

Texas Lone Star

A Publication of the Texas Association of School Boards | Volume 42, Number 3 | April 2024



STRENGTHENING GOOD GOVERNANCE

School board
training a top
priority for
75 years

Featured Event



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APRIL

- 4 • TASB Spring Workshop — San Angelo
- 9 • 2024 TASB SHARS Road Show — Katy
- 10 • TASB Spring Workshop — Houston
- 10-11 • TASB HR Services: Employment Relationships: Independent Contractors, Contract Entitlement, Benefit Eligibility, and More — Virtual Event
- 11 • TASB Student Solutions: Defending Districts in Special Education Dispute Resolution — Virtual Event
- 14-16 • TASB Risk Management Fund Conference — Round Rock
- 16 • TASB Facility Services: Asbestos Designated Person Training — Amarillo
- 17 • TASB Facility Services: Integrated Pest Management — Amarillo
- 17 • TASB SHARS Matters Webinar Series: Telehealth and Telemedicine Services — Virtual Event
- 20 • TASB Governmental Relations: Legislative Advisory Council I Meeting — Austin
- 23 • TASB Facility Services: Asbestos Designated Person Training — Midland
- 24 • TASB Facility Services: Integrated Pest Management — Midland
- 25 • TASB Spring Workshop — Gonzales
- 30 • TASB Spring Workshop — Uvalde

MAY

- 1-2 • TASB HR Services: Administering Pay Plans — Virtual Event
- 8 • TASB Spring Workshop — Alpine
- 8-9 • TASB HR Services: Understanding Wage and Hour Law — Virtual Event
- 9 • TASB Spring Workshop — Abilene
- 9 • TASB Spring Workshop — Huntsville
- 9 • TASB Student Solutions Webinar Series: Wrapping Up 2023-24 — Virtual Event
- 9-10 • TASB Virtual 30th Annual SHARS Conference — Virtual Event
- 14 • TASB Spring Workshop — Commerce
- 14 • TASB Spring Workshop — Nacogdoches
- 15 • TASB Spring Workshop — Canyon
- 15 • TASB SHARS Matters Webinar Series: End-of-Year SHARS Reminders — Virtual Event
- 20 • TASB SHARS Road Show — Waco
- 21 • TASB Spring Workshop — Waco
- 23 • TASB Spring Workshop — El Paso



For more information about these events or deadlines, visit the TASB website at tasb.org or call TASB at **512-467-0222** or **800-580-8272** toll-free.

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Texas Lone Star • Volume 42, Number 3

Texas Association of School Boards
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512-467-0222 • 800-580-8272

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Address changes should be sent to Michael Pennant, TASB, P.O. Box 400, Austin, Texas 78767-0400.

Articles in *Texas Lone Star* are expressions of the author or interviewee and do not represent the views or policies of TASB. Permission to reprint should be emailed to communications@tasb.org or addressed to the Managing Editor, P.O. Box 400, Austin, Texas 78767-0400.

Texas Lone Star does not guarantee publication of unsolicited manuscripts.

Postmaster: Send address changes to TASB, P.O. Box 400, Austin, Texas 78767-0400.

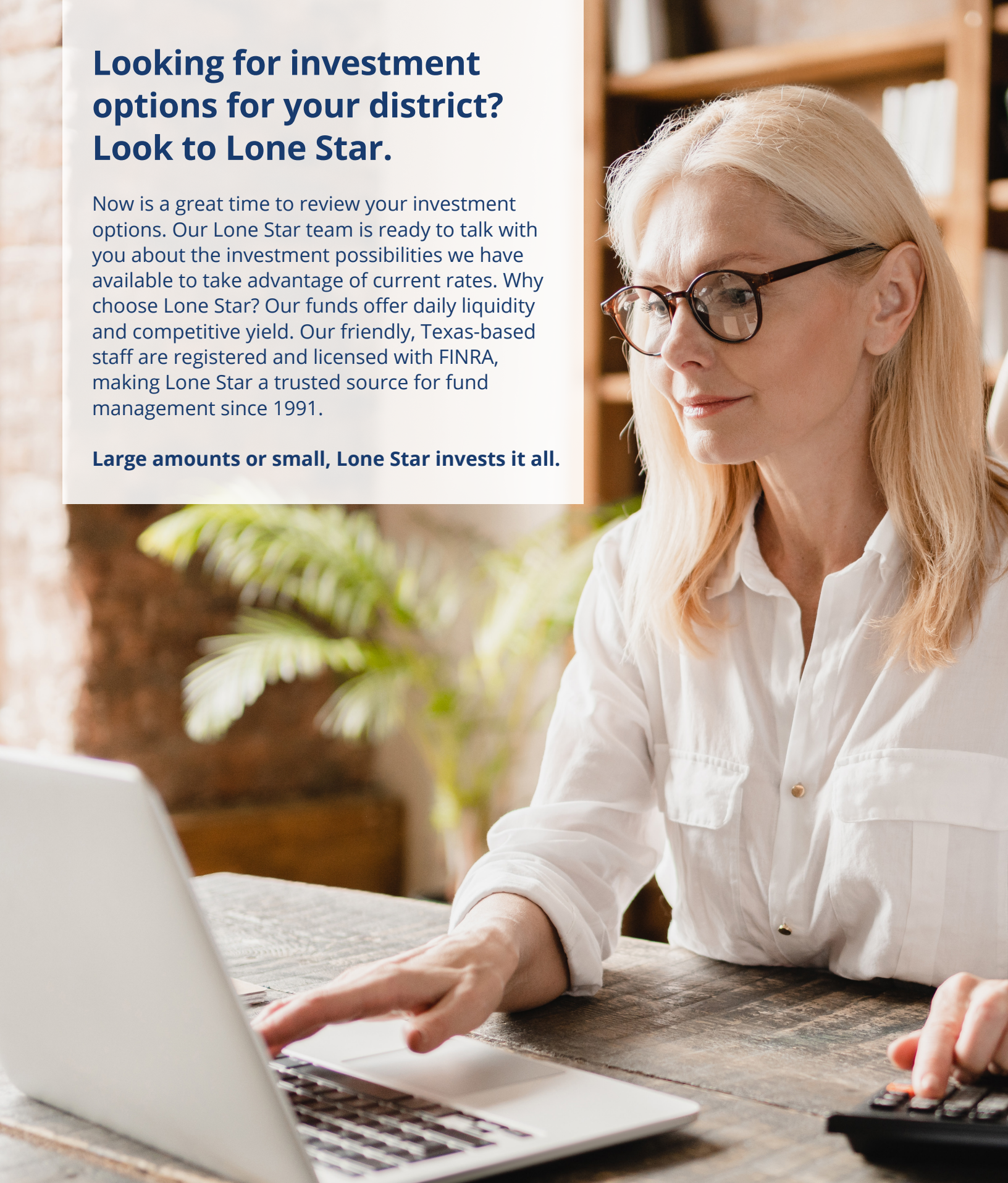
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Trusted Training

TASB services help trustees better serve students

by Armando Rodriguez



Armando Rodriguez

As TASB President, I have the honor and responsibility of championing quality education across our great state. At the heart of this mission lies a fundamental principle: the importance of trustee training in guaranteeing top-level services to the students and taxpayers of Texas.

This month's history story, part of the magazine's year-long effort to honor the Association's 75th anniversary, discusses the evolution and importance of training services that TASB provides to school boards across Texas.

School board training is not merely a matter of good governance — it is a legal imperative in our state. As publicly elected officials entrusted with guiding the educational landscape, school trustees must have a comprehensive understanding of the laws, issues, and challenges facing our schools today. Their decisions hold profound implications for student outcomes and community well-being, underscoring the critical need for ongoing education and development.

Expert training through TASB

In Texas, we recognize that effective governance is contingent upon informed leadership. Through trustee training mandated by the state, we equip our board members with the knowledge, skills, and perspectives necessary to navigate the complexities of the education sector. From fiscal management and policy formulation to community engagement and curriculum development, trustees must possess a holistic understanding of their roles and responsibilities.

The strength of TASB has always resided in two pillars: training and

networking. Our commitment to elevating board members extends far beyond compliance. It is about empowering individuals to fulfill their duties and fortify their school districts. Through TASB's comprehensive training programs, we provide trustees with the tools and insights needed to drive positive change within their communities.

The strength of TASB has always resided in two pillars: training and networking.

Networking, collaborating

Training, however, is just one piece of the puzzle. Equally invaluable is the opportunities for networking and collaboration that TASB facilitates. By fostering connections among board members from diverse backgrounds and regions, we create a dynamic ecosystem of shared knowledge and best practices. Through conferences, workshops, and forums, trustees gain invaluable insights into the challenges and innovations shaping districts across the state.

In the dynamic landscape of education, effective governance requires more than just good intentions; it demands informed decision-making and strategic vision. Trustees must stay abreast of evolving policies, emerging trends, and best practices to ensure that their districts remain at the forefront of educational excellence. TASB serves as a catalyst for this ongoing learning journey, providing trustees with the resources and support

needed to navigate the ever-changing terrain of public education.

Investment in the future

Moreover, trustee training is not just about compliance; it is an investment in the future of our state. By equipping board members with the knowledge and skills needed to lead effectively, we lay the groundwork for student success and community prosperity. Every decision made, every policy enacted, every dollar allocated carries the potential to shape the trajectory of countless lives. Through rigorous training and professional development, trustees can maximize their impact and drive meaningful change within their districts.

Let us reaffirm our commitment to excellence in education. Let us recognize the pivotal role that trustee training plays in providing the best education possible to our students and safeguarding the interests of Texas taxpayers as well. Together, let us embrace the opportunity to learn, grow, and lead with purpose. As stewards of Texas' educational future, we must rise to the challenge of governance with humility, integrity, and unwavering dedication.

In the spirit of collaboration and continuous improvement, let us journey forward, empowered by knowledge, united in purpose, and driven by a shared commitment to excellence in education. Together, we can ensure that every student in Texas receives the world-class education they deserve.★

Armando Rodriguez, president of the Canutillo ISD board of trustees, is the 2023-24 president of TASB.

