

# Texas Lone Star

A Publication of the Texas Association of School Boards | Volume 41, Number 4 | May 2023

## Designing Safer Schools

How to focus on security *and* learning when building facilities

## One District's Safety Journey

Lumberton ISD's approach focuses on preventative efforts



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## MAY

4-5 • TASB SHARS Conference 2023 — Austin

10 • TASB Spring Workshop — Abilene

11 • TASB Spring Workshop — Huntsville

15 • TASB Spring Workshop — Nacogdoches

16 • TASB Spring Workshop — Alpine

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17 • TASB SHARS Matters Webinar Series: Documentation Requirements and Best Practices — Virtual Event

17 • TASB Spring Workshop — Canyon

19-20 • TASB Spring Workshop — South Padre Island

23 • TASB Spring Workshop — Waco

25 • TASB Spring Workshop — El Paso

## JUNE

7-8 • TASB HR Services: Managing State and Federal Leave — Virtual Event

14-17 • TASB Summer Leadership Institute — San Antonio

21-22 • TASB HR Services: Get a Grip on the Family and Medical Leave Act — Virtual Event

21-24 • TASB Summer Leadership Institute — Fort Worth

## JULY

11 • TASB Facilities Services: Asbestos Designed Person Training — Austin

12 • TASB Facilities Services: Integrated Pest Management — Austin

12-13 • TASB HR Services: Administering Pay Plans — Virtual Event

13 • TASB Facilities Services: Best Practices: Maintenance and Operations — Austin

14 • 2023 Council of School Attorneys Post-Legislative Seminar — 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.



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# Stronger Together

Trustees stand united for student success

by Debbie Gillespie



Debbie Gillespie

Springtime is one of my favorite times of the year. We enjoy mild, sunny days and cool evenings with little humidity. And the fragrant, blooming flowers are everywhere! As school district trustees, this also is a time when we have the privilege to enjoy the cherished memories that come at the end of each school year.

My husband and I “smart-sized” our life several years ago, buying a house in a little neighborhood just a block off the busy North Dallas Tollway. While there is some noise, we also have four small ponds that are home to many geese and ducks, giving us a tiny sense of country life. I absolutely love them.

This spring, we spend many evenings walking by the ponds to check on all the new babies. As they begin to grow, they freely walk the streets going from pond to pond — one adult leads, one follows, and all the littles cluster in between. One evening last year as I was taking pictures of the wildlife, my husband inched a little too close to a family of geese. Boy, did that momma jump into action and quickly chase him away. I giggled, but it also reminded me of the innate protective power within humans and creatures. We will do all we can to protect our own children — and the students we serve.

As we approach the end of the school year, I can't help but think about the horrific tragedy a year ago at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde. We continue to pray for the families, and we honor the memories of the precious students and courageous teachers who lost their lives May 24, 2022.

## A keen focus on school security

Security is being discussed in our

homes, districts, and at the Capitol in Austin more than ever before.

If you attended the recent TASB Governance Camp, I hope you also participated in the pre-conference session that focused on safety and security. Two panels took a deep dive into what school districts are doing to keep students and staff safe. The wealth of information offered also serves to emphasize why local control is vital to each of our communities.

In a growing community like Frisco, we are very fortunate to have an amazing security and emergency response team that partners closely with the Frisco Police Department. We have implemented a variety of security measures, including double-entry doors, Ring™ cameras, and security resource officers. There is no doubt that school leaders across Texas want all of our students and staff to feel safe so they can concentrate on learning.

Governance Camp also gave us the valuable opportunity to listen to students freely share their concerns and struggles. It was a great reminder of the varied needs and differences in our communities.

Happily, students also shared their successes and goals. While safety is always going to be a top priority, we should be proud of the many programs that public schools offer to help each student maximize their potential.

## Sharing good news

As this school year begins to wind down, I asked a few teachers and trustees to share some good news from this year. Their excitement was incredibly heartwarming.

I will proudly start with my own district, where at Frisco ISD's Bledsoe

Elementary School, the kindergarten, first, and second grade teams have worked with students to understand blindness etiquette to assist students with visual impairments. Fourth graders at our Minett Elementary are publishing a campus wide magazine highlighting various learning experiences on campus, while the staff is producing a weekly podcast featuring the everyday operations of an elementary school.

Over in Southeast Texas, New Caney ISD's Porter High School Aerospace Engineering students have a two-year partnership with Tango Flight to build a Van's RV-12 airplane. Yes, an airplane!

Liberty Hill ISD in Central Texas and Maypearl ISD in North Texas shared important initiatives they are using to help students stay on graduation paths. Highland Park ISD in Amarillo began a new program with its service center that provides training support to campus and district leaders.

