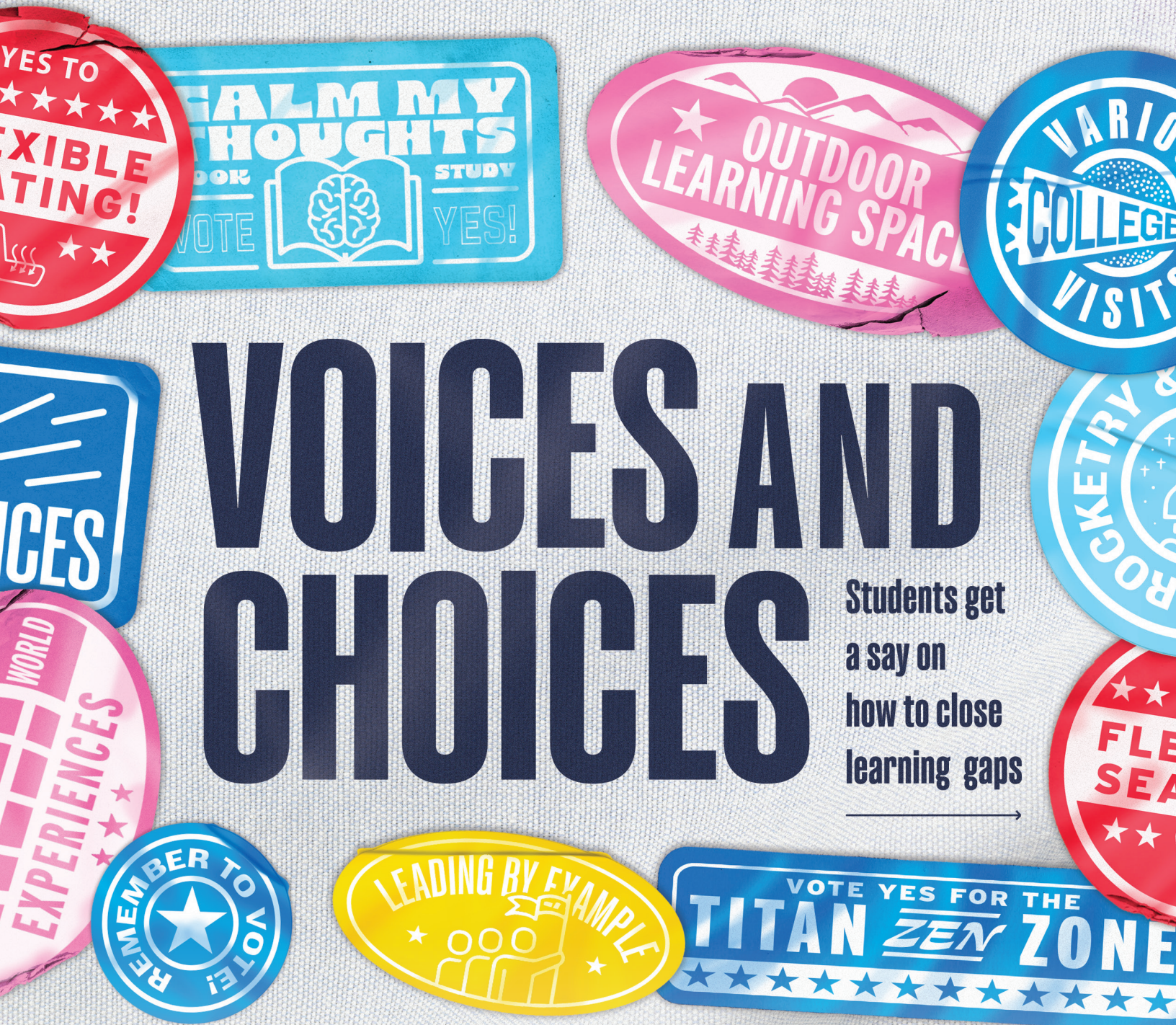


# Texas Lone Star

A Publication of the Texas Association of School Boards | Volume 41, Number 9 | November 2023



**WEATHERING THE STORMS**  
MANY FACTORS DRIVING UP PROPERTY INSURANCE COSTS

**FAMILY, SERVICE, CANUTILLO**  
BORDER REGION SHAPED NEW TASB PRESIDENT'S VALUES



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## NOVEMBER

6-7 • TASB HR Services: HR Academy — Georgetown

6-7 • TASB HR Services: Advanced HR Academy — Georgetown

7 • TASB Facility Services: Asbestos Designated Person Training — Huntsville

8 • TASB Facility Services: Integrated Pest Management — Huntsville

9 • TASB Student Solutions Webinar Series: CTE and Transition and Special Education — Virtual Event

14 • TASB Legal Services: Fall Legal Seminar — Tyler

15 • TASB Legal Services: Fall Legal Seminar — Waco

15 • TASB Risk Fund: School-Based Law Enforcement Summit — Austin

15 • TASB SHARS Matters Webinar Series: Cost Report Audits and the Informal Review Process — Virtual Event

15-16 • TASB HR Services: Service Record Management — Virtual Event

18 • TASB Legal Services: Fall Legal Seminar — South Padre Island

29-30 • HR Services: Understanding Compensation in Schools — Virtual Event

## DECEMBER

5 • TASB Facility Services: Asbestos Designated Person Training — Edinburg

6 • TASB Facility Services: Integrated Pest Management — Edinburg

7 • TASB Facility Services: Best Practices: Maintenance and Operation — Edinburg

13 • TASB SHARS Matters Webinar Series: Random Moment Time Study — Virtual Event

## JANUARY

11 • TASB Student Solutions Webinar Series: We've Reviewed Our Special Education Program. Now What? — Virtual Event

16 • TASB Facility Services: Asbestos Designated Person Training — Austin

17 • TASB Facility Services: Integrated Pest Management — Austin

17 • TASB SHARS Matters Webinar Series: SHARS Updates (Presented by the Texas Education Agency) — Virtual Event

17-18 • TASB HR Services: Hiring Effective Teachers and Keeping Them — Virtual Event

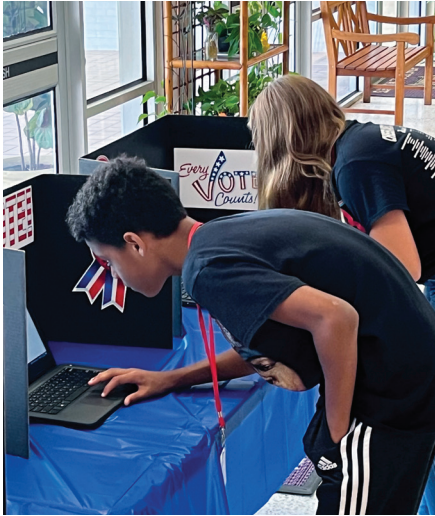
25-26 • 2024 Texas Association of Community College Attorneys Conference — Austin



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



## Features



### 8 Voices and Choices

Students get a say in how to close the learning gaps



### 12 Family, Service, Canutillo

Border region shaped new TASB president's values



### 16 Weathering the Storms

Many factors driving up property insurance costs

## Departments

- 2 Calendar
- 20 Legal News
- 22 Capitol Watch
- 24 Good Governance
- 26 District Voices
- 28 News & Events
- 42 A Closer Look

## Columns

- 5 From the Top
- 7 Editor's Note

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# The Power of Family

Honoring my mother's legacy in new role

by Armando Rodriguez



Armando Rodriguez

**A**s I begin my time as president of TASB, I do so with a profound sense of honor and responsibility. This moment is not just a personal achievement; it's a testament to the power of family, the values we hold dear, and the indomitable spirit of those who inspire us.

It is a moment I wish to dedicate to my beloved mother, Leticia "Letty" Hidalgo Rodriguez, whose legacy and unwavering belief in the transformative power of education will forever guide me in this journey.

My mother passed on Aug. 17, and her words of encouragement and unwavering support will be my guiding light as I take on this important role.

In the world of public education, we often use terms like "community" and "family" to describe the bonds that unite us. However, these words are not mere rhetoric; they embody the essence of our shared mission to nurture and empower the minds of the future. My own journey in public education has been deeply influenced by the culture of family, and it is this very culture that I wish to champion as TASB president.

Growing up in the tight-knit community of Canutillo, Texas, I was fortunate to be raised by parents who instilled in me the values of hard work, compassion, and the importance of education. My mother was not just the matriarch of our family; she was a relentless advocate for education, a beacon of wisdom, and a source of boundless love.

Letty, as the Canutillo community knew my mother, exemplified the strength and grace of a true educator. Her nurturing spirit extended beyond the boundaries of our home, touching the lives of countless individuals during her 72 years. She was



Leticia "Letty" Hidalgo Rodriguez (in front) surrounded by three of her children. From left: Ediberto Rodriguez, Lissette Galdean, and Armando Rodriguez, TASB president.

not just my mother; she was a guiding force in our community, a source of inspiration for all who had the privilege of knowing her.

As I stand here today, I reflect on the values and principles my mother instilled in me. She taught me that family is not limited to blood ties; it encompasses all those who share a common purpose, a common dream. TASB is a family, a community of educators, leaders, and advocates who are bound by the common goal of fostering excellence in public education.

Her dedication to her family and her ability to make everyone feel valued will forever be etched in my heart. It is this very dedication that I aim to infuse into my tenure. Our Association's strength lies in the bonds we forge, the support we provide, and the unity we foster among educators, school board members, and stakeholders across Texas.

In the face of challenges, my mother's unwavering resolve served as a reminder that education is not just a profession; it's

a calling. She was a living testament to the belief that public education has the power to uplift individuals, families, and communities. It is this belief that fuels my passion for TASB's mission and drives my commitment to ensuring an equitable and a quality education for all Texas students.

During my tenure as TASB President, I pledge to continue our collective efforts to advocate for policies and practices that support the needs of our diverse student population. I am committed to working tirelessly to promote educational opportunities, support innovative teaching methods, and provide the resources necessary for our schools to thrive.

Furthermore, in the spirit of family and unity, I call upon all members of TASB to actively engage in the important work ahead. Together, we can build bridges, foster understanding, and empower our schools to be beacons of excellence. We will work closely with educators, parents, and students to shape the future of education in Texas.

As we move forward, let us remember that the culture of family is not just a concept; it is a force that unites us in our pursuit of a better future. Together, we can ensure that every student in Texas has access to a high-quality education, and we can honor the legacy of those who believed, as my mother did, that education has the power to transform lives.

Let us embrace the culture of *familia* as we work towards our shared vision of a brighter future for Texas education.

Thank you, and may we continue to make our beloved state proud.★

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





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# Learning Together

School district teams of eight gather at Convention

by Laura Tolley



Laura Tolley

**A**t the Association, people are still talking about the overwhelming success of the recent txEDCON23 TASA | TASB Convention in Dallas, the largest assembly of state public education decision-makers. From informative sessions and exciting student performances to opportunities to meet school leaders from across the state, Convention offered a wealth of ideas and inspiration to those who traveled from all corners of Texas to attend.

Canadian ISD Superintendent Lynn Pulliam and his district's board of trustees drove more than 350 miles from their Texas Panhandle community to join other public ed leaders at Convention. He told me that this wasn't the first time. "The Canadian trustees have long valued the importance of attending the Convention," he said.

The district, which has an enrollment of 829 students, is in Canadian, named after the river that flows north of the small town. Its school board was named the 2023 Outstanding School Board of the Year for Region 16.

"Attending as a team of eight is beneficial on many fronts," he told me just before he and his crew left for Dallas. "First, it provides an opportunity for a group that is otherwise only together mostly once a month for a few hours at a time to travel together — in itself a big deal when you're driving from the far hinterlands like Canadian in the far northeast corner of the Panhandle."

