



INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH

TAFT SCHOOL POWER OF LEARNING SURVEY

Executive Summary:

Purpose: This report summarizes insights gathered from open-ended survey responses from the Taft School community, including alums, current parents, former parents, and other stakeholders. Responses highlight vital themes such as academic excellence, faculty impact, diversity and inclusion, tradition, and a sense of community. Over 1300 respondents completed the survey, and over 500 provided meaningful responses to open-ended questions.

Key Themes

What should never change about Taft?

Community 38%- Taft's strong community was the top theme across all open-ended questions. Many of the responses added further detail on how that community was formed in their eyes, with 24% referencing "the shared traditions."

Rigor (24%): Our community is committed to maintaining high admissions, academic, and college placement standards. Over half of the respondents who mentioned rigor reference how the challenges of Taft prepared them for college and life, with a central theme of learning balance.

Educating the Whole Child (19%)—In keeping with the commitment to rigor, a fifth of our respondents focused on providing opportunities for Taft students to learn beyond the classroom. The value of a boarding school is the rigorous non-academic pursuits.

Representative response:

"The sense of community, and the ability of everyone at the school to recognize that there's more to high school than classes. The education is top-notch and challenging, and it should stay that way. But there are also so many other ways that students learn and engage with each other and with the community." – Alum from the 1980s

Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities of a Taft 2030 Graduate?

Nurture Relationships and Connections (47%)- Our community needs to return to human relationships in the evolving technology world. This theme, directly aligned with our strategic plan, was so prominent that additional sub-themes emerged. The ability of our students to



INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH

communicate both orally and in writing (33%), have “agreeable disagreements” (13%), and be able to connect with diverse people (15%).

Critical Thinking (36%): The speed at which information and disinformation can travel in our modern world requires a measured and thoughtful approach to managing them.

Artificial Intelligence and Technology (23%): Generative AI is no longer an optional skill. It is an “arrival” technology. Unlike laptop computers, its presence in schools is not the result of a policy of adoption.¹ Our community fully embraces this sentiment and believes that Taft students must have a strong working knowledge of how AI can help bolster their passions and skills. This is not antithetical to nurturing relationships in the response.

Resilience (22%)—While not in the top three for this question, this theme was often the question being begged. All of the above themes are rooted in facing challenges and setbacks well. Respondents comment on Taft teaching students about failure and grit and how those themes have helped them in their lives.

Representative responses:

“Flexibility, a methodological approach to understanding the world from a range of different perspectives, the value of honesty, the virtues of failure.” – Alum from the 1980s

“A decade ago I would have said, computers, artificial intelligence and 3D-printing. Now I say, compassion, natural intelligence and bonding.” –Alum from the 1980s

Powerful Learning Experience

Taft’s Faculty (54%)- It is no surprise that Taft’s faculty are the soul of our institution. Respondents called out esteemed faculty in both specific and general terms. Only half of the powerful learning experiences shared occurred in a classroom setting. This underscores the role all faculty play in all domains of Taft life.

¹ Eric Klopfer, Justin Reich, Hal Abelson, and Cynthia Breazeal, "Generative AI and K-12 Education: An MIT Perspective." March 27, 2024



INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH

Practical Experiences (14%)- The ability to do hands-on learning (5%) with real-world projects (4%) was instrumental. Both alumni and parents commented on the value they saw in how Taft passes on the weight of learning to the students.

Engaging In The Struggle (13%)- The power of struggling through a topic and combating self-doubt to ultimately achieve success. Taft has fostered and must continue to foster an environment where students are appropriately pushed and encouraged to fail. Many alumni look back on the journey for failure as seminal to their overall success.

Representative response:

During Inquiries in biology class with Mrs. Benedict, I saw my daughter conducting experiments and research that seemed collegiate level. She was thinking and planning for projects, executing her own design and experiments, using complex formulas and equipment, and delivering an organized and clear statement about her findings. Now that she is in college, I see the benefits of how well-prepared she is, based on her Taft experience. - Current and former parent

Differences by Graduating Year

- **Pre-1980s Alumni:** Strong emphasis on preserving Taft's traditions and legacy. They often expressed pride in the school's consistency over decades.
- **1980s-2000s Alumni:** Balanced views, appreciating the traditions while calling for incremental changes to adapt to modern needs.
- **2010s-2020s Alumni:** Forward-looking perspectives, often advocating for more diversity, inclusion, and technology integration.

