year; the median electrician earns about $58,600; and the top 10% earn more than $80,300. Those figures understate what the top of the license ladder pays. The federal wage survey counts employees only, so master electricians who hold contractor licenses and run their own businesses are not in the distribution.[73]

Figure 14. Texas electrician annual wages by percentile, May 2025



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics, May 2025, Electricians (47-2111), Texas. Employees only; self-employed contractors are not surveyed.

Figure 15. The journeyman's exam runs on Algebra I

On the journeyman's exam…	…the math being used	…where Texas teaches it (TEKS / 19 TAC)
Ohm's law and power problems (E = I × R, P = I × E), rearranged on the exam to find current, resistance, or power	Solving literal equations (formulas) for a specified variable	Algebra I TEKS A.12(E) — 19 TAC §111.39(b)(12)(E)
Sizing conductors for voltage drop, where the drop grows with every foot of circuit length (VD = 2 × K × I × L ÷ CM)	Linear relationships: rate of change (slope) and evaluating linear formulas	Algebra I TEKS A.3(A)–(B) — 19 TAC §111.39(b)(3)(A)–(B)
Service and feeder demand-load calculations, working backward from a total load to the unknown circuit value	Solving linear equations in one variable	Algebra I TEKS A.5(A) — 19 TAC §111.39(b)(5)(A)

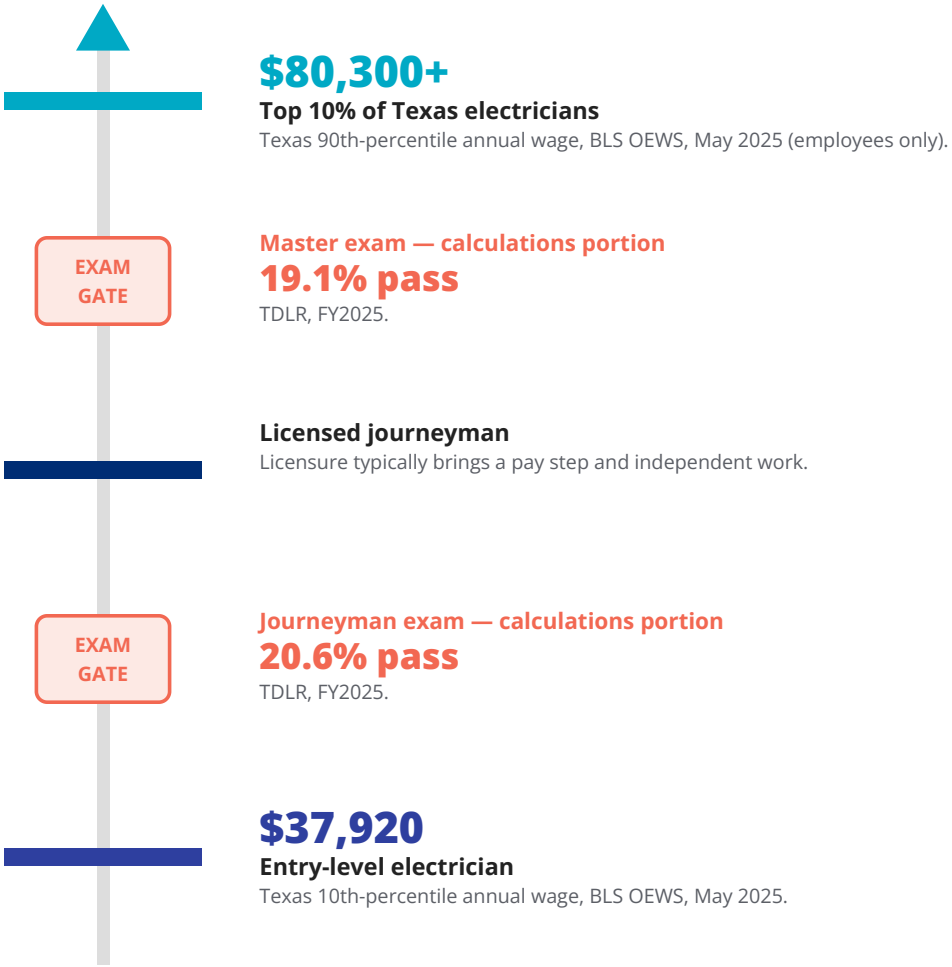
Source: Texas 2036 analysis of Texas journeyman electrician examination content (TDLR/PSI) and TEKS mathematics standards.

72 *Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation, electrician license types and examination requirements.*

73 *U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics, May 2025, Electricians (47-2111), Texas," https://www.bls.gov/oes/tables.htm (May 2025 state file; employment 76,770; 10th percentile $37,920; median $58,570; 90th percentile $80,300; national 90th percentile $108,510). The OEWS survey "does not cover the self-employed, owners and partners in unincorporated firms," https://www.bls.gov/oes/oes_ques.htm. Figures reflect the 10th, 50th, and 90th percentiles.*

Reaching the top requires demonstrating math proficiency. About 20% of attempts at the calculations portion of the Texas journeyman electrician exam succeed, and about 19% of attempts at the master's electrician exam.[74] Those sections are not outliers. Across all 26,303 electrician exams that the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation (TDLR) administered in fiscal 2025, the overall pass rate was 23.5%, and the calculations portions were the lowest-passing components at both license levels.

Figure 16. Mathematics content of Texas electrician licensing examinations



Source: Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation, Electrician Candidate Information Bulletin (PSI examination content outlines) and Electrician Exam Statistics, Fiscal Year 2025; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics, May 2025.

Texas' economy is rich in math-heavy industries. More importantly, Texas students need math skills so that they can share in the state's prosperity. This is particularly clear in the trades, where math is used every day and the ability to pass mathematics-focused exams is a prerequisite to building a better life for workers and their families.

74 *Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation, Electrician Candidate Information Bulletin (PSI examination content outlines). Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation, "Electrician Exam Statistics, Fiscal Year 2025" (Sept. 1, 2024–Aug. 31, 2025): journeyman calculations 20.56%, journeyman NEC 24.46%, master calculations 19.08%, master NEC 22.21%; all exams 23.50% (6,181 of 26,303). https://www.tdlr.texas.gov/electricians/elecExamStats2025.htm. Pass rates are per exam administered, including retakes.*

SECTION 4

What Texas Built, What Changed, and What It Has Begun to Rebuild:

Forty Years of Education Policy

Key Takeaways

- **Texas Built a Framework That Worked:** From 1993 to 2011, the state paired rigorous standards with annual measurement and public ratings with consequences. As a result, eighth-grade math scores rose 32 points, the nation's second-largest gain.
- **Then It Set Several Pieces Aside:** Between 2009 and 2013, Texas dropped the third-grade promotion rule, moved textbook adoption to districts, cut required high school exams from 15 to five, and flattened school ratings to two categories.
- **The Rebuild Is Real but Incomplete:** Since 2015, A–F ratings, Reading Academies, HB 1605 curriculum funding, SB 2124 automatic enrollment, and HB 2 math academies and screeners have restored much of the structure, but the newest pieces are only beginning to reach classrooms.