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Serving Our Members

History project highlights TASB training for boards

by Laura Tolley



Laura Tolley

This month, our TASB history project continues with a focus on the evolution of school board training, which has been a top priority for the Association from the beginning. School board member training is required by law in Texas. But even before that was mandated, TASB recognized the need to provide important training for members, and that support continues today.

The story, which begins on page 8, discusses how at its founding in 1949, TASB began providing regular updates on new laws affecting public education at its regional meetings and through a newsletter. And at TASB's first convention, held in November 1950, information sessions were offered to support trustees' knowledge and understanding of new laws.

Today, TASB continues to offer a broad range of training opportunities throughout the year — at TASB Headquarters and in different parts of the state, as well as virtually. This month's history story also includes a sidebar about TASB's largest training events. It's interesting to reflect on how far TASB has come and its long-standing commitment to providing expert training to school boards across the state.

We continue our coverage honoring TASB's 75th anniversary with a story about the history of Leadership TASB, a board member development program that's designed to take experienced board members to a new level of service and leadership. The first cohort met in 1993 — and now there are nearly 1,000 LTASB alumni!

There's also a feature about the administrative professionals who serve

school districts throughout Texas. (Administrative Professionals Day is April 24.)

These multiskilled individuals handle many tasks and duties as they support superintendents, board members, and others in their school district. To help support their vital work, TASB offers training for them as well. Twice a year, TASB hosts a conference specifically designed for administrative professionals. Read more about the conference and some of the administrative professionals who serve school districts on page 18.

Getting the word out

I also wanted to give a big shoutout to another service area that plays a critical role within Texas school districts — communications and marketing teams. In late February, the Texas School Public Relations Association held its annual conference in Sugar Land, where participants had the opportunity to attend informative sessions, network, and celebrate their successes at the awards ceremony.

It must be so rewarding and empowering to be part of a school communications and marketing team that is focused on sharing the successes and challenges of its district's students, staff, and school community. The goal is always to raise awareness about what's happening in the classrooms, on the athletic fields, at school board meetings, and on campuses. The more positive light these skilled teams can shed on the activities and accomplishments within their districts, the more invested their individual communities become in supporting Texas public school students, who are the key to our state's strong future.

Now, it's more important than ever to tout the positive stories about public

education in Texas — and these teams are at the forefront of that critical effort to inform parents, community members, state and local leaders, and voters — among others — about all of the great things going on within Texas public schools.

These teams use a wide range of communications tools to get the word out: newsletters, flyers, brochures, booklets, planners, programs, postcards, news releases, videos, magazines, posters, annual reports, manuals, photos, and more. It's impressive to read through the long list of categories and the winning school districts that TSPRA recognized from across the state at the conference.

Casi Thedford, communications coordinator at Wylie ISD in Collin County, and her team were one of those dedicated teams taking home several awards. Wylie ISD is a district of more than 19,000 students in North Texas. Within the last year, we republished a couple of stories from the Wylie ISD communications teams in the pages of *Texas Lone Star*, and I was so pleased to see both of those stories honored by TSPRA.

I also want to note that TASB's Communications, Marketing, and Events team won 35 TSPRA awards for their dedicated work supporting our members. Congratulations to the entire department for their excellent work! You can read about TASB's TSPRA awards on page 39.

I hope you enjoy the issue. ★

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laura Tolley".

Laura Tolley is managing editor of *Texas Lone Star*.

STRENGTHENING GOOD GOVERNANCE

SCHOOL BOARD TRAINING A TOP PRIORITY FOR 75 YEARS

by Melissa Locke Roberts

Editor's note: In every issue of Texas Lone Star this year, the magazine will honor TASB's 75th anniversary by writing about the positive impact the Association has had on Texas public schools through its high-quality services, visionary leadership, and skilled advocacy. Additionally, these articles will highlight the significant events, people, legislation, and issues that have shaped public education in Texas. Overall, these articles reflect how TASB and school leaders work hard together to promote educational excellence for all Texas schoolchildren.

School board training is not only important for good governance — Texas law requires it. As publicly elected officials whose actions can affect student outcomes, school trustees must be familiar with not only certain laws but also the issues facing schools today and how to function well as a governance leadership team.

The Framework for School Board Development, initially adopted by the State Board of Education in 1996, calls for board members to acquire skills in developing “vision and goals, systems and processes, progress and accountability, advocacy and engagement, and synergy and teamwork.”

That's quite a syllabus. Fortunately, since TASB's beginning in 1949, school board training has been a top priority.

“The two strengths of TASB have always been training and networking — raising board members to understand how they can fulfill their role and make their school district stronger, and then networking with other board members at conferences and understanding the challenges that other districts are facing,” said Faye Beaulieu, who served as 2013-14



Photos over the years show TASB trainers and members actively participating and connecting at various TASB events, in sessions and out in the field, and carrying on through a pandemic.

Photos from the TASB archives



TASB president while she was a member of the Hurst-Euleless-Bedford ISD board. “That’s how you make your own district stronger, so that you’re not just focused internally but you’re focused on the well-being of 5.5 million kids across the state and what those other districts are doing to meet their challenges.”

Training from the get-go

Long before board member training was required, TASB recognized the need to clarify complex laws and share best practices with its members. It started the year TASB was founded, in 1949, which happened to coincide with the passage of major legislation that ushered in a new era of education reform in Texas.

The Gilmer-Aikin laws, passed by the 51st Legislature that year, consolidated schools across the state into fewer, more efficient units; created a state funding plan with the establishment of the Foundation School Program; and made major revisions to school services and staffing.

Public school leaders were scratching their heads over all the changes. So, in its earliest days, TASB launched into training mode by providing regular updates on the new laws at regional meetings and with the publication of a newsletter. And at TASB’s first convention, in November 1950, informational sessions focused on how the Gilmer-Aikin laws were impacting schools.

School board members were also eager to learn specifics about the jobs to which they had been elected.

In 1951, a group called the Texas Committee of Ten, consisting of five representatives from the Texas Association of School Administrators and five from TASB, was formed. The initial intent was to study the relationships between board members and superintendents, but the discussion broadened considerably.

The following year, the committee developed the *Handbook for Texas School Board Members*. Up to that point, school boards had no guidelines or formal written procedures to follow. The handbook was published in May 1952; after reviews and revisions from about 400 people, the first official edition was printed in October 1953.

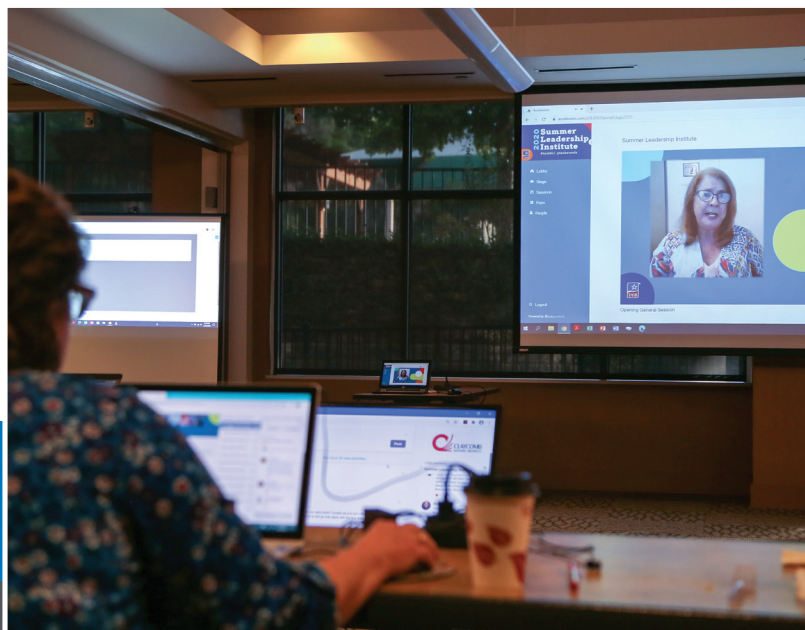
The committee then started improving workshops, conferences, and association meetings to provide essential materials and answers. Regional workshops that had been held in collaboration with area school board associations since 1955 were gradually expanded to help members understand current education topics, spawning the TASB tradition of Spring Workshops (held every year between February and May across the state).

At long last, a network was in place for TASB to help provide school trustees with the tools and information they desperately needed.

Expanding into the ‘80s and ‘90s

By the end of the 1970s, TASB training was being offered at workshops across the state and at the annual convention, established in coordination with TASA in 1960. When new legislation required school trustees to obtain more professional development in 1981, TASB staff responded with training on policy, legal, personnel relations, and other subjects.

Then, in 1984, House Bill 72 sent shockwaves through every aspect of public education in the state. Perhaps the most important legislation since the Gilmer-Aikin laws, the bill called for accountability at all levels of education, including the school board. Trustees were required to receive 20 hours of accredited training in 12 standards set up by the SBOE, becoming the only elected officials in the state with such a mandate. Since accredited training was sparse at the



time, TASB worked to fill the void — especially after the 1986 TASA | TASB Convention.

“At the Convention [the first held after the mandated training went into effect], approved training sessions were few, seats were scarce, and tempers in the San Antonio heat were hotter than some of the local cuisine,” wrote Bill Nemir, former director of TASB Leadership Team Services (now known as Board Development Services) in the March 1996 *Texas Lone Star*. “Board members with 15 years’ experience raced newly elected colleagues for seats to hear basic information about the role of the board.”

His account was not only colorful but accurate in describing the intense interest in continuing education among school board members, who not only wanted to comply with the new law but also recognized the value of professional development.

“Most trustees who were determined to leave with 20 hours’ credit and training in the 12 standards managed to complete their task. A few even had cuts, bruises, and the odd sore limb to prove their commitment and fortitude,” wrote Nemir. “In the intervening years, school board member training in Texas has become both more accessible and more appropriate to board member needs.”