The long trip offers them time to get to know each other. "I think our group has come to value the perspectives that each member brings to table — and getting to know each other beyond the boardroom contributes to our understanding of those perspectives," Pulliam said.



Photo by TASB Media Services

Beth Griesmer with Tori Marnell, Clint Mahannah, and Superintendent Ricardo Garcia from Tulia ISD at the TASB booth during txEDCON23.

More than 80 teams of eight attended the Convention, often dressing in district colors as symbols of pride and unity. TASB encourages these teams to attend to enhance members' learning experiences.

"Attending the various sessions, both individually and in groups, lends itself to rich conversations about the public education issues around the state, which leads to a better-informed team when making decisions about our own district at future board meetings," said Pulliam.

## Going the extra mile(s)

TASB understands it's a major investment of time and effort for school leaders to attend Convention. Many TASB staff members work long and hard before, during, and after Convention, but I want to take a moment to give a special shout-out to staff writer Beth Griesmer, who literally went the extra mile(s) to find out what Convention means to school leaders.

Just before the Dallas gathering, Griesmer traveled to Tulia, also located in the Panhandle, to meet with the Tulia ISD team of eight before they headed to Dallas. Griesmer found Tulia ISD to be "the hub of activity and connectedness in Tulia. I

was impressed by how the board does not take that role lightly. They deeply care about their students and their future.

"When I started this quest to tell the story of a team of eight and their Convention experience, Tulia was a place on the map. When I got there to meet the board the week before Convention, they welcomed me like a member of the Tulia ISD family," she said.

Griesmer stayed for the board meeting that evening. "The Tulia ISD team of eight didn't agree on everything at their September board meeting. They asked tough questions of their superintendent and voted their conscience," she said. "But they always share a meal together before board meetings and the whole team beamed with pride when the meeting started with recognizing the accomplishments of students and staff at each of the three campuses in the district."

The Tulia ISD team of eight carried that bond to Convention, where they were focused on learning about ideas and programs they could take back to Tulia to help their students succeed. "The Tulia ISD board clearly understands that learning together will make them stronger as a team and have a tangible impact on their district," Griesmer said.

You can read more about Tulia ISD's inspiring journey on page 30 and find more Convention news throughout the November issue.★

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

Laura Tolley is managing editor of Texas Lone Star.



# VOICES AND CHOICES

STUDENTS GET A SAY IN HOW  
TO CLOSE THE LEARNING GAPS

BY BETH GRIESMER





It's hard for Justin Gabrysch, principal of East Victoria High School, to say which proposal was his favorite. Maybe it was the one from band members and football players who wanted to learn how to be campus leaders, or the requests for opportunities to visit colleges. Even the portable yoga studio to help students manage stress was interesting.

"As a principal, I would not have come up with all of these proposals myself," Gabrysch said.

The students' compelling ideas poured in last year after Victoria ISD officials asked them, "What would you do with \$100,000 to improve learning?"

When every educational dollar needs to be stretched as far as it will go, and then some, Texas school districts are finding innovative ways to maximize funding outcomes. Victoria ISD Superintendent Quintin Shepherd asked school leaders how they would spend \$100,000 to help close the learning gaps and improve learning. That's when Gabrysch came up with the bold idea of using participatory budgeting, a process that involves those most affected by the decisions.

## Equity and democracy

"He gave everyone a leadership role to solve a complex problem like closing the learning gaps," Shepherd said.

All middle and high school students in the South Texas district of 13,000 were invited to participate in



## Victoria

the five-step process that started with a hype video to invite student participation and explain how it would work. The video emphasized that "this was a chance to have your voice heard."

From there, the district used the ThoughtExchange application to allow secondary students and teachers to submit ideas on how to spend the money. ThoughtExchange, a survey platform that fosters easy feedback, also lets participants rate the ideas submitted by others. There were more than 300 proposals submitted that received 8,000 ratings. This allowed Gabrysch and student leaders to see trends and create distinct categories: real world experiences, college and career readiness, mental health, and technology.

The next step was voting. "Participatory budgeting promotes social justice and equity by introducing the democratic process," said Jack Yost, a senior from Victoria ISD who presented about the experience with other student leaders at TASB's Governance Camp in March.

"When the students and Mr. Gabrysch presented this idea to the board," said Mike Mercer, Victoria ISD board president, "their definition of equity was making sure that every student had what they needed to succeed. That's what we are about."

The students voted through history classes on how to allocate the \$100,000 amongst the four categories. "The idea was to promote equity and to do our best to give every student the resources they need," said Isabella De la Rosa, a 2023 graduate from East Victoria High School.

A ballot was created with three options specifying how much money to allocate to each of the four categories. Students received "I Voted" stickers after submitting their ballots to promote the mechanics and power of democracy. The winning allocation gave \$40,000 each to real world experiences and college and career readiness, \$12,000 to technology, and \$8,000 to mental health.

Students who were interviewed after they voted said they felt valued and excited about being part of the democratic process. They also thought it was a great opportunity to make positive changes in their school community.

"This democratic process empowered our school community to propose, discuss, and vote on initiatives that would directly benefit students' learning experiences and overall well-being," said Gabrysch.

## Needs vs. wants

De la Rosa said the next step in the process involved randomly drawing two students from each grade level to serve on a committee with teachers to go through the proposals in each category.



Students received "I Voted" stickers after casting their ballots on fund allocation.



Victoria ISD high school students use real voting equipment to cast their ballots on fund allocation.



"It was a balance between teacher needs and student wants," she said. "It was a collaborative process."

The groups had to figure out which proposals would get the most resources to the most students. This required deliberation, collaboration, and compromise to find solutions and common ground, according to De la Rosa.

"It has to close the learning gaps and it has to improve learning," Gabrysch said in explaining the overarching criteria. He said the whole process required trusting the students, but he also noted it took "the burden off the administrator to figure it all out."

To those student leaders and teachers, participatory budgeting wasn't a formula. It was a philosophy and process where everyone's voice was relevant and important. The student presentation at Gov Camp explained that the "let's spend it together" theme of participatory budgeting created buy-in and enthusiasm around the idea of improving learning outcomes.

"This gave students ownership to want to come to school," Gabrysch said.

"I think over time that it's going to improve adult participation in the district because students are telling their families what they are excited about," said Mercer.

## Assessing results

Victoria ISD used Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief funds to cover the costs of the student initiatives. "We were clear from the beginning that this is a one-time funding opportunity and may not be able to continue," Shepherd said.

So how are these initiatives sustainable? "It helped us set spending priorities," said Mercer. He emphasized how the urgent need to close the learning gaps was born out of the impact of the pandemic on students. "It came upon us in a very unique time in history," Mercer said. "In these unprecedented times, do some unprecedented things."

Mercer, Gabrysch, and Shepherd — with a masterful assist of the student voice from De la Rosa — pre-

sented at Summer Leadership Institute in June about their district's experience with participatory budgeting.

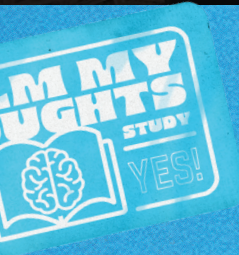
"For us, innovation is about reducing the cost of failure to increase the value," Shepherd explained to the session audience of board members and district administrators. "We find those one or two things that work on a micro level and make them macro."

From a governance perspective, Mercer said participatory budgeting was a hit. "What is 99% of the complaints? It's that you didn't tell us what you were doing," he said, referring to what boards tend to hear from the community. "This was an exercise in transparency."

De la Rosa explained that the experience brought on "rounds of epiphanies" for the students and teachers as one of the final steps in the process was to put the initiatives into action. A good example of this was college visits that many students would never have experienced without the funding for them. "It opened doors they weren't aware were even there," De la Rosa said.



Principal Justin Gabrysch is pictured at SLI in June with Isabella De la Rosa, Superintendent Quintin Shepherd, and Board President Mike Mercer.





Gabrysch agreed that the experience opened doors and opened students' minds. "I walk in different shoes than my peers' is one of the best takeaways from the process," he said.

"Even if this project doesn't continue," De la Rosa said, "the things they did during the initial year made an impact."

However, the success of many of the programs was undeniable, Gabrysch said. The final step in the participatory budgeting process was to evaluate what worked. "Several initiatives from the process last year are proving to have a significant impact and will be continued into this year due to their effectiveness in enhancing the educational environment and benefiting a large number of students."

## Keeping it going

One of the programs that is continuing into this school year is the Leading by Example proposed by the band members and football players. "This student-led initiative was born from the understanding that peer influence holds significant sway over student behavior and engagement," Gabrysch said.

The budgeting provided training for students to serve as role models and leaders within their respective

groups on campus, such as sports teams and fine arts groups. Gabrysch explained, "These newly empowered student leaders spearheaded activities ranging from mentorship programs and study groups to promoting a sense of responsibility and camaraderie among students." He looks forward to seeing more positive changes within the school communities this year.

Many projects created through the funds allocated to mental health will also continue into this year. "We championed projects aimed at enhancing student well-being, including the creation of tranquil spaces around campus designed to provide students with a haven for decompression amidst the pressures of adolescence," he said.

The Calm My Thoughts group, made up of both students and teachers, works together to oversee these spaces. The group also promotes community support and understanding of mental health challenges, particularly those made more acute by the pandemic. Another initiative that will continue is an outdoor learning space that was created in an underused space on the high school campus that has proven to be popular with a wide variety of classes.

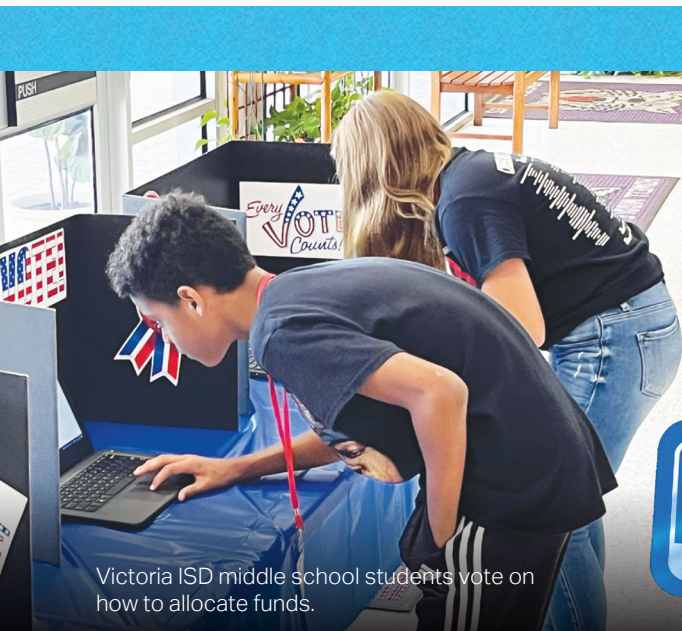
These programs created through an innovative process are not the only ideas the district is

sticking with. "By continuing to utilize participatory budgeting, we ensure that the initiatives funded reflect the genuine needs and aspirations of our community," Gabrysch said.

"Ultimately, the participatory budgeting process will remain an integral part of our school's culture, serving as a means to foster collaboration, transparency, and shared responsibility," he said. They plan to broaden the scope of the process to engage more members of the community in future initiatives.

"It's impossible to discount the message that was sent to our students, staff, and community that is if you're willing to speak and willing to get involved, your voice will be heard," Mercer said. "We just empowered an entire generation to know that their voice matters and their voice counts."

*Beth Griesmer is a staff writer for Texas Lone Star.★*



Victoria ISD middle school students vote on how to allocate funds.



Students from East Victoria High School present on participatory budgeting at Gov Camp in March.