Texas has improved math performance at scale before. During the 1990s and 2000s, the state paired rigorous academic standards with regular measurement, public reporting, and supports for educators and struggling students. Several parts of that framework changed late in the first decade of the 2000s, and Texas has spent the last decade rebuilding elements of it.[75]

A culture of high expectations, 1993–2011

Between its first NAEP administration in 1990 and 2011, Texas posted the nation's second-largest eighth-grade math gain, 32 points, or roughly three grade levels of learning.[76]

That period of improvement spanned governors of both parties and coincided with high academic standards, rigorous annual measurement and public reporting of results with consequences attached for schools and districts.

Texas' current academic standards originate from that era. The State Board of Education adopted the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills in 1997, first taught in 1998–99, and last revised the math standards in 2012.[77]

75 *See the sources cited throughout this section; Legislative Budget Board, "Texas Public School Accountability" (1994).*

76 *Texas 2036 analysis of NAEP Data Explorer unrounded state mean scale scores.*

77 *Texas Education Agency, "TEKS Review and Revision." The mathematics TEKS were adopted by the State Board of Education in 1997 and took effect September 1, 1998 (19 TAC ch. 111), making 1998–99 the first school year taught under them.*

In 1993, Gov. Ann Richards signed the modern school accountability rating system into law. It built on groundwork from Ross Perot's 1984 reform package, which included the "no pass, no play" rule. By the Legislative Budget Board's 1994 assessment, Texas had built the most comprehensive public school accountability system in the country at the time.[78]

Gov. George W. Bush maintained that focus from 1995 until he left in December 2000 to prepare for the presidency. He pushed to raise the rigor of the state's academic standards, the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills,[79] and invested in educator development through the state's Reading Academies. He also sought to extend that model to mathematics and science instruction.[80]

Texas changed several parts of that framework

Texas began dismantling parts of that structure in the first decade of the 2000s. The unwinding started with retention, moved to textbooks, and ended with the rating system and the tests behind it. These changes occurred as Texas' earlier math gains began to stall and later reversed.

The grade-advancement requirement in third grade reading was eliminated after the 2008–09 school year.[81] The fifth and eighth grade requirements remained but were substantially weakened in practice, with grade placement committees promoting most students who did not pass. Fewer eighth graders were retained in 2008–09 than in any of the 10 preceding years, and fewer than 1,000 fifth graders were retained that year.[82] Retention requirements were eliminated entirely in 2021.[83]

In 2011, the state shifted textbook approval and adoption to school districts, ending a centralized adoption system that had operated for roughly 90 years and had been a state responsibility since the 1918 constitutional amendment guaranteeing free, state-purchased textbooks.[84]

78 *SB 7, 73rd Legislature (1993); Texas Legislative Budget Board, "Texas Public School Accountability: A Report Card on Implementation of the System" (1994), https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED394205.pdf.*

79 *House Research Organization, Texas House of Representatives, focus report on the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, https://hro.house.texas.gov/focus/teks.pdf.*

80 *The University of Texas at Austin, Charles A. Dana Center, "Our History."*

81 *Texas Education Agency, "Grade-Level Retention and Student Performance in Texas Public Schools," https://tea.texas.gov/data-reports/school-performance/accountability-research/. Third grade students were required to pass the state reading test to advance to fourth grade beginning in 2002–03. Fifth grade reading and mathematics requirements began in 2004–05 and eighth grade requirements in 2007–08.*

82 *Texas Education Agency, "Grade-Level Retention in Texas Public Schools, 2008–09." Under the grade placement committee process, a committee including the child's parents and school officials could advance a student who was judged likely to perform on grade level with additional accelerated instruction the following year.*

83 *HB 4545, 87th Legislature (2021); Texas Education Agency, "HB 4545 Tutoring, Rider 95." HB 4545 eliminated grade retention in grades 5 and 8.*

84 *Texas Constitution, Article VII; Texas Education Agency, "An Overview of the History of Public Education in Texas."*

Perhaps the most significant change came in 2013, when the state replaced the differentiated rating structure it had used for two decades with a two-category system, *Met Standard* or *Improvement Required*. The new system provided considerably less differentiation among schools and districts, identifying only the lowest of the low performers. In 2013, 1,136 of the state's 1,228 districts, 92.5%, received *a Met Standard* rating.[85]

The same session narrowed what the state tested. HB 5 (83R, 2013) from 2013 cut the end-of-course exams required for graduation from 15 to five and removed Algebra II from the default graduation plan. It also converted the Algebra II exam into an assessment that districts may give at their option.[86] Since the 2014–15 school year, most Texas graduates have not been required to take Algebra II, and the state has had no end-of-course measure of mathematics beyond Algebra I.

At the same time, Texas raised the rigor of the test itself. STAAR, first administered in the 2011–12 school year, set a higher bar than the TAKS test it replaced.[87] The result was a system in which assessment results continued to identify differences in student performance, while the accountability system itself gave parents and communities much less information about performance across schools and districts.

What has been rebuilt (and expanded) since 2015

Since 2015, Texas has moved to reverse several of those decisions.

- **2015 and 2017.** HB 2804 (84R, 2015) created the A–F school accountability system, and HB 22 (85R, 2017) revised it before the first campus ratings were issued in 2018, restoring differentiated and higher quality information for parents.[88]
- **2019.** HB 3 (86R, 2019) required K–3 teachers and principals statewide to complete Reading Academies, and created the Teacher Incentive Allotment, which lets top-performing teachers earn substantially above base pay.[89]

85 *Texas Education Agency, "Accountability Rating System Archives," https://rptsvr1.tea.texas.gov/perfreport/account/index.html. Texas Education Agency, "2013 Accountability Ratings Highlights" (Jan. 2014): 1,136 of 1,228 districts (92.5%) rated Met Standard or Met Alternative Standard; 80 districts (6.5%) rated Improvement Required.*

86 *HB 5, 83rd Legislature, Regular Session (2013); Legislative Budget Board, Fiscal Note, HB 5, Conference Committee Report, May 25, 2013, https://capitol.texas.gov/tlodocs/83R/fiscalnotes/html/HB00005F.htm ("The bill would reduce the number of end-of-course assessments from 15 to 5… limit end-of-course assessments to Algebra I, Biology, English I, English II, and United States History"); Texas Education Code §28.025(b-1) (foundation program: Algebra I, geometry, and one advanced mathematics course) and §39.0238 (optional Algebra II and English III postsecondary readiness assessments).*

87 *Texas Education Agency, "State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR)."*

88 *HB 2804, 84th Legislature (2015); HB 22, 85th Legislature (2017); Texas Education Agency, "Accountability."*