Recognizing that changes were needed, the SBOE in 1996 passed a wholly revised version of its rule on training. The Framework for School Board Development (which replaced the 12 standards and would be updated again in 2012 and 2020) requires school trustees to receive an orientation to the Texas Education Code, participate in an annual team-building activity, and obtain additional needs-based continuing education.

The Framework eventually added a focus beyond mere vision. In a recent interview, George McShan, who served as TASB president in 1998-99, said that with the Framework, “we began to really emphasize outcomes. And those outcomes are about student outcomes. What really matters is how well our students are doing.”

The ‘90s ushered in a new era of increased training options for TASB members. Hot topics like strategic planning and site-based decision making were in demand, and TASB ISD was unveiled as a systematic approach to training board members, emphasizing “positive and effective ways to govern and improve local schools.” TASB’s premier leadership program, Leadership TASB, began with the Class of 1993, taking experienced board members to a new level of development. (Read more about LTASB on page 14.)

In 1994, TASB hosted its first satellite-delivered board training session. “By uplinking our training to a satellite, we can send the training to anyone with a steerable satellite dish,” reported *Texas Lone Star* early that year. The first-ever Winter Governance Seminar was introduced in 1998, and a summer iteration of that event followed soon thereafter (now known as Governance Camp).

Because board presidents were tasked with announcing the number of hours of required training accrued by each board member, TASB created a service in 1995 to simplify that process. Through the Continuing Education Credit Reporting Service, trustees could now keep track of hours (whether it be training from TASB or another provider), and the service would issue quarterly reports on board training credit to each district’s superintendent.

The ever-challenging 21st century

TASB moved into high gear as the 21st century demanded new approaches to training.

Members had been taking advantage of training via CD-ROM when a new online approach was introduced in 2002. The Online Learning Center was created “to provide greater flexibility and convenience to members.” Board members reported that the OLC “moved learning to a personal, local level” that would help districts save money on travel expenses and accommodate those who lived in remote areas of the state.

The type of training was evolving as well. Specifically defined guidance was developed for new and veteran board members and board officers, and courses were created to address new state-required training in the areas of cybersecurity and the sexual abuse/human trafficking of children.

As educational research had revealed a strong correlation between effective school board governance and student success, TASB introduced XG training in 2017. At the first XG Summit that year, thought leaders and district policymakers shared effective practices in place in Texas school districts and in-depth research on the importance of “eXceptional Governance,” XG for short. Then-Lockhart ISD Board President Steve Johnson said, “What it turned out to be was a total shift in our thinking as a board, coming together as a board to really impact student achievement.” The foundational results of XG have since been applied to customizable in-district consulting.

In March 2020, as COVID-19 shut down the world, TASB necessarily moved into the uncharted territory of virtual training.

A month earlier, Governance Camp unknowingly became the last in-person event for quite some time. In lieu of in-person Spring Workshops, 11 virtual webinars were offered in April and May, with a total attendance of 2,040. In June, the Summer Leadership Institute was TASB’s first attempt at hosting a virtual conference over a period of days. Staff switched gears to provide this virtual

training in less than five weeks. More than 1,800 attended the event, complete with several networking sessions and access to on-demand viewing for 30 days.

The TASA | TASB Convention that year, txEDCON2020, was also held online, with over 2,700 participants. More than 160 districts were recognized as having their entire leadership teams in attendance, more than any in the history of Convention.

Clearly, school trustees were not going to put training on hold — even during a pandemic. And neither would TASB.

As it has since 1949, TASB is there to provide appropriate and effective training for school board members — no matter the challenges. And it will continue to develop and refine training to fit specific needs, such as the recently launched Texas Trustee Institute, offering first-year board trustees an immersive learning experience.

After all, training is a primary reason that TASB exists.

“Before TASB was founded, school boards across the state had nowhere to go for guidance about the jobs they were elected to do,” said TASB Executive Director Dan Troxell. “In the 75 years since, TASB has provided them not only essential training but also numerous networking opportunities to learn from each other how to deal with the many challenges that school districts face.”★

Melissa Locke Roberts is a staff writer for Texas Lone Star.



TASB's largest training events

Summer Leadership Institute

Commonly referred to as SLI, this event started in 1990, adopting its current format after blending two events offered in the late 1980s: Preparation for Leadership and Board Presidents and New Board Members Institute. It is held after the May elections, making it TASB's first training event of the year for newly reconstituted boards.

Focus

- Professional development is the focus. New trustees have specific training; other sessions cover all levels of experience.
- Networking is a huge plus. SLI is designed to provide plenty of time for attendees to network with board members and administrators from around the state.

Featured speakers

- Education leaders and motivational speakers

First year to offer two locations

- In 2008, TASB began offering this event, traditionally held in San Antonio, in Fort Worth as well. Because San Antonio had sellout crowds, branching out to another city accommodated the growing number of those who wanted to attend.

Most challenging years

- In 2011 and 2012, fees were waived for TASA and TASB members in recognition of the financial crisis affecting school districts.

- Due to the pandemic onslaught and shutdown in 2020, the in-person event was converted to a virtual event for the first time. Staff hustled to find a platform to deliver the event virtually and present it in a way that kept the spirit of SLI. More than 1,900 attended and enjoyed a full slate of sessions and opportunities to network. The event returned in person in 2021, with an option to attend a virtual version.

Changes in the future?

- "I'm sure the technology will continue to change, but people wanting to be together face-to-face, I don't see that changing," said Kathy Dundee, assistant director of Meeting and Event Planning, who has been involved in TASB event planning since 1991.

TASA | TASB txEDCON

The annual txEDCON, formerly known as the TASA | TASB Convention, has been a prime source of education and inspiration for local school district leaders for more than six decades. Here are a few facts about what has become the largest convening of public education decision-makers in Texas.

The first convention

- The first on record was held in San Antonio in November 1950, a year after TASB was established. The event offered three sessions and a business meeting.
- Delegate Assembly was not in place yet, but members did consider and pass resolutions, mainly concerning the mechanics of the new organization.
- A head count was not recorded, but meeting rooms reportedly overflowed with trustees from all sections of the state.

The first convention with the Texas Association of School Administrators

- In 1960, TASA and TASB held a joint convention for the first time.
- Held in Austin, it offered trustees a more robust selection (11 topic sessions then, compared with more than 150 sessions offered today).



Focus

- To improve governance and leadership in Texas public schools and enhance statewide support for public education

Locations

- Members gathered annually in Austin from 1960 until 1971, when the event moved to San Antonio, where it remained until 1990 when Houston became a venue option.
- In the decades that followed, the location varied between Houston and Dallas and later Austin again.
- In 2022, it returned to San Antonio, where it also will be held in 2024. It returns to Dallas in 2025 and 2026.

Featured speakers

- Politicians, thought leaders, athletes, and writers were among those who spoke at the convention, including Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson; Texas Govs. Mark White, Ann Richards, George W. Bush, and Greg Abbott; U.S. Sens. John Tower and Lloyd Bentsen; journalist Dan Rather; writer Alex Haley; U.S. Olympic gymnast gold medalist Mary Lou Retton, and former Dallas Cowboys Roger Staubach and Emmitt Smith.

Entertainment

- For years, the convention offered a musical performer and dance Saturday night. Among those featured were B.J. Thomas, Conway Twitty, Louise Mandrell, Ray Price, Rick Trevino, and Tammy Wynette.
- In the last couple of decades, student performances from districts across the state have wowed attendees.

Most challenging years

- In 2005, hurricanes Katrina and Rita forced the cancellation of the convention in Houston. Staff from both associations kicked into high gear and moved the event to Dallas in fewer than 30 days.

- In 2011 and 2012, fees were waived for TASA and TASB members in light of the financial crisis affecting school districts.
- In 2020, about six months after COVID-19 forced a global shutdown, TASB staff created the first-ever virtual convention. More than 2,700 attended the event, which featured virtual general and breakout sessions, exhibit booths, student performances, Delegate Assembly, and awards ceremonies.

First convention requiring a registration fee: 1967 (TASB and TASA members could attend for \$3 per person; banquet tickets cost \$5 and luncheon tickets, a mere \$2.50)

First featuring Delegate Assembly: 1967

First honoring TASA Honor Boards: 1976

First featuring commercial exhibits: 1961 (42 total, compared to more than 300 today)

First exhibit of school architecture: 1962 (the next year it featured an exhibit on "air-conditioned schools")

Changes in the future?

- "One of our goals is to position this event as the leader for team-of-eight training, providing transformative education that prepares attendees to govern future-ready schools," said Jackie Clark Spencer, who has been involved in TASB event planning since 1982 and now serves as director of Event Operations. "We'd also like to find more ways to discover what our members need in the way of programming and possibly even create a community strand."

SLI and txEDCON are the largest of TASB's training events. Other events include Governance Camp, Spring Workshops, Legal Seminars, and more. Visit the events section of tasb.org for a complete list.





BUILDING AND BONDING LEADERS

Leadership TASB continues
legacy of learning

by Mary Ann Lopez

Back in 1990, when then-TASB Board President Patti Clapp started thinking about creating a leadership training program for trustees to “go above and beyond their basic board training,” she had no idea she was launching a program that would have a ripple effect in the lives of trustees, their students, and their communities.

In its more than 30 years, Leadership TASB has touched the lives of nearly 1,000 board members from across Texas — and it soon will top that number in the coming year. Through the years, Clapp has excitedly watched the program grow. And she never tires of hearing from school board members who have participated in LTASB, each sharing the positive and lasting impact it has had on their lives and their work.

“I love the results of Leadership TASB,” Clapp said. “I think it helps our trustees from across the state kind of take their blinders off on their school districts, and they get to see what other school districts are doing; they get to learn from other trustees in those districts, see pilot projects so they can bring back good ideas to their districts. I just think it’s a wonderful communication tool. ... When we started it, we thought it was a great idea, but I don’t know that we realized the impact it would have on trustees across the state.”

Founding the future

LTASB was the brainchild of Clapp who, with an advisory committee formed in July 1991, developed the program. It took years of planning and discussion before the first cohort gathered in 1993.