I love how we all support each other in these proud moments, as if these students were our very own. We also are there for each other in difficult times.

There will be many happy moments to enjoy as we wind down another year. I am thankful for each of you. You share your hearts, energy, time, wisdom, and talents for the benefit of our students, staff, parents, and community members. I am so grateful for your service!★

*Debbie Gillespie, a Frisco ISD trustee, is the 2022-23 president of TASB.*



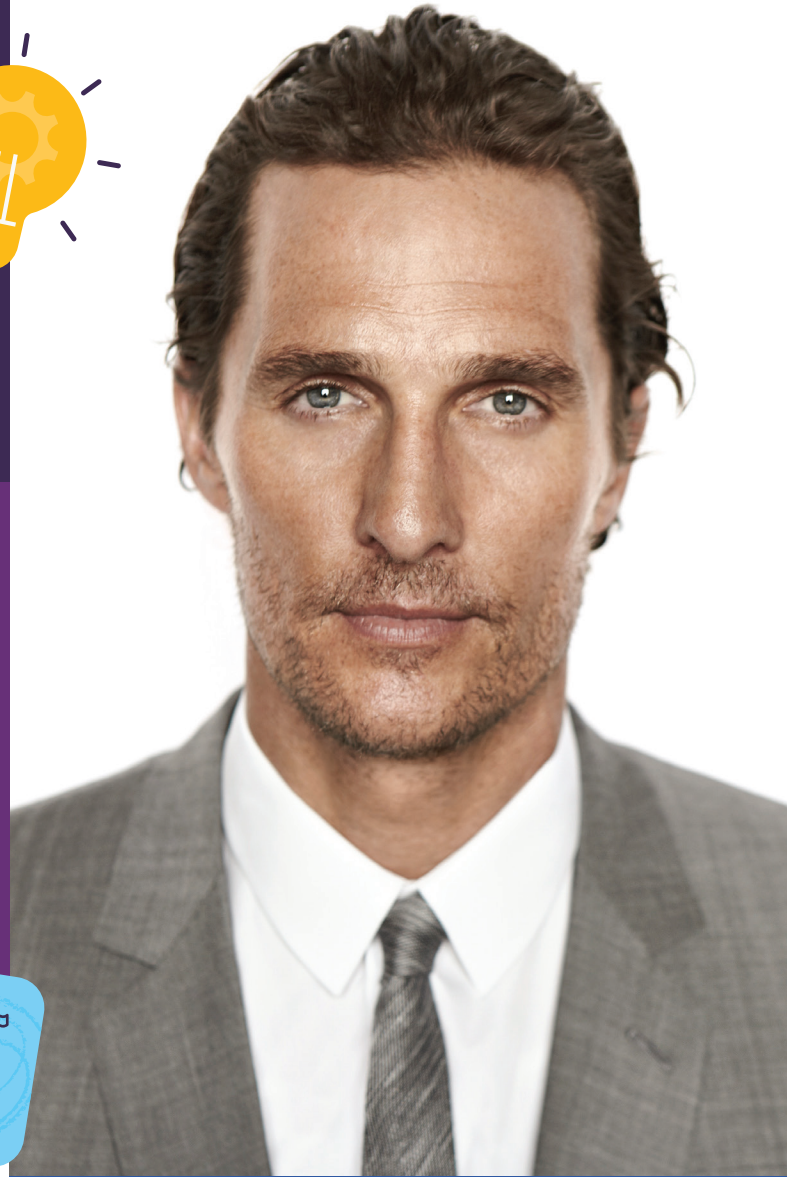
# TASA | TASB Convention txEDCON23

*Ideas. Insights. Inspiration. Shaping Public Education Together*

General Session  
Speaker



**MATTHEW  
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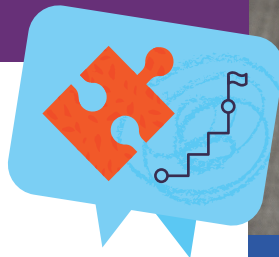
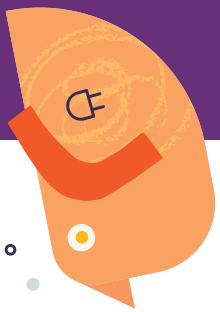


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# Safety First

School leaders focus on protecting students, staff

by Laura Tolley

It's that time of year again. There are deadlines to meet, grades to complete, honors to bestow. It's an exciting race to the finish of another school year for public school personnel and students across Texas. Soon, the summer break will be upon us.

I know many of you still have a lot of work to complete. But I want to offer my thanks and congratulations now to school district leaders, teachers, and staff members who have worked hard this past year to provide the best education possible to Texas public school students.