89 *HB 3, 86th Legislature (2019).*

- **2023.** HB 1605 (88R, 2023) created an incentive-based system to get high-quality instructional materials back into classrooms, providing up to $60 per student for state-reviewed materials and requiring the State Board of Education to review and certify whether materials meet the standard.[90] SB 2124 (88R, 2023) made enrollment in advanced sixth grade math automatic for students scoring in the top 40% on the fifth-grade assessment, with a parent opt-out.[91] By 2026, 32% of Texas seventh graders took the eighth-grade math STAAR, double the 16% of 2023, including more than 65,000 students from low-income families.[92]
- **2025.** HB 2 (89R, 2025) required numeracy screeners for every student in kindergarten through third grade and required K–3 educators to complete Mathematics Achievement Academies. It also extended Additional Days School Year summer funding through eighth grade.[93] HB 8 (89-2, 2025) set a 15-year goal of positioning Texas among the top five states on NAEP and in postsecondary readiness, to be pursued through cut-score increases at the five-year accountability refresh, beginning in 2028.[94]

Advanced math enrollment doubled in three years

In 2023, Texas passed SB 2124, which automatically enrolls students scoring in the top 40% on fifth grade math into advanced sixth grade math unless a parent opts out.

Reaching Algebra I in eighth grade opens the door to calculus, statistics and dual-credit math in high school.

The results came fast. By 2026, 32% of Texas seventh graders were taking eighth-grade math, double the share of 2023, including more than 65,000 students from low-income families. Texas is now among the leading states guaranteeing automatic access to advanced math.

Source: Texas 2036 analysis of Texas Education Agency, Texas Assessment Research Portal.

Texas has now rebuilt several key pieces of its earlier framework, but many of those changes are recent, and their implementation remains incomplete. Other states have taken up approaches to math improvement, with many similar to those Texas pioneered decades ago. They are often combining several strategies and sustaining them over multiple years. Their experiences offer useful lessons as Texas considers what comes next.

90 *HB 1605, 88th Legislature (2023).*

91 *SB 2124, 88th Legislature (2023), https://capitol.texas.gov/BillLookup/History.aspx?LegSess=88R&Bill=SB2124.*

92 *Texas 2036 analysis of Texas Education Agency, Texas Assessment Research Portal, grade 7 students taking the grade 8 mathematics STAAR by economic disadvantage status, 2023 and 2026.*

93 *HB 2, 89th Legislature (2025), https://capitol.texas.gov/BillLookup/History.aspx?LegSess=89R&Bill=HB2.*

94 *HB 8 (89-2, 2025); Texas Education Agency, "Updated 2028 A-F Accountability Rating System Framework." HB 8 requires TEA to use a specified process for raising cut scores toward a 15-year goal of top-five NAEP and postsecondary readiness performance, and prohibits raising cut scores outside the scheduled five-year refresh cycle.*

SECTION 5

Four States Are Running the Texas Playbook:

Alabama, Tennessee, Louisiana and Mississippi

Key Takeaways

- **Alabama Put a Math Coach in Every Elementary School:** Under its 2022 Numeracy Act, Alabama has placed more than 840 coaches and became the only state whose 2024 fourth grade NAEP math score exceeded its pre-pandemic level.
- **Tennessee Made Tutoring Permanent:** Tennessee put roughly $200 million behind TN ALL Corps, wrote tutoring into its funding formula when federal relief expired, and now outscores Texas in eighth grade math after trailing by 16 points in 2011.
- **Louisiana and Mississippi Stayed the Course:** Louisiana has aligned curriculum review, training, coaching and assessment to the same standards for a decade, and Mississippi enacted a Math Act modeled on its 2013 literacy law in April 2026.

While Texas math scores slid, four Southern states picked specific math strategies, funded them, measured them, and held them in place long enough to see results. Alabama, Tennessee, Louisiana and Mississippi offer different examples of how states have combined coaching, tutoring, instructional materials, screening and accountability. Their experiences do not isolate the effect of any one policy, but they do show how several of the strategies Texas is considering can operate at scale.[95]

Alabama: a math coach in every elementary school

In 2019, Alabama fourth graders ranked last in the nation in math, 52nd of 52 jurisdictions.[96]

The Alabama Legislature answered with one comprehensive bill, the Numeracy Act of 2022.[97] The legislation:

- Placed a trained math coach in every K–5 school in the state, and two in schools with 800 or more students;
- Created an Office of Mathematics Improvement in the state education agency;
- Required universal math screeners for early problem detection; and
- Instituted intensive support for the lowest-performing schools.[98]

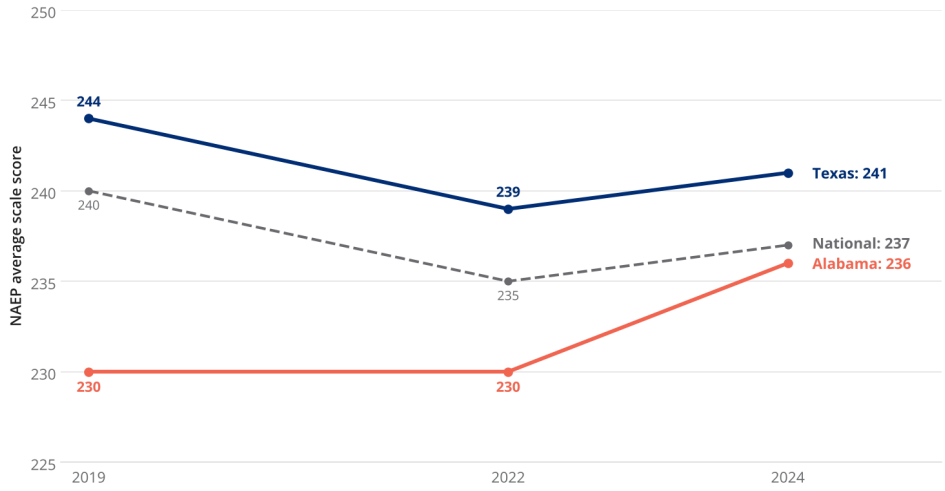
95 *See the four state profiles in this section for each program, its funding, and its sources.*

96 *National Center for Education Statistics, NAEP 2019 grade 4 mathematics state results. Rankings cover the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Department of Defense schools.*

97 *Alabama Numeracy Act, Act 2022-249 (SB 171, 2022), Ala. Code §16-6H-1 et seq.*

98 *Alabama Numeracy Act, Act 2022-249 (2022); National Council on Teacher Quality, "Alabama's Bold Action."*

Figure 17. Alabama NAEP fourth grade mathematics, 2019–2024



Source: Texas 2036 analysis of NAEP Data Service, National Center for Education Statistics. Alabama posted the largest fourth-grade gain of any state, 2019–2024.

