

Texas Lone Star

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1949-2024

YEARS

**A LEGACY OF EXCELLENCE,
A FUTURE OF POSSIBILITY**

**CELEBRATING
SERVICE TO
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BOARDS**

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FEBRUARY

- 6 • TASB Grassroots Meeting — ESC Region 12, Waco
- 7 • BoardBook Premier® Basic Skills Training — Austin
- 7 • TASB Grassroots Meeting — ESC Region 4, Houston
- 8 • TASB Grassroots Meeting — ESC Region 2, Corpus Christi
- 8 • TASB Grassroots Meeting — ESC Region 5, Beaumont
- 8 • TASB Student Solutions Webinar Series: Discipline of Students with Disabilities — Virtual Event
- 8-9 • TASB Conference for Administrative Professionals — Austin
- 12-13 • 2024 Texas Federal Advocacy Conference — Washington, D.C.
- 14 • TASB Facilities: Asbestos Designated Person Training — San Antonio
- 14-15 • TASB HR Services: Implementing Strategic HR Practices — Virtual Event
- 15 • TASB Facilities: Integrated Pest Management — San Antonio
- 20 • TASB Grassroots Meeting — ESC Region 9, Wichita Falls
- 20 • TASB Grassroots Meeting — ESC Region 14, Abilene
- 21 • TASB Grassroots Meeting — ESC Region 11, Fort Worth
- 21 • TASB Grassroots Meeting — ESC Region 20, San Antonio
- 22 • TASB Grassroots Meeting — ESC Region 3, Victoria
- 28-March 2 • TASB Governance Camp, Powered by Student Voice 2024 — Galveston

MARCH

- 7 • TASB Grassroots Meeting — ESC Region 6, Huntsville
- 7 • TASB Grassroots Meeting — Virtual Event
- 19 • TASB Spring Workshop — Lubbock
- 27-28 • TASB HR Services: Writing Effective Job Descriptions — Virtual Event



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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Promise and Potential

Let's focus on ambitious, attainable goals

by Armando Rodriguez



Armando Rodriguez

The start of a new year is a time not only to reflect on the accomplishments and challenges of the past, but to envision a future filled with promise and potential. As president of TASB, I am honored to share with you a message that resonates with hope, ambition, and a commitment to making a profound impact on the lives of Texas students.

This year, our focus must be clear: set ambitious goals that move the needle towards ensuring that every student and staff member in our great state has access to the opportunities that pave the way for success. The educational landscape is ever evolving, and as stewards of our children's futures, we have a responsibility to foster an environment that not only meets but exceeds their needs.

"Moving the needle" has become a powerful phrase that encapsulates our collective efforts to make positive changes that benefit all Texans. In the realm of education, this mantra takes on a special significance. It urges us to push beyond the status quo, to propel the educational experience forward, and to create tangible improvements in the lives of our students and educators.

Research consistently affirms what we inherently know: students who succeed often do so because they receive the support they need during the foundational years of their academic journey. This underscores the urgency of our mission. We cannot afford to wait; we must act decisively to ensure that every child in Texas receives the help they need to thrive.

As we embark on this journey, our first and foremost resolution must be to redouble our efforts in providing the resources necessary for a robust and

equitable educational experience. This includes addressing disparities in access to technology, investing in professional development for educators, and creating an inclusive environment where every student feels valued and supported.

The new year brings with it a unique opportunity to create change — change that is not merely symbolic but substantive, reaching every corner of our diverse state. We must be strategic in our goal setting, providing benchmarks that are both ambitious and attainable. By doing so, we commit ourselves to a continuous cycle of improvement, constantly pushing the boundaries of what we can achieve for the benefit of our students.

One critical aspect of our mission is to ensure that our schools are not just centers of learning but vibrant hubs of opportunity that extend beyond the classroom and into the realm of extra-curricular activities, career guidance, and community engagement. We must strive to create an ecosystem where students can discover their passions, hone their skills, and prepare for the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

This focus on opportunities is not limited to students alone. It extends to our dedicated educators who play a pivotal role in shaping the minds of the next generation. Providing them with the tools, training, and support necessary for professional growth is an investment in the future of our state. A motivated and well-equipped teaching force is essential for the success of any educational initiative.

In the spirit of the new year, let us also emphasize the importance of collaboration. The challenges we face are complex and multifaceted, requiring a united effort from parents, educators,

We must strive to create an ecosystem where students can discover their passions, hone their skills, and prepare for the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

policymakers, and community members. By working together, we can leverage the collective wisdom and resources of our communities to address the unique needs of our schools and students.

As we embark on this journey, it is my sincere wish that every Texan recognizes the pivotal role that public education plays in shaping the destiny of our state. Our commitment to supporting public education is not just a resolution for the new year but a perennial endeavor that requires dedication, advocacy, and a tireless pursuit of excellence.

In closing, I extend my heartfelt wishes to everyone for a great year ahead. May it be a year of progress, achievement, and positive transformation in the lives of Texas students. Together, let us move the needle towards a brighter future, where every child has the opportunity to reach their full potential through the power of public education.★

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

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Celebrating 75 Years!

Year-long project honors TASB history

by Laura Tolley



Laura Tolley

The beginning of a new year can be a good time to reflect back on past events to gain perspective as we contemplate the future.

Here at *Texas Lone Star*, we're kicking off a year-long history project in this issue to celebrate TASB's 75th anniversary. Each issue this year will feature an article, or several, highlighting the Association's positive impact on Texas public schools, as well as recount the major milestones in Texas public education and the people involved in shaping those historical moments.

A story starting on page 8 explains how it all began 75 years ago. It's written by Melissa Locke Roberts, a former TASB staff member who continues to write for *TLS* — and we are fortunate to have had her working on this project for the past year. Roberts began working in TASB Communications in 2004 and retired as assistant director of communications consulting in August 2021.

As we developed a plan to honor TASB's 75th anniversary, we decided that each issue of *TLS* this year would feature an article focusing on a specific way that TASB has assisted school boards and the schools they serve. That covers a wide range of topics, from advocacy support and trustee training to public awareness campaigns and services designed to help schools function efficiently. It was a monumental but worthwhile task to research the long history of TASB and public education in Texas.

"A big challenge was sifting through resources that are not in a digital format," noted Roberts. "Another challenge was having a limited amount of space. There's so much more to each story — most importantly the people behind every single

effort. What I hope shines through is the heart behind it all. The main impression I've gotten from digging into TASB's past is that its work has always been based on a genuine interest in helping public schools succeed. It makes me proud to be associated with such a positive, purposeful organization."

Besides the *TLS* articles published this year, there also will be additional online content, including an interactive historical timeline, a list of all TASB presidents, and more. Read more about the new website and brand logo on page 18.

is to provide the opportunity for every child to succeed in arriving at his or her greatest potential."

Much has changed here at TASB and in public education across Texas during the past 75 years. TASB has expanded its services and launched new initiatives and programs in unflinching support of school boards across Texas as they continue to find innovative ways to provide an excellent education to students.

But those words written more than 35 years ago remain true today. I believe it's fitting to once again dedicate this history

"The main impression I've gotten from digging into TASB's past is that its work has always been based on a genuine interest in helping public schools succeed."

— *Melissa Locke Roberts, staff writer, Texas Lone Star*

TASB history book

This project isn't the first time that TASB has taken a look back at its work. *Leadership for Changing Times*, a book published in 1989, covered the first 40 years of TASB's history. There were limited copies of that book printed, and it has long been TASB's plan to continue that coverage.

The book included a dedication to the "civic-minded volunteers of society who choose to be guardians of education — the school trustees on boards of education. School trustees are the ones who carry the torch of leadership, who make a stand for a cause, and who persevere to raise our education standard. Their goal

project to Texas school board members — past and present. School board members across Texas commit countless hours and tremendous effort to the goal of offering a great education to Texas public schoolchildren. We honor your outstanding leadership, and we are proud to be a partner in your mission to promote education excellence.

Thank you for your service.★

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

Laura Tolley is managing editor of Texas Lone Star.

A LEGACY OF

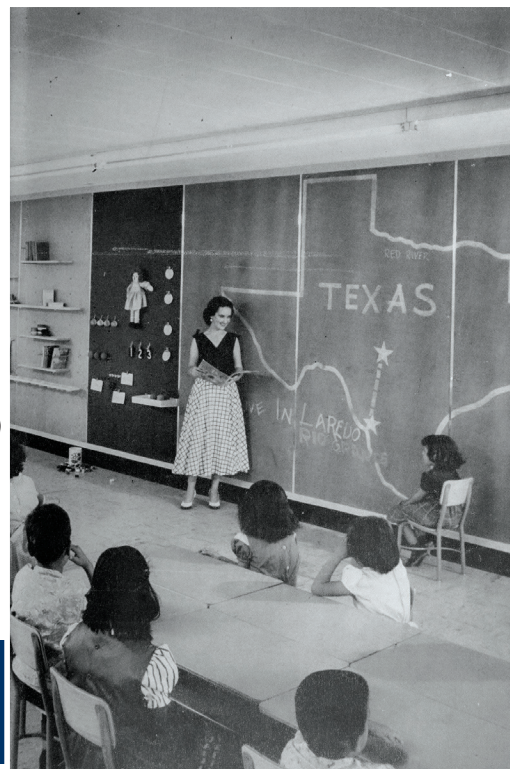
TASB'S 75-YEAR HISTORY SHOWS STEADFAST COMMITMENT TO STUDENTS

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.

Depression-era schoolchildren in San Augustine County. (Library of Congress photo archive)



A classroom in the early 1950s, Laredo ISD. (TASB archives)



In 1949, Texas lawmakers were facing a phenomenal challenge. In the burgeoning postwar years, public schools were bursting at the seams. Facilities were inadequate and teachers were in short supply. School systems could not meet the demands without increased funding and a framework for support.

Something had to be done.

"Proposals for improving education in Texas must be based upon the needs of the state," said a committee of leaders that had been tasked with finding solutions. "Personalities, petty quarrels, local self-interest, political alignments, selfishness — these must be forgotten by any group entrusted with designing a better education for Texans."

That message, which still resonates today, was one of many that helped pass the Gilmer-Aikin laws, designed to usher in the framework for a modern public education system in Texas. The landmark

legislation also laid the foundation later that year for the establishment of the Texas Association of School Boards.

In the 75 years since that pivotal moment, much has changed, for both the Lone Star State and TASB. Through it all, however, the Association has persistently focused on its purpose: to strengthen public education in Texas.

"Our mission has always been to provide outstanding training and support so that the voices of our board members are amplified, and they have the opportunity to ensure that every child has a quality education," said TASB Executive Director Dan Troxell. "We do that through advocacy, through great training on governance, and all the services we provide."