Conclusion

The survey responses provide rich insights into the Taft community's perceptions. While there is a broad appreciation for Taft's traditions, academic rigor, and faculty, younger alumni and current parents highlight the need for innovation and greater diversity. We will continue to delve into the responses of current parents to produce a specific report for that subgroup. These insights can guide Taft in balancing its legacy with evolving community expectations to ensure continued relevance and excellence.



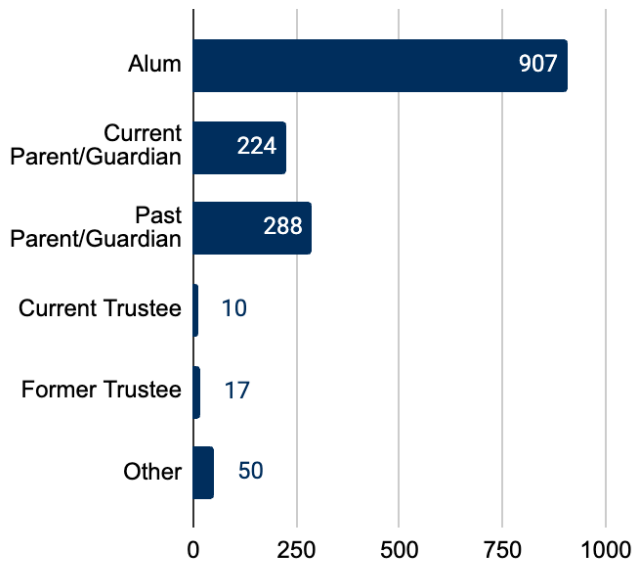
TAFT

INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH

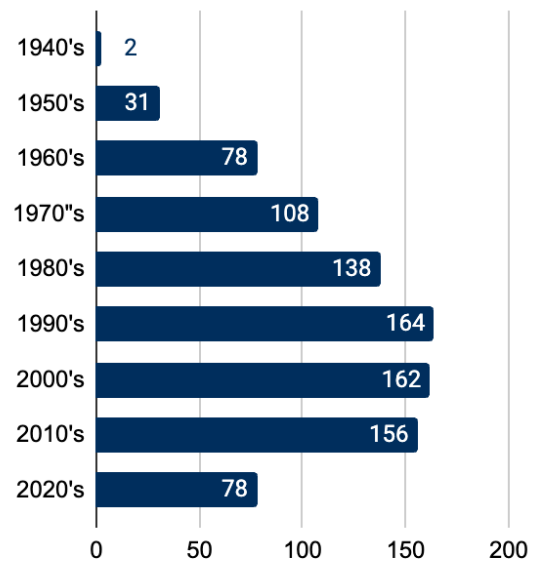
Response Distribution

Relationship to Taft

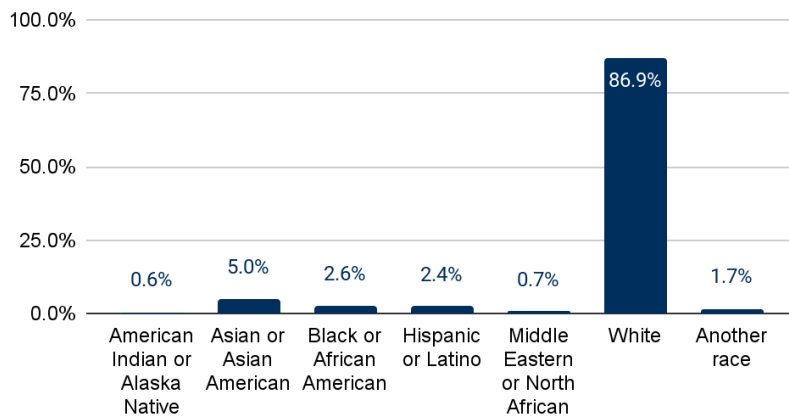
Can select all that apply



Graduating Decade of Alums



Racial Distribution of Respondents



Gender Distribution of Respondents