The coaching corps is the centerpiece of Alabama's reforms. With more than 840 coaches placed so far, the state is on the way to having a math coach in every K–5 school by the 2027–28 school year, with annual state funding growing from $40 million in 2024 to $68 million in 2025.[99]

After two years of implementation, Alabama recorded larger fourth-grade math gains than any other state since 2019 and became the only state whose 2024 fourth grade NAEP math score exceeded its pre-pandemic level.[100] Those gains arrived before the program reached full scale. The Numeracy Act's coaches will not be in every elementary school until the 2027–28 school year.

The mechanism is well studied. Training shows a teacher what works, and a coach in the classroom helps the teacher apply it with real students. Across 60 rigorous studies, instructional coaching improved teaching quality and student achievement more than nearly any other form of professional development.[101]

Texas has already adopted two of the Numeracy Act's four planks. HB 2 (89R, 2025) requires the universal math screeners. The Mathematics Achievement Academies provide structured, state-developed training in evidence-based math teaching aligned to the TEKS and to approved materials.[102] Texas has not advanced the other two reforms, the coaching infrastructure and a dedicated office with intensive support for the lowest-performing schools.

99 *National Council on Teacher Quality, "Alabama's Bold Action: Turning the Tide with High-Quality Instructional Materials, Professional Learning, and Coaching." Alliance for Learning Innovation, "How State R&D Investments Are Improving Math Outcomes in Alabama" (2026): more than 840 elementary math coaches, one in every K–5 school by 2027–28. A+ Education Partnership, Education Trust Fund budget tracking: $40 million (FY2024) and $68 million (FY2025) for Numeracy Act implementation.*

100 *National Center for Education Statistics, "2024 Mathematics State Snapshot Report: Alabama, Grade 4." Texas 2036 analysis of NAEP Data Explorer, grade 4 mathematics, 2019–2024, all jurisdictions.*

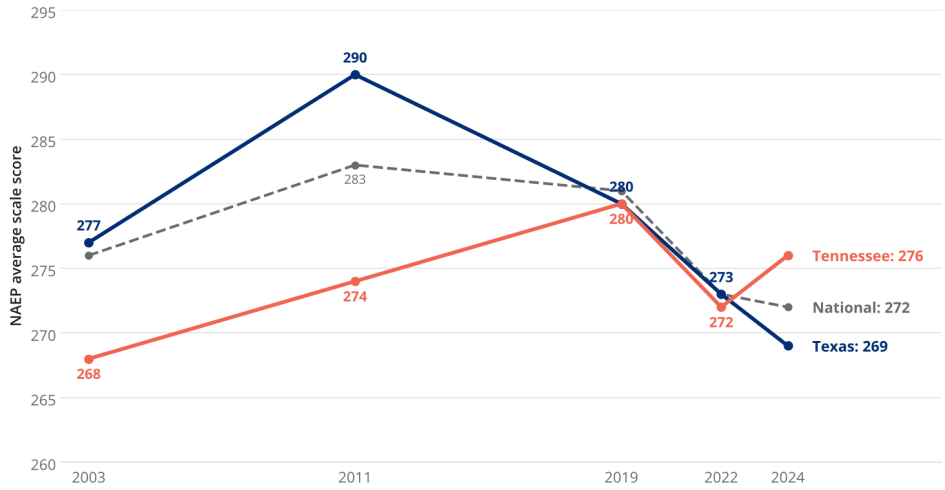
101 *Kraft, Blazar and Hogan (2018), "The Effect of Teacher Coaching on Instruction and Achievement: A Meta-Analysis of the Causal Evidence," Review of Educational Research 88(4).*

102 *HB 2, 89th Legislature (2025); Texas Education Agency, Mathematics Achievement Academies.*

Tennessee: tutoring made permanent

In 2011, Texas outscored Tennessee on NAEP eighth grade math 290 to 274, a 16-point advantage.[103] By 2024, the order had reversed, with Tennessee at 276 and Texas at 269.[104] Most of that reversal came from Texas' decline, but Tennessee held near its earlier level through a pandemic in which no state improved on its 2019 eighth grade math score.[105] It now leads Texas by seven points. Figure 18 shows this trend.

Figure 18. Texas and Tennessee NAEP eighth grade mathematics, 2003–2024



Source: Texas 2036 analysis of NAEP Data Service, National Center for Education Statistics. Tennessee passed Texas in 2019 and led by seven points in 2024.

Where many states treated tutoring as a temporary pandemic response, Tennessee made it a permanent feature of its system. The state put roughly $200 million behind TN ALL Corps, reached more than 200,000 students, and when federal relief funds expired, added tutoring into its state funding formula rather than letting the program lapse.[106]

Over the same period, as Tennessee expanded and sustained its tutoring strategy, eighth-grade math proficiency on the state's general assessment rose from 24.8% in 2021 to 38.3% in 2026. Counting the eighth graders who took the Algebra I end-of-course exam instead, the 2026 figure is approximately 44%.[107] On the national test, Tennessee fourth graders matched their pre-pandemic score in 2024, while most states remained below their 2019 levels.[108]

103 *NAEP Data Explorer, Texas and Tennessee grade 8 mathematics, 2011.*

104 *Ibid., 2024; National Center for Education Statistics, "2024 Mathematics State Snapshot Report: Tennessee, Grade 8." National Center for Education Statistics, The Nation's Report Card, 2024 mathematics state results compared with 2019.*

105 *National Assessment Governing Board, news release on the 2024 Nation's Report Card (January 2025). No state scored above its 2019 grade 8 mathematics average in 2024.*

106 *National Student Support Accelerator, "Tennessee Investment in Student Achievement."*

107 *Tennessee Department of Education, "State Assessment Data Files." Tennessee's general assessment shows eighth grade math proficiency rising from 24.8% in 2021 to 38.3% in 2026. Including eighth graders taking Algebra I end-of-course exams, the 2026 figure is approximately 44%.*

108 *National Center for Education Statistics, "2024 Mathematics State Snapshot Report: Tennessee, Grade 4."*

Texas requires tutoring, too. HB 4545 (87R, 2021), as revised by HB 1416 (88R, 2023), requires up to 30 hours of supplemental instruction for each failed STAAR exam. On paper, the minimum hours are comparable to Tennessee's model.[109]

Four differences matter. Tennessee made its funding permanent through the formula. HB 4545 carried no new state appropriation; districts could apply existing compensatory education funds, which were not increased to cover the new costs.[110] Tennessee built its program as a state-managed delivery system while Texas assigned delivery to districts. And Texas allows a parent to modify or remove the requirement for an individual student by written request to the campus. Tennessee also ties tutoring to its third-grade promotion gate, while Texas has no equivalent policy.[111] Texas has funded a parent-directed delivery mechanism, the PASS program, though it currently covers early literacy only, a gap that Recommendation 5 addresses.[112]

Louisiana: curriculum quality, reviewed and rewarded

Louisiana made instructional materials a central part of its improvement strategy. Beginning in 2013, the state reviewed every curriculum offered to Louisiana classrooms and published results in three tiers, reaching full implementation in the 2016–17 school year.[113] Tier 1 fully aligns with the standards, Tier 2 partially aligns, and Tier 3 does not meet the state's non-negotiable criteria.