# FAMILY, SERVICE, CANUTILLO

## BORDER REGION SHAPED NEW TASB PRESIDENT'S VALUES

*by Laura Tolley*

**A**rmando Rodriguez's values are rooted in family, education, public service — and Canutillo.

As Rodriguez puts it, his story is Canutillo, a small community in El Paso County that values hard work, the opportunities offered through a good education, and close family ties. From an early age, his family instilled in him "a culture of high expectations" that led to him getting a business degree from The University of Texas at El Paso and sparked a desire to serve his community.



As a student at Canutillo High School, Armando Rodriguez traveled to the Houston Rodeo as a member of the FFA program.



TASB President Armando Rodriguez at the 2023 Canutillo High School commencement ceremony.

The heart of his town is Canutillo ISD, which Rodriguez attended and graduated from Canutillo High School, and where he now serves on the school board as vice president. This far West Texas region has had a tremendous impact on him.

"I've always been influenced by the convergence of cultures that make up the El Paso borderland. Here's a place where good old American values mix with an unapologetic Mexican culture that gives this community a unique view of the world," he said. "El Paso is what the rest of Texas will look like in a couple of decades, and because of that, I feel El Paso and Canutillo are at the forefront of what makes Texas work."



## NEW ROLE AT TASB

Rodriguez is excited to bring his background and experience to his latest role in public service — TASB President for 2023-24. He succeeds Debbie Gillespie, a former Frisco ISD trustee who will serve the next year as TASB's Immediate Past President.

"I have been given the opportunity to bring the experience I have gained as a school board member of a growing, largely Hispanic school district along the Texas-Mexico border and bring that to the state level," he said. "I want to make sure that every single student in our state, regardless of the ZIP code in which they live or the area code in front of their telephone number, will have access to high-quality educational opportunities."

Gillespie, who has served with Rodriguez on the TASB board for several years, said his experience will be a benefit to TASB members.

"Armando is capable and kind-hearted, and he is willing to step up to any challenge," Gillespie said. "We have learned so much from each other about how to overcome differences and face challenges that are put before us. I have enjoyed serving with him on the TASB Board and look forward to continuing our work together as he steps up to presidential level."

Before he was elected President, he served as President-elect for 2022-23. In addition, Rodriguez was in the Leadership TASB Class of 2012, graduating as a Master Trustee.

"TASB is a legacy organization that continues to serve elected trustees, school district officials, and students in every corner of the state. As the role of schools in our communities expands to better meet the needs of parents, teachers, and students, so will our organization," Rodriguez said. "I look forward to meeting with leaders from throughout Texas to determine how we can reach the goals we have set for TASB and for our member school districts."

## PUBLIC SERVICE STARTED EARLY

Rodriguez's public service career began in 2005 at age 21, when he was elected as the youngest-ever member of the Canutillo ISD Board of Trustees, which serves a district of about 6,000 students across 10 campuses. His election was not a surprise to many in the district: Rodriguez had been a permanent fixture at school board meetings as a student, even before he was eligible to vote in any election. Now, at age 40, he is an experienced school board member serving his fifth term.

At Canutillo ISD, Rodriguez has made it his mission to improve the quality of education in his community, especially for underserved students. Through his work, he ensures that students have access to high-quality educational, fine arts, and athletic facilities. He also is one of the founding members of the Canutillo Alumni Foundation for Education, commonly known as CAFÉ,



At a txEDCON23 TASA | TASB Convention ceremony, Debbie Gillespie (right) hands the gavel to new TASB President Armando Rodriguez. Gillespie is now TASB Immediate Past President.



TASB President Armando Rodriguez at a children's home in Tel Aviv, Israel, during a trip with the American Israel Public Affairs Committee in 2017.





TASB President Armando Rodriguez is interviewed by a Fort Sam Houston ISD student at Governance Camp 2020.

Photo courtesy of Canutillo ISD

which was specifically designed to award scholarships to Canutillo graduates.

During his tenure on the Canutillo ISD board, there have been historic gains in student achievement and state-recognized progress. The district also boasts being one of the few high schools in the region to earn the National Blue Ribbon designation from the U.S. Department of Education, the most prestigious award given to a public school.

"I'm especially proud of the A-B Honor Roll distinction the district received from the Educational Results Partnership for our efforts to close achievement gaps and create high-performing schools — the only El Paso district to get such an honor," he said.

Rodriguez also has played a key role in modernizing Canutillo schools. Some of the district's recent accomplishments include the establishment of Northwest Early College, a National Blue Ribbon School and one of the best high schools in the country according to *U.S. News & World Report*; the creation of the Canutillo Connect initiative, which bridges the digital divide in the community by distributing Apple devices to all students and creating better internet connectivity throughout the district; the back-to-back-to-back A rating for the district by the Texas Education Agency, and being named the Best Small School District by the H-E-B Excellence in Education Awards in 2022.

Canutillo ISD also is the first district to seek and receive permission from the state to add two nonvoting student advisors to its board of trustees, he said. These student advisors sit at the dais with the board and partici-

pate in the discussion of all agenda items to bring the student perspective into the discussion, he said.

"Mando, as everyone in Canutillo knows him, has been a transformational figure for our district. At his young age, he has given nearly half of his life to serving the children of Canutillo. He has set a culture of high expectations and created an environment where students can reach unprecedented heights regardless of their background or barriers," said Patricia Mendoza, Canutillo ISD board president. "I am looking forward to seeing Mando serve with the same passion as TASB President."

Other leadership positions for Rodriguez include serving on the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials' board of directors. He has also served as president of the Mexican American School Boards Association and president of the Far West Texas School Boards Association.

## PROTECTING PUBLIC EDUCATION

Canutillo ISD Superintendent Pedro Galaviz praised Rodriguez as a man of service who is "committed to the community that raised him" and to public education.

"Mr. Rodriguez is the type of passionate leader school districts need on their side. A true visionary, he works alongside other board members and administrators to continuously improve the lives of students by guaranteeing access to high-quality programs," Galaviz said. "I am especially excited to have him serve as president of TASB as he will bring a type of sensibility and knowledge that is unique to those who were raised along the Texas-Mexico border."

Rodriguez's board service is guided by his beliefs that a school board is responsible for being the best steward of public trust and tax dollars and that members must serve as the strongest advocates for children and



TASB President Armando Rodriguez presenting awards to the Canutillo High School FFA Award winners.

Photo courtesy of Canutillo ISD





Photo courtesy of TASB President Armando Rodriguez

TASB President Armando Rodriguez at a Leadership TASB event.



Photo courtesy of TASB President Armando Rodriguez

As a founder of the Canutillo Alumni Foundation for Education, or CAFÉ, TASB President Armando Rodriguez plays a critical role in organizing the annual golf tournament that raises thousands of dollars in scholarships.

for public education. But there are other important issues board members face in today's political climate.

"Our role as trustees also has become more nuanced as we help school districts get out of the pandemic and through much of the political waters public education has been muddling through," he added.

But whatever challenge or opportunity he takes on in public education, at Rodriguez's core lies the deep understanding that all children deserve a good education.

"Public education is the great equalizer. It provides people of all backgrounds the opportunity to excel and reach personal and community goals," he said. "In a community like Canutillo, with such humble beginnings, public education is transformative. From its early start as a rural school district serving the children of farm workers to its status as a premier suburban school district, we have helped end cycles of poverty and given families access to unprecedented opportunities."★

Laura Tolley is managing editor of Texas Lone Star.

## TASB President Armando Rodriguez's Thoughts on Board Service

### *What do you enjoy most about being a Canutillo ISD board member?*

I love the opportunity to serve the community that gave everything to me. Through my work on the school board, I hope to bring about change that will transform lives.

### *What is most challenging about being a school board member?*

Public education continues to be under attack, and it is frustrating to sit and watch a system as important as public schools get shortchanged and second guessed by individuals and organizations whose best interest may not be the improvement of educational opportunities for all students.

### *Your best advice for new trustees?*

Make every decision with the students' best interest at heart. If you let what's good for students guide you, you will always cast the right vote.

### *What advice do you have for trustees who are facing tension with other board members? With members in their community?*

Keep students at the heart of the work you do. Don't let personalities and adult-oriented problems get in the way of what is good for kids.

**"Mr. Rodriguez is the type of passionate leader school districts need on their side. A true visionary, he works alongside other board members and administrators to continuously improve the lives of students by guaranteeing access to high-quality programs."**

**— Pedro Galaviz, Canutillo ISD Superintendent**



# WEATHERING THE

by Sylvia Wood

# STORMS

MANY FACTORS DRIVING UP PROPERTY INSURANCE COSTS



Photos courtesy of Hearne ISD

The hallways of Hearne High School flooded after the sprinkler system froze during Winter Storm Uri.

**F**irst, high winds blew off a cafeteria roof at Hearne ISD. A hailstorm later caused significant damage, followed by a flood in the high school caused by Winter Storm Uri in 2021, and then another costly hailstorm a year later. “We get real nervous around here when the sky gets dark,” said Jay Davis, Hearne ISD executive director of operations.

The district, located about 20 miles north of Bryan-College Station, isn’t alone in worrying about what the weather can do to property. Recent weather events have caused billions of dollars in covered property losses across Texas to businesses, homes, and schools.

“I have become best friends with our claims adjuster over the last three years,” said Davis, whose district has property coverage through its membership in TASB Risk Management Fund.

As the largest risk pool in Texas serving school districts for nearly 50 years, the Fund has been on the front lines trying to help its members weather storms while dealing with one of the most challenging and expensive property coverage and insurance markets in recent history.

“The market for property coverage in Texas is particularly difficult because of the size of the state and the diversity of severe weather events



that can occur,” said Mary Barrett, associate executive director for TASB Risk Management Services. “Over the past few years, school districts have been particularly impacted as we’ve seen fewer providers willing to take on those risks, pushing prices up.”

All those factors add up to what’s known in the industry as a “hard” insurance market. Earlier this year, State Farm announced it would no longer be accepting new applications for property and causality coverage in California because of wildfire and construction costs. In Florida, Farmers Insurance became the fourth major insurer to exit that state amid record hurricane losses, leaving homeowners scrambling to find new providers.

For school districts in Texas, the risk of severe weather has also had consequences — namely more expensive risk pool contributions or insurance premiums, higher deductibles, and fewer providers willing to offer coverage.

“This is the hardest and most difficult property insurance market I have seen in my 50-plus year career,” said Bob Reim, an independent insurance consultant who works with dozens of Texas school districts through the Robert V. Reim Company. “Premium increases of 50% or more are not unusual.”

## Record losses

During the first half of 2023, Texas led the country with \$7.2 billion in insured losses. That figure includes an estimated \$1 billion from hailstorms this past June alone. Texas leads all other states with the most hail events in nine of the last 10 years, according to the Insurance Information Institute. In 2022, many Texas public schools experienced severe damage from frozen pipes during Winter Storm Elliott in

“Over the past few years, school districts have been particularly impacted as we’ve seen fewer providers willing to take on those risks, pushing prices up.”

— Mary Barrett, Associate Executive Director,  
TASB Risk Management Services



After a speedy assessment from the Fund claims adjusters, Hearne ISD was able to get to work cleaning up the water in the high school.

December. And Winter Storm Uri in February 2021 is estimated to have caused more than \$23 billion of insured losses overall in Texas.

Members of the Fund’s property coverage program, which covers half of the ISDs in Texas, generated \$100 million in covered losses due to the 2021 freeze brought on by Uri. Hearne ISD was one of those member districts hit hard by the storm. The high school sprinkler system froze and burst on a Saturday night, causing extensive water damage.

One of the first calls Davis made was to his TASB property claims adjuster.

“We had a lot of water in the building, and we were able to get crews here that Sunday morning to start getting the water out,” Davis said. “When kids came back after spring break, they already had two hallways completed so that we could start school.”





Photo courtesy of Hearne ISD

The damage to the high school was extensive after Winter Storm Uri.