At its founding, Clapp said, “There exists a need to develop board members as true trustees, ones who accept the responsibility to look at the big picture, to be aware of how their decisions affect other districts in the state. TASB can assist by developing a vehicle to provide a cadre of leaders who have a shared vision for education improvement for all children.”

Since its founding, school board members accepted into LTASB have honed their leadership skills, expanded their board governance knowledge, and built lifelong friendships with trustees from across the state.

Leadership TASB: The Early Years

Patti Clapp (below), who was a Richardson ISD trustee, started thinking about establishing a leadership program that would go beyond basic training when she was TASB president in 1990-91. An advisory committee met back in 1991 to discuss what would become Leadership TASB, and the first cohort graduated in 1993. LTASB now has served nearly 1,000 trustees — and counting. Here are a few photos from the program’s early years.



“LTASB is an outstanding training program for school board members who are dedicated to serving their school districts,” said Dan Troxell, TASB executive director. “Not only do trustees gain a deeper understanding of board governance, but they also have the chance to network with board members from across the state. These trustees are in the trenches together. They begin to build lifelong friendships that are invaluable, and through these relationships, they also gain insights into both the challenges experienced and opportunities available to districts.”



Photos courtesy of TASB Media Services and TASB staff

Cohorts continue

Since its inception, LTASB has been geared toward experienced board members who want to learn more about governance and advocacy. Each year, a cohort of up to 36 experienced board members from districts of all sizes and locations across the state are accepted into the program. Trustees are selected based on their demonstrated leadership in their local district and communities and other factors. Those participating in an LTASB cohort commit to the traditionally year-long program, which consists of five sessions held at locations around the state that vary year to year, with each trip lasting several days. Trustees meet with local school and

government officials, tour schools, and learn about innovative programs while also working on a capstone project.

Robert Long III, division director of Board Development Services, is the current LTASB program manager. Long said that while there is a lot of behind-the-scenes planning needed to coordinate the LTASB site visits, watching the board members have lightbulb moments makes all the effort worth it.

"The field trips are really critical to trustees having boots on the ground to see and experience what is happening at districts across the state," Long said. "It's during these times when discussions take place, ideas are shared, and growth occurs. These trips are when friendships

are forged, and strong ties are created. That is at the heart of LTASB. Those who participate have a deep and abiding love for the program, and that continues to show up in the work these board members continue to do."

Lifelong learning

Back in 1993, David Sublasky was a Fabens ISD trustee and a member of the first LTASB cohort. At that time, his district was the 14th poorest in the state and desperately needed support, he said, adding that unlike his board, other districts had the funds to provide for their needs.

"When we all came together, it was an opportunity to listen and understand," Sublasky said. "Because folks had more than Fabens, they didn't exactly know what they had. Those folks began to understand how desperate we were."

Sublasky would go on to serve 22 years on the Fabens ISD board, 11 of those as president, and during his local tenure, he was elected to the TASB Board, serving from 1992 to 1998. He is also a TASB past president and currently serves as the education service center representative on the TASB Board of Directors. In addition, he is president of the Texas Association of Education Service Centers and has served for 23 years on the Region 19 ESC board.

He acknowledges that traveling to different locations across the state for site visits wasn't just a fun trip; it was hard work. Each trustee had their own unique experience, with each person taking away something different, he said.

"It's a challenging time, an opportunity to get down and work and grow," Sublasky said. "I believe that's the reason why people continue to want to learn and grow. You may have graduated with a 'Master Trustee,' but you never learned it all. It really is something you have to continue to work on."

LTASB accepts applications from trustees interested in the leadership program from May 1 to July 1. The next LTASB cohort will kick off Sept. 27-29 in San Antonio during txEDCON24.

For more information, email leadershiptasb@tasb.org. ★

Mary Ann Lopez is a staff writer for Texas Lone Star.

LEADERSHIP TASB IN ACTION

Leadership TASB offers experienced board members a unique program that will take members to the next level of service and leadership. The program offers a range of learning experiences each year, though each class is unique.

From meeting different school district leaders to bonding in informative group sessions to enjoying student performances to visiting classrooms, LTASB members travel around Texas on field trips to expand their knowledge about public education and strengthen their skills. Here are a few photos of LTASB trips highlights through the years.



LTASB class members in 2011 visit a Cedar Hill ISD school in North Texas.



Students often hold performances for LTASB classes during visits to their campuses. LTASB class members in 2023 enjoy a ballet folklorico performance by students from San Elizario ISD's Josefa L. Sambrano Elementary School.



Bus rides are a regular part of LTASB field trips, ferrying class members to different sites on their trip agenda. LTASB class members Jesse Salinas, then a Crosbyton CISD trustee, and Marina Quilantan-Rivera, a Lyford CISD trustee who is now board president, board an Austin ISD bus in 2009.



At Texarkana ISD's Texas High School in East Texas, students in the Tigers Building Outstanding Technology Systems host a demonstration for LTASB members in 2013.



LTASB class members in 2008 visit an elementary school classroom at Driscoll ISD in South Texas.

Photos courtesy of TASB Media Services and TASB staff



LTASB class members traditionally pose for at least one group photo on field trips. Here, LTASB class members in 2018 pose at Randall High School, part of Canyon ISD in the Texas Panhandle.



LTASB class members in 2023 visit the Capitol in Austin. Trips to the Capitol often are part of the LTASB program itinerary.



LTASB class members in 2019 enjoy food prepared by Stafford MSD students. Field trips to school campuses often include a meal prepared by students in a culinary arts program.



Graduation marks a special time for LTASB members, who gather with fellow classmates to celebrate becoming Master Trustees. Class of 2017 members attend their graduation ceremony in Fort Worth in June. From left: Joyce Foreman, a Dallas ISD trustee, Angie Cox, then a Lewisville ISD trustee, Joseph Guillory III, then a Port Arthur ISD trustee, Angie Trejo, a Mathis ISD trustee, and Velinda Reyes, a San Isidro ISD trustee.



LTASB members in 2015 conduct a group presentation, which is typically part of each class.

Wearing Many Hats

Admin conference gives support to multifaceted role

by Beth Griesmer



Administrative Professionals Day is April 24, and TASB joins others in honoring the outstanding personnel working on the frontlines in public school districts across Texas. The administrative professional teams who support superintendents and board members have a particularly pivotal role in their districts — and often wear many different hats throughout the day.

In support of their crucial work, TASB puts on a conference twice a year offering training and support for administrative professionals. More than 160 people from school districts and regional education service centers across the state gathered for the 2023-24 TASB Conference for Administrative Professionals at TASB headquarters in October and February.

The conference is an opportunity to make new friends.



“Here at TASB, we understand your role in your districts,” TASB Executive Director Dan Troxell said as he welcomed attendees to the October conference. “That’s why we put this conference on twice a year, because we know the importance of your roles.”

Resources and support

The conference, held Oct. 26-27 and Feb. 8-9, included sessions on legal issues, team dynamics, district policy resources,



Photos by TASB Media Services



▲
TASB Executive Director Dan Troxell leads a panel of superintendent and administrative professional pairs from Temple and Thrall ISDs.

Conference attendees laugh as they perform songs written by ChatGPT during a general session.
▼

artificial intelligence, and supporting board members. The two-day event focused on specific information and resources needed for the challenging work of district administrative professionals.

“I think a lot of people would be surprised by the vast array of topics we are expected to have knowledge of,” said Annie Sralla, secretary to the superintendent in Danbury ISD. “Often the most important things I do in a day are never going to be listed on a job description. Staff, parents, and school board members turn to me often with questions.”

Sralla is two years into her role in the district south of Houston. She is looking forward to when she doesn’t have to learn something new every day, but her role is so varied





Photos by TASB Media Services

in her 700-student district, she doesn't know when that day will come. From preparing materials for board meetings to reassuring parents to updating the policy manual, a day for an administrative professional requires a variety of skills.

"You are really multifaceted in your roles," Troxell said. "You are the senior executive in charge of first impressions in your districts. You are the senior executives of logistics."

"Here at TASB, we understand your role in your districts. That's why we put this conference on twice a year, because we know the importance of your roles."

– TASB Executive Director Dan Troxell

▲
Conference attendees participate in a session on team dynamics the first day of the conference.

Annie Sralla, secretary to the superintendent in Danbury ISD, meets with other district staff. Sralla (pictured right) wears many different hats for her 700-student district.



Networking opportunities

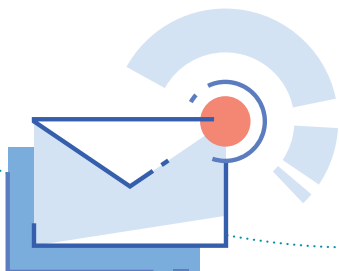
One of the conference's most valuable aspects is the opportunity to network with other professionals who understand the complexities of the work. A panel of superintendent and administrative pairs from Corsicana, Temple, and Thrall ISDs discussed the importance of a strong working relationship on the second day of the conference.

"Nurture, trust, and humor are essential to have for a successful relationship," said Tommy Hooker, superintendent of Thrall ISD. He described during the panel discussion how his administrative assistant, Joan Sladek, offered a very nurturing presence to people in the district when she came into her role 13 years ago. "You have to sprinkle in humor, too. You have to have a lot of humor in what we do."

The conference offers support for those new to their district roles and is



▲
The conference gives administrative professionals from across the state an opportunity to network.



an opportunity for them to interact with more experienced administrative professionals.

“This was my first TASB conference and I learned so much. I feel more confident coming home and taking care of my job responsibilities,” said Rebecca Furlough, who is new to her role as administrative assistant to the superintendent in Terrell ISD-Kaufman County, a district of 5,000 students east of Dallas.

Both the fall and spring conferences offer the same sessions to allow attendees to choose the dates that work best for them. The dates for the 2024-25 conference will be Oct. 24-25, 2024, and Feb. 20-21, 2025. More information and registration details will be available in August.