In the first year of reviews, one program out of 60 cleared the bar.[114]

Louisiana left failing materials on the market. It published the results and made better choices by districts easier with statewide contracts and discounts for Tier 1 materials, training dollars directed only toward providers teaching the state's standards, and public reviews written by Louisiana teachers using the products.[115]

By full implementation, 90% of Louisiana teachers were using Tier 1-rated curriculum.[116] A RAND study found Louisiana teachers more than 30 percentage points more likely than peers in other states to be using materials fully aligned to their state standards.[117]

Louisiana then went further by aligning teacher training and assessment to the same academic standards and holding that line for 10 years.[118]

109 *HB 4545, 87th Legislature (2021); HB 1416, 88th Legislature (2023); Texas Education Code §28.0211.*

110 *Texas Education Agency, "HB 4545 Tutoring, Rider 95." Implementation funds came from federal ESSER dollars; no state funds were assigned.*

111 *Tennessee Learning Loss Remediation and Student Acceleration Act (2021), Tenn. Code Ann. §49-6-3115.*

112 *Texas Education Agency, "HB 1416 FAQ," https://tea.texas.gov/curriculum-and-instruction/hb-1416-faq.pdf.*

113 *Louisiana Department of Education, "Instructional Materials Reviews."*

114 *Pondiscio (2017), "Louisiana Threads the Needle on Ed Reform," Education Next 17(4).*

115 *Louisiana Department of Education, "Instructional Materials Reviews."*

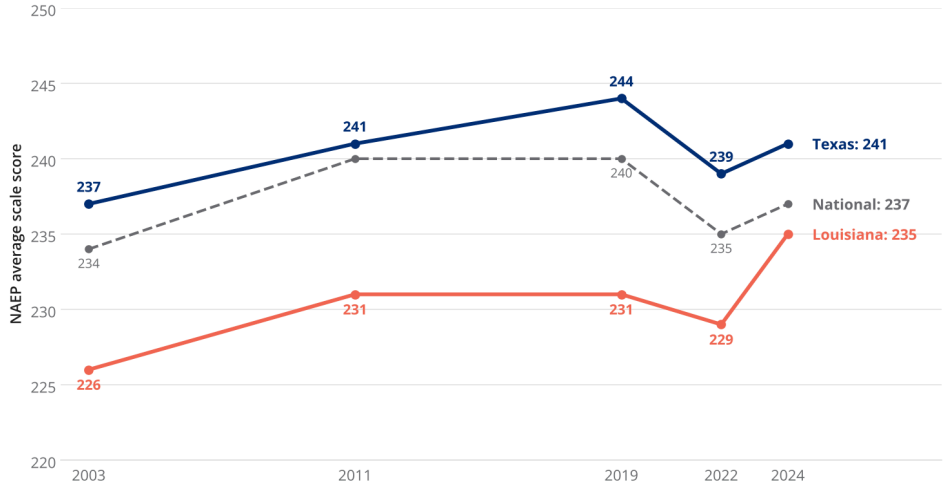
116 *Ibid.*

117 *Kaufman et al. (2018), "Aligned Curricula and Implementation of Common Core State Mathematics Standards," RAND Corporation.*

118 *Louisiana Department of Education, "Instructional Materials Reviews"; Louisiana Department of Education, Professional Learning Partner Guide.*

Texas has enacted part of this strategy. HB 1605 (88R, 2023) provided up to $60 per student to purchase state-reviewed, high-quality instructional materials.

Figure 19. Louisiana NAEP mathematics performance following curriculum review



Source: Texas 2036 analysis of NAEP Data Service, National Center for Education Statistics. Louisiana's 2024 fourth grade score is its highest on record.

Texas went beyond Louisiana by creating its own curriculum, Bluebonnet Learning, which reached roughly 1.1 million Texas students in its first year.[119] Texas has not yet aligned training and assessment behind the same standards or sustained that alignment over time.

Mississippi: applying a literacy playbook to math

Mississippi's early-literacy turnaround is one of the most studied education reform stories in the country. In 2013, the state passed the Literacy-Based Promotion Act, placing coaches and universal screeners in its elementary schools, and spent the following decade improving reading outcomes.[120]

In April 2026, Mississippi applied the same approach to math. The Mississippi Math Act, carried in an omnibus education bill, passed both chambers unanimously.[121] The legislation created a statewide math coaching program concentrated in grades two through six, required universal K–5 math screeners three times a year, and required an individualized math plan for every student identified as falling behind. It also established a fifth-grade algebra readiness indicator with a cut score on the fifth-grade assessment designed to flag students before they enter middle school.[122]

119 *State Board of Education, adoption of Bluebonnet Learning instructional materials (November 2024); Texas Education Agency, instructional materials adoption and district usage data.*

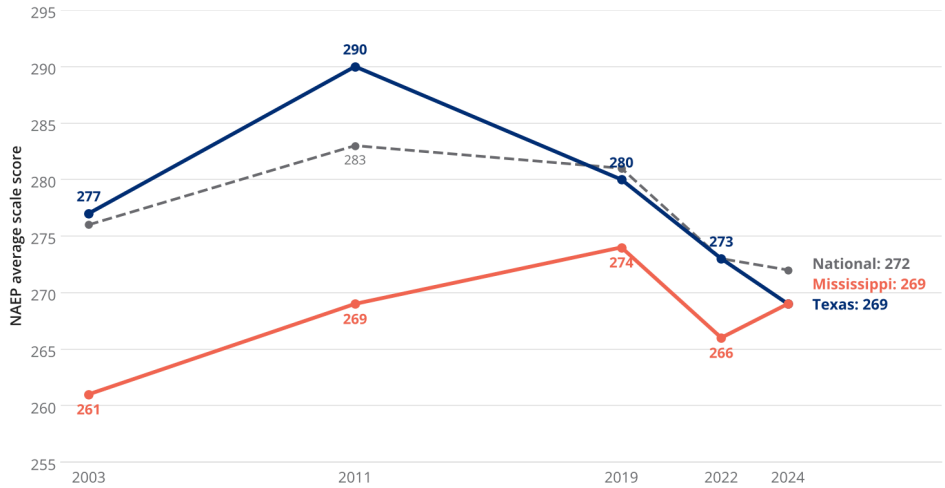
120 *Mississippi Literacy-Based Promotion Act (2013), Miss. Code Ann. §37-177-1 et seq.*

121 *Mississippi Math Act, SB 2294, 2026 Regular Session; Mississippi Legislature, SB 2294 (2026 Regular Session) bill status history. The Math Act provisions were carried in an omnibus education bill whose conference report was adopted unanimously in both chambers, Senate 52-0 and House 121-0.*

122 *Mississippi First, "SB 2294 Conference Report Summary." The algebra readiness indicator is a cut score on the fifth grade mathematics assessment, used to identify gaps that would affect success in Algebra I later and to alert sixth and seventh grade teachers to problem areas. Magnolia Tribune, "Civics, financial literacy, Math Act included in omnibus Mississippi education bill as session winds down," April 2, 2026: the SB 2294 conference report carrying the Math Act passed both chambers unanimously; coaching targets teachers in grades 2–6, with annual reporting beginning in 2026–27.*

Mississippi undertook that effort with an eighth grade NAEP math score identical to Texas', 269 in 2024, against a national public average of 272.[123] The two states are in the same position on the same measure. The difference is the response.