As TASB celebrates this major milestone, here's a look at how it all came to be.

SERVICE

by Melissa Locke Roberts



The evolution of public education in Texas

The idea that public education was a public good took hold before statehood, when the founding fathers cited the Mexican government's failure to establish a public school system among the reasons for their call for independence.

"Unless a people are educated and enlightened," they stated in the Texas Declaration of Independence, "it is idle to expect the continuance of civil liberty, or the capacity for self-government."

In the fledgling Republic of Texas, leaders continued their cry for a foundation of public education — but they lacked the resources to make it happen until after statehood in 1845. In January 1854, the Texas Legislature sold land to the U.S. government for \$2 million and created the Permanent School Fund. With this, public schools took hold in the state.

Still, the ensuing decades presented constant challenges. Funding was needed for textbooks, facilities, and teachers. Coordination of the school system was difficult in a large, rural state. Issues surrounding segregation exacerbated the challenges.

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, many children left school to help their parents make a living, and overall enrollment fell nationwide as the number of 5- to 13-year-olds declined.

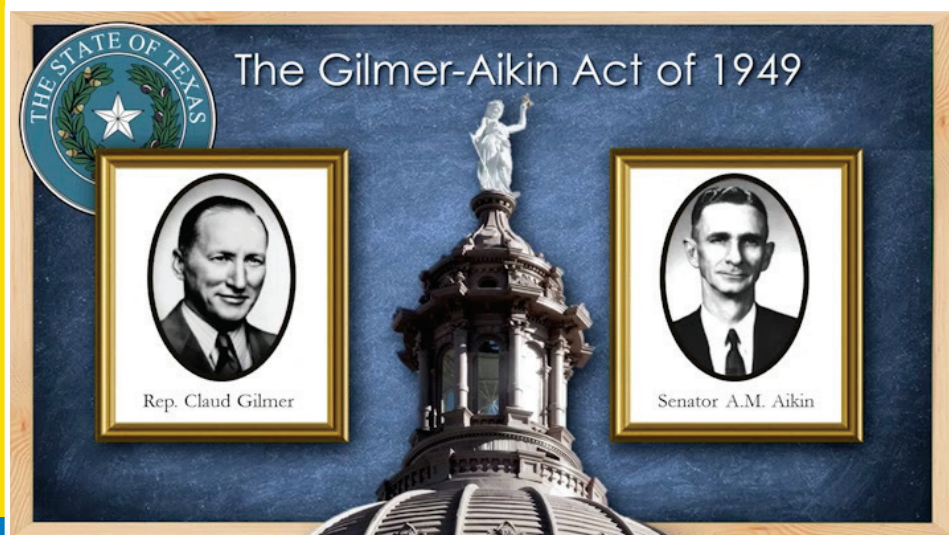
The situation prompted the State Board of Education in Texas to conduct a three-year study on the adequacy of Texas schools, and in 1938, the findings re-

sulted in a bold proposal to consolidate school districts throughout the state. That plan wouldn't be implemented until the Gilmer-Aikin reforms over a decade later, when more than 6,000 districts were regrouped into 2,200 units.

Like the Great Depression, World War II had a devastating and transformational effect on education in Texas. Resources were largely directed toward war efforts and away from social programs, including schools. Dropouts became common. High school enrollments across the country decreased from 6.7 million in 1941 to 5.5 million in 1944. Many teachers and students left the classroom to enlist.

But change was imminent. During the war, more than a million military personnel came to Texas for training, and many returned to make it their home. Their overseas experience highlighted the importance of an educated populace in maintaining a strong democracy. War-related industry lured farmers and small-town residents, including women and minorities, into urban and suburban centers. With a net population growth of 33%, Texas quickly transitioned from mostly rural to increasingly urban. Also, the unprecedented postwar baby boom greatly affected school enrollment nationwide, which grew by more than 50% in the 1950s.

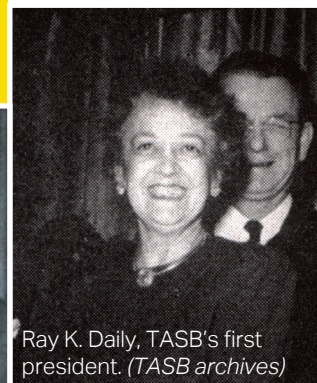
It was in this context that the push for reform gained momentum and resulted in the passage of the Gilmer-Aikin laws in 1949.



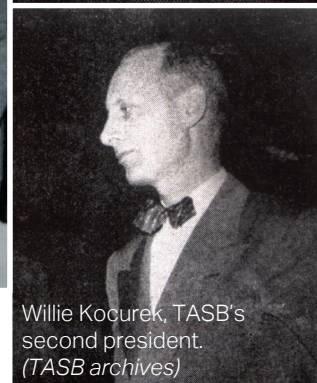
Rep. Claud Gilmer
and Sen. A.M. Aikin Jr.
(TASB archives)



Early TASB leaders, including the 1950 Executive Committee. (TASB archives)



Ray K. Daily, TASB's first president. (TASB archives)



Willie Kocurek, TASB's second president. (TASB archives)

A time for unification

Two years before the new laws passed, the 50th Texas Legislature created a committee to study education reform. Rep. Claud Gilmer of Rocksprings and Sen. A.M. Aikin Jr. of Paris led statewide efforts to collect information from school leaders, elected officials, the press, and civic groups about needed changes. Input from such a wide swath of community leaders across the state was invaluable.

After the laws were enacted, an implementation team under the state auditor held 32 regional meetings in summer 1949 to explain the changes to school superintendents and to notify each district of its state funding entitlement for the coming year. These regional meetings highlighted the need for more periodic meetings of school leaders and for neighboring school districts to work together in solving problems. A statewide association of school boards seemed like the perfect idea.

As it turns out, the idea actually had been planted years earlier.

In 1941, a small group of school trustees from the Gulf Coast area met with the goal of creating a statewide association. Their plans were tabled with the outbreak of World War II that year, but they kept the dream alive.

After the war, they were ready to act. In November 1946, the Houston Board of Education hosted a small group of trustees interested in forming an association. Guiding the group were Ray K. Daily, a Houston school

board member and leader of women's groups in the Gulf Coast area, and J.W. Edgar, Austin school superintendent who would later serve as the first Texas commissioner of education. Over the next few years, other interested trustees joined the discussion, and in 1949, an expanded group met in Fort Worth following the Texas State Teachers Association Convention.

Soon afterward, a committee met in Austin and consulted with The University of Texas, which offered organizational and funding assistance as well as office space on campus. The full group gathered again in November 1949, this time with about 100 trustees representing 26 districts from across the state — and TASB was born. Its purpose was clarified by Daily, the organization's first president.

"Every activity of the Texas Association of School Boards is aimed at the task of helping YOU do a better job for the children of your community," she wrote in a letter to all school boards in Texas.

Texas school trustees, who served growing metropolitan cities, small towns, and isolated, rural areas, finally had a way to connect with each other and collectively forge a positive future for Texas schools. As Willie Kocurek said, after becoming TASB's second president the next year, "School board members had no power, nor did we have a unified voice to act as an organization. Only by banding together as an association could we be effective. There would be strength in numbers."

The Gilmer-Aikin Laws

One mission in mind

In the last 75 years, TASB services have morphed and expanded to help school boards and the districts they serve overcome challenges and be proactive. But the organization's core purpose has never changed.

"I think what has sustained us is that our members have a calling to serve their boards, their communities, and the children who are being educated in those communities. I hear that from board member after board member, and that's what fuels my passion at TASB because we're serving people who are serving others," said Troxell. "Our mission — and theirs — has never wavered."

James B. Crow, who served as executive director from 1995 to 2021, expressed the same sentiment during TASB's 50th anniversary in 1999: "Although much has changed over the last half century, our mission has remained fundamentally the same: to promote educational excellence for Texas schoolchildren through advocacy, visionary leadership, and high-quality services to school districts."

The theme has remained constant since the very beginning. As a founding member, Kocurek reflected on TASB's journey in 1999: "This Association is such a great, great enterprise. It has expanded into areas of service and creative education that few would have dreamed of 50 years ago. But the mission of service is still the same. What is most pleasing to me is that the germ that was planted so long ago has grown as we'd hoped — and beyond."★

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

The Gilmer-Aikin Committee was formed in 1947 to study what changes were needed to improve public education in Texas. The committee's report, published the next year as *To Have What We Must*, contained 33 broad objectives of unprecedented reform that resulted in the drafting of three bills. Passed by the 51st Legislature in 1949, these bills became known as the Gilmer-Aikin laws — and ushered in a new era for public education in Texas.

The many changes included the following:

- More than 6,000 school districts were consolidated into 2,200 more efficient units. There are now roughly half that number after further consolidations.
- The Foundation School Program was established through a combination of local and state support, designed to guarantee a minimum standard of public education for every student.
- The funding plan was based on an economic index rather than the traditional per-capita system of distributing education funds, and funding became dependent on attendance.
- Higher teacher salaries attracted many to the state and the profession itself.
- Education specialists were hired.
- Services for minorities began to improve.

The statute also established the Texas Education Agency, to be led by an appointed commissioner of education, and changed the existing State Board of Education from an appointed body to one whose members are elected by popular vote.



TASB's first convention, 1950. The joint annual TASA | TASB Convention would begin in 1960. (TASB archives)

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

MEMBER VOICE AT TASB'S CORE FROM THE VERY START

by Dax González

From its inception in November 1949, one of TASB's foundational purposes has been to offer a unified voice regarding public education for the more than 1,000 school boards across the state.

In fact, the first TASB gathering — before the Association had an executive director — featured about 100 trustees who met to formulate a plan of service and developed what could be considered TASB's first-ever advocacy agenda, though it wasn't formally called that as it is today. The issues identified then focused more inwardly as the fledgling association took shape, but the agenda's focus turned outward toward the Texas Legislature and other arenas as TASB grew in size and clout.

"Throughout our growth, the Association has always worked to ensure that every member school board has had the opportunity to participate in and directly contribute to the formation of the organization's advocacy goals," said TASB Executive Director Dan Troxell.

Early incarnations of TASB's legislative program featured school board members gathering in Austin to draft priorities that would impact the Association's advocacy efforts.

"The Association understands and values the importance of collaborative engagement at the grassroots level to form legislative priorities that best represent school boards," said George McShan, a former Harlingen CISD

trustee who was the first African American to become president of TASB, serving in 1998-99.

In 1992, the organization developed a more inclusive method for generating its legislative agenda that was comprised of two processes.

The first was a series of regional meetings designed to solicit local priorities from trustees to be proposed to the TASB Board of Directors and then the Delegate Assembly. The second was the opportunity for local boards to submit resolutions or positions directly to the TASB Board for consideration and then to the Delegate Assembly for adoption. In 2002, the results of the two processes were combined to create the TASB Advocacy Agenda — TASB's biennial legislative plan of action.