“The job of administrative professionals is incredibly valuable,” Troxell said. “Because of the hard work they do, public schoolchildren have the opportunity to fulfill their greatest dreams. They help children become who they were intended to be. There is no greater work than that.”★

Beth Griesmer is a staff writer for Texas Lone Star.



Schools as Polling Places

Legal, safety requirements for hosting elections

by TASB Legal Services

Texas school campuses often serve as polling sites for primary, general, and school board elections in their communities. This article explores the legal requirements and safety considerations for schools that serve as polling places.

Q: Must school district facilities be used as polling places?

A: Yes. The entity that owns or controls a public building, including a school district, must make the building available for use as a polling place in any election that covers territory in which the building is located. Tex. Elec. Code § 43.031. However, schools may strategically locate polling places on school property to minimize disruption to campus operations.

Q: Can a district charge a fee for use of its facilities?

A: A school district may not charge for expenses associated with the use of a district facility as a polling place if election day is a day the building is normally open for business. Otherwise, the district may seek reimbursement only for the actual expenses resulting from the use of the building in the election. Tex. Elec. Code § 43.033.

Q: What safety considerations should a district take into account?

A: A polling place requires a large, open, accessible space. A polling place on school property should minimize voter interaction with students and disruption to campus operations. Thus, an ideal location is an area on the outskirts of campus (e.g., an auditorium, gym, or foyer) or an administrative building. The site should be clearly separated from the rest of cam-

pus so that voters cannot interact with students or pass through the polling place and into the rest of the building without clearance through the school district's visitor management process. The polling place entrance and exit should be clear. This is especially important because some activities or items may be allowed in the polling place but not on school property, and vice versa.

Districts should also consider the following precautions:

- Ensure a staff member is present on campus from poll opening at 7 a.m. until closing at 7 p.m. on election day;
- Increase staff presence in common areas and during activities such as passing periods near a polling place;
- Plan for an increase in both vehicle and pedestrian traffic on or near school property during morning drop-off, afternoon pickup, lunch, and recess, including increasing the number of staff or volunteers involved in monitoring and assisting students during these times;
- Ensure all faculty and staff, campus visitors who are not voters, and election workers wear appropriate identification;
- Communicate plans and expectations to the school community in advance through direct communications and information on the district and campus websites.

Each school district must include in its multihazard emergency operations plan (EOP) a policy for district property used as a polling place. A school board may consult with local law enforcement

regarding reasonable security accommodations, but a district is not required to obtain or contract for the presence of law enforcement to secure a polling place. Tex. Educ. Code § 37.108(e).

Q: Are weapons allowed in a school district facility being used as a polling place?

A: The law expressly prohibits certain items and activities in the vicinity of a polling place. For instance, firearms, knives with blades over 5½ inches, and other specified weapons are prohibited on the premises of a polling place on the day of an election or while early voting is in progress. Tex. Penal Code § 46.03(a)(2). This prohibition does not apply to law enforcement officials and certain judicial officers and government attorneys. Tex. Penal Code § 46.15(a).

To ensure that voters are aware of the prohibition of weapons at polling places and to ensure that an offender can be prosecuted, the district or other entity running the election should post a sign as described by Texas Penal Code section 46.15(n)-(o).

Note that state law restricts school districts from posting a sign prohibiting firearms in a location where firearms are not actually prohibited. Districts should contact the Secretary of State Elections Division for additional information.





Q: What about the use of cell phones and security cameras?

A: Communication devices, including cell phones and recording devices, are generally prohibited within 100 feet of a voting station. Tex. Elec. Code § 61.014. The Elections Division advises that cameras that cannot be turned off should not view voting equipment.

Q: What do we need to know about electioneering when school facilities are being used as a polling place?

A: The Texas Election Code prohibits loitering or electioneering for or against a candidate, measure, or political party within 100 feet of an outside door through which a voter may enter the building in which a polling place is located. Tex. Elec. Code §§ 61.003, 85.036. Electioneering includes posting, using, or distributing political signs or literature. Section 61.010 imposes an additional prohibition on wearing a badge, insignia, emblem, or other similar communicative device for or against a candidate, measure, or political party appearing on the ballot. Tex. Elec. Code § 61.010.

The early voting clerk and the presiding judge have the authority to enforce the prohibition of electioneering within the 100-foot marker. Although the district may not prohibit electioneering outside of the 100-foot marker, the

district may enact reasonable regulations concerning the time, place, and manner of electioneering.

Q: Are voters subject to the district's procedures for visitors on campus?

A: No. Districts may not conduct background checks on individuals who come on school property solely for the purpose of voting. To vote, a person must be a registered voter and present acceptable identification at the polling place. Election workers are responsible for verifying the qualifications of each voter. Tex. Elec. Code § 63.001, et seq. If a voter wants to remain on campus or enter another area of campus after voting, however, campus employees may treat the person as they would any other campus visitor.

Q: Must a polling place meet accessibility requirements?

A: Yes. State and federal laws require that polling places be accessible to voters who are elderly or physically disabled. State accessibility requirements are found in Tex. Elec. Code § 43.034.

Finally, each polling place must have an area for parking not smaller than the size of one parking space that is reserved for curbside voting. The area cannot be designated specifically for people with disabilities. Tex. Elec. Code § 64.009(a-1).

For more information on this subject and other school law topics, visit TASB School Law eSource Library at tasb.org/resources/esource.★

This article is provided for educational purposes and contains information to facilitate a general understanding of the law. References to judicial or other official proceedings are intended to be a fair and impartial account of public records, which may contain allegations that are not true. This article is not an exhaustive treatment of the law, nor is it intended to substitute for the advice of an attorney. Consult your own attorney to apply these legal principles to specific fact situations.

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Advocacy Agenda

Call for resolutions in full swing

by Dax González

TASB's call for new Advocacy Resolutions is underway, and school boards are already submitting their legislative issues for inclusion in the 2024-26 Advocacy Agenda.

Advocacy Resolutions are board-submitted positions guiding TASB's response to issues that might come before the Texas Legislature, the State Board of Education, the federal government, and regulatory entities. While Advocacy Priorities are developed through the grassroots process and consensus among trustees at the Legislative Advisory Council, boards can provide their proposed resolutions in the language and context that is important to them for consideration by the TASB Delegate Assembly.

Resolution proposals will be accepted until 11:59 p.m. on June 17. Each resolution must be adopted by your board and must be submitted using the form found by going to gr.tasb.org, clicking on What Is the TASB Advocacy Agenda?, and then finding How to Submit an Advocacy Resolution. But plan now to put any proposed resolutions on your board's agenda well before the deadline for submissions if you haven't already.

Proposed resolutions are first reviewed by the TASB Resolutions Committee and then by the TASB Board of Directors. In September, the 2024 Delegate Assembly will adopt approved resolutions that will form part of the 2024-26 Advocacy Agenda, which will remain in effect until the end of the 2026 TASB Delegate Assembly.

Please note that all current resolutions will expire along with the 2022-24 Advocacy Agenda in September after the Delegate Assembly adjourns. Any resolu-

tions your district wants to see on the new agenda must be submitted again.

Also, we strongly encourage your board to send a trustee to the TASB Delegate Assembly in San Antonio on Sept. 28 to represent your board's interests and support your advocacy positions and proposed resolutions. Learn more at tasb.org/about/governance/delegate-assembly.

An electronic version of the resolution submission form, the current Advocacy Agenda, and more information may be found at gr.tasb.org. Please contact Dax Gonzalez at 800-580-4885 or dax.gonzalez@tasb.org if you have any questions.

Happening in Austin

With the recent primary elections dominating much of the news cycle over

the past couple of months, education news out of Austin has been pretty sparse. Here's a round-up of some items you may have missed coming out of the Texas Education Agency.

TEA has started taking steps to transition Marlin ISD back to an elected board of trustees after having appointed a board of managers to the district back in January 2017. As part of the transition process, two elected trustees will resume their governance authority and become part of the board of managers that currently has three members. As required by statute, Texas Commissioner of Education Mike Morath will continue to designate trustees to replace managers until the governing body is comprised entirely of elected members. The appointment of the board of managers is set to expire on Jan. 31, 2026.

As Marlin ISD is transitioning out of state management, La Joya ISD has been placed under state control. Morath has appointed a board of managers and superintendent to oversee La Joya ISD after a TEA investigation found instances of fraud and other misdeeds conducted by members of the elected board and administration.

The commissioner appointed the following individuals to the new board:

- Julian Alvarez III
- Anita Chavez
- Celso Gomez Jr.
- Rosalva Hernandez



Attendees gather at TASB headquarters for a Grassroots Meeting to discuss their districts' legislative priorities.

Photo by TASB Media Services

- Carlos Margo
- Jessica Ochoa
- Alyssa Peña

The appointed superintendent is Marcey Sorensen, who most recently served as deputy superintendent for the Virginia Department of Education.

The SBOE met in early February and took action on a couple of important issues. This was the first meeting under newly appointed SBOE Chair Aaron Kinsey (R-Midland). He succeeds Keven Ellis (R-Lufkin), who was appointed as chair in 2019 and who will continue to represent his East Texas district. Kinsey's term as chair is set to expire on Dec. 17, 2025.

The board reviewed and approved the suitability rubric for the Instructional Materials Review and Approval (IMRA) process called for by HB 1605 that will outline the criteria to be used in the IMRA process to determine the suitability and appropriateness of instructional materials for a particular subject and grade level. The subjects and grade levels addressed include English and Language Arts for grades K-third and fourth-eighth, Second Language Acquisition for grades K-third and fourth-sixth, and math for grades K-12. The board also determined that it will have final authority for approvals and criteria of how instructional materials will be reviewed as part of IMRA.

SBOE members also approved two changes to the Dyslexia Handbook to clarify requirements for dyslexia evaluation, identification, and instruction to better align with HB 3928. The board's Committee on Instruction will seek feedback from stakeholders to help make further changes after HB 3928 required the SBOE to revise the handbook and determine the qualifications and training requirements for when a student is evaluated for and later identified as having dyslexia.★

Dax González is division director of TASB Governmental Relations.