## Reinsurance costs

Severe and unexpected weather is one of the more visible factors driving up the property coverage costs for school districts. But there are other global market forces at play as well, including rising reinsurance costs for insurers and risk pools.

"Reinsurance can be described as insurance for insurance companies and risk pools," Barrett said. "Insurance companies and risk pools can only take on so much risk and purchase reinsurance to help reduce uncertainty."

In turn, those reinsurers charge higher rates that ultimately get passed on to policy holders and risk pool members. Between January and June 2023, property reinsurance rates climbed 33% on average, according to reinsurance brokerage firm Howden Tiger.

Here in Texas, school districts have experienced these price hikes on their property coverage renewals or seen them in the responses they get when they put out requests for insurance proposals. Increasingly, Barrett said some districts are only seeing one or two responses and more limitations in coverage.

## Bad timing

For school districts, the timing of a hard insurance market couldn't be worse. In 2022, Texas joined California as the only states with populations of more than 30 million, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. To accommodate growing enrollments, districts have had to add new facilities and buildings, all of which require property coverage.

In addition, inflation, supply chain issues, and labor shortages have driven up building values, making it more costly to insure and repair facilities when damage occurs. According to Marshall & Swift Trend Factors, values in some states, including Texas, grew 34% between 2020 and 2022.

Amid these challenges, school districts are also grappling with budgets stretched thin as funding levels have stayed flat since 2019, despite increased costs related to teacher shortages and record inflation. This year, an increasing number of districts have had to pass deficit budgets, leaving no cushion for higher deductibles or coverage costs.

"We understand that districts face a lot of tough choices right now with their budgets," Barrett said. "In this challenging environment, we're continuing to work with Fund members to ensure the Fund provides coverage options that align with our mission to support public education. Especially now, we're committed to helping districts come up with coverage solutions that offer budget certainty in uncertain times."

## How the Fund can help

When districts join the Fund, they become part of a self-insured, not-for-profit risk pool of more than 1,000 Texas education organizations collaborating to share risk and protect their resources. As part of that collective goal, the Fund encourages all of its members to take advantage of training, insights, and resources to help mitigate risk and lessen the potential for budget surprises.

In today's challenging property coverage market, the Fund encourages districts to pay particular attention to every roof they have, including documenting the type of roofing material, its age, and maintenance history.

Not only will potential insurers ask for this information, but Barrett said it's also an essential part of developing a comprehensive roof and building maintenance program that can extend the life of this expensive asset.

"Roofs are among a district's biggest facility investments," Barrett said. "Districts, of course, want to choose roofing materials based on factors like price and energy efficiency, but they should also make sure their roofs will stand up to weather patterns in their regions — especially hail."



Having documentation and an overall roof inspection and maintenance plan will come in handy for districts either seeking to go out to bid for a new coverage provider or for those who have a claim after a weather-related event.

When Hearne had to replace the roof on the high school after a storm, Davis recalled how they used a thicker membrane than was standard as part of their risk mitigation plan.

The Fund “has been incredible because we have actually had to replace roofs twice in the last five years,” he said. “The second hailstorm came and everything we replaced the first time was not damaged because we used the thicker membrane. The upgraded materials saved a lot of roofs in the second hailstorm.”

Another strategy that can help districts stay prepared is to do regular building appraisals on all district facilities every two to three years. A recent appraisal will be more reflective of actual replacement costs if a building is damaged in a weather event.

Finally, like homeowners seeking to save on their property insurance, some districts might also consider opting for higher deductibles — \$500,000 or even more than \$1 million. Not every district will be able to afford such a high deductible in the case of anything but a catastrophic loss, but it is a strategy to reduce upfront coverage costs.

“What’s happening with the property coverage right now can feel pretty overwhelming for districts trying to navigate a hard insurance market,” Barrett said. “Fortunately, the Fund has a long history of stability and success in offering comprehensive risk solutions to school districts for whatever crisis may lie ahead — from hurricanes and hailstorms to catastrophic ice events — and that commitment won’t change.”★

*Sylvia Wood is a staff writer for Texas Lone Star. Staff writer Beth Griesmer contributed to this story.*

## Preventative Maintenance and Roof Replacement Planning

A solid preventive maintenance program that includes regular roof inspections can extend the lifespan of these expensive assets. Here are some tips:

- Inspect roofs at least twice a year and always after severe weather.
- Develop a roof replacement strategy in addition to a preventive maintenance plan. Don’t rely “on the next hailstorm” to replace roofs that are near the end of their expected useful life. Insurers and risk pools, often driven by their reinsurers, may limit coverage for older roofs or not cover them at all.
- When replacing roofs, ensure the roof material and type withstands hail activity typical of the region.

Finally, make sure your risk pool or insurance company is aware of your facility and roof management plans. This is a great way to stand out as a “better risk” in a highly competitive property market that shows no signs of letting up any time soon.

## The Differences Between Insurance, Risk Pools, and Insurance Brokers

Insurance is a required and increasingly expensive part of life, whether it’s medical insurance for your family or car insurance. The idea is that you pay a premium to transfer most of the risk of driving your car around town to a company that is willing to take on that risk. It’s transactional and optimistic that you will be safe and not need the company to help pay the costs of an accident.

Risk pools, on the other hand, collectively self-insure by sharing in the inherent risks with a membership of contributors. The focus is less transactional and more about managing risk for the benefit of the whole group. Risk managers use their expertise to identify and mitigate risks, with an emphasis on being proactive.

An insurance broker acts as an intermediary and shops around for the best insurance rates for a fee. However, spending the least amount possible on insurance may not be the best goal. Risk pools are built for a specific group — such as school districts — and design coverage that understands the nature and operations unique to that business. Risk management is about protecting assets, not just covering them in case of catastrophe.



# Security Changes

New law requires armed personnel on campuses

by TASB Legal Services

A key aspect of House Bill 3, the school safety law passed by the Texas Legislature this year, requires districts to assign armed personnel at every campus. The following are answers to frequently asked questions about armed security officers in HB 3.

## 1. What does HB 3 require?

HB 3, effective Sept. 1, 2023, added new Texas Education Code section 37.0814, requiring each school board to determine the appropriate number of armed security officers for each district campus and, absent a good cause exception, ensure at least one armed security officer — specifically, a commissioned peace officer — is present during regular school hours at each campus. A school board can claim a good cause exception to this requirement due to lack of funding or qualified personnel.

## 2. Can a district comply by having individuals other than commissioned peace officers present at each campus during regular school hours?

No, not without first claiming a good cause exception. The statute states that an armed security officer described by Section 37.0814(a) must be: (1) a school district peace officer, (2) a school resource officer (SRO), or (3) a commissioned peace officer employed as security personnel.

## 3. Who is a school district peace officer?

A school district peace officer is a district employee licensed by the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement and commissioned by the district. This option is available only if the district has its own police department.

## 4. Who is an SRO?

An SRO is a commissioned peace officer employed by another commissioning entity (e.g., county sheriff, city police department) who is assigned to a specific school district through a memorandum of understanding (MOU). The officer works for the commissioning entity, not the school district.

## 5. Who is a commissioned peace officer employed as security personnel?

Texas Education Code section 37.081 states that a school board has four options for employing security personnel:

- Employing or contracting with security personnel
- Entering into an MOU for SROs provided by a local law enforcement agency or a city or county that employs commissioned peace officers
- Contracting with a security services contractor licensed under Texas Occupations Code chapter 1702 for a commissioned security officer who has completed the Department of Public Safety Level II or III training course
- Commissioning its own peace officers

## 6. What counts as a campus?

The Texas Education Agency has informally indicated that a campus is defined as a facility that has its own unique campus ID number registered with TEA, an assigned administrator, enrolled students who are counted for average daily attendance, and assigned instructional staff; receives federal and/or state and/or local funds as its primary support; provides instruction in the Texas

Essential Knowledge and Skills; has one or more grade groups in the range from early education through grade 12; and is not a program for students enrolled in another public school, provides only virtual instruction, or uses only facilities not subject to the district's control. If, based on TEA's understanding of the term campus, a school board determines it is best to have one commissioned peace officer serving more than one campus, the board should seek a good cause exception and choose an alternative standard that allows a single officer to be shared by two or more campuses in immediate proximity.

## 7. What counts as being present?

If a commissioned peace officer is not assigned full time to the campus, the board should seek a good cause exception. School district police department schedules, MOUs for SROs, and contracts with security companies should provide coverage when an officer is on leave.

## 8. What are regular school hours?

The phrase is not defined in law and may be addressed in future regulations. For now, if an officer will not be present during regular instructional hours, a school board should pursue a good cause exception.

## 9. How does a school board claim a good cause exception?

The new statute does not address the mechanics, but clearly the law calls







for board action, and a board resolution makes the most sense. TASB Legal Services has provided a sample resolution on eSource. Go to [tasb.org](https://tasb.org), click on Legal under the Services tab, go to the TASB School Law eSource section, click on Business, and then Safety and Emergency Management. Then click on Armed Security Officer Requirement in House Bill 3.

**10. What is in an alternative standard?**

If the board claims a good cause exception, the board must provide an alternative standard that may include reliance on a school marshal or an employee or contracted individual who has completed the handgun safety course required for handgun license holders and is authorized to carry a firearm by the district (often called a “guardian” in school board policy). Each district must create and maintain documentation of its compliance with this section.

**11. How much detail should the board share publicly about its safety plans, including its alternative standard?**

Board action must take place through a formal vote in a posted public meeting. Beyond that, the details of the district’s security plans can be protected.

The board may meet in closed session to deliberate its security audit or the deployment, or specific occasions for

(See *Security*, page 36.)

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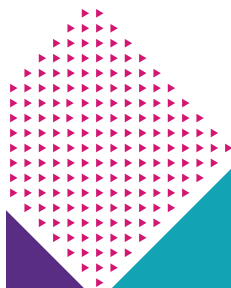
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# Protecting Public Ed

Delegate Assembly members sound alarm on vouchers

by Dax González

**D**uring the txEDCON23 TASA | TASB Convention in Dallas, school board members at the 2023 TASB Delegate Assembly discussed how two of the biggest obstacles hindering student achievement are adequate school funding and the focus by some politicians on vouchers.

In response to those concerns, Delegate Assembly members amended the 2022-24 Advocacy Agenda to reinforce TASB's priorities and resolutions on improving school funding and prohibiting the use of public tax dollars for private institutions. The measures passed by an overwhelming supermajority of voting members.

"Legislators failed to adequately fund Texas public schools — despite the state's historic 2023 budget surplus of more than \$32 billion," said Nancy Hum-

phrey, Plano ISD's delegate. "Texans do not want to give away billions of dollars to private schools who have no elected board, no fiscal transparency, and no system of accountability when our public school students are being shortchanged thousands of dollars per pupil by the state."

Additionally, the more than 450 trustees who were serving as delegates from their school boards debated and voted on other issues important to their local students and communities, such as charter school transparency, state accountability, student assessments, and mental health support for students and staff.

## Setting priorities

The Assembly also adopted a new priority, approved 16 new resolutions, and amended two other priorities.



Delegate Assembly members vote at TASB's membership meeting in Dallas.

The new priority calls upon the Texas Education Agency to refrain from retroactively changing the metrics used in the state accountability system. The amended priorities clarify language in school finance and state accountability priorities already in the agenda and strengthen language asking the Legislature to prohibit the use of public funds for private school vouchers.

The 16 new resolutions address issues ranging from grace periods for school ratings after significant STAAR changes to protecting districts' rights to pay off debt



James Matlock, a Hutto ISD trustee, speaks at Delegate Assembly.



Attendees at Delegate Assembly.

Photos by TASB Media Services





early to increased funding for the instructional materials allotment.

Delegates also elected TASB's Directors and Officers for the upcoming year. Debbie Gillespie, a former Frisco ISD trustee, completed her term as TASB President and Armando Rodriguez of Canutillo ISD assumed that role for 2023-24.