Featuring a truly grassroots-oriented process, TASB continues to gather input from local trustees at every step of the development of its advocacy priorities. It begins with an electronic survey of all school board members to determine the issues most important to them. The results of that survey are then shared with trustees who attend the Grassroots Meetings, with one such meeting being held in each of the state's 20 education service center regions. Trustees at those meetings vote on the most critical issues to their region and elect trustees to serve on the Legislative Advisory Council (LAC), which will work to meld the regional priorities into one state-



TASB's Delegate Assembly in 1977. (TASB archives)

wide list. (Grassroots Meetings are held in even-numbered years and are currently happening.)

"TASB's grassroots process levels the advocacy playing field among the diverse districts across our vast state. The smallest ISDs have the same opportunity to promote potential legislation addressing issues impacting them as the largest, most richly resourced districts," said Faye Beaulieu, who was the 2013-14 president of TASB and is a former Hurst-Euless-Bedford ISD trustee.

"Every trustee's voice can be heard during Grassroots Meetings. The process also allows trustees to develop their leadership potential as they speak to issues important to their own district and collaborate with trustees from other areas to reach a common goal. As a school board president, I loved watching other school board members grow their confidence by participating in the process," Beaulieu said.

Once the regional priorities are identified, LAC members travel to Austin to draft a list of statewide priorities that best represent the issues identified back home. Four of these members are then elected to sit on the Legislative Committee of the TASB Board to ensure that the voice of local trustees is represented as the Board makes its recommendations to the Delegate Assembly.

"When we are advocating at the Capitol, we're not asking for what I or other staff members want. We are advocating for what our members have told us is important based on their direct input during our regional Grassroots Meetings," said Grover Campbell, associate executive director of TASB Governmental Relations.

The next, and most important, step of the process for developing TASB's priorities is sending a delegate to the annual Delegate Assembly, where trustees vote on the Association's leadership and Advocacy Agenda. Every member school board is invited and strongly encouraged to send a representative who can take an active role in the future of their organization.

In addition to the priorities, TASB members have a direct line to the agenda through the resolutions process, where member boards may submit issues that are important to them for consideration and possible inclusion in TASB's broader legislative program. Advocacy Agenda Resolutions help direct TASB's response to issues that may come up during the legislative biennium and are not overtly addressed by the priorities.

"With thousands of bills filed each session, there are bound to be issues that just aren't covered by our Advocacy Priorities," said Campbell. "It is helpful to have another layer of guidance from our members when our priorities don't quite get down to the level of specificity that we need."

The TASB Board recently created a special committee to review the Association's Advocacy Agenda process to ensure it remains a meaningful engagement opportunity for school board members. Any significant changes proposed by the committee would need to be approved by the TASB Board and then ultimately by the Delegate Assembly.

Even as the specifics of the process may adapt and change, TASB members will continue to have a voice in the creation and content of the Association's Advocacy Agenda — as they have since the beginning.

Dax González is division director of TASB Governmental Relations.

Milestones in TASB's First Year

- After TASB launched in 1949, one of its first actions was to select leaders. Ray K. Daily, a Houston Board of Education member, was chosen as TASB's first president, with Willie Kocurek as first vice president, J.A. Gooch of Fort Worth as second vice president, and O.D. Weeks as secretary-treasurer. A.L. Chapman, professor of educational administration at The University of Texas, was named executive director.
- The Association's first meetings that year laid the groundwork for the purpose of the group's existence. Initial services proposed included encouragement and support of regional meetings of school board members and the provision of a research and information service to which local school boards could subscribe. Thus sprang the roots of *Texas Lone Star* magazine, then called the *Texas School Board Newsletter*, in March 1950, as well as specialized publications and booklets geared toward local education leaders.
- At regional meetings, school trustees received regular updates on the new Gilmer-Aikin laws and their effects. And at the first Convention, held in San Antonio in November 1950, an overflow crowd of trustees from across the state learned about the job of a school board member.
- By the end of 1950, TASB had grown from 26 members to 170 members. In another two years, that number nearly doubled.
- The resources and training that TASB offered were clearly needed. Also clear to members was the fact that the unified voice they had formed had the power to help improve public schools.

Fulfilling the Future

by Beth Griesmer

Texas public schools prepare a skilled workforce

Celeste Garcia knows her future is big in her small town. After four years in the Ignite Technical Institute at Falfurrias High School, she will graduate in June with an associate degree from Del Mar College in welding as well as two certifications in welding and an electrical apprenticeship certificate.

Garcia was introduced to welding in eighth grade through a two-week special program offered by Brooks County ISD that included hands-on experience and a welding competition.

"This is something that is interesting," she thought at the time. "I liked it. I liked that we were doing better than the boys in the competition." She came in second and hasn't looked back.

Falfurrias and other public schools are preparing future members of the Texas workforce in compelling and innovative ways, from offering them free college credits while attending high school to industry certifications to real-world experiences. Career and technical education programs across the state are striving to meet regional workforce needs through college and industry partnerships.

Garcia is a student in the Rural Schools Innovation Zone, a collaboration among five South Texas school districts that combines resources and students to provide comprehensive CTE programs with college credits and industry certifications that meet the workforce needs in the area. Because she had the flexibility to take required coursework early, Garcia has been able to focus on her craft in her senior year. She is in the welding building at Ignite Technical Institute from 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. every day.



Falfurrias

"You come in, you get dressed, and we learn something new every day," she said. "It is so exciting to come and see what we are going to do today."

Following this unconventional path has given Garcia the fortitude to face some difficult losses in her family. "If I didn't have welding, I don't think I would be anywhere," she said when describing the loss of her father and grandmother and the support she received from her instructors.

SUPPORT FROM THE TOP

Michael Gonzalez, executive director of RSIZ, gives credit to the support of the superintendents and school boards who have joined together to create more opportunities for their students in a swath of South Texas about 90 minutes west of Corpus Christi. "Leadership takes a vested interest in helping students reach their goals and making their dreams come true," he said.

The five members in the zone — Agua Dulce, Benavides, Brooks County, Freer, and Premont ISDs — offer students who join RSIZ the choice of five academies that focus on the fields of education, health-care, JROTC, skilled technical trades, and STEM. The academies partner with different colleges in the area, including Coastal

← Celeste Garcia, a Falfurrias High School senior, will graduate in June with an associate degree in welding. (Photo courtesy of Rural Schools Innovation Zone)





Bend College, Del Mar College, Texas A&M Kingsville, and Texas A&M Corpus Christi. Each academy offers industry credentials and dual credits for college and associate degrees.

Gonzalez also credits the Texas Education Agency's initiatives for the robustness of the zone's programs. "At the forefront is P-TECH. In my opinion, that is the future," he said.

Pathways in Technology Early College High School, or P-TECH, is a statewide program that encourages students who are not traditionally on the path to college to receive college credit and workplace credentials while still in high school. These programs follow a P-TECH Blueprint from TEA to provide support for students with career training and real-life experience.

"We know that our kids need more support as they get a little older. We do a pretty good job in the brick and motor situation of getting our kids to graduate and getting certifications," Gonzalez said. "To really be a viable solution, the year-five and year-six support that P-TECH allows us is genuine. Once we start taking advantage of that, you are going to see a lot more production from independent school districts in better aligning ourselves to the workforce needs of each region."

COMMUNITY WORKFORCE

Inspired by and modeled after RSIZ, the Permian Basin Innovation Zone seeks to increase student access to high-wage, high-demand jobs in West Texas. PBIZ

↑ Permian Basin Innovation Zone administration, faculty, students, and business industry partners pose with Texas State Sen. Kevin Sparks, R-Midland, at a press conference on Oct. 17, 2023. (Photos courtesy of Permian Basin Innovation Zone)

is a collaboration between Buena Vista, Crane, Grandfalls-Royalty, and McCamey ISDs as well as Midland College, Odessa College, and industry leaders in the area.

"The goal was to grow the workforce within the communities and help lift these communities out of poverty," said Sara Saleem, PBIZ director. The former Midland ISD teacher described how PBIZ leadership has been very intentional in building the curriculum and foundations of the program, with extensive market research focused on labor needs and trends in the area.

"Our goal is to get students into higher ed programs that connect to a pathway or directly into the workforce," Saleem said.

After a year of planning and preparing, classes in the education, medical, and welding academies started this year with 67 ninth grade students across the four districts, which is about 40% of the total freshman population. "TEA is leaning toward the completer model, so we are creating our programs to follow that model," Saleem said about the decision to not offer partial programming to upper classmen.

Both zone programs are looking to

include oil and gas, renewable energy, and automotive to the academies.

"The goal is to build internships into each pathway," Saleem said. "We are talking to industry partners about building curriculum and the required certifications to prepare the employees they need in the future."

EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

"The future is about skills," said Rich Froeschle, senior labor market economist for Texas State Technical College in Waco. "Both technical skills that align with the trajectory of the economy and employability skills, which is more about the attitudes toward work and work ethic, behaviors and judgements, and critical thinking."

According to Froeschle, workforce data points toward growth in specialty trade construction, including HVAC, plumbing, and electricians. "Technical healthcare fields will continue to grow as the population ages and demands more healthcare," he said. "But if there is a single answer to future workforce needs, it starts with greater emphasis on employability skills, aka soft skills, and using technologies like generative AI to solve problems and improve productivity."

Trustees across the state try to balance these different types of workforce needs. Tulia ISD Board Member William Fifer worries about the future of the students in his small district in the Panhandle. Like so many trustees wrestling with tight budgets and daunting policies, he hopes

→ Tulia High School teacher Stephen Hernandez holds a piece of welding artwork that was included in a student competition. (Photo by Beth Griesmer)



his district is doing enough to provide programs and resources to equip the students to be successful after graduation.

"My biggest concern is that when our kids graduate that they are college, career, and military ready. They are prepared to go out into society and be good citizens, whether they stay in Tulia or go somewhere else," said Fifer.

EXPANDING OPPORTUNITIES

"As trustees, we are constantly challenging ourselves to ask the questions," said Lynn Boswell, Austin ISD trustee and a member of the TASB Board of Directors. "It's not enough to just offer these programs. It's important to offer programs that expand opportunity, that really do something meaningful for our students."

As a larger district, Austin ISD offers a wide array of CTE and college preparatory programs, including P-TECH, advanced placement, international baccalaureate, On Ramps, and magnet schools.

"A thing I love about it as a trustee is our role of connecting the community with the district," Boswell said.

"We have partnerships with community colleges, partnerships with businesses, our students get to do internships, and professionals from industry are in classrooms."