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Navigating Change

SHARS program facing numerous challenges

by Karlyn Keller

Texas public schools face many challenges and changes that are sweeping across the school Medicaid/School Health and Related Services program. Recent shifts have led to a significant upheaval in funding and operational frameworks, leaving many in our educational community searching for clarity and stability. Advocacy will play a pivotal role in overcoming these challenges.

Changes and immediate impact

Recent modifications to the SHARS program have led to a \$400 million funding reduction. Districts were given minimal notice to accept their settlement offer (reduction) or appeal through an informal review, a process further compli-

cated by end-of-year school holiday break in December.

It is expected that more than 50% of districts across the state have challenged their settlement offers for various reasons, including the monumental changes to the RMTS rates. The Texas Health and Human Services Commission has initiated the review of these appeals, denying many so far.

Training opportunities

The Texas HHSC established new procedures back in January for the Federal Fiscal Year 2023 Cost Report submissions, signaling new requirements for districts to navigate. Training opportunities for this process were available, ending in March.

However, there are other training opportunities. TASB will host the SHARS 2024 Conference, with in-person sessions in Katy, Waco, and virtual events in April and May that will feature presentations by TEA and TASB staff.

The SHARS 2024 Conference series will also celebrate TASB's 30th anniversary in the world of school Medicaid. It is an essential gathering for school districts and education service centers, focusing on a comprehensive exploration of program changes and best practices within the SHARS framework. This event will serve as an invaluable resource for those dedicated to enhancing school-based health services.

Your district's participation will be instrumental in advancing our collective understanding and implementation of SHARS, ultimately benefiting students across Texas.

Grant opportunity

Amidst these operational challenges, a \$50 million Center for Medicare & Medicaid Services grant is available that offers an opportunity for enhancing the SHARS/school Medicaid program. This grant underlines the importance of aligning SHARS with best practices, enabling Texas to expand service offerings, which can include a focus in the much-needed arena of mental health



support. It's not clear yet if the state will apply for the grant.

Moving forward

Advocacy plays an important role in dealing with these changes. School board members are urged to:

1. Meet with district SHARS staff to get a better understanding of how the program works and what challenges interfere with providing and reporting services.
2. Promote staff participation in SHARS training and the TASB SHARS 2024 Conference to stay informed and proactive.
3. Engage with legislators to share SHARS' positive impacts and advocate for program efficiency to include alignment with school timelines and practices, and formal establishment of an advisory group.
4. Encourage HHSC to use the CMS grant opportunity to advocate for expanded mental health services and best practice alignment.

The future of the SHARS program and its capacity to support Texas students hinge on informed advocacy and strategic planning with stakeholders. By uniting voices, sharing insights, and leveraging opportunities for improvement, Texas schools can navigate these turbulent times while moving toward a more supportive and transparent SHARS program.

TASB, while supporting districts with their SHARS program, remains engaged at all levels of advocacy and support in what is happening within the SHARS arena and welcomes opportunities to work with your district to further your SHARS program.★

Karlyn Keller is division director of TASB Special Education and Student Solutions.

Upcoming SHARS and Special Populations Events

April 9	2024 TASB SHARS Road Show — Katy
April 11	TASB Student Solutions: Defending Districts in Special Education Dispute Resolution — Virtual Event
April 17	TASB SHARS Matters Webinar Series: Telehealth and Telemedicine Services — Virtual Event
May 9	TASB Student Solutions Webinar Series: Wrapping Up 2023-24 — Virtual Event
May 9-10	TASB Virtual 30 th Annual SHARS Conference — Virtual Event
May 15	TASB SHARS Matters Webinar Series: End-of-Year SHARS Reminders — Virtual Event
May 20	TASB SHARS Road Show — Waco



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Purpose and Continuity

Slidell ISD trustee has served for 50 years

by Tim Fletcher

Editor's notes: The District Voices column features articles written by local school district board members around Texas. Send submissions to managing editor Laura Tolley at laura.tolley@tasb.org.

When I got out of high school, I felt the need and longing to give back to the community. I liked the idea of someone getting out of school, someone who had just been in it and knew how everything worked, doing something to give back. I couldn't imagine then that I would serve on the school board for 50 years.

There were some older gentlemen on the board when I started — real good guys — and right out of the box they made me president of the board. It was kind of overwhelming, to say the least.

We are all working toward the same goal of serving our students the best we can with what we have.

It's all been a learning experience, but it's also always been rewarding. Out of the years that I've been on the board, I've been president for all but four of them and I have missed only five board meetings.

I've had four children go through the district. My kids probably had a rougher time than others. I didn't listen to them when they would talk about how this teacher does this and that teacher does that. I would tell them that they are going

to have to talk to their mom. I am biased in a different way. I want what's best for all Slidell kids. I don't just consider my kids. I consider all of them. That has always been my philosophy.

Making things happen

I guess you could say I bleed Slidell blue and orange. It's exciting to be part of something that impacts the lives of students. We are a small district, but we are growing. Any time you can build and give back, it's worth it.

For years, we had the same building that I went to school in. Someone said, "Well, someday we will need a new building," and I thought that is never going to happen. Well, now we have a new high school building built with the support of taxpayers and the community.

Over the years, I have been a part of decisions both large and small. No decision was made lightly, and it has helped to have the students as my focus and my guide. We have built a new gymnasium, and we are currently building a new elementary school with the help of a bond.

You get into the mode of wanting the best facilities and the best things you can have for kids. My kids are out of school and now I have grandkids in the district. People ask me, "Why do you still want to be on the board?" The day I think I can't contribute is the day I leave the board.

Seeing the big picture

I don't care if you're in a school district with 30,000 kids or 400 kids, the issues affect your district the same way as they affect us.

We are all working toward the same goal of serving our students the best we can with what we have. Being on the



Photo by TASB Media Services

Tim Fletcher, who has served as a Slidell ISD trustee for 50 years, attends txEDCON23.

board for a long time has helped me see the bigger picture and just keep working at it.

I've been through nine or more superintendents over the years. My wife threw me a birthday party once and there were seven superintendents there. Each superintendent we had was exactly who we needed when we needed it. It's funny how that works. You might need one superintendent who wants to be a penny pincher and the next one who is good at public relations.

The board's concern and focus as we grow is how we can best serve our kids. We have a great superintendent currently in Taylor Williams. We are very fortunate to have her as someone who has her eye on the future. We hired her as a teacher, so she has come through the district with a deep understanding of our needs.

We have been very fortunate to have stability with teachers. Many of our teachers will have their whole career and retire in the district. Teachers and staff want stability. It has always been important to me that they can look to the school board to guide the district.

I cannot fully express how much of an honor it has been to serve the kids in my district. People like to pat me on the back for my years of service, but I can assure you that I am the lucky one.★

Tim Fletcher is a member of the Slidell ISD Board of Trustees and currently serves as board president. Slidell ISD serves 480 students and is about 20 miles northwest of Denton.



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Preparing for txEDCON24

Submit session proposals for annual conference

April is the month to submit proposals to present at txEDCON24 this fall in San Antonio.

The conference, hosted by TASB and the Texas Association of School Administrators, will be held Sept. 27-29 at the Henry B. González Convention Center in downtown San Antonio.

TASA and TASB are interested in session proposals that involve practical strategies, skill-building exercises, and collaborative frameworks that can help governance team members achieve their educational goals. Session proposals should be innovative, interactive, and grounded in real-world experiences.

The txEDCON24 sessions will fall into one of these categories:

- Vision and Goals
(*Shared vision, district goals, strategic planning*)
- Systems and Processes
(*Human resources, professional development, curriculum and instruction,*

budgeting, bonds, policy, school law, facilities, school safety, and cybersecurity)

- Progress and Accountability
(*Student learning outcomes, progress monitoring, superintendent evaluation, state and local accountability*)
- Advocacy and Engagement
(*Building partnerships and engaging community, parents, and businesses; legislative policy; public school advocacy*)
- Synergy and Teamwork
(*Roles and responsibilities, ethics, teamwork, collaboration among Team of Eight*)

The application process opened April 1 and ends May 1. To submit applications, potential presenters must use the Session Selection tab available at tasa.tasb.org.

Application submission requirements:

- Applications are accepted only online.

- Sessions are one hour in length.
- Session formats include open discussion, panel, or presentation.
- Sales presentations will not be accepted.
- No more than three applications per school district or organization will be eligible for consideration.

All sessions regarding legal topics must include at least one licensed attorney in the presenting group. Preference will be given to legal presenters who are members of the TASB Council of School Attorneys.

All presenters must register and pay the appropriate fee to attend the conference.

Application review process

In mid to late May, TASA and TASB members will be invited to provide feedback on the submitted proposals. Final determinations are based on the following criteria:

- Presenter knowledge in the topic area
- Feedback from TASA and TASB members

Submission of a proposal does not guarantee selection. Notification of acceptance or rejection of proposals will be emailed by late June.

Learn more about txEDCON24 and using Session Selector at tasa.tasb.org. If you have questions, contact Eric Simpson at TASA (esimpson@tasanet.org or 512-477-6361).★




Attendees at a session of txEDCON22.

Photo by TASB Media Services

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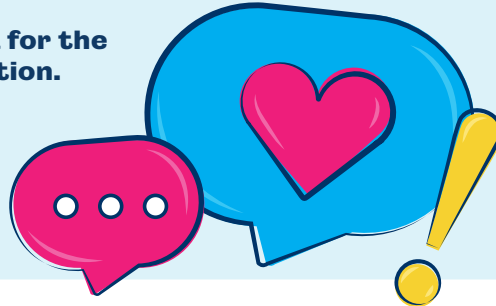


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LTASB in the Coastal Bend

Trustees get in-depth tour of historic King Ranch

by Stephanie Blanck

LEADERSHIP TASB

Editor's note: Leadership TASB is a unique board development program designed to take experienced board members to a new level of service and leadership by introducing them to a variety of issues, people, activities, and locations. These columns are written by class members and track the group's progress.