Figure 20. Texas and Mississippi NAEP eighth grade mathematics, 2003–2024



Source: Texas 2036 analysis of NAEP Data Service, National Center for Education Statistics. Texas and Mississippi both scored 269 in 2024.

None of these states rely on a single policy lever. Alabama pairs its coaches with high-quality instructional materials and screening. Louisiana runs high-dosage tutoring alongside near-universal Tier 1 curriculum adoption. Tennessee strengthened summer remediation while it built out tutoring. Mississippi is applying a full literacy playbook to math at once.

Texas has piloted, passed or partially built every one of the strategies examined here. The opportunity is to connect those pieces more deliberately, target funding at scale, and sustain implementation long enough to determine what is producing results.

The experience of other states also suggests that Texas does not need to search for an entirely new math strategy. It can build on policies already in place, strengthen areas where implementation remains incomplete, and use student outcomes to determine where additional investment is warranted. The next section identifies seven opportunities to do that.

123 *National Center for Education Statistics, 2024 Mathematics State Snapshot Reports, Texas and Mississippi, Grade 8. Both states averaged 269 against a national public average of 272.*

SECTION 6

Seven Policy Opportunities for the 90th Legislature:

Connecting the Pieces Texas Already Has

Key Takeaways

- **Five Recommendations Build the State's Capacity to Deliver:** A Texas Math Coaching Corps, Mathematics Achievement Academies through eighth grade, a training track for accelerated math teachers, funded implementation of high-quality instructional materials, and PASS tutoring accounts for math.
- **Two Concern What Texas Expects and What Parents See:** An updated set of math standards ahead of the scheduled 2031 review, and mailed report cards, screener results and at-home guides so parents can act on their child's math performance.
- **None Requires Texas to Invent Anything:** Each recommendation scales a program already on the books, adds a reporting requirement to data the state already collects, or adapts an approach another state is running now.

Texas already has most of the pieces in place, including a rigorous assessment system, statutory tutoring requirements, funded high-quality instructional materials and automatic enrollment in advanced middle school math. It has not yet connected them into a deliberate math strategy that reaches classrooms at scale.[124] The seven recommendations below are designed to close that gap.

Five of the seven recommendations build the state's capacity to deliver, through coaching, teacher training, materials implementation and tutoring. The final two concern what the state expects of students and what parents can see about their progress.

1. Establish a Texas Math Coaching Corps

Texas has already invested in improving instruction across the board. It pays its best teachers more through the Teacher Incentive Allotment, funds curriculum-specific training through Strong Foundations grants, and adds instructional time through the Additional Days School Year program.[125]

Texas has not built the delivery mechanism that ties this support together, a trained coach working with teachers in their own classrooms and on their own curriculum, week after week.

124 *Section 4 documents each of these programs and their statutory bases.*

125 *Texas Education Agency, "Teacher Incentive Allotment," https://tiatexas.org/. HB 2, 89th Legislature (2025), increases designation allotments beginning in 2026–27; TEA has not yet published final per-designation amounts (TEA TAA letter, "House Bill 2 Implementation: Teacher Incentive Allotment"). Texas Education Agency, "HB 2 Implementation: Additional Days School Year Update," Oct. 23, 2025. Effective September 1, 2025, ADSY formula funding expanded from grades PK–5 to PK–8, with a new three-quarter-day funding pathway for campuses offering 200 or more instructional days. Texas Education Agency, "Strong Foundations Grant Program."*

Other states have made coaching the centerpiece. Alabama is placing a math coach in every K–5 school, scheduled to reach full coverage in the 2027–28 school year, and is the only state whose 2024 fourth grade NAEP math score exceeds its pre-pandemic level. Mississippi funded a targeted version, concentrating coaches in grades two through six in its highest-need districts.[126]

Alabama's design may not transfer to Texas one-for-one. Coaching itself is among the best-evidenced investments in education research. The meta-analysis of 60 studies found large improvements in instructional quality and meaningful gains in student achievement, larger than most other forms of professional development.[127] The same analysis found those effects shrink as programs scale, with smaller gains associated with large rollouts than in tightly run pilots. That is the reason to concentrate coaches where the need is greatest rather than spread them thin.

Texas would not be starting from nothing. The state's 20 regional education service centers already deliver training to districts, the Mathematics Achievement Academies give coaches a state-developed foundation to teach from, and the state's push for high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) gives them a curriculum to coach toward.[128] A Texas corps could follow the Mississippi pattern rather than the Alabama one, concentrating coaches on the campuses where math performance is weakest and expanding as results warrant. A targeted start keeps the effects large while the state builds the pipeline of trained coaches a bigger program would require.

> **Recommendation:** Establish and fund a Texas Math Coaching Corps that places trained mathematics coaches in the state's highest-need campuses, prioritizes the middle grades, works through existing regional service center infrastructure, and aligns to the state's high-quality instructional materials efforts.

2. Extend Math Academies through eighth grade

Texas offers math academies for the early grades but not for the middle grades, which is where its math results fall furthest.

In 2019, HB 3 required elementary teachers and principals to complete Reading Academies, ensuring educators were current on science-based reading practices.[129] In 2025, HB 2 extended the concept to mathematics. Every K–3 educator, including teachers, principals, academic coaches and interventionists, must complete a Mathematics Achievement Academy by the 2030–31 school year, with a $50-per-hour stipend for training. Teachers in fourth and fifth grade may opt into a shorter summer training beginning in 2026. For grades six through eight, no math academy requirement exists.[130]

126 *National Council on Teacher Quality, "Alabama's Bold Action"; Mississippi First, "SB 2294 Conference Report Summary."*

127 *Kraft, Blazar and Hogan (2018).*

128 *Texas Education Code ch. 8 (regional education service centers); Texas Education Agency, "Education Service Centers"; HB 2, 89th Legislature (2025) (Mathematics Achievement Academies).*

129 *HB 3, 86th Legislature (2019).*

130 *HB 2, 89th Legislature (2025).*

The early grades matter, but the state's greatest math need is in the later grades. On NAEP, Texas fourth graders score above the national public average, and eighth graders score below it. On STAAR, the share of seventh graders on grade level in math has fallen from 41% in 2019 to 29% in 2026, the lowest result on any of the state's math assessments that year. Meanwhile, fourth grade has recovered better than any other tested grade.[131]

> **Recommendation:** Extend HB 2's Mathematics Achievement Academies through eighth grade, so the state trains teachers in the grades where Texas math performance struggles most.