One of the Austin ISD programs with community connections is the Clifton Career Development School, a CTE-focused center that allows high school students across Austin ISD to participate in programs of study in areas such as welding, culinary arts, hospitality, and plant science. Currently, 270 students are enrolled from 14 different high schools in the district.

"About 98% of the students in our programs are also in special education programs," said Sachi Edson, assistant principal at the Clifton Career Development School. While CTE programs across the state accommodate a wide range of students, Clifton is designed to work with special education case managers to provide support to students even beyond graduation with internships focused on acquiring additional life skills.



↑ The Permian Basin Innovation Zone welding academy is housed at Grandfalls-Royalty ISD. (Photos courtesy of Permian Basin Innovation Zone)

→ Poinsettias grown from seeds by students adorn the tables at Clifton Career Development School Friday lunches. (Photos courtesy of Austin ISD)



Clifton serves lunch to the public every Friday in a restaurant-style setting that is a collaboration of the students in the culinary, hospitality, and plant science programs. Michael McGhee, a senior from Akins High School in the Clifton hospitality program, was joined at Clifton by his mother, Ulla Stewart, on a Friday in December. She came to enjoy a lunch of marinated beef and mashed potatoes, proudly taking photos of McGhee as he seated guests and poured water and iced tea.

Culinary students brought out plates of food to the tables that were decorated with poinsettias grown from seeds by plant science students. The students described the food to patrons in detail, just like waiters in an upscale restaurant. Students planned and prepared every facet of the meal.

McGhee would like a career as a rap musician, but his mother beamed as he spoke confidently about his prospects. "I will definitely go work in a restaurant after graduation," he said.

Boswell said Austin ISD strives to connect people with the real world. "The trick with that is making sure that we are training people for things they can really run with and earn a living wage," she said.

PATHS TO SUCCESS

The increased focus on workforce training in public schools comes at a time when Americans' confidence in higher education appears to be on the decline. As college costs continue to increase, Americans' belief in the viability of a college education has decreased. Just 36% of those polled by Gallup in June stated they had "confidence in higher education," which is down from 57% in 2015 and 48% in 2018.

As a traditional college education feels out of reach, school districts are providing other paths to success. "I think for years CTE got a bad reputation because the program offerings did not match the regional occupational demand," said Froeschle. "TEA has taken on an enormous task to reform CTE and instituted new programs of study that give students multiple occupational exit points and must be aligned with local job demand. That's a huge step in the right direction."

More and more students are graduating from Texas public schools with sub-

stantial college credits, associate degrees, and industry training.

"I'm also impressed with colleges, like my own Texas State Technical College, that are putting greater emphasis on reaching out to high school CTE students and letting them know about the learning opportunities available to them," said Froeschle. "High school and CTE coursework are an important stage in the personal talent development process. But most important, I think we need to do a better job of communicating to students that a four-year college education is not the only route to career success and upward wage mobility."

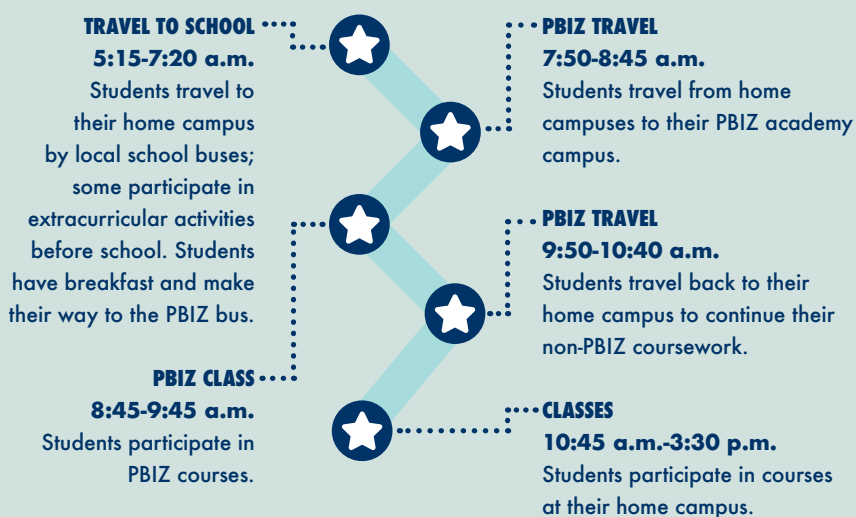
Hard Work Reaps Many Rewards

Texas high school students' success does not come without hard work and sacrifice. College- and career-focused programs often require a high level of commitment. When students are involved in sports and other extracurricular activities on top of their studies, it can make for a long day. However, balancing demands can build additional skills for students.

"I'm a big supporter of embedding more employability skills into the general education curriculum," said Rich Froeschle, senior labor market economist for Texas State Technical College. "I like the term 'intentionality,' which means that we purposely and transparently insert competencies into various courses and programs of study that support and promote building employability skills."

Often referred to as soft skills, employability skills include competencies such as time management, problem solving, and teamwork.

Intentionality is the approach the Permian Basin Innovation Zone has taken with helping students build time management skills. The schedule below shows what a typical day looks like for PBIZ students, who can spend considerable time traveling between the four rural member districts. All students are assigned to take an online Spanish course for their foreign language requirement. The PBIZ buses are equipped with Wi-Fi to provide students the opportunity to complete Spanish coursework while in transit.



Garcia, the senior at Falfurrias High School, did get the message about different educational and career opportunities. Like many seniors, she will walk the stage in June with an associate degree and multiple industry certifications to her credit. She plans to work and continue her education after graduation.

"I want to become a welding inspector and have my own welding company after getting my bachelor's degree," Garcia said.★

Beth Griesmer is a staff writer for Texas Lone Star.

Brand

New

Telling TASB's story
through revamped logo

by Sylvia Wood

In early 2021, as discussions were underway on revamping TASB's family of websites, the conversation kept returning to the red, white, and blue logo that's been a symbol of the Association since 2006.

"We knew we wanted a fresh look for our websites and that our longtime brand didn't translate well to digital," said TASB Deputy Executive Director Tiffany Dunne-Oldfield. "We also knew that some people misunderstood our logo and confused TASB for a government entity."

Yet changing up a longtime brand that has defined TASB for more than 15 years wasn't a job to take on lightly. The challenge was even more complicated because the brand would not only be reflected on the new website, but it would launch in 2024, which coincides with TASB's 75th anniversary.



TASB's oldest logo, which was retired in 2006.

"Whatever we came up with had to tell the story of TASB while also paying tribute to our decades of service in support of our members and public education," Dunne-Oldfield said. "Just as important, our new brand needed a modern refresh that would translate seamlessly on digital while also positioning TASB strategically for the future."



Not surprisingly, many nonprofit organizations outsource their re-branding campaigns to ad agencies with experience in planning, designing, and launching a new look.

In TASB's case, the decision was made to leverage the same expertise that has expertly guided and governed the Association since its inception — the TASB Board of Directors.

Not only are TASB directors elected volunteer school board members with deep connections to their school districts and communities, but in many cases, they are also working professionals with extensive backgrounds in business, nonprofit management, law, technology, and consulting, to name just a few.

"As an Association, we are blessed to have such extensive knowledge on our board because our directors are always bringing that trusted experience to the table," said TASB Executive Director Dan Troxell. "Our success over the past 75 years is really a reflection of our member-led governance structure that

ensures TASB is aligning our work with member values, needs, and priorities."

A tradition of innovation

In nearly everything it does, TASB has a tradition of innovation. That's one of the driving factors behind the large portfolio of services and solutions developed by TASB over the decades. When school districts identified a need that wasn't being addressed in the private sector, TASB would step in with a program to help — from board training and superintendent searches to policy and legal services.

As for the TASB logo, however, not much had changed since the Association's inception. In fact, prior to 2006, when TASB launched its red, white, and blue logo, there had only been variations of one other graphic element — an outline of Texas with TASB aligned vertically on the left.



In 2006, TASB launched the red, white, and blue logo, which will now be retired.

“We used it all the time on everything,” recalled Kathy Dundee, TASB’s director of Conference and Event Planning. “I remember it was on programs for Summer Leadership Institute as well as Leadership TASB. It was around for a very long time.”

That previous brand didn’t change until 2006, when TASB underwent another major change — moving from its longtime address of North Lamar, Guadalupe Street, and U.S. Highway 183 to its current headquarters on Research Boulevard to accommodate the need for more space.

That’s when the Association launched the red, white, and blue logo with a distinctive star against a blue background and the TASB letters aligned in white against a backdrop of red. The look evokes the Texas flag and related

and logo with the goal of:

- Modernizing the TASB brand while respecting the history and legacy of past members and leaders
- Cultivating a look and feel that positions TASB as a member-focused, data-driven, and digitally intelligent nonprofit organization
- Differentiating ourselves from governmental agencies and clarifying who we are, what we do, and why we do it

“We appreciated having the opportunity to guide this project,” said TASB Immediate Past President and subcommittee member Debbie Gillespie, who formerly served on the Frisco ISD board. “TASB staff were all so incredibly responsive to the committee’s concerns and questions as we worked through

Over the course of three months, the subcommittee met a total of three times to look at different designs, iterations, and color combinations. In spring 2023, they directed TASB staff to be more intentional about spotlighting the “why” behind everything TASB does — namely the more than 5.4 million public schoolchildren across the state.

“We had some great choices and ideas, but we all agreed that we wanted to remain student centered while also recognizing that each district within the 20 regions is very different,” Gillespie said. “The committee also wanted to acknowledge and incorporate how crucial the partnerships among students, staff, parents, and community members are to the success of all of our students.”

Hopkins also noted the importance of paying tribute to TASB’s 75-year legacy



TASB™

feelings of loyalty and affection for the Lone Star state.

Aligning the launch of that brand with the 2006 move made sense: TASB leadership wanted a fresh look for its brand-new headquarters.

Modernizing the brand

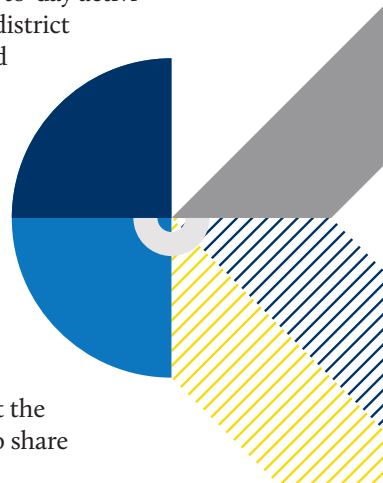
The same was true as recent work on the tasb.org website required a brand modernization for TASB’s new digital home, complete with refreshed colors and design. At the forefront of this work was a key group of five TASB directors working as the Planning and Development Subcommittee on Brand Modernization. Their charge was to come up with a recommendation to the TASB Board of Directors for a new TASB brand

many possible designs and color combinations. We talked about the history of TASB along with our mission, the meaning of the design, colors, and how to incorporate them all into the logo.”