The new Advocacy Agenda will remain effective until the 2024 Delegate Assembly adopts a new one. The full Advocacy Agenda may be found at [gr.tasb.org](http://gr.tasb.org).

Delegate Assembly is TASB's official members meeting where every member has a vote in the direction of TASB and its advocacy work. As Active Members, each local school board and regional education service center has the exclusive right to appoint a delegate who could speak and vote at the Delegate Assembly meeting in September at Convention.

The process for local school boards to name a delegate begins at a regular board meeting with an agenda item to appoint a delegate and alternative to attend the Delegate Assembly. For more information about Delegate Assembly, visit [delegate.tasb.org](http://delegate.tasb.org).★

*Dax González is division director of TASB Governmental Relations.*

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# Welcoming Trustees

## Best practices for onboarding new members

by Robert Long III

Once the November election results are finalized, it's certain that many districts around the state will be welcoming new trustees to the boardroom. Whether or not your district is in a post-election transition, it's safe to say that every board experiences changes eventually. Which is why having best practices in place for onboarding your new board members can make the difference between merely doing what is required and creating a truly welcoming and thoughtful experience.

In the midst of a transition, boards have an opportunity to experience growth, while recommitting to the hard work at hand. State law requires all new board members receive a local district orientation. But beyond what the law requires, a new board member orientation, when done well, offers the chance to not only impart critical information, but to also build trust, expand understanding, and nurture relationships.

### Overview of district goals

New board members are starting in the middle of the game. They need to know what's already in the playbook. They are coming in with only the knowledge they've been able to glean from the sidelines or while researching from home. Now, they need to be ready to make decisions and be an active player.

To support new trustees and prepare them for success in their first year of service, it's helpful to receive an overview of the district's goals. It's likely that new trustees have been following the board's work, but there may be programs, policies, and other items that have a lengthy history, and they may not know the details. Sharing some background

knowledge of key goals, programs, and policies will help bring them into the fold and get them up to speed so they can be confident and active participants in board business.

### Introduce key district staff

As part of your local district orientation, it is helpful to schedule a visit for new trustees to meet district administrators and staff members with whom they will regularly be interacting, such as members of the superintendent's cabinet and key administrative support staff. This will help them not only put a face to a name but also to make connections between the important work being done in the district and the people making it happen. Sharing a binder that includes key contact information, department heads, organizational charts, and any other pertinent information, will put important contacts right at their fingertips.

During these introductions, it's also a great opportunity for the superintendent and administrative staff to start a dialogue, highlighting the distinct roles of the superintendent and the board and

how they work in tandem to guide the district and its students toward success. It's an opportunity to create connections, fostering a sense of community that can be critical when building relationships, which benefits everyone in the long run, particularly when the team of eight must tackle challenging business.

### Board member outreach

When welcoming a new board member, it's helpful for veteran board members to remember what their onboarding experience was like. Keeping that in mind, current trustees might consider what worked and what didn't, while acknowledging that this is a chance to set aside some time to get to know their newly elected trustees, making them feel a part of the team.

For some board members, sending a note congratulating the trustee and welcoming them to the board might be a starting point. For others, it might be useful to set up time to grab coffee and meet informally. However you choose to connect with your new members, whether in person or through email, it's important to limit the number of trustees who are represented or communicating to avoid a quorum.

### Policies and procedures

Board members know it takes time, sometimes years, to get acclimated to and learn all there is to know about board service. That's why during a discussion of policies and procedures you'll want to offer an overview and avoid diving too deep. You want your new board members to walk away feeling more confident than confused.

And it goes without saying, whatever you're planning for your new trustee ori-





entation, you should reference the Texas Education Code for a list of required orientation topics. But a way to simplify the process without overwhelming new trustees is to focus on performance summaries in these key areas:

- Safety
- Academics
- Finance

When addressing board operations, you'll want to make sure that your new board members understand how agendas are set and what a typical workflow looks like. Offering tips for meeting preparation will also be useful for new members. Your operations orientation will not hit every area, but topics critical for new board members to understand include:

- Communication
- Meeting etiquette
- Board member expectations

At a minimum, you'll need to give an overview of the local and legal policies involved in board operations, ensuring new board members can differentiate between the two levels of policy.

### Recommit to the work

As your new board members begin to settle into their roles, it's a great time for the board to revisit district goals, the board's commitment, and the "why" behind the work. Having conversations about the "north star" of board service — providing an outstanding education for all students — and recommitting to the board's work can be advantageous, allowing seasoned members and new trustees to get on the same page, especially in advance of the required annual three-hour teambuilding training. And if you're not sure where to start, TASB's Board Development Services offers individualized training and teambuilding sessions designed to meet your goals.

### Additional supports

In addition to the support your new trustees will find through your board's orientation, TASB offers training opportunities and on-demand courses for new board members. Texas Trustee Institute is a foundational learning opportunity designed specifically for newly elected trustees, so they can be a confident and

collaborative part of your board. At TTI, trustees not only learn about key topics related to their service, but they also have the chance to network with other new board members from across the state. Stay tuned for upcoming sessions in 2024.

New trustees can also find support through TASB's Online Learning Center, which offers on-demand courses, including the Top 10 Things to Know bundle with key courses for new board members. A wide range of courses is available to guide board members on their learning journey.

The more intentional you are when planning your new trustee onboarding activities, the more likely you will see the payoff down the road, when the work gets challenging and collaborating is critical. If you're unsure where to begin with onboarding new trustees, contact TASB Board Development Services at **board.dev@tasb.org** or call 800-580-8272, extension 2453.★

*Robert Long III is division director of TASB's Board Development Services.*



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# Implementing Change

## Lockhart ISD shifts to self-funded health insurance

by Michael Wright

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

In an era when traditional insurance often leaves both districts and employees grappling with rising costs, Lockhart ISD has embarked on an innovative journey in employee healthcare. In 2022, we shifted from the conventional Teacher Retirement System insurance to a new self-funded insurance program called Lion Care.

For years, Lockhart ISD faced the challenge of mounting healthcare premiums. We knew our staff needed a more cost-effective alternative. District leaders and my fellow trustees led the charge in 2021 toward a more employee-centric healthcare system.

We knew the move would be risky. Self-funded insurance had only been successfully implemented in a handful of other mid-sized or smaller school districts across Texas, but we knew our employees needed a more financially sustainable option.

In fall 2022, the program officially launched. One year later, we can say the change has been transformative.

### Employees over profit

Lion Care's primary distinction lies in employee empowerment. With Lion Care, named in honor of our district's mascot, employees can choose any healthcare provider while cutting out traditional insurance companies' upcharge.

Our third-party administrator plays a pivotal role in ensuring Lion Care's success.

One noteworthy feature of Lion Care is a program that helps mitigate out-of-pocket costs for employees who need care that can't be contained to an office visit.

This program provides access to a network of surgeons and diagnostic centers aligned with the third-party administrator. This partnership ensures that our employees see healthcare providers who prioritize patient care over navigating insurance bureaucracy, resulting in more efficient, cost-effective procedures.

### System sustainability

With Lion Care, we can control the funds allocated to employee wellness. Instead of paying premiums to an external insurer, we directly allocate resources where they're most needed. For instance, if we notice a trend in diabetes cases among staff, we can invest in finding a top-tier diabetes treatment program.

We negotiate directly with healthcare providers rather than relying on insurers. This direct approach ensures faster payment to providers and a lower cost. The self-funded plan also offers a lower premium and a reasonable \$15 copay for employees.

Another benefit is the financial sustainability. If the total costs are less than what we've allotted at the end of the year, the fund balance rolls over. We can use the surplus for more health benefits, effectively growing the resources available for employee wellness year after year.

If the cost is more than what we've allotted, the stop-loss insurance plan steps in to cap employee costs at a certain level and protect our funds. This guarantees financial stability during health crises and mitigates risk.

### Challenges vs. reward

Though the transition has been largely positive, we've also seen major challenges.

The biggest hurdle has been educating employees. It requires a shift in mindset,



Photo Courtesy of Lockhart ISD

Michael Wright, president of the Lockhart ISD Board of Trustees.

encouraging them to be proactive about their health and healthcare choices.

Often, doctors suggest a diagnostic procedure or surgery through one of their own partners. Employees must then remember to pause and contact their healthcare advocate to schedule the procedure with a partner in the third-party administrator's program. If not, the employee could face considerable out-of-pocket expenses. But if they do use a program partner, that means the employee pays zero out-of-pocket expenses for surgery or diagnostic tests. But this does require some extra effort by the employee.

Overall, the risk has been well worth the reward. In 2022-23, 85% of employees had \$1,000 or less out-of-pocket costs for the entire year, and an astonishing 48% of employees paid less than \$100. The average prescription cost for that year was \$2.03.

### Lessons for other districts

We believe healthy teachers are productive teachers. When we prioritize teacher health, we invest in a brighter future for students.

For other districts considering a similar transition, my advice is this: Plan carefully, make sure you're in a financial spot to cover the costs before implementation, and take the risk. Invest in the well-being of your employees – they are worth it.

In a healthcare landscape fraught with uncertainties, self-funded insurance can be an innovative option that not only benefits the district but also — and most importantly — the dedicated teachers and staff who shape our students' futures.★

*Michael Wright is board president at Lockhart ISD, which has more than 6,000 students.*



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# The Mesquite Promise

How a districtwide program nurtures students

by Mary Ann Lopez

More than 30 school board members attending txEDCON23 TASA | TASB Convention in Dallas took a field trip to Mesquite ISD where they learned about an innovative districtwide program that is having a positive impact not only with students and staff, but on the entire district community as well.

The Mesquite Promise is based on four guiding principles — excelling, belonging, dignity, and making a difference — and 16 habits aligned with those principles. The goal is to create a supportive learning environment that nurtures student development, while removing barriers so they can learn, grow, and be successful.

Trustees took a bus from the Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Center to visit two of the district's schools, located about 17 miles east of Dallas. Mesquite ISD spans 60 square miles, including Mesquite, Garland, and Balch Springs. It serves more than 38,000 students on its 52 campuses and has about 5,400 employees. Trustees visited Rutherford Elementary School and Vanguard High School, taking student-led tours and enjoying two lunch panels, the first of which included students, followed by teachers, librarians, and district leaders.

In the opening presentation at Rutherford Elementary School, Mesquite ISD Superintendent Ángel Rivera explained that The Mesquite Promise is a set of beliefs and a way of life.

"The promise is about student outcomes," he said. "It may look differently at different schools, but it's always about outcomes."

The Mesquite Promise isn't something only relegated to teachers or administrators; it is a part of every aspect of the district because, Rivera said, "everyone, regardless of title, has an impact."

Putting The Mesquite Promise into practice required a mindset shift, he said.

"Young people are not problems to be fixed, but fires to be lit," Rivera said. "The Mesquite Promise is a lens to view our shared commitment, a framework to identify opportunities and encourage and support positive habits with simple strategies and resources. It's a promise we make to our students, our

community, our parents. And it permeates every decision and interaction."

How students put the four guiding principles into action will vary, and some actions may seem small, but when each student takes initiative, it can have a larger, lasting impact. For example, the first promise, "You Were Made to Excel," is tied to four habits: taking initiative, being accountable, setting ambitious goals, and pursuing your passion. For students, that might include picking up trash to keep their campus clean, helping others, studying for a test, or acknowledging when they've made a mistake.

In June 2020, Mesquite ISD formed the Leadership and Empowerment Team, which was tasked with finding ways to remove obstacles while encouraging belonging and dignity for all. To make a systemic change, the district launched The Mesquite Promise.

During the field trip, students from Rutherford Elementary School and Vanguard High School made presentations and guided trustees through their individual campuses, showcasing the programs offered to students and explaining how they tie in with The Mesquite Promise.