3. Create a training track for teachers of accelerated math

Texas has led the nation in opening advanced math pathways. SB 2124's automatic enrollment in advanced math doubled participation in three years at essentially no cost (Section 4).[132]

These accelerated courses compress three years of middle school math standards into two so that students reach Algebra I in eighth grade. Nearly a third of Texas seventh graders are now on that track, taught by middle school teachers who are new to standards the State Board adopted only in April 2025.[133] The state expanded access faster than it trained the teachers responsible for these courses.

> **Recommendation:** Include a specialized track within the expanded Mathematics Achievement Academy program for teachers of accelerated mathematics, covering the accelerated sequence that fits three years of middle school math into grades six and seven, and moves Algebra I instruction to eighth grade.

4. Fund instructional materials implementation

Texas treated instructional materials as a state responsibility for nearly a century before the 2011 shift to district adoption (Section 4).[134]

HB 1605 (88R, 2023) restored the state's role with the per-student funding and State Board materials review described in Section 4. The state went further and created its own curriculum. Bluebonnet Learning math was approved by the SBOE in November 2024, and within a year it reached roughly 1.1 million Texas students.[135]

131 *NAEP Data Explorer, Texas grade 4 and grade 8 mathematics, 2024; Texas Education Agency, Texas Assessment Research Portal.*

132 *Legislative Budget Board, fiscal note for SB 2124, 88th Legislature (2023) ("No fiscal implication to the State is anticipated").*

133 *Texas 2036 analysis of Texas Education Agency, Texas Assessment Research Portal (32% of grade 7 students took the grade 8 mathematics STAAR in 2026); State Board of Education, middle school advanced mathematics standards, adopted April 11, 2025.*

134 *Texas Constitution, Article VII; Texas Education Agency, "An Overview of the History of Public Education in Texas."*

135 *State Board of Education, adoption of Bluebonnet Learning instructional materials (November 2024); Texas Education Agency, instructional materials adoption and district usage data.*

Early returns point in the right direction. In San Antonio ISD's first year with Bluebonnet math, the share of fourth graders on grade level rose 10 points. District leadership reported math performance trending upward in grades three through eight, not the usual pattern in a first year with new materials.[136] Edgewood ISD and Harlandale ISD posted eighth grade gains of 15 and 13 percentage points in the same cycle.[137] Three districts and one year of results is an encouraging early signal, but more evidence is needed before the effect can be understood.

Louisiana shows what the following decade could look like if Texas stays committed to implementation. Louisiana couples curriculum review with training, coaching and the state assessment, all aligned to the same standards the Tier 1 materials teach. It publishes a Professional Learning Partner Guide that vets which training providers actually know the top-rated materials. A district can see at a glance which trainers know the curriculum it just adopted.[138]

Texas has the corresponding tool. Strong Foundations grants exist precisely to fund curriculum-specific professional learning. They have not been funded at the scale that math HQIM adoption now requires.[139]

> **Recommendation:** Fund implementation support and training for districts adopting math HQIM, growing Strong Foundations grants as more districts adopt math instructional materials.

5. Extend PASS tutoring accounts to mathematics

Texas has repeatedly acted on the conviction that struggling students are owed more instruction, not lower expectations. The Student Success Initiative committed state dollars to accelerated instruction in 1999, and HB 4545 required it for every student falling short on STAAR in 2021.[140]

Tennessee showed what tutoring at scale can look like. Texas' newest delivery mechanism is the Parent Access to Supplemental Supports program, created by HB 2 (89R, 2025), for students struggling in reading performance. PASS funds parent-directed tutoring accounts for students in grades one through four, letting families arrange reading tutoring directly rather than waiting on district capacity.[141] There is no equivalent parent-directed account for a student who is behind in math.

Extending PASS to mathematics applies an existing delivery mechanism to the subject where Texas students are furthest behind, reaching students state law already identifies.

136 *Texas Education Agency, Texas Assessment Research Portal; San Antonio Report, "How did San Antonio schools perform on STAAR this year?" Paraphrased from remarks by San Antonio ISD deputy superintendent Shawn Bird.*

137 *Ibid.*

138 *Louisiana Department of Education, Professional Learning Partner Guide.*

139 *Texas Education Agency, "Strong Foundations Grant Program" (program scope and funding).*

140 *SB 4, 76th Legislature (1999); Texas Education Code §28.0211, Accelerated Instruction; HB 4545, 87th Legislature (2021).*

141 *HB 2, 89th Legislature (2025); Texas Education Agency, "Parent Access to Supplemental Supports (PASS)."*

Recommendation: Extend the PASS tutoring accounts to mathematics through eighth grade for students identified as below grade level by the state's screeners and assessments, and scale funding to the population those tools identify.

6. Update the state's math standards

Everything in Texas math instruction depends on what students are expected to learn. Texas' previous math score improvements rested on rigorous learning standards, consistently measured.[142]

The math TEKS standards were last revised in 2012. On the State Board's current timeline, a comprehensive review of the K–12 math standards is not scheduled to begin until 2031, with revised standards reaching classrooms in 2033. A kindergartner starting school this fall would spend most of elementary and middle school learning math to standards written before they were born. The Board has shown it can move faster. In April 2025, it adopted new middle school advanced mathematics standards to support SB 2124's automatic enrollment, moving from work group to final adoption in six months.[143]

Updating the standards is not an isolated endeavor. The Student Success Tool, which will measure math achievement three times a year beginning in the 2027–28 school year, and the state's instructional materials, including Bluebonnet Learning, are both keyed to the TEKS. Both will faithfully measure and teach whatever standards exist. The question is whether Texas wants them built on 2012's strategies or on the 14 years of evidence since.[144]

Recommendation: Update the Texas math standards ahead of the scheduled 2031 review, with funding for TEA to support an accelerated State Board revision modeled on the Board's 2025 advanced-standards adoption, so educators and students are working from standards that reflect the past decade of research on mathematics instruction.