Gillespie acknowledged that she was personally partial to the red, white, and blue logo, but she kept an open mind as she and the other subcommittee members considered the possibilities. Joining her in this work were TASB First Vice President Tony Hopkins, who serves on the Friendswood ISD board; TASB Director Sylvia Sánchez Garza of South Texas ISD; TASB Director Linda Gooch of Sunnyvale ISD; and former TASB Director Robert Westbrook, who until recently served on the Schertz-Cibolo-Universal City ISD board.

while positioning the Association for the future. “The committee also wanted to make sure the new brand would allow TASB to highlight that they offer a broad variety of services that enhance the day-to-day activities of school district operations and give voice to the needs of school boards across the state,” he said.

At its March 2023 meeting, the committee got the opportunity to share



the result of all the work with the entire TASB Board of Directors, which approved the new logo and brand, even as some tweaks were still being made to the brand story, which describes the elements of the new logo and what they symbolize for TASB and our members. (See brand story details in box on right.)

Minimizing impact on the budget

At the same time, TASB staff members were working on the rollout plan for the new logo, keeping in mind that the formal launch would coordinate with the unveiling of the new **tasb.org** website in early 2024. To minimize budget impact, the decision was made to take a thoughtful approach to updating materials with the new brand, a process that is expected to take the entire year.

“From business cards to PowerPoint templates and hundreds of other items, the TASB logo is everywhere, and we knew we would not be able to change out everything overnight because of the time and costs involved,” said TASB Brand and Marketing Director Stephany Wagner-Thornhill, who is overseeing the implementation of the new brand. “We’re prioritizing those materials that

have the highest visibility among our members, from training materials and event programs to TASB-branded presentations and publications.”

Hopkins said the new brand, and everything it represents, “highlights the groups vital to the success of schools in Texas, which is a collective effort of school board members, employees, parents, and the communities we serve — all focused on helping each student succeed in Texas.”

Gillespie is optimistic that the new brand will be well received, even as some members may feel a bit of nostalgia for the red, white, and blue logo that served TASB so well for so long. For her part, Gillespie said she’s going to cherish her old TASB lapel pin while wearing the one with the new brand at upcoming TASB events and meetings.

“Change can be difficult, but it’s also exciting,” she said. “Our subcommittee had a lot of meaningful discussions about our TASB history and our TASB future, and I think the new logo is a true reflection of our mission to promote educational excellence for all of our Texas public school students.”★

Sylvia Wood is a staff writer for Texas Lone Star.

Our TASB Brand Story

We are TASB, and our brand reflects our members and their unified voice in support of public education.

Each element of our logo symbolizes a vital part of our Texas public school family. The center star is inspired by the more than 5.4 million Texas schoolchildren across our diverse state. Students are always at the center of the TASB mission to promote educational excellence, and the surrounding navy blue is a tribute to our members, whose good governance is the cornerstone for thriving school communities.

Yet success is only possible in partnership with families and parents, who are represented in our brand by a gray color that emphasizes how these connections are the building blocks for strong school communities. Working in collaboration with parents are the dedicated educators and staff who are celebrated for their commitment with a vibrant yellow. Our collective optimism about the power of public education is as vast as the Texas sky, which is represented by light blue.

Together, these symbolic blocks of color complement one another and work together to create a brighter future for all Texas schoolchildren and a stronger, more prosperous Lone Star State for everyone.





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 April 30: UvaldeRegion 20

May 8: AlpineRegion 18
 May 9: HuntsvilleRegion 6
 May 9: AbileneRegion 14
 May 14: NacogdochesRegion 7
 May 14: CommerceRegion 10
 May 15: CanyonRegion 16
 May 17-18: South Padre.....Region 1
 May 21: WacoRegion 12
 May 23: El PasoRegion 19

Opioids and Texas Schools

Creating a policy for using overdose antagonist

by TASB Legal Services

The opioid epidemic in the U.S. impacts people of all ages, but those between the ages of 15 and 24 make up a significant number of opioid-related deaths. An opioid antagonist can be used to block the drug's effects. This article answers questions about laws requiring Texas school districts to adopt a policy for opioid antagonists.

Q: What is an opioid overdose?

A: An opioid is a drug that produces morphine-like effects. Opioids include prescription painkillers, like oxycodone, as well as heroin. People may become addicted to opioids with continuous use and may build up a tolerance to the drug's euphoric effects, thereby increasing amount and frequency of use.

In an overdose, the person's bodily functions begin to slow, including the impulse to breathe. The person may become nonresponsive or exhibit blue-ness around the fingertips or eyelids. An opioid overdose can lead to brain damage or even death.

Q: What is an opioid antagonist?

A: An opioid antagonist blocks the effects of the opioid. Naloxone is the opioid antagonist's generic name, but its common brand name is Narcan. Naloxone may be administered by an autoinjector or a nasal spray. Improperly administering naloxone does not typically result in a medical emergency. Side effects include flu-like symptoms.

Q: Can a school district obtain a prescription for an unassigned opioid antagonist?

A: Yes. An opioid antagonist may be issued under an unassigned prescription,



meaning the prescription does not specify the name of one person but authorizes use under certain circumstances. For example, emergency medical service personnel are authorized to administer the antagonist if the person they are assisting shows clinical symptoms of an opioid overdose. Tex. Health & Safety Code §§ 483.101-.106.

A physician or person who has been delegated prescriptive authority under Chapter 157, Texas Occupations Code, may prescribe opioid antagonists in the name of a school district through an unassigned standing order. Tex. Educ. Code § 38.225.

Q: Does a school district need a policy for administering an unassigned opioid antagonist?

A: Yes, depending on the grades served. In 2023, the 88th Texas Legislature amended the Texas Education Code to require school districts to adopt and

implement a policy regarding the maintenance, administration, and disposal of opioid antagonists at each campus in a district that serves students in grades 6 through 12. Districts may also adopt and implement such a policy at other campuses in the district, including campuses serving students in a grade level below grade 6. The law requires districts to have adopted a policy before Jan. 1, 2024.

The policy must:

- Provide that authorized and trained school personnel and volunteers may administer an opioid antagonist to a person who is reasonably believed to be experiencing an overdose;
- Require campuses subject to the policy to have present one or more authorized and trained school personnel members or volunteers to administer an opioid antagonist during "regular school hours";
- Establish the number of opioid antagonists that must be available at each campus at any time; and
- Require that the supply of opioid antagonists at each campus be stored in a secure location, easily accessible to authorized and trained school personnel and volunteers.

Tex. Educ. Code § 38.222.

Q: Which employees or volunteers should be trained to administer an opioid antagonist?

A: This is a local decision. The National Association of School Nurses has issued a written position statement emphasizing the importance of the school nurse facilitating access to naloxone for the management of opioid-related overdoses in the school setting. Schools may need to train additional personnel to ensure an authorized individual is available.

Q: When does a trained and authorized person need to be available to administer an opioid antagonist?

A: A district's policy must require one or more authorized and trained employees or volunteers to be present "during regular school hours." Tex. Educ. Code § 38.222(c). The law does not define the meaning of this phrase or how it may apply to off-campus or after-school activities.

Q: What needs to happen after an opioid antagonist is administered?

A: No later than 10 business days after a school employee or volunteer administers an opioid antagonist, the school must report certain information about the incident to the district, the physician or other person who prescribed the opioid antagonist, and the commissioner of state health services.

Q: What sort of training must a district provide?

A: Each district that adopts a policy is responsible for training school personnel and volunteers. The training must be provided annually in a formal training session or through online education and includes practicing with an opioid antagonist trainer device. Tex. Educ. Code § 38.224; 25 Tex. Admin. Code 40.86.

Q: Does the law protect a school district employee or volunteer who administers an opioid antagonist?

A: Yes. A person who in good faith takes, or fails to take, any action under laws requiring an opioid antagonist policy is immune from civil or criminal liability or disciplinary action. In addition, the district and school personnel and school volunteers are immune from suit resulting from an act, or failure to act, including an act or failure to act under related policies and procedures. Tex. Educ. Code § 38.227.

Q: Where can districts find the required policy?

A: A district's Policy FFAC(LOCAL) includes decisions that the district has made regarding storing and administering medication at schools.★

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Employee Engagement

Staying connected can improve job satisfaction

by Cheryl Hoover

Creating a workplace that keeps employees engaged in their work and connected to the organization can be challenging, but it is well worth the effort. Research has found that engaged employees report higher job satisfaction and are less likely to leave.

Most employees, especially top performers, want the opportunity to advance to higher positions and to receive raises that reflect their contribution levels to remain satisfied with their job.

However, in school districts and other public school entities, pay increases and promotions are typically limited. School boards and district leaders should continue to work together to make improvements in these two areas, but they also should focus on other ways to motivate employees to stay engaged in their work. Creating and consistently implementing meaningful employee engagement strategies spur employee motivation, which, in turn, can contribute to higher levels of job satisfaction.

Motivation and retention

Motivation is the driving force behind human actions and here are two main categories of motivators: extrinsic and intrinsic. Extrinsic motivators are external factors such as pay raises, bonuses, promotions, and recognitions. Intrinsic motivators are aspects determined by an individual's own values and goals. Examples are autonomy, satisfaction from addressing work challenges, purpose, pride in learning new skills, and feeling connected to a team. Both are important to keeping most employees committed to their jobs and to achieving their goals.

When supervisors thoughtfully provide a variety of motivators, it increases opportunities for employees to stay engaged. Many employee retention studies and surveys confirm employees primarily leave a job due to poor relationships with their boss or peers or to low engagement with their work. Supervisors can strategically focus on these two areas: building positive relationships with employees and creating an engaging environment that connects employees to their work.

Typically, individuals who experience a high level of self-fulfillment from their work and have positive relationships in the workplace tend to place less value on the roles that compensation and promotions play in their overall job satisfaction.

Following are some simple but powerful ways a supervisor can create an engaging work environment:

- Creating a positive workplace culture
- Building relationships
- Showing authentic appreciation
- Providing leadership opportunities
- Offering relevant learning activities

Creating a positive workplace culture

Culture has a huge influence on the workplace, employees, and productivity. Workplace culture is an organization's shared set of values and beliefs about the workplace, along with the generally accepted behaviors of the employees.

An organization with a positive workplace culture retains employees, attracts quality applicants, promotes engagement and teamwork, raises morale, and increases performance. Job satisfaction and collaboration are enhanced, while stress is reduced.

With intentional planning, culture

can be improved. Communicating the mission and vision of the organization and focusing on the “why” of the work are typically the first steps in creating a positive workplace culture. Embracing a shared vision motivates and encourages employees to commit to being part of a collaborative work environment.