On a somber note, we also are approaching the one-year mark of the tragic school shooting at Uvalde ISD's Robb Elementary School that claimed the lives of 19 students and two teachers. We continue to grieve the loss of so many lives there and, sadly, at other schools in Texas and across the nation.

For school district officials everywhere, security and safety remain a top priority. In this month's *Texas Lone Star*, we focus on several safety topics that are vital to district operations. Our cover story features an informative graphic that illustrates strategies to help create a welcom-

ing learning environment that adds strong security measures to protect students and staff. We include an article that offers tips on how to complete state-mandated school safety and security audits. There also is a special, expanded version of our District Voices column by Lumberton ISD Superintendent Tony Tipton, Ed.D., who writes about his district's safety journey.

There are safety rules and regulations, procedures, audits, and other items Texas districts have implemented to do everything possible to help provide a secure environment for children, but there also are extra efforts being made by some districts to help build trust and goodwill with their law enforcement communities.

## Eating lunch, building trust

I recently learned about one special program at Wylie ISD in North Texas, where campuses offer a free meal to any uniformed police officer who drops in during lunch. It's called the Blue Plate Special program. Pretty clever, right?

"It's a way to have police officers who aren't routinely on school campuses visit our schools," Wylie ISD Director of Safety and Security Brian Kelly said in a story about the district's lunch effort. "They get to know the students, teachers, and staff, and as a bonus, it gets more officers in our schools."

Wylie ISD considers the Blue Plate Special one more step toward increasing school safety and security. It's a way to encourage members of local law enforcement, outside of school resource officers, to be an additional police presence in the schools.



Laura Tolley

Wylie Police Officer Marcus Barrera, a Wylie High School graduate himself, was one such officer who stopped by a school campus this year for lunch. At R.V. Groves Elementary, he enjoyed a free square pizza, corn, and chocolate milk. He also received smiles and high fives from many schoolchildren, who chatted him up in the lunch line.

"They asked me to sit with them; they even saved me a seat!" Barrera said with pride. "The kids were not afraid to talk to me. They immediately engaged with me. I like that we can mold that relationship."

"I like to be friendly so the kids know they can talk to us," said Barrera, who has been in law enforcement for six years, the last three with the Wylie Police Department. "The more we're in schools, the easier it is for kids to come to us when they have things they need to talk about."

Barrera noted that the Blue Plate Special program gives law enforcement officers another reason to visit schools and "hang out with the kids."

I want to thank Casi Thedford, Wiley ISD's communications coordinator, for telling me about the district's lunch program. It's an interesting, authentic way to help children get to know and trust their law enforcement community. The sweet photo she also shared with me says it all.

Wishing you all a safe and happy May. I hope you find this issue informative and interesting.★

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

Laura Tolley is managing editor of Texas Lone Star.



Photo courtesy of Wylie ISD

Wylie Police Officer Marcus Barrera enjoys lunch with a student at Wiley ISD's R.V. Groves Elementary.

# Designing Safer Schools

## How to focus on security *and* learning when building facilities

As school districts plan to build new facilities or renovate existing ones, safety is always a top priority. Here are some strategies to create a welcoming learning environment that is also more secure than a traditional school building.\*

### 1 Alarms, Cameras, and Call Buttons

All entrances to the school need to be equipped with this basic safety equipment and actively monitored during school hours. Consider adding panic buttons to classrooms and the front entrance.

### 2 Extended Vestibules

Eliminate tailgating and door propping by extending the distance between the main entrance and access to the school with a vestibule that can serve as a secure welcome area to greet and clear visitors.

### 3 Elevated Windows (7 feet or higher)

Bullet-resistant glass is important, but another way to minimize potential harm is to elevate windows so that potential attackers don't have a clear view into classrooms or common spaces like cafeterias.

### 4 Recessed Classroom Doors

Push classroom doors in about three feet from the hallway to minimize the line of sight for an intruder and to create a pocket of safety for students and staff in long corridors if they quickly need to hide.

### 5 Stop the Bleed Kits

Consider adding these to every classroom and in common areas where they are easily accessible. If students and teachers can't get to them easily and quickly, they won't be much help in an emergency.

### 6 Easy-Lock Door Hardware

Every classroom should be secured with a door lock that is compliant with the American Disabilities Act and has a user-friendly one-touch lever that is easy for anyone to manage under stress.

### 7 Buy Some Time

Fire safety already makes it possible to automatically close doors when a fire alarm sounds. Consider this same technology upon activation of a panic alarm. A closed door will slow down an intruder.

### 8 Add Bollards at Front Entrance