Winford Adams Jr., vice president of the Spring ISD board, was one of the visiting trustees.

"I wanted to learn more about what Mesquite is doing in regard to The Promise," Adams said. "It's a good opportunity to see what is happening on the ground."







Preceding page, far left: Mesquite ISD students discuss benefits of The Mesquite Promise. Top: Mesquite ISD Board President Elaine Hornsby talks about The Mesquite Promise. Bottom: Vanguard High School students in a firefighter education track take a selfie with a trustee. This page, top left: Rutherford Elementary School students tell trustees about Camp Calm, where students engage in social and emotional learning. Top right: Mesquite ISD Superintendent Ángel Rivera discusses how The Mesquite Promise has positively affected his district. Bottom: Rutherford Elementary School students welcome board members with a presentation.

Photos courtesy of Wade Odom/Mesquite ISD

I'm always looking for innovative programs, whether around the state or the country, to see what we can do at Spring."

During the lunch panels, held at Vanguard High School, students shared how as a result of The Mesquite Promise, they feel welcomed and encouraged to participate at their schools. Students said they feel they have a voice and that based on the actions of adults in the district, whether they be teachers, staff, administrators, or board members, they know the adults in their lives care about them.

"It's very important for everyone to feel involved and respected, especially at school where you feel like you're part of a family," a high school student shared. "At Poteet High School, we're reminded of The Mesquite Promise regularly. It's unique to Mesquite, but it's impactful. When you leave the school, you remember the values."

Elaine Hornsby, president of the Mesquite ISD board, was one of the panelists. She said that before The Mesquite Promise existed, the board discussed how they might improve district culture. What resonated was the belief that everyone deserves dignity. That was the starting point for the program.

"It's been very powerful with the school board," Hornsby said. "It is in

our minds [when we make decisions]. 'Is there dignity in this? Are we giving dignity

to every person?'" Aziza Basha, a fifth-grade teacher at Cannaday Elementary School who is in her fifth year of teaching at the school, said she incorporates The Mesquite Promise every day.

Before The Mesquite Promise, she found it challenging to connect with some of her students, no matter how much she tried. Incorporating The Mesquite Promise tenets, she was able to create surveys at the start of the year that offered her insights into her students, learning more about their interests. Over the course of the year, she creates activities to reassess their interests and skills, so she can support and encourage them, and find ways to connect, so they know they are made to excel and that they belong, which are two of the four tenets of The Mesquite Promise.

"The Mesquite Promise brilliantly ties in four brilliant principles: excelling, belonging, dignity, and making a difference, in an effort to achieve one goal — promoting a sense of belonging," Basha said. "With its 16 habits, educators are able to meticulously deliver purposeful lessons, have meaningful conversations, and make lifelong differences!"

Belinda Gonzalez, board secretary at West Oso ISD in Corpus Christi, said she appreciated that trustees were able to see

how The Mesquite Promise impacted not just one school, but the entire district as well.

Her fellow trustee, Rose Soto, agreed, saying that she thought a program like The Mesquite Promise would be a great benefit for their district and its students.

Arden Dawson, vice president of the River Road ISD school board in Amarillo, said of all the programs and field trips he's attended over the years, this one stood out as one of the most significant that he's experienced.

"My mind was blown from the very first campus, how all the kids were bought in [to The Mesquite Promise]. The kids, the community, the board, the principals, and administrators: it's taken all of them to make it happen," he said. "I thought we would see what we typically see when a board or a school is presenting, something cool, but not necessarily something we could do in our district."

Dawson said that while some programs might be cost prohibitive for districts to replicate, The Mesquite Promise could be adapted to a school district and its needs without much financial impact. He plans to take what he learned back to his district.

"The concept can make a difference on every one of our campuses," Dawson said.★

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



# United for Public Education

## txEDCON23 brings school leaders together

by Beth Griesmer

The Tulia ISD team of eight came to the annual txEDCON23 TASA | TASB Convention ready for a learning adventure, and the event held in Dallas Sept. 29-Oct. 1 did not disappoint. They were among the 5,660 school board members, superintendents, and other education leaders from across Texas who came together for informative sessions, spirited panel discussions, and inspirational student performances from Poteet, Frisco, and Aldine ISDs.

Attendance was up 8% this year and so was the energy throughout the Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Center. General session speakers included Ken Williams, Damon West, and Meagan Johnson, who discussed topics ranging from efforts to reach all students, servant leadership, and the multigenerational workforce. Tomball ISD Superintendent Martha Salazar-Zamora was named Superintendent of the Year and the trustees from Corsicana ISD were selected as the 2023 Outstanding School Board by the Texas Association of School Administrators.

Weaving their way through the more than 300 education-related displays in the exhibit hall, the Tulia ISD group chatted about some of the takeaways on the morning of day two.

"I went to an artificial intelligence one and that is going to be huge," said Tori Marnell, Tulia board vice president. "We're trying to figure out how to deal with that and how to incorporate AI into learning and how to incorporate it into schools. Something I hadn't thought about is what rules does a board need on using AI?"

Tulia ISD Trustee William Fifer "was able to get bits and pieces and talk to board members from districts our size." Tulia is an 850-student district located between Amarillo and Lubbock in the Texas Panhandle.

"I went to the Vanguard High School [session]," he said about the CTE-focused session highlighting an innovative high school in Mesquite ISD. "I would like to take some of that, but our town is so small. But I think we could talk to businesses in our town to partner with us and our CTE program. Maybe we could get our kids hired on right there in Tulia."







Clockwise from top left: A crowded breakout session at txEDCON23 TASA | TASB Convention. Top right: Aldine ISD student performers are congratulated by TASA President and Aldine ISD Superintendent LaTonya Goffney. Lower right: A Convention attendee asks a question during a panel discussion. Center: The Potee ISD student performance. Bottom left: Attendees take a selfie at Convention. Middle left: Members of Tulia ISD's team of eight from left: Superintendent Ricardo Garcia and board members Tori Marnell, Monica Gomez, Clint Mahannah, Kacy Quinton, Eddie Subealdea (president), and William Fifer.

Photos by TASB Media Services

Smaller districts with fewer than 1,000 students attended txEDCON23 in force, making up more than a quarter of the districts in attendance and packing the Small School District Seminar Friday morning.

"Some of these are bigger school districts that present and tell you how to do it," Marnell said. "We can go home and think 'do we have that in our bylaws? Do we need to change that? What do we need to do with this information?'"

### Building connections

Convention is designed for members to connect, network, and learn new ways to improve student success.

"I really enjoy the roundtable-type discussions when you talk to other school districts and hear other people's input," said Tim Fletcher, who has served on the Slidell ISD board for nearly 50 years. "I believe most school board members are willing to listen to others and want to do the best thing for their districts. You always come out with something."

Fletcher has attended so many Conventions he's lost count. "I'm sure it's more than 30," he said. However, this year was the first for many attendees.

"I met a board from the Fort Hood area," said Tulia ISD Board Member Kacy Quinton. "They asked how long I have been on the board, and I told them I had just been appointed. One of them

said, 'You're still drinking out of the water hose.' They told me to ask a lot of questions."

Quinton's fellow freshman trustee on the Tulia ISD board, Clint Mahannah, agreed with that advice. "As a new board member, you have to know about school finance. You have to ask questions because they can be on this page and you're on that page," he said. "Coming to Convention helps. It helps to know where you can find the information you need."

Both Fletcher and Mahannah were among the hundreds of delegates and alternates who poured into a ballroom at the Omni Hotel Saturday afternoon to have a voice in setting the Advocacy Agenda at Delegate Assembly, TASB's annual membership meeting.

Frisco ISD students honored outgoing TASB President Debbie Gillespie during a performance at the beginning of the first general session. Pete Hazzard, managing director of fine arts for Frisco ISD, thanked the crowd for their service on behalf of Texas public education students and teachers. He asked, "What if we could all come together with a unified 'why?'"

For the Tulia ISD team and so many others that traveled to Dallas, that's exactly what they experienced at Convention.★

*Beth Griesmer is a staff writer for Texas Lone Star.*



TASB Risk Management Fund

# EXCELLENCE 2023 AWARDS

## Congratulations to the 2023 Excellence Award Winners!

The TASB Risk Management Fund recognizes exemplary solutions to common and emerging risk management challenges from these members:

Allen ISD

Blue Ridge ISD

Bullard ISD

Laredo Community College

Liberty Hill ISD

Mesquite ISD

Northwest ISD

Read about their successes at [tasbrmf.org/excellence](https://tasbrmf.org/excellence).

# Governance Camp

Mark your calendars for the 2024 event!

Texas school board members, district leaders, and students should start working on their session proposals for the 2024 Governance Camp, which will be held Feb. 28-March 2, 2024 in Galveston.

Governance Camp is a premier training event for Texas school board members that focuses on governance and leadership. The Camp's keynotes, sessions, and networking opportunities provide trustees with the knowledge and skills necessary to lead and serve their communities.

"In the wilderness of good school board governance, TASB Governance Camp is the ultimate platform for superintendents, trustees, and students to unite and shape the future of education and good governance in Texas. Victoria ISD has been, and will be, an active participant as we realize it is a unique experience where vision meets action," said Quintin Shepherd, superintendent of Victoria ISD.

Camp also offers a unique student participation program that is popular among attendees and provides a great experience for the students.

"I have had the privilege of bringing student leaders from across Fort Bend ISD to participate in the Governance Camp for the past few years. The opportunities that students are given to present in front of school board members and school leaders from across Texas has been a life-changing experience for them," said Mike Madden, student leadership coordinator at Fort Bend ISD.

## How to participate in Camp

There are several ways to attend and participate in Camp:

- Submit a proposal for a session focused on leadership or governance — share the great things your district and/or board are doing. Session submissions for district sessions opened Nov. 1 and closes Jan. 13, 2024, at 5 p.m.
- Submit a student scholarship application. Texas high school seniors in



public schools can apply for one of several \$1,500 scholarships available. Winners serve on a panel at Camp. Submissions for scholarship applications opened Nov. 1 and closes Jan. 13, 2024, at 5 p.m.

- Participate in student voice activities. Encourage your students to lead sessions or demonstrations. Submissions for student sessions/exhibits opened Nov. 1 and closes Jan. 13, 2024, at 5 p.m.
- Districts may send up to 10 high school students and two chaperones to student voice activities. Email [kathy.dundee@tasb.org](mailto:kathy.dundee@tasb.org) for more information.
- Attend Camp activities. Registration and housing for board members, superintendents, and administrators opens Jan. 17, 2024, at 9 a.m.

All student voice activities, including the scholarships, are sponsored by Walsh Gallegos Treviño Kyle and Robinson PC.

## Special speakers

Adam Sáenz will discuss how to harness the power of stress to build high-functioning boards. Stress, when understood and managed effectively, can result not only in increased personal well-being, but also help create more authentic relationships with colleagues and others.

Kenyon Salo is a trainer in the fields of inspiration, leadership, and adventure. One of only five members on the Denver Broncos Thunderstorm Skydive Team, he brings more than 20 years of successful audience engagement through humor, awe-inspiring moments, and prolific storytelling.

For questions about attending or participating in the 2024 Camp, email [kathy.dundee@tasb.org](mailto:kathy.dundee@tasb.org). ★



# Trustees Honored

## Corsicana ISD named Outstanding School Board for 2023

The Texas Association of School Administrators has named the Corsicana ISD Board of Trustees the 2023 Outstanding School Board — the top honor in the TASA School Board Awards program, which has honored Texas school boards that have demonstrated commitment to their students and to their communities since 1971.