Next steps should include creating a welcoming, friendly atmosphere for employees and providing the resources and support to empower employees to succeed.

Building relationships

When supervisors commit focused time to connect with employees, it provides the opportunity for employees to increase their motivation and stay connected to their work. Meaningful and genuine relationships can be established with individual employees through the formal appraisal process or informal interactions and regular check-in meetings.

Taking the time to meet individually with each employee to discuss goals, successes, challenges, and changes is a key strategy to build relationships. Listening to the employee's self-assessment of their work, progress made toward goals, where they need support, and their suggestions for improvement shows a personal commitment and interest in the employee. To get additional employee input, a supervisor may also conduct opinion surveys





and stay interviews, which are interviews conducted to help retain employees.

Encouraging employee input can reveal areas of improvement and result in innovative ideas to solve known and unknown problems. Acting on this feedback can be key to bolstering workplace engagement, but supervisors often fail to do so. It is important to find ways to constructively address employee input.

Showing authentic appreciation

Recognition generally is based on an individual's good deeds at work, while appreciation goes a step further by affirm-

ing a person's value to the organization. Impactful employee appreciation should be meaningful, authentic, timely, and consistent.

Appreciation includes an acknowledgment of an employee's skills and abilities, work contributions, achievements, or years of service in the form of praise, social recognition, gifts, financial rewards, and promotions.

Delivery of the appreciation is important. For example, providing verbal praise with a positive tone and body language makes appreciation authentic. In addition, stating specific reasons makes the positive feedback more significant as opposed to generally stating "good job" or "way to go."

Recognition occurs from the leadership down to the employee. Appreciation shown from many directions increases the opportunities for it to occur across an organization.

Employee appreciation makes the workplace more collaborative, positive, and productive. Employees who are shown the right amount of appreciation for their work show a lower rate of burnout, improved daily emotions, and stronger relationships with their co-workers. Sincerely acknowledging and thanking employees helps address several workplace challenges, particularly retention of employees and prevention of employee grievances.

Providing leadership opportunities

Educational organizations must have a growth framework that offers career

pathways. This may include descriptions of different pathways outlining required education (i.e., master's degree), certification or other credentials, and experience.

Without adding to workloads, employees can take the lead in meetings, in campus or department committees, or on specific projects of interest when opportunities arise. Allowing employees to showcase and use their leadership skills can benefit the organization while facilitating individual development.

Offering relevant learning activities

Employees are more inclined to believe they are making positive contributions if they are continually learning. Trainings are one opportunity, but new learning challenges also can be provided through experiences such as leading a team or participating on a committee. You may also consider offering opportunities for employees to shadow leaders, coach peers, or mentor new employees. Offering a variety of learning opportunities can raise employee confidence and hone existing skills while keeping an employee interested in their work.

Board involvement

School boards can support district leaders in creating an engaging workplace that keeps employees motivated by advancing strategies and programs that spur employee engagement beyond compensation and promotions.★

Cheryl Hoover is an HR consultant at TASB HR Services.

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Campus Security

TASB Risk Management Fund holds safety summit

by Beth Griesmer and Laura Tolley

Recruiting safety and security personnel has become one of the biggest challenges for school districts across the state as they work to implement new requirements enacted by the Texas Legislature, school leaders said at a TASB Risk Management Fund conference.

Texas school leaders are discovering different ways to attract skilled employees to these critical roles.

"Part of our recruiting strategies have been [telling people] you don't have to work weekends; you don't have to work the night shift; you don't have to be out in the blinding rainstorm to investigate [vehicle] accidents," said Bill Avera, police chief and emergency manager of Jackson-

ville ISD, a district of more than 4,000 students in East Texas.

Avera and other school leaders were panelists at the TASB Risk Management Fund's School-Based Law Enforcement Summit, held Nov. 15 at TASB headquarters in Austin. About 60 representatives from 50 Fund member districts attended the summit, which was the culmination of the Fund's first-ever residency program focusing on providing members with school-based law enforcement resources and training.

The day-long summit kicked off with an overview of the Texas Education Agency's role in school safety from John Scott, who is chief of the agency's School Safety and Security office. TASB staff from

Legal Services, Policy Service, and HR Services discussed safety-related services and features provided by the Association, while other speakers focused on elements of law enforcement liability.

Mary Barrett, associate executive director of TASB Risk Management Services, said the residency program and summit were organized "to help members of the TASB Risk Management Fund navigate the unique risk management aspects of implementing safety and security measures on campuses and establishing effective law enforcement practices."

Barrett told attendees that Texas school districts have long had to address safety and security issues on their campuses, but those needs and concerns have increased in recent years.

"What we're hoping to do today is open your eyes to some of the exposure that might be there, but also help you think about what you can do to improve safety and security on your district's campuses," Barrett said.

An afternoon panel featured Avera and other district officials who are facing the challenges of finding the best ways to strengthen safety and security for their students and staff. The panel provided an opportunity for attendees to hear how districts of various sizes were addressing the implementation of House Bill 3, a wide-ranging school safety measure passed by the Texas Legislature last year.

HB 3 requires an armed security officer on each campus, mandates education service centers to serve as resources for



At the summit, panelists discussed implementation of House Bill 3, the school safety bill passed last year by the Texas Legislature. From left: Rick Goodrich, chief of Safety and Security at Boerne ISD, Troy Burke, director of Safety and Security at Royse City ISD, Jo Ann Bludau, superintendent at Hallettsville ISD, and Bill Avera, chief of police and emergency manager at Jacksonville ISD.



John Scott, chief of the Texas Education Agency's School Safety and Security office, provided an overview of TEA's role in school safety.

Photos by TASB Media Services

local schools, created the school safety office within TEA, calls for audits for districts regarding school safety, and requires mental health training for district employees who regularly interact with students.

“Every community is very unique in how they choose to address safety and security in schools,” said Jo Ann Bludau, superintendent of Hallettsville ISD. “What our district has done has been a work in progress.”

Bludau and Avera were joined by safety and security leaders from Royse City and Boerne ISDs. Each of the four district leaders have approached the state requirement to have armed personnel on each campus in different ways.

Jacksonville ISD has its own district police department. But Avera, who is also president of the Texas School District Police Chiefs’ Association, noted that fewer than 400 school districts in the state have their own police force.

Bludau said Hallettsville ISD, a small district of about 1,000 students located between San Antonio and Houston, relies on the guardian program to staff each

campus with armed personnel. Rick Goodrich, chief of safety and security for Boerne ISD, said his Hill Country district with more than 10,000 students uses a combination of school resource officers (SRO) and security personnel.

A hybrid model is what many districts are turning to as they address community needs and regulatory requirements. Royse City ISD, a district of more than 7,000 students northeast of Dallas, uses a combination of SROs and school marshals.

Troy Burke, Royse City ISD’s director of safety and security, discussed the challenges every district faces in developing safety plans. “You have to play by the rules your board and superintendent laid out for you,” he said.

Scott, who was appointed to the new TEA role in October 2022, told attendees that his office is establishing school safety review teams in sectors around Texas that will conduct required safety audits, help schools with safety technical assistance, and serve as advisors on other security-related issues.

“We’re building a team to help schools,” Scott said. “You guys are going

to know these folks on a first-name basis. They are going to live in your community.”

But Scott noted that the issue for districts is not only about ensuring physical security — it’s also about identifying potential threats and finding ways to address them.

“It’s not all about physical security. I’ll be the first person to say to anybody [that] identifying a young person who is on the path to violence is just as important as locking the door,” Scott said. “It is important to identify these folks, get an assessment on them, and get a management plan so we can manage that threat.”

Scott said his office’s personnel will be able to serve as advisors to districts seeking help on threat assessments.

“We’re here to partner with schools,” Scott said.

For more information about the Fund’s residency program and additional school-based law enforcement materials, visit tasbrmf.org/sble.★

Beth Griesmer is a staff writer for Texas Lone Star. Laura Tolley is managing editor of Texas Lone Star.

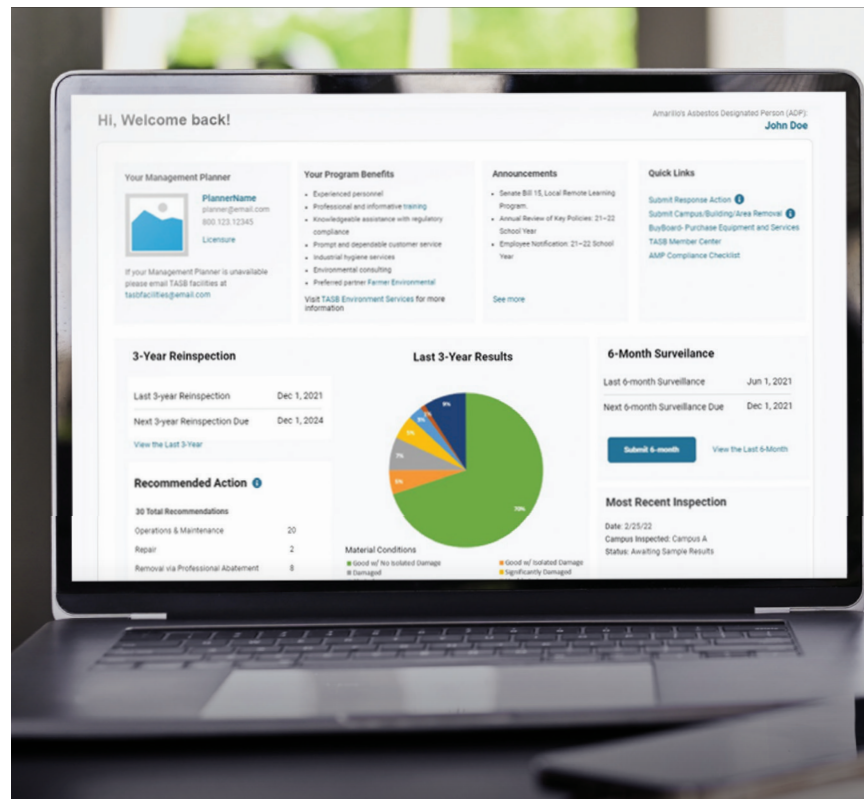
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LTASB Visits El Paso

Trustees explore dual-language programs

by Camille Eckersley

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.

On their second field trip, Leadership TASB Class of 2024 members traveled to El Paso, where trustees learned that when students are allowed to flourish success can be within reach.

Trustees saw the evidence of the hard work undertaken at both Canutillo and El Paso ISDs and how those efforts have allowed students to achieve.

During the November field trip, trustees headed off to explore the two border-town districts for an eye-opening experience.