142 *Section 4 documents the standards and measurement policies behind the 1990s and 2000s gains.*

143 *State Board of Education, TEKS review and revision timeline approved November 22, 2024, which schedules the comprehensive K–12 mathematics review to begin in 2031 with implementation in 2033; Texas Education Agency, 2024 Middle School Advanced Mathematics TEKS Review, adopted April 11, 2025 and available to districts beginning with the 2025–26 school year.*

144 *Texas Education Agency, "Overview of House Bill 8"; Texas Education Agency, "Student Assessment."*

7. Strengthen what parents can see about math performance

Texas parents have a right under the Education Code to know how their children are doing in school.[145] In practice, the signal they get about math is thin. STAAR results come once a year, usually through an online portal, and many parents never see them. National surveys find that most parents believe their child is at or above grade level even when state results say otherwise.[146]

That is about to change. Beginning in the 2027–28 school year, the Student Success Tool will measure math at the beginning, middle and end of the year, and the new numeracy screeners will flag early problems in kindergarten through third grade.[147] Texas will have more information about each student's math progress than it has ever had. The question is whether it reaches parents in a form they can use.

A parent who learns in October that a child is behind in fractions can do something about it. A parent who finds out the following summer cannot. The state should send results home on paper, not only through a portal, and every notice that a student is behind should come with a plan: what the school will do, and what the parent can do at home. Texas already produces parent guides for reading; it should do the same for math, with a short, grade-by-grade guide through eighth grade that explains in plain language what the child is expected to learn that year, what the screener or test result means, and the kinds of practice and questions a parent can use at the kitchen table. Districts should hand those guides to parents with the results, provided in English or Spanish.

> **Recommendation:** Strengthen parent notification and support for math performance: mail STAAR and Student Success Tool report cards home, explain screener results in plain language, and provide grade-by-grade parent guides through eighth grade that tell parents what their child should be learning, what the results mean, and how to help at home.

145 *Texas Education Code, Chapter 26, Parental Rights and Responsibilities.*

146 *Learning Heroes, "Hidden in Plain Sight: A Way Forward for Equity-Centered Family Engagement" (2022). National parent surveys repeatedly find that most parents believe their child is at or above grade level while state results show otherwise.*

147 *HB 2, 89th Legislature (2025); Texas Education Agency, "Overview of House Bill 8."*

CONCLUSION

A High-Return Investment Texas Has Made Before

None of the recommendations in this report ask Texas to invent an untested policy. Each extends a program already running in Texas, applies data the state already collects, or adapts an approach another state is already running at scale.

Alabama built a coaching corps from scratch. Tennessee funded tutoring out of a smaller budget and then made it permanent. Louisiana reviewed and rated every curriculum offered in its classrooms. What set those states apart was staying with the strategy long enough for it to work.[148]

The 90th Legislature convenes in January 2027, just as Texas' new screeners come online, the Student Success Tool replaces STAAR, and the 2026 NAEP results are released.[149] For the first time in years, lawmakers will be able to see precisely which students are behind, in which grades, and how far. The seven opportunities in this report are built to act on exactly that information.

The cost of not acting on Texas math outcomes carries real consequences. It shows up in eight of the 10 fastest-growing high-wage occupations requiring STEM skills, in the semiconductor and aerospace plants that need a workforce fluent in math to run them, and in contractors who report difficulty filling skilled positions while fewer than one in four attempts at the state's electrician exams succeed. Every year Texas does not act on what it already knows about coaching, tutoring and instructional materials is another cohort of students moving through classrooms the state could have reached.[150]

Texas celebrates its bicentennial in 2036. The eighth graders of that year enter kindergarten in 2027. Whether they leave school with the math skills that the Texas economy will ask of them depends on choices the Legislature makes next session.

Texas raised its math performance for two decades and knows the policies responsible for that achievement. Four states are using versions of those policies now and are seeing scores rise. The students who will run the plants, wire the houses and finance the growth this report describes are already in Texas classrooms. Whether they acquire the math proficiency to continue the Texas Miracle rests on the policy decisions of the 90th Legislature.

148 *See Section 5 for each program and its sources.*

149 *Texas Education Agency, "Overview of House Bill 8"; National Center for Education Statistics, NAEP 2026 administration schedule.*

150 *Texas Workforce Commission, "Report on Texas Growth Occupations, 2025"; Associated General Contractors of America, 2025 Workforce Survey; Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation, electrician examination statistics, fiscal year 2025.*

ABOUT THIS REPORT

Methodology:

How Texas 2036 Built This Analysis

This report draws on publicly available state and national data, a Texas 2036 crosswalk of state math standards to skilled-trade work, and a review of state policy and research. All Texas 2036 analyses use statewide aggregate data; Texas 2036 did not use student-level records. Unless noted, findings are descriptive and do not establish that any single policy caused a change in student performance.

National assessment. Texas and national public school results come from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Data Explorer and Data Service for eighth grade (1990–2024) and fourth grade (1992–2024) mathematics. Jurisdictions scoring "significantly higher" than Texas are identified with NCES state comparisons at the .05 level. Grade-level equivalents follow a common understanding that 10 NAEP points approximate one year of learning, a rough guide rather than a precise conversion.

State assessments. State results come from the Texas Education Agency's (TEA) Academic Excellence Indicator System for TAKS (2005–2011, grades 6–9) and from the Texas Assessment Research Portal and Texas Performance Reporting System for STAAR. STAAR trends begin in 2017, when TEA finalized its performance levels, and report the share of students at Meets Grade Level or above. Results from 2012 to 2016 are excluded because passing standards changed during those years. Results count students by test taken, so seventh graders in an accelerated math pathway appear in eighth grade results.

Cohort analysis. To follow the four classes in Texas high schools in 2025–26 (classes of 2026–2029), Texas 2036 linked statewide STAAR results by grade and year from third grade through Algebra I. Each point reflects all students tested in that grade that year, not matched student records. The Algebra I point includes only ninth-grade test takers, no scores exist for 2020, and grade-level tests and Algebra I have different passing standards.

Standards and the skilled trades. Texas 2036 mapped math tasks used in residential construction trades and on Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation (TDLR) electrician exams to specific Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) student expectations. To gauge student performance on those skills, Texas 2036 joined answer keys for Spring 2024 released STAAR items in grades 6–8 to TEA item-level results, reporting a range where two items tested the same standard. Exam pass rates are TDLR fiscal year 2025 figures per exam administered, including retakes; wages are from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (May 2025), which excludes the self-employed.

Workforce and economy. Fastest-growing occupations reflect a Texas 2036 ranking of high-wage, high-demand occupations in the Texas Workforce Commission's 2025 growth occupations report by projected growth from 2022 to 2032, using TWC and TEA STEM designations. Fortune 500 relocations reflect Texas 2036 analysis of Fortune 500 (2026) and CBRE headquarters data.

About Texas 2036

Texas 2036 is a nonpartisan public policy organization dedicated to identifying and advancing data-driven policies that improve lives and expand opportunities for all Texans.

About the author

Trip Davis serves as policy advisor for K-12 education. His work focuses on curriculum and instruction, with particular emphasis on numeracy, implementation of high-quality instructional materials and student assessment. He is also working to expand career and technical education across the state, with an emphasis on the unique challenges of workforce development in rural areas.

TEXAS 2036