The Corsicana school board was chosen from among five finalists interviewed by a committee of Texas school administrators, and the winner was announced at txEDCON23 TASA | TASB Convention in Dallas in late September. The committee was impressed by the board's focus on the whole child as well as the trustees' commitment to their community and advocacy for students on the local, state, and federal levels.

"This board is committed to children," said members of the selection committee. "They are focused on changing student lives in very real, visible ways that impact

their futures. It's not just about graduating kids but about preparing citizens of their community to be successful."

The committee described the Corsicana board as "innovative, creative, and forward-thinking," and said that they "embody the concept of the team of eight."

"When we talk about a school board that we want other boards to emulate and look up to, this board absolutely shined," said the committee. "You can tell that they have worked together for many years. They demonstrate what an effective board can do over time if they are allowed to work together with the superintendent and with the community on behalf of students."

Corsicana ISD is a public school district serving about 6,000 students on eight campuses in Corsicana, which is northeast of Waco and part of Education Service Center Region 12.

In her nomination of the board for this award, Corsicana ISD Superintendent

Diane Frost said: "None of what we do for the children of this community would be possible without the leadership and guidance of the Corsicana ISD School Board. These men and women serve without compensation, giving of their time and their talents to support the mission and vision of CISD. They are strong advocates for public education and work tirelessly to ensure that we have the resources, systems, and policies in place to ensure that every child's needs are met every day. In CISD, we are focused on Every Tiger. Every Day."

The other four finalists for 2023 Outstanding School Board were Crowley ISD, Region 11; Montgomery ISD, Region 6; Texas City ISD, Region 4; and Ysleta ISD, Region 19. The 2023 Regional Honor Boards (semifinalists) were Rio Grande City Grulla ISD, Region 1; Ingleside ISD, Region 2; Rice Consolidated ISD, Region 3; West Orange-Cove CISD, Region 5; Mineola ISD, Region 7; Canadian ISD, Region 16; and Fort Stockton ISD, Region 18.★



The Corsicana ISD school board and superintendent at the TASA | TASB Convention. From left: Leah Blackard, board vice president; Kamar Chambers, a trustee; Diane Frost, superintendent; Seth Brown, board president; and trustees Barbara Kelley, Brad Farmer, Cathy Branch, and Jaime Roman.

# Superintendent Honored

## Tomball ISD leader wins 2023 SOTY Award

by Sylvia Wood

Martha Salazar-Zamora of Tomball ISD was named Superintendent of the Year by TASB in a special presentation at txED-CON23 TASA | TASB Convention in Dallas.

Salazar-Zamora, whose district is in Education Service Center Region 4, was selected for the prestigious award from a group of five state finalists that included Wade Stanford, Westwood ISD, Region 7; Jim F. Chadwell, Eagle Mountain-Saginaw ISD, Region 11; Sheri Blankenship, Hereford ISD, Region 16; and Jose Rafael Lopez, Kermit ISD, Region 18.

In naming Salazar-Zamora as the winner of this year's award, the eight-member selection committee commended her energy and commitment to helping all students succeed, no matter their ZIP code or circumstances. They also noted her willingness to listen, build relationships, and work with other community and education leaders to strengthen public education in Tomball ISD and across the state.

"The entire committee was so impressed by the candidates for this year's Superintendent of the Year award," said Kerrville ISD Trustee Rolinda Schmidt, who chaired the TASB selection committee. "As school board members, we understand the challenges involved in successfully leading a school district, and it's no small accomplishment to be a state finalist. It's always so inspiring to hear about what these public education leaders are doing to advance student outcomes in their districts and to create learning and working environments where everyone has the opportunity to achieve.

"We were all so impressed by Dr. Salazar-Zamora's unmatched energy, enterprising spirit, and commitment to serving her students and community," said Schmidt, who is also President-Elect of TASB. "She is truly an advocate for her students and for creating opportunities for them to achieve their goals — whatever they may be."

Sponsored by TASB and underwritten by Balfour, the SOTY program has



TASB Director Nicholas Phillips, a Nederland ISD board member, TASB President-Elect Rolinda Schmidt, a Kerrville ISD board member, Tomball ISD Superintendent Martha Salazar-Zamora, the SOTY winner, and Lee McLeod, Tomball ISD board president.

recognized exemplary superintendents for excellence and achievement in educational leadership since 1984. The district of the SOTY winner receives a \$5,000 check and the superintendent is given a custom ring. The districts of each of the finalists receive \$1,000, also given by Balfour.

"I'm so amazingly grateful to God to allow me this opportunity to serve the students in Tomball ISD," Salazar-Zamora said at the SOTY ceremony. She commended all the superintendents at the event, as well as all educators, school board members, and leaders for their collective passion in helping students be successful, despite the challenges facing public education.

"It is not an easy time to be in public education today, but together we can and will continue to fight for public education," said Salazar-Zamora, the first female Hispanic superintendent to earn the SOTY honor.

Salazar-Zamora has served as superintendent of Tomball ISD, located about 30 miles northwest of Houston, since 2017 and brings more than 36 years of education experience to the role. Prior

to joining Tomball ISD in 2014 as chief academic officer, she served in leadership positions in Round Rock, Houston, Spring, and Kingsville ISDs.

Salazar-Zamora was recognized on Aug. 25 as one of the Houston area's 30 most influential women and is the first female and Hispanic superintendent of Tomball ISD, which includes more than 22,000 students across 23 campuses, most of which are rated A campuses under the state accountability system.

"It is really saying something to stand out among this talented and dedicated group who are the superintendents of Texas public school districts," said TASB Executive Director Dan Troxell. "The successful working relationship between school boards and their superintendents is at the heart of excellent student outcomes and strong governance in their districts. Everything we do at TASB is in support of the extraordinary work that superintendents and school boards do in service to their students."★

Sylvia Wood is a staff writer for Texas Lone Star.



# Blue Ribbon Honors

## 26 Texas public schools receive national honor

Twenty-six Texas public schools have been recognized as National Blue Ribbon Schools for 2023 by the U.S. Department of Education. Across the nation, 353 schools received the prestigious honors.

Established in 1982, the National Blue Ribbon Schools Program has bestowed about 10,000 awards to more than 9,700 schools. The National Blue Ribbon School award affirms and validates the hard work of students, educators, families, and communities in striving for — and attaining — exemplary achievement.

“These schools are a shining example of the great things happening in classrooms across Texas,” said Texas Education Commissioner Mike Morath. “Each fosters strong learning environments; employ loving, dedicated educators who focus on student outcomes; and facilitate programs and support that positively shape the leaders of tomorrow. I join Texans everywhere in saying congratulations on this incredible recognition.”

While awardee schools represent the diverse fabric of American schools, they also share some core elements. National Blue Ribbon School leaders articulate a vision of excellence and hold everyone to high standards. They demonstrate effective and innovative teaching and learning, and the schools value and support teachers and staff through meaningful professional learning. Data from many sources are used to drive instruction and every student strives for success. Families, communities, and educators work together toward common goals.

National Blue Ribbon Schools serve as models of effective and innovative school practices for state and district educators and other schools throughout the nation. A National Blue Ribbon School flag gracing a school’s entryway or on a flagpole is a widely recognized symbol of exemplary teaching and learning.

The Texas public schools named as National Blue Ribbon Schools are:

- Brownsville ISD: Ortiz Elementary
- Copperas Cove ISD: House Creek Elementary
- Cross Plains ISD: Cross Plains Elementary
- Cross Roads ISD: Cross Roads Junior High
- Dallas ISD: Rosemont Upper School
- Dallas ISD: Trinity Heights Talented and Gifted School
- Dumas ISD: Sunset Elementary
- Falls City ISD: Falls City Elementary
- Frankston ISD: Frankston Elementary
- Garland ISD: Herfurth Elementary
- Gorman ISD: Maxfield Elementary
- Honey Grove ISD: Honey Grove Elementary
- Houston Gateway Academy: Houston Gateway Academy Elite College Prep
- IDEA Public Schools: IDEA Carver Academy
- Industrial ISD: Industrial Elementary East
- Klein ISD: Nitsch Elementary
- Laredo ISD: Farias Elementary
- Laredo ISD: Hector J. Garcia Early College High School
- Lubbock ISD: Talkington School for Young Women Leaders
- McLeod ISD: McLeod Elementary
- Milano ISD: Milano Elementary
- Pittsburg ISD: Pittsburg Intermediate
- Roma ISD: Roel A. & Celia R. Saenz Elementary
- Royse City ISD: Davis Elementary
- Sundown ISD: Sundown Elementary
- Vega ISD: Vega Junior High★

### Security (from page 21)

implementation, of security personnel or devices. Tex. Gov’t Code § 551.076. The board may also meet in closed session to deliberate security assessments or deployments relating to security personnel. Tex. Gov’t Code § 551.089. In addition, the Texas Public Information Act protects the confidentiality of certain school district records, including new protections in HB 3, and information held by a school district police department, the disclosure of which would hinder law enforcement. Tex. Gov’t Code § 552.108.

### 12. Where can we look for further guidance?

TASB Legal Services has published resources for compliance with HB 3 and other school safety topics. Go to [tasb.org](https://tasb.org), click on Legal under the Services tab, go to the TASB School Law eSource section, click on Business, and then Safety and Emergency Management.

Districts are also encouraged to pay close attention to TEA’s guidance and webinars. To the extent any TEA guidance contradicts this FAQ, TASB defers completely to TEA.★

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

# Poll on Public Ed

## Texans support funding for schools, teacher pay

by Sylvia Wood

Texans want lawmakers to prioritize teacher salaries and funding for public schools, according to a new TASB poll, which also shows declining support for voucher programs that would shift taxpayer dollars into private schools.

When asked about the importance of key public education issues, the top two priorities were increasing teacher salaries, with 73% of Texans considering it extremely or very important, and additional funding for public schools, with 68% of respondents prioritizing it.

"Texans have spoken loud and clear," said TASB Executive Director Dan Troxell. "They value public education and want lawmakers to prioritize our teachers and students by investing in salaries and allocating more money for school budgets."

The poll, conducted in late June by Perception Insight, a Texas-based opinion research firm, also reveals a downward trend in support for voucher programs. When asked about using public tax dollars to pay for private or religious schools, only 32% of respondents said that vouchers are important — the lowest ranking issue in the poll.

When specifically asked about their stance on vouchers, only 39% favored vouchers, marking a significant eight-point decrease since February 2023, when TASB conducted a similar poll during the regular legislative session. This increase in opposition against vouchers not only extends across party lines but also among a majority of white, Hispanic, and Black respondents in both urban and rural communities.

"The more Texans learn about vouchers, the less likely they are to support them," Troxell said.

The poll of 800 registered voters was conducted on behalf of TASB in June. Among those responding, 48% reported voting for Republicans most often, 35% indicated a preference for Democrats, and the remaining 17% said they vote independent of party.

"This poll is one of the most comprehensive looks at voter sentiment on vouchers that has been done this year," said Marc DeSignore, president and owner of Perception Insight. "The broad representation of voters across all backgrounds and partisanship underscores the key finding that support for vouchers is decreasing among key voter subgroups when compared to other education issues like teacher salaries and funding."

When asked about the importance of education issues, poll respondents rated the following as extremely or very important:

- Increasing teacher salaries (73%)
- Additional funding for public schools (68%)
- Reducing local property taxes (54%)
- Public tax dollars to be used to pay for private or religious schools (32%)

Other major poll findings include:

- The Texans who ranked increased teacher salaries as the most important issue affecting public education included Republican voters (64%), Democratic voters (88%), and independent voters (70%).
- Among those polled, 76% of urban respondents and 69% of rural respondents said increasing teacher salaries was the most important.
- More than half of all voters (56%) said they are aware of the Legislature's recent efforts to create a voucher program. Of those, 50% said what they have seen, read, or heard about vouchers has made them less likely to support the program. Only 34% said they are more likely to support vouchers.★

Sylvia Wood is a staff writer for Texas Lone Star.