Pedro Galaviz, Canutillo ISD's superintendent, greeted the group at Gonzalo & Sofia Garcia Elementary School, where trustees received a festive welcome from the school's students and staff, who cheered them as they made their way into the school. The students also entertained the group with a beautiful traditional dance and a wonderful breakfast with homemade tamales and pastries.

After the warm welcome, trustees toured the school's Montessori program, which serves children who are pre-kindergarten to kindergarten age. Canutillo ISD was the first district in El Paso to open a public Montessori program. Trustees also toured other elementary classrooms to see what students were learning.

After a festive morning, trustees traveled to Jose J. Alderete Middle School, serving students in sixth through eighth grade. Among the amazing programs at the school is a medical academy, which provides students with a rigorous curricu-

lum emphasizing math and science.

At Canutillo High School, which boasts a beautiful campus atmosphere and houses Pathways in Technology Early College High School, trustees learned more about the P-TECH Program. The educators are very proud of what the school has accomplished and how they prepare students for a career in criminal justice or law enforcement.

Next up, trustees headed to El Paso

ISD for visits to Mesita Elementary and Wiggs Middle schools.

At Mesita, trustees gathered with the district's leaders, enjoying a meal while learning more about the school's dual-language program.

During the visits to the two schools, trustees learned that 87% of Mesita's students and 61% of Wiggs' students are enrolled in dual-language programs. At Mesita, along with Spanish, students have Mandarin as a third language option. During the visits, trustees observed how students receive mentoring throughout each campus, which was inspiring to all those on the trip. Traveling on the bus to each location provided the cohort the opportunity to discuss and share what they experienced. The final campus on the tour was The Lady on the Hill, as El Paso High School is nicknamed.





Top left: TASB President Armando Rodriguez, a Canutillo ISD trustee, talked to LTASB members at Gonzalo & Sofia Elementary School.

Bottom left: LTASB members listen in on a class at El Paso ISD's Mesita Elementary School.

Top right: The LTASB Class of 2024 poses outside the majestic El Paso High School, a local landmark also known as The Lady on the Hill.

Bottom right: LTASB member Paolo Gonzalez, a Pasadena ISD trustee, introduces her service dog, Gonzo, to students at Gonzalo & Sofia Garcia Elementary School.

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The school sits on a mountainside at the foot of the Franklin Mountains. It overlooks the central part of the city, and its boundary is with Juárez, Mexico. The school is full of pride, history, and tradition.

Based on what trustees experienced, it was clear that at El Paso High School there is a powerful learning environment for all involved, including students, staff, and administrators. As with the other schools, El Paso High School also has an exceptional dual-language program, which seeks to ensure students are prepared to speak, read, write, and comprehend in either language.

And a trip to the school wouldn't have been complete without a visit to the famous R.R. Jones Stadium, ranked as one of the top 10 high school football stadiums in the U.S. It was absolutely breathtaking to see.

After the visits were complete, trustees discussed how the leadership teams at Canutillo and El Paso ISDs have supported their schools, leading to student success. Both districts have amazing servant-hearted teachers and students who are proud, empowered, and respectful.

During this visit, the group shared how eye opening it was to see what these two districts have accomplished, helping to make their districts great.★

Camille Eckersley, a Bluff Dale ISD trustee, is a member of the Leadership TASB Class of 2024.



Top: Students at Canutillo ISD's Gonzalo & Sofia Garcia Elementary School welcome LTASB members to their campus.

Bottom: A festive student performance at Canutillo ISD's Gonzalo & Sofia Garcia Elementary School was a highlight of the LTASB group's visit to the school.

Photos by TASB Media Services

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Gov Camp Life

School leaders tout benefits of annual TASB event

by Laura Tolley

Texas trustees and other school leaders will gather again in Galveston this winter for a popular TASB conference that offers a unique opportunity to receive expert training focused on governance, leadership, and student voice.

Registration is open for Governance Camp: Powered by Student Voice, which will be held Feb. 28-March 2. The annual gathering, which includes keynote speakers and breakout sessions, has become a must-attend event for many Texas public school district leaders.

“While all TASB-led conferences are wonderful, I strongly feel that Governance Camp is at the top of the list when it comes to opportunities to grow board members and administrators,” said Gilbert Trevino, superintendent of Floydada Collegiate ISD, a rural district of about 700 students in Northwest Texas. The conference’s smaller setting offers more opportunities to engage with other attendees and has less risk of missing important sessions, he noted.

“The training is important to our roles as district leaders,” Trevino said. “We are able to attend sessions and hear from other school leaders about programs, practices, or strategies that help improve our roles within our schools.”

Hearing from students

A Camp highlight for attendees is hearing directly from students about their educational experiences in the Texas public education school system.

“I strongly believe that anytime we can hear from students about their experiences in public education, we should take advantage of that wonderful opportunity,” Trevino said. “We are in this business for kids, so their outlook, feedback, and viewpoints should be cherished. Oftentimes, the student voice presentations give us a look into the leaders of tomorrow and how our public schools are creating diverse opportunities for them in this 21st century.”



Last year's Camp closed with a two-hour workshop by educational speaker Adolph Brown.

Lyford Consolidated ISD, a rural school district in the Rio Grande Valley that serves about 1,400 students, has been bringing students to Camp ever since the student voice element was introduced in 2016. They are members of Lyford CISD's Tech Squad, a group of highly trained students that teaches peers, teachers, and even other districts about technology applications.

“One of the benefits of bringing the Lyford Tech Squad to the TASB Governance Camp is the chance for students from a small rural school district down in the tip of Texas to forge new connections and friendships from across the state,” said Mark Anthony Piñon, an instructional technology specialist at Lyford CISD. “Engaging with diverse peers from various backgrounds helps to foster a rich exchange of ideas, promoting a deeper understanding of different ideas and viewpoints.”

The continuity of attending Camp year after year “helps students cultivate a network of connections and resources,” Piñon said. Those connections may help open doors for internships, college admissions, or other career pathways.

At Camp, Lyford CISD's Tech Squad students enjoy demonstrating the impact of educational technology on their learn-

**Governance Camp:
Powered by Student Voice**
Feb. 28-March 2
Galveston

ing experiences.

“Their insights have been eye opening for board members, offering a firsthand look into the benefits of innovative teaching methodologies,” Piñon said. This year, the students are excited about the prospect of introducing even more cutting-edge tools and strategies through the district's EdTech Playground.

The technology offers educators and administrators hands-on experience with diverse devices and applications. “It's an interactive space designed to inform and empower them by demonstrating the capabilities of educational technologies and facilitating effective integration into classroom settings,” he said.

Support for Camp

E3, a design-build contractor in Texas, has been a Camp sponsor for several years and is exclusive sponsor for Student

Photos by TASB Media Services



Students created name tags and picked up stickers from the name badge station to start their Camp experience last year.

Voice. E3 CEO Klip Weaver also attended Camp, and other TASB conferences, when he was an Argyle ISD school board member.

“While my participation has moved from attendee and public servant to presenter and vendor, the value I gain from the TASB staff, my peers, and the school board community has remained consis-

tently valuable and worthwhile,” Weaver said. “[Camp] is among my favorites because the intimate setting affords spontaneous and incidental conversations, and not much is more valuable to me than those deep and vulnerable connections.”

Kelli Tharp, vice president at E3 for Communications and Marketing, also finds Camp a rewarding experience.

“Now responsible for marketing at E3, I ensure that conferences we attend offer quantity of knowledge and quality of value to amass engaged and energetic attendees,” Tharp said. “The summation of my attendance at TASB conferences — as both a former school district employee and current vendor — has entered the double digits...and although I’ve changed hats over the years, my TASB conference experience has never ended without new ideas, renewed energy, and valuable connections.”

Claycomb Associates Architects and Walsh Gallegos Trevino Kyle and Robinson, P.C. also are Camp sponsors this year. To register for Camp and to find other information about the event, contact the following:

Registration: registrar@tasb.org
 Housing: janice.rivera@tasb.org
 Special needs: nicole.green@tasb.org
 Other Camp questions: kathy.dundee@tasb.org★

Laura Tolley is managing editor of Texas Lone Star.

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Superintendent Salary

Survey shows compensation increases in 2023-24

The median salary for a Texas school superintendent in 2023-24 is \$150,000, an increase of 0.7% from the prior year, according to the annual TASB and the Texas Association of School Administrators Superintendent Salary Survey.

The survey is conducted each fall to help school districts across the state understand compensation trends. Of all the responsibilities entrusted to school board members, among the most important is hiring and evaluating a superintendent, said Amy Campbell, director of TASB HR Services, which administers the survey.

"In today's competitive labor market, it's important that school board members have the latest compensation data so they can develop a compelling pay and benefits package that will help them recruit or retain the best superintendent for their district," Campbell said.

This year's survey included participation from 736 districts, representing 72% of districts in Texas and marking a higher rate of participation over last year. There was a wide variation in median salaries based on district size, with a range from \$112,466 in districts with fewer than 500 students to \$349,600 in districts with enrollments of 50,000 or more.

Among the 196 smallest districts with 499 or fewer students that responded to the survey, the median superintendent pay increased to \$112,466, which is 3.4% higher than the year before.

"Smaller school districts account for the majority of districts in Texas, so it's important to look at the survey results based on enrollment," Campbell said. "We provide an overview of salaries based on the median so school boards can better understand the numbers as they relate to their district." District administrators can run reports based on enrollment and education service center region using TASB HRDataSource™.

The survey also looks at trends in superintendent experience. Of the 134 districts in Texas reporting a new superintendent in 2023-24, 91 school boards, or 68%, hired a superintendent with no previous experience in the position. In 2022-23, the percentage of districts hiring a first-time superintendent was slightly higher at 73%.

Campbell said the overall trend has stayed relatively constant in recent years. New superintendents generally have prior experience as a deputy or assistant superintendent, so they're not entirely new to a district leadership role.



Another data point of interest is the amount of time that superintendents spend in that role in their district. The median is about three years, which remains unchanged from last year. The median experience for superintendents overall is five years total.

Salaries remain only one part of a superintendent's overall compensation package, and the survey results also include data on bonuses, transportation benefits, health insurance benefits, and cell phone reimbursement, all of which can add significant value.

Key findings include:

- Only 3.4% of responding districts (24) gave a bonus to their super-

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intendent with more than half of those bonuses being \$10,000 or less. Compared to last year, the percentage of districts paying a bonus dropped slightly from 4%.