The Leadership TASB class traveled this winter to the Coastal Bend region, where members learned about the successes and struggles of several local districts and toured a historic Texas ranch that helps support public education.

Over the course of three days, trustees met with the superintendents, trustees, and staff of Gregory-Portland, Santa Gertrudis, and Kingsville ISDs, discovering how they have made a difference in these unique districts, some of which cover vast swaths of land.

On the first day, Michelle Cavazos, superintendent of Gregory-Portland ISD, gave the class details and insights about her district before boarding a bus with us and acting as district tour director for the group. Tim Flinn, board president, noted that having LTASB alumni on the school board allowed for a deeper understanding of the struggles of education and that the knowledge they gained from the program enhances the board's discussion and problem-solving abilities.

Gregory-Portland ISD, located in the town of Portland, has an intensive P-TECH program in collaboration with Del Mar College in nearby Corpus Christi, as well as other agreements with Texas A&M Corpus Christi. The district is building a new CTE building, which will last for decades even as industry needs change.

In the fall, the district will be opening an early childhood center for prekindergarten, a preschool program for children with disabilities, and kindergarten students. The center is being



developed around "neighborhoods," or learning pods, each with its own theme and a hands-on experiential space where children can build their vocabulary, even before they enter elementary school.

Upon returning to the Gregory-Portland ISD administration building, a delicious lunch was provided by students in the district's culinary careers program. The remainder of the afternoon, Cavazos and several trustees discussed what good governance looks like and noted that the job of the superintendent is to build the team of eight.

At Gregory-Portland ISD, they use a "communication matrix," which is kept on a Google document that trustees can access any time. This matrix updates questions from trustees or the community, noting who will respond, and in what time frame. Gregory-Portland ISD trustees stressed that the board's responsibility is to always advocate for public education and to have honest, open conversations with stakeholders.

Day two had an early start with a drive out to the King Ranch, where a guide gave an entertaining tour and explanation of the history and development of the schools that are located right on the legendary ranch.

Santa Gertrudis ISD was named after the creek that runs through the ranch.



Henrietta King started the school when her husband, Richard, promised those working at the cattle ranch an education for their children. One of the original buildings now houses pre-K to second grade students. Another campus houses third through eighth grades, and the high school is located at Texas A&M Kingsville.

We were met at the Santa Gertrudis School by Veronica Alfaro, the district's



Top left: Students wave to LTASB members outside of the Santa Getrudis School in Kingsville.



Bottom left: LTASB members tour Gregory-Portland ISD's early childhood center, which is slated to open this fall. The center has a number of "neighborhoods" or learning pods, each with its own theme and hands-on experiential space where children can learn.

Top right: While visiting the King Ranch, members of the LTASB Class of 2024 pose for a photo outside the historic Santa Getrudis Ranch building.

Middle right: Students from Gregory-Portland ISD's culinary careers program are recognized during a lunch that they provided for LTASB members.

Bottom right: LTASB members view a King Ranch history display while visiting the ranch in Kingsville.

Photos courtesy of Chris Kovatch, vice president of Orangefield ISD's school board and a member of the LTASB Class of 2024.

superintendent, and many of her staff as well as high school students. She spoke of the challenges they face, and the students discussed their experiences in earning college credits and certifications while in high school. Academy High School opened in 1994-95, and through a partnership with Texas A&M Kingsville, students had the chance to take college classes starting in ninth grade. The site's motto is, "We are successful with less, we make it happen."

We ended our day with Cecilia Reynolds-Perez, superintendent of Kingsville ISD, and her board of trustees, who walked our class through the challenges and successes they have had over the years. They also joined the LTASB group for dinner, during which they answered many questions from class members.★

Stephanie Blanck, a Georgetown ISD trustee, is a member of the Leadership TASB Class of 2024.



Camp Stories

Students offer inspiration at conference

by Beth Griesmer

Hundreds of school trustees from across Texas gathered in Galveston Feb. 28-March 2 to find public education inspiration from experts, peers, and, most importantly, students. The annual Governance (Gov) Camp was packed with educational sessions and opportunities to gain insight into the student experience with a day of Student Voice panels, exhibits, and sessions.

“There is great reason to have hope,” said Adam Sáenz, supervising psychologist for Texas A&M’s medical school and department of athletics. He shared in the first general session his inspirational story about how two teachers made a difference in his life as he struggled in school.

Sáenz discussed what board members can do to support struggling students. “The school is the frontline of mental health intervention,” said Sáenz. “It’s the gym, it’s the hallways, the cafeteria, the classroom, it’s the football field, it’s the volleyball court.”

He encouraged trustees to support their teachers and staff so they can be the mentally healthy adults in districts supporting students in and out of the classroom. Sáenz kicked off Gov Camp Feb. 28 with a session on how boards can harness the power of stress to build connections.

Learning together

Board members from Bloomington ISD shared lunch together and talked about the sessions they had attended the second morning. “One of the best ideas I’m taking from Gov Camp is setting up a student advisory council for our new superintendent,” said Blanca Wallace, a Bloomington ISD trustee. “Our priority is teaching our students to advocate for themselves.”

The small district outside of Victoria has a new superintendent this school year. “It’s really important to hear from the students,” Wallace said. “They have ideas we would never have thought of.”



Gov Camp attendees had more than 60 breakout sessions to choose from focused on innovative programs, governance, and leadership. There were more than 20 sessions and hands-on demonstrations related to student voice on March 1. Trustees could earn up to 17.5 hours of continuing education credit, with 3,200 credit hours awarded.

Inspiring voices

The second day of Gov Camp never fails to inspire with a full day of presentations, demonstrations, and insights from dozens of Texas students who shared their experiences both in and out of the classroom. The “Student Voice Scholarship Panel” was



moderated by Jim Walsh from the law firm and event sponsor Walsh Gallegos Kyle Robinson & Roalson P.C.

The panelists impressed and entertained the crowd of school leaders with their earnest appreciation for everything they had gained from their school experiences. The discussion emphasized the support and sense of community that the students had received through their schools. For senior Ja'Zhana Henderson, her principal had come to Galveston from Amarillo ISD to be at the event. "I wouldn't be on the stage today without that support," Henderson said.

The panel focused on the opportunities the students had experienced through school programs. Leander ISD senior Ananya Khanna talked about discovering aerospace engineering through a high school class. "Women belong in aerospace," she declared to applause from the audience.

Students led sessions and demonstrations on everything from rebuilding a 1951 Ford truck to diplomatic relations with students overseas. Trustees walked away inspired by innovative programs and especially by the young people who worked hard to make them successful.

The day of student inspiration ended with high energy fun from keynote speaker Kenyon Salo, a member of the Denver Broncos Thunderstorm Skydive Team. Salo expressed to trustees the transformative power of sharing stories and how it can help them in their roles as district leaders. "The reason we are on this planet is to be of service."★

Beth Griesmer is a staff writer for Texas Lone Star.

Top left: Adam Sáenz told the audience about his struggles of growing up in South Texas.

Middle left: Students from LaPoynor ISD performed during the first day of Gov Camp.

Bottom left: The final session of Gov Camp got folks up and moving.

Top middle: Speaker Kenyon Salo brought high energy fun to the last day of Gov Camp.

Bottom middle: The winners of the Student Voice Scholarship spoke during a panel discussion with moderator Jim Walsh. Pictured left to right, Dan Arredondo, Samantha Gregory, Jim Walsh, Ja'Zhana Henderson, Ananya Khanna, and Camden Redden.

Top right: Board members from Bridge City ISD attended Gov Camp together.

Bottom right: Student-led sessions were fun and interactive.

Photos by TASB Media Services



Cell Connectivity

The Texas Association of School Boards, Inc. (TASB) announced a new wireless infrastructure program from TASB exclusive provider Diamond Communications, a private wireless infrastructure company, with the goal of bringing increased cell connectivity to Texas public school districts.

“We are very excited about developing this program as it opens the potential for new investments in cellular infrastructure on school district properties, which may lead to better connectivity for school districts and their communities in both rural and urban areas,” said TASB Executive Director Dan Troxell. “Cellular connectivity is essential, especially during emergencies, and under this program, school districts may be able to effectively market district land to cell carriers for the construction of new communication towers to boost bandwidth and reliability.”

TASB decided to work with Diamond Communications on the program after

researching the market and speaking with numerous service providers beginning in 2022.

“We’ve long heard from our members that they wanted a solution to help improve cellular connectivity without all the work needed to broker agreements with the different wireless carriers on their own,” said TASB Division Director of Facility Services Jeff Clemmons. “This program, which we’re calling ConnectED Texas, seeks to simplify the process in a market that school districts may not be familiar with and gives school districts the potential to earn revenue on land that may be leased for new towers or other infrastructure. It’s a win-win situation.”

Texas school districts are increasingly relying on cellular service to provide internal and outgoing notifications in the event of an emergency. Not only do emergency personnel and first responders need reliable communications, but

parents and school officials also need to be able to share information via texts and calls. Cell phone signal strength and network capacity are essential to accurate location sharing, especially critical during emergency situations.

Data shows that approximately 50% of school districts in Texas have at least one major carrier with unreliable coverage, Clemmons said.

With connectivity being affected by infrastructure proximity and capacity in a given area, working with an experienced wireless infrastructure company to market available properties to an array of carriers may be one way school districts can improve connectivity on their campuses and earn lease revenue.

“We are thrilled to be working with TASB,” said Peter Woodbury, President, Strategic Partnerships at Diamond Communications.★



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Take advantage of our most popular training sessions offered in multiple locations across the state.

March 19: Lubbock	Region 17
March 25: Dublin	Region 11
March 26: Wichita Falls	Region 9
March 27: Kingsville	Region 2
April 4: San Angelo	Region 15
April 10: Houston	Region 4
April 25: Gonzales (New Location!).....	Regions 3 and 13
April 30: Uvalde	Region 20
May 8: Alpine	Region 18
May 9: Huntsville	Region 6
May 9: Abilene	Region 14
May 14: Nacogdoches	Region 7
May 14: Commerce*	Region 10
May 15: Canyon*	Region 16
May 21: Waco*	Region 12
May 23: El Paso	Region 19

*These locations will offer the Texas Trustee Institute Spring Workshop Edition of new board member training.