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# Excellence Award Winners

Risk Management Fund honors seven member districts

The TASB Risk Management Fund has announced that seven member school districts have been named 2023 Excellence Award winners.

The annual awards program is designed to showcase members of the Fund, which includes more than 1,000 Texas public school districts, community colleges, education service centers, and other education entities collaborating to self-insure risks.

“Our Excellence Awards program recognizes members that implement exemplary solutions to common and emerging risk management challenges,” said Mary Barrett, associate executive director of Risk Management Services. “We congratulate this year’s recipients and thank them for implementing innovative risk management solutions.”

Winners receive a monetary award and a plaque. They are:

## Allen ISD

Allen ISD launched a campaign to defend against the ever-growing risk of cybercrime that included biannual cyber-defense tests, updated servers, and compliant records retention policies. The district also educated staff on their role in protecting sensitive data.

## Blue Ridge ISD

Blue Ridge ISD’s Special Education team took advantage of free employee training through the Texas Behavior Support Initiative. The district designated “calm-down spaces” at campuses, introduced professionals trained in Mental Health First Aid for Adolescents, and continued to build relationships and trust with parents and students.

## Bullard ISD

Bullard ISD police officer Clayton Bryant became a certified emergency medical technician and collaborated with Christus Health to create the state’s only school district first responder organization, the equivalent of an ambulance service. Bryant responds to medical



Photo courtesy of Mesquite ISD

The TASB Risk Management Fund selected seven member school districts as 2023 Excellence Award winners, including Mesquite ISD. The Mesquite ISD transportation team built a campaign to promote a positive workplace that gives drivers an incentive to stay.

emergencies and delivers critical care on campuses and at district after-hours events.

## Laredo Community College

Laredo College offered an eight-hour Safety and Security Workshop for employees and students to move through scenarios centered on a range of emergencies such as evacuation, mass casualty, and fire. Laredo College controlled costs by leveraging courses it already subscribes to and enlisting trained employee facilitators.

## Liberty Hill ISD

Liberty Hill ISD’s efforts to comply with security mandates as well as a mandate from district leadership to implement a comprehensive safety plan when the 2022-23 school year started resulted in the development of a multifaceted security strategy that includes training for employees, community members, and local law enforcement. Staff also hosted a communitywide safety summit.

## Mesquite ISD

Mesquite ISD’s transportation team

built a campaign to promote a positive workplace culture that gives drivers incentive to stay year after year. Along with morale-building activities, the campaign included employee appreciation events, pay raises, professional development opportunities, and attendance bonuses. The result? Driver retention is up and accidents, injuries, and their associated costs are down.

## Northwest ISD

Traffic collisions can be stressful, and employees sometimes forget to collect all the information necessary to file a claim with the Fund. Northwest ISD addressed the challenge by equipping each vehicle with a step-by-step guide, a form for documenting details such as the other driver’s contact information and insurance carrier, and a guide for taking photos at the collision scene.★

# Achieve optimal staffing efficiency and effectiveness

An **HR Services Staffing Review** examines staffing practices within the context of the district priorities and provides a road map for decision-makers.

Areas reviewed include:

- Administrators
- Professional support
- Classroom teachers
- Educational aides
- Clerical support
- Athletics
- Special education
- Operations and facilities
- Student nutrition



HR Services

[hrservices.tasb.org](http://hrservices.tasb.org)  
800-580-7782



## Special Education Workload Staffing Analysis from the experts at TASB Student Solutions

- Data-based staffing recommendations
- Individualized planning meeting with District Administration
- Analysis of district-specific Special Education student data
- Detailed report including findings and recommendations

Contact our team of experts about a Special Education Workload Staffing Analysis and discover other ways TASB Student Solutions can help you achieve success for your special populations.



Student Solutions

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# Bulletin Board

## Purple Star Campus Designations Awarded to 150 Texas Schools

Gov. Greg Abbott announced that 150 Texas public schools have received the Purple Star Campus designation for the 2023-24 school year for their exceptional commitment to supporting and meeting the unique needs of military-connected students and their families.

“Texas proudly supports the brave men and women of our U.S. military and their families — and that includes the nearly 200,000 military-connected students attending public schools across our state,” Abbott said in a news release announcing the honors.

To be designated a Purple Star Campus, schools must select a campus-based military liaison, create and maintain an easily accessible webpage that includes information for military-connected students and their families, institute a campus transition program for military-connected students, and support a military family assistance initiative, according to the Texas Education Agency. All Texas public schools are eligible to receive a Purple Star Campus Designation, regardless of their military-connected student population size.

“We recognize the challenges military-connected students often face when transitioning schools, and by fostering an environment that embraces their unique experiences, these schools are creating a nurturing atmosphere where every individual student can thrive,” said Texas Education Commissioner Mike Morath.

You can read the list of 2023-24 Purple Star Campus designee by going to [tea.texas.gov](https://tea.texas.gov), clicking on news releases, and finding the headline: Governor Abbott Announces Purple Star Campus Designations for 150 Texas Schools.

## January 2024 is School Board Recognition Month!

Start planning now for next year's School Board Recognition Month! TASB's planning kit includes social media graphics, certificates, a sample news release, and more to help with your board appreciation efforts. Get details on the 2024 theme and access the planning kit at [tasb.org/sbrm](https://tasb.org/sbrm).



Argyle ISD students posed last year with a sign recognizing their school board members.

Photo courtesy of Argyle ISD

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

- ▶ **New Diana ISD:** Superintendent.  
Deadline: Dec. 31, 2023
- ▶ **Goldthwaite ISD:** Superintendent.  
Deadline: Jan. 3, 2024

For information about vacancies or services provided by TASB's Executive Search Services, call **800-580-8272**, email [executive.search@tasb.org](mailto:executive.search@tasb.org), or visit [ess.tasb.org](https://ess.tasb.org).



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

If you have received any awards or honors, please send your news and photos to [tls@tasb.org](mailto:tls@tasb.org).

# Board Members: MAP YOUR JOURNEY TO SUCCESS

TASB supports trustees at every point along the board leadership journey, offering training and programs to excel at board governance.

## New Trustees

### Texas Trustee Institute

TTI offers a comprehensive program to build skills, dive into governance, and develop a leadership network.

**Key offerings:** Texas Open Meetings Act, Board Governance, Consensus Building.

### Sessions coming soon!

Learn more! [board.dev@tasb.org](mailto:board.dev@tasb.org)

## Master Trustees

### Leadership TASB

For experienced trustees, meet with innovative districts and leaders, while learning what makes them successful. LTASB's one-of-a-kind experience will expand your view of education leadership.

### Application opens May 2024.

Learn more! [leadershiptasb@tasb.org](mailto:leadershiptasb@tasb.org)

### Whole Board Training

Need support with your superintendent evaluation process? Board Development Services' consultants are here to help! Get training tailored to your district's needs.

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## ENGAGE



## EXPAND



## EXPLORE



### Foundational Training

Find on-demand courses for new trustees, including the Top 10 Things to Know bundle of essential courses in the Online Learning Center.

[onlinelearning.tasb.org](https://onlinelearning.tasb.org)

## Experienced Trustees

### Board Officer Institute

For veteran trustees and board officers, BOI imparts knowledge and tools for effective and efficient meetings.

**Key offerings:** Important Tools for Meeting Preparation, Effective Meetings, Focused and Productive Board Discussions.

### Sessions coming soon!

Learn more! [board.dev@tasb.org](mailto:board.dev@tasb.org)

### Continuing Education

With the Online Learning Center, you can find courses to support your board service, including Introduction to Parliamentary Procedure, Board Officers Forum, and Advocacy 101 and 201.

[onlinelearning.tasb.org](https://onlinelearning.tasb.org)



Board Development Services

For information on any of these offerings:  
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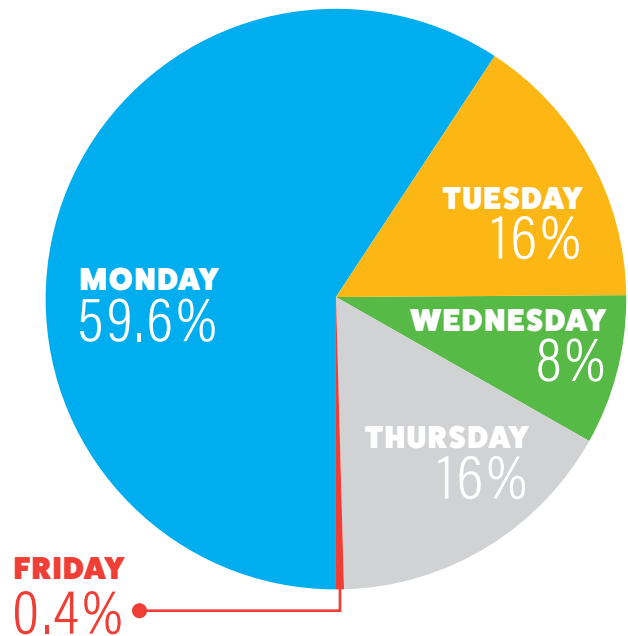
# A Closer Look

## Regularly Scheduled Board Meetings

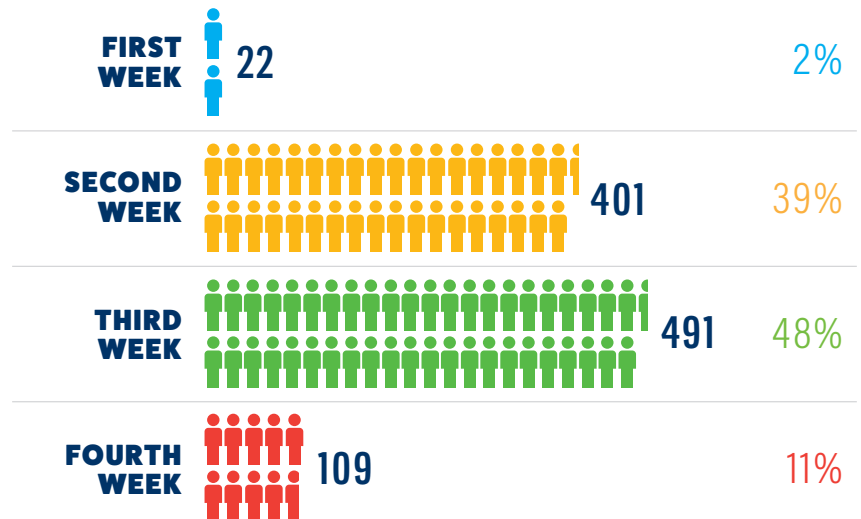
For trustees who have ever wondered when other school boards hold their regularly scheduled monthly meetings, our data shows that most school boards in Texas like to start their week with a meeting. Not surprisingly, few school boards prefer to end their week that way.

For boards that have been considering changing up their meeting schedule, here's a collective look at what other school boards across the state are doing.

## Board Meetings by Day of the Week



## Monthly Meeting Week in Order of Popularity



Have a data question you think we could help with? Let us know at [tls@tasb.org](mailto:tls@tasb.org).

**Source:** Based on a review of 1,023 member districts by TASB Planning & Research.

This data does not reflect when districts have multiple meetings per month. TASB does not collect this information.



# How do you choose a health plan for your district? Talk to someone who knows school districts.

TASB Benefits Cooperative understands the unique needs of school districts. We work with districts of all sizes, all across Texas, and we're ready to get to work for you. Our experienced and friendly team can guide you through the health plan decision-making process.

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**We have you covered.**



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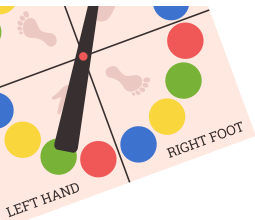
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## November 18 • South Padre

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**Legal Services**