- 19% of responding districts (132) are paying a car allowance to their superintendents, which held steady from last year after a downward trend over the past five years. The median vehicle allowance is \$6,000, a number that has stayed consistent. Only 11% of districts provide a vehicle for the sole use of the superintendent.
- 88% of districts reported paying health insurance benefits for their superintendent with a median contribution of \$3,900 annually, which remains unchanged from last year. That percentage has stayed consistent between 84% and 89% over the past five years.
- 35% of districts (244) reported providing their superintendent with a cell phone allowance. The median is \$1,200 annually, an amount unchanged from last year.
- 26% of districts (186) reported paying a portion of the superintendent's required TRS contribution. The median contribution is \$17,256, a 7.5% increase over last year. Some districts pay housing subsidies to superintendents, with 11% or 79 providing either a residence or housing allowance. Only eight districts reported providing both. The median housing allowance is \$6,000, up from last year's median of \$4,900.

In compiling the survey data, TASB HR Services sends an email survey invitation to 1,019 school districts across the state. Salary data from districts with interim and part-time superintendents is not included.

"We always want to provide school board trustees with resources and information to help them be successful in recruiting and retaining top superintendent talent," Campbell said. "The survey data provides insights that can be used to develop superintendent contracts that reflect the market while bridging the needs of the district with that of its top leader."★



2024 Superintendent of the Year (SOTY) Nominations Schedule

April 19 ★ Nomination submissions due to designated ESC

June 28 ★ Regional screening completed and nominations submitted to TASB

August 23–24 ★ All regional winners interviewed and five finalists chosen by TASB State Selection Committee

September ★ Finalists interviewed and Superintendent of the Year chosen by TASB State Selection Committee

September 28 ★ Presentation of the award at txEDCON24

Entry documents for the SOTY award program can be downloaded from tasb.org/soty. Questions? Call us at 800-580-8272 or email soty@tasb.org.

◀ *Tomball ISD Superintendent Martha Salazar-Zamora, the 2023 SOTY winner*

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SOTY Award

Submit nominations for standout superintendents

by Sylvia Wood

Texas school boards are invited to submit nominations for the 2024 Superintendent of the Year.

Presented annually since 1984, the SOTY Award spotlights outstanding district leaders. The SOTY winner, announced on stage each fall at txEDCON, is chosen for exemplifying strong leadership skills, dedication to strengthening public education, and commitment to community engagement. The winner also exhibits a strong and effective relationship with their board.

“This year marks the 40th anniversary of the Superintendent of the Year program, which showcases the exceptional work being done in Texas public schools under the guidance of talented leaders,” said Nicholas Phillips, Nederland ISD trustee and chair of the TASB Member Services Committee, which oversees the SOTY award process. “As an educator myself, I understand the extraordinary impact a school district superintendent can have on moving a district forward and creating a culture of achievement for all students. We’re looking forward to seeing what this year’s nominees are doing on behalf of our public schoolchildren.”



A graphic with a light blue grid background. On the left, there are several colorful icons: a blue speech bubble with a pink heart, a pink speech bubble with three white dots, a yellow star, a blue curved arrow, a blue question mark, and a yellow exclamation mark. On the right, the text "Stay connected!" is written in a large, bold, dark blue font. Below this, it says "Follow TASB on social media for the latest in Texas public education." in a smaller, bold, dark blue font. At the bottom, there are four social media icons: Facebook, X (Twitter), LinkedIn, and Instagram. Next to each icon is the text "Texas Association of School Boards" and the respective handle: "@tasbnews" for X and "@tasbphotos" for Instagram. The TASB logo is in the bottom left corner, consisting of a blue square with a white star and the letters "TASB" in a bold, sans-serif font.

To be eligible, superintendents must have served in their district for three years at the time the award is presented. The deadline for 2024 applications to be submitted to the district's regional education service center is April 21, but boards are encouraged to start early. In addition to highlighting the superintendent's successes, the board must pass a resolution in support of the nomination.

The nomination packet includes district demographic and performance data to provide the committee insight into the district's progress on student performance, efforts to close achievement gaps, and the context for that work.

"We encourage boards to take the time to nominate their outstanding superintendents because it's a great opportunity to spotlight excellence among our Texas public education leaders," said Dan Troxell, TASB executive director and the 2008 SOTY winner. "These talented education leaders deserve honor and recognition for their hard work, innovation, and commitment to their students and communities."

The selection process begins with regional interviews, conducted by each ESC in late spring. A regional winner is named in all 20 ESC regions where a superintendent is nominated.

Among the regional winners, five finalists are selected by the State Selection Committee after a round of interviews in August. The five finalists will go through another round of interviews at txED-CON24, when the winner is selected and announced.

The SOTY winner is presented with \$5,000 for use by their district, and finalists each receive \$1,000 for use by their district. The award program is underwritten by Balfour, and the winner receives a custom Balfour ring.

The 2023 SOTY winner was Martha Salazar-Zamora of Tomball ISD. See other past winners and find more details on eligibility and the nomination process and materials at tasb.org/soty.★

Sylvia Wood is a staff writer for Texas Lone Star.

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

► **Rogers ISD:** Superintendent
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The 2022-23 rebate is the largest to date, benefiting more Cooperative members than ever before. Since 2006, the Cooperative has rebated about \$100 million back to its members. Membership in The Local Government Purchasing Cooperative continues to grow and now numbers more than 3,000 governmental entities across the state.

BuyBoard helps members pool their collective purchasing power on products, equipment, and services they use every day. For member school districts, being eligible to participate in BuyBoard is one of the many benefits of TASB membership.

"BuyBoard gives our district the reassurance that we are receiving a strong product at a fair price. Every dollar counts in this current financial environment," said Vidor ISD Superintendent Jay Killgo. "We want our taxpayers to know that Vidor ISD is making the most of our resources. The rebate is an added bonus and reinforces the excellent partnership with BuyBoard."

2023 SOTY Winner Receives Trophy



Last December, Tomball ISD Superintendent Martha Salazar-Zamora was presented with her award for being the 2023 Superintendent of the Year. Her district also received a check for \$5,000. Bottom row from left: Tina Salem, Tomball ISD trustee, Robert Long III, division director of TASB's Board Development Services, Salazar-Zamora, Darlene Breau, Alief ISD board president and a TASB Director, and Justin Unser, Tomball ISD trustee. Top row from left: Tomball ISD trustees Michael J. Pratt, Mark Lewandowski, Matt Schiel, John E. McStravick (president), and Lee McLeod.

TASA Honors James B. Crow with Golden Deeds Award



James B. Crow

Photo by TASB Media Services

James B. Crow, who retired as executive director of TASB in 2021, has been honored with a Golden Deeds Award, a coveted award for distinguished service to education in Texas.

The Texas Association of School Administrators and the Texas A&M University Department of Educational Administration and Human Resource Development co-present the Golden Deeds Award each year to an individual from any profession who has, through actions and deeds, improved the educational system in Texas to enrich the lives of all Texas public school students.

"James Crow dedicated five decades to serving Texas public schools. Most recently, he served as executive director of the Texas Association of School Boards for 26 years, making him the organization's longest-serving executive director," said current TASB Executive Director Dan Troxell. "Throughout his long career, he worked tirelessly to help lawmakers, policymakers, and local boards of education make informed decisions to support the best outcomes for every Texas student."

Prior to becoming TASB executive director in 1995, Crow served in a variety of positions at the organization after joining the staff in 1981. Before that, he worked for Austin ISD for six years, first as a high school journalism teacher and then as a public information officer.

In honor of his contributions, TASB created the James B. Crow Innovation in Governance Award to recognize education professionals who carry on his vision of improving student education through school leadership.

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Facts Over Attacks

Setting the record straight for members' benefit

by Tiffany Dunne-Oldfield



Tiffany Dunne-Oldfield

As TASB marks its 75th anniversary this year, there is much to celebrate with our long tradition of providing high-quality services and programs to our members.

Our reputation as the premier school boards association in the state has taken decades to build and is made possible only by a reciprocal and cooperative relationship with the school boards that drive our mission for excellence in public education.

Simply put, our association is founded on a shared vision that we're stronger together, whether it's advocating at the Capitol on behalf of students and teachers, or leveraging our collective expertise to strengthen local governance, particularly in the areas of training and policy.

After 75 years, we'd like to think our track record speaks for itself. But our success as an organization has actually made us a target for folks looking to tell a story about TASB that isn't based on our history of excellence.

Over the next year, as we commemorate this milestone anniversary, you'll have an opportunity to learn more about our history, which began in 1949 when 100 trustees representing 26 districts came together to strengthen public education.

Unfortunately, this past year has posed unique challenges in terms of managing TASB's public reputation amid a disinformation campaign designed to chip away at the unity that has defined us since our inception.

Of course, the initial reaction when you hear ugly gossip is to ignore it, in hopes that others who know you well will speak up and present the facts. Thankfully, we saw our supporters and mem-

bers do just that in board meetings, with letters to the editor and op-eds, on social media, and even at the Capitol.

But it also became clear that we needed to do more to correct the falsehoods being circulated and to give you, our members, additional information to set the record straight.

Dispelling myths

So last November, we took the extraordinary step of publishing an online TASB Myth Buster with the goal of offering up the facts about this exceptional organization. To be honest, I struggled with giving any ink to the "myths," including the wildly misinformed one that "TASB monopolizes school district business."

The reality is that TASB has stepped in and developed its nonprofit programs and services for public schools when there's been a gap in solutions provided by others. The goal of TASB's work has always been to lessen the burden of government and help school districts find cost-effective solutions to operate more efficiently and make best use of every local tax dollar, which ultimately supports better student outcomes.

But, because we believe in local governance and the power of elected school boards to chart the best course for their school district, we are also encouraging our members to be informed consumers, not only about TASB services but any would-be TASB competitors. So, in conjunction with the myth buster, we published a list of questions online to help boards evaluate services being offered by TASB — or other organizations — for quality, transparency, and best value.

Ask us tough questions

We are encouraging our member boards to ask tough questions, especially as they consider whether to renew with us for 2024. We welcome the scrutiny because we have more than seven decades of experience and data to illustrate our commitment to quality, transparency, and value.

To start, we've kept the same formula to determine membership fees since 1978, with smaller districts paying less than larger ones. This year's median membership renewal is \$2,400, but just under 200 districts (approximately 20% of Texas school districts) will pay our minimum membership rate of \$800.

We also have a cap of \$11,000, which has been in place since 1991. As such, no district since that time — no matter how large — has ever paid more than \$11,000 for their annual membership fee.

Another important point is that nearly half of our member school boards received a rebate last November for their participation in the Local Government Purchasing Cooperative, also known as BuyBoard®. Of the 603 districts that received a rebate, 37% received an amount greater than or equal to their TASB membership fee and 52% received a rebate that covered half the cost. It's not an exaggeration to say that, in many cases, a TASB membership pays for itself.

Let me close with one more important fact — here at TASB, we truly care about you, our members. We have long been your partner and look forward to the privilege of serving you in the future.★

Tiffany Dunne-Oldfield is deputy executive director of TASB.



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