Visit tasb.org/spring-workshops for more information.

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If safe learning environments are your priority, we're ready to lend a hand. TASB and Diamond Communications want to help bring improved wireless service and emergency communication to Texas schools, enhancing connectivity to help you address the safety and effectiveness of your learning environments.

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Diamond
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Contact TASB about ConnectED Texas

512-505-2850 | jeff.clemmons@tasb.org

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TSPRA Awards

The TASB Communications, Marketing, and Events team earned 35 awards in the Texas School Public Relations Association's Star Awards program.

The Star Awards recognize excellence in public school communications and marketing. TASB won the following:

Best of Category

- Writing: Nonpartisan school boards, (Thought Leadership)
- Published News or Feature: Rock Scholars, (*Texas Lone Star*, June 2023)

Gold Star

- Booklet: Guide to Participating in Delegate Assembly
- Program: txEDCON22 Program
- Annual Report: Texas Association of School Boards 2022 Annual Report
- Magazine: *Texas Lone Star* Magazine
- Image/Identity Package: SHARS Conference Materials
- Writing: Nonpartisan School Boards;

and Public Schools, Not Vouchers, Offer the Most School Choice

- Published News or Features: *Texas Lone Star* articles published in 2023: Focusing on Mental Health; Full on Focus; In the Zone; Making Connections; Powered Together; Putting Partners Together; and Rock Scholars
- Original Art: Designing Safer Schools infographic
- Video – Documentary: Public Schools Are Under Attack
- Video – Promotional: No Room; and Nonpartisan School Boards
- Video – Marketing: BuyBoard back to school marketing campaign
- Miscellaneous Digital Media: Hate 3-Ring Binders; and txEDCON23 Exhibitor Prospectus
- E-Newsletter: Texans for Strong Public Schools Newsletter
- Website – Template Driven Design: tasbrmf.org website

- Marketing Campaign: Benefits Coop Health Plan campaign

Silver Star

- Image/Identity Package: Admin Professions Conference materials
- Writing: How Arlington ISD Is Building Community Support
- Published News or Feature: Building Bond Support
- Logo, Trademark, Symbol: Board Officer Institute logo
- Original Art: 88th Texas Capitol illustration
- Social Media Campaign: School Board Recognition Month campaign

Bronze Star

- Published News Release, Edited: New Poll Shows Bipartisan Support in Texas Against Education Voucher Proposals
- Published Print Ad: BuyBoard back to school marketing campaign
- Logo, Trademark, Symbol: Texas Trustee Institute logo★

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Bulletin Board

Nominations Open for 2024 Student Heroes Award

The State Board of Education has announced the opening of the nomination window for the 2024 Student Heroes Award.

Approved by the SBOE in 2015, the Student Heroes Award highlights Texas public school students participating in impactful volunteer service in their communities, such as initiating programs for seniors or facilitating fundraisers for children receiving medical treatment. Since the award's inception, nearly 120 Texas public school students with a heart for service have been named Student Heroes. Fifteen students, one from each SBOE district, receive the award each year.

The SBOE encourages students, teachers, administrators, and community members to nominate any Texas public school students who exemplify the core value of selfless service. To be eligible for nomination, service projects performed by nominees must be voluntary and not associated with any curriculum requirement, school service project, or preexisting community program. Winners will receive a plaque and a medal from their district's SBOE member during an awards presentation held at their school.

Nominations will close on May 4. More information about the program and submitting a nomination can be found by going to tea.texas.gov and searching for Student Heroes Award. You may also email heroes@tea.texas.gov or call the SBOE support office at 512-463-9007.

Nominations Open for Teacher of the Year Awards Program

Nominations are open for the 2025 Texas Teacher of the Year awards program. Each school district and charter operator may nominate two teachers — one elementary and one secondary educator — for Regional Teacher of the Year to their regional education service center by June 13 (completed online applications are automatically sent to ESCs).

All district/charter nominees advance to a regional competition, coordinated by each ESC. The 40 regional winners (one elementary teacher and one secondary teacher for each region) then become semifinalists for Texas Teacher of the Year. Six finalists — three elementary and three secondary educators — are chosen, and following an interview process, the Texas Elementary Teacher of the Year and Texas Secondary Teacher of the Year are selected. One of the two winners goes on to represent the state in the National Teacher of the Year program.

For more information about the program and to find the online application site, go to tasanet.org, find the Awards tab, and click on Texas Teacher of the Year.

We want to recognize school board members' extraordinary work in TLS!

If you have received any awards or honors, please send your news and photos to tls@tasb.org.

Why (from page 42)

than providing ways for parents, staff, students, and community members to be heard. Special workshops and town hall forums offer good ways to explain the external factors impacting your district budget, detail your plan to manage these challenges, and gather feedback. It's important that decision-making processes are open and transparent and provide multiple opportunities for your community to weigh in.

The next few months will be tough, whether your district adopts a budget by a June 30 or August 31 deadline. With so much uncertainty ahead for Texas public schools, one thing is for sure: difficult conversations are never easy but avoiding them makes them only more challenging. We owe it to our communities and our lawmakers to be as vocal as possible about the real-life impacts of these budget deficits.★

Tiffany Dunne-Oldfield is deputy executive director of TASB.

TASB's Executive Search Services is currently accepting applications for the positions listed below:

- **Clyde CISD:** Superintendent
Deadline: April 3, 2024
- **Prairie Lea ISD:** Superintendent
Deadline: April 17, 2024
- **Pewitt CISD:** Superintendent
Deadline: April 17, 2024

For information about vacancies or services provided by TASB's Executive Search Services, call **800-580-8272**, email executive.search@tasb.org.



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Start With the 'Why'

Share actionable strategies to deal with deficit budgets

by Tiffany Dunne-Oldfield



Tiffany Dunne-Oldfield

It's never been easy to be a school board member, but these days the job has gotten exponentially more difficult due to a worsening school funding environment that is impacting districts across the state.

By some accounts, a majority of Texas districts will be dealing with a deficit budget and related potential fallout — including staff and program cuts — in the 2024-25 school year. What's also clear is that these deficits are impacting both the largest and smallest districts in all parts of Texas, from the Gulf Coast to the Panhandle.

No community wants to hear that dozens, if not hundreds, of school district jobs may need to be eliminated to make up for the funding shortfall. People are always a district's most valuable asset, making up 80-85% of the overall budget. So not even Houdini could magically escape a significant budget deficit without making tough staffing decisions.

Maintaining trust

In recent weeks, TASB HR Services has been offering a lot of strategies for district administrators to analyze and navigate staffing challenges in light of a budget deficit. Yet for school board trustees, the difficulties extend far beyond just making sense of the data. The other imperative is figuring out how to have those difficult conversations with community members, parents, and staff about budget issues in a way that doesn't undermine confidence in district leadership.

Prior to joining TASB, I spent time as a communications chief for two large districts in the Houston area. One of the toughest jobs I had during that time was communicating the proposed closure of several beloved magnet programs. We had

auditoriums packed with parents, students, and teachers who were understandably upset and had a lot of questions and concerns.

Before working in public education, my career also included many years in corporate communications in the banking sector. I learned a lot about preparing and communicating quarterly reports that sometimes fell short of expectations. And like any corporate workplace, there were cycles of layoffs and re-orgs that all had to be implemented without scaring off investors, customers, and key staff.

The bottom line: Whether you're accountable to voters or shareholders, there are ways to manage disappointing news and difficult circumstances while protecting against the erosion of trust.

Explaining the cause

First, you need to explain the external factors contributing to the situation. For districts facing deficit budgets, that means describing how double-digit inflation has resulted in exponential growth in the district's cost of operations. It also should include discussions on how teacher recruitment/retention issues — which necessitated salary raises last budget cycle — are now creating significant roadblocks to a balanced 2024-25 budget unless cuts are made. You should also detail how the relentless focus on voucher legislation during the 88th regular legislative session affected lawmakers' ability to reach an agreement on how best to increase school funding. Talk about how disappointed you were with this outcome, especially since the state had an unprecedented surplus budget and there was widespread understanding that most Texans viewed school funding as a top priority for lawmakers. Some community members don't know or understand these facts.

Navigating challenges

Next up, and this point is important, your district's leadership team must pivot to actionable strategies to address the current situation. This type of hard pivot to talking about what's in your control, and the decisions and steps needed to navigate these looming budget challenges, will help build confidence and support in the actions needed to manage.

A mentor from my days in banking taught me that a 20:80 approach usually works best when you are managing challenging financial news. That is, spend about 20% of your time explaining the external pressures and factors affecting your current situation, then spend the majority of your time discussing actionable strategies to navigate and manage the reality of the challenges you are facing.

This might include the work that your board is doing to communicate with lawmakers about the real-life impacts of the budget deficit, whether it's cutting jobs, reducing bus transportation, or closing schools. It might also include staffing analyses and how you are working to minimize impact while making thoughtful, fair decisions about reductions in force if needed. In some cases, you might include conversations about additional revenue streams such as a Voter-Approval Tax Rate Election. Many school communities may be more open to bringing such a proposal to the ballot box if it provides an alternative to drastic staffing and program cuts.

Listening to concerns

Finally, there is nothing more important during this upcoming budget season

(See 'Why', page 40.)

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SARITA MAYBIN

Sarita Maybin is a former university dean of students and literally wrote the book on how to respond to the question, *If You Can't Say Something Nice, What DO You Say?*



ANTHONY ROBLES

Anthony Robles is a three-time wrestling All-American, the 2011 NCAA Division I National Champion, a two-time ESPY Award recipient, and the author of *Unstoppable*, a book about triumph over adversity.



JAMIE VOLLMER

Jamie Vollmer is the author of the book *Schools Cannot Do It Alone*, which the *American School Board Journal* named one of its Top Ten Books of the Year.



Registration Opens April 16

Visit tasb.org/SLI for more information.



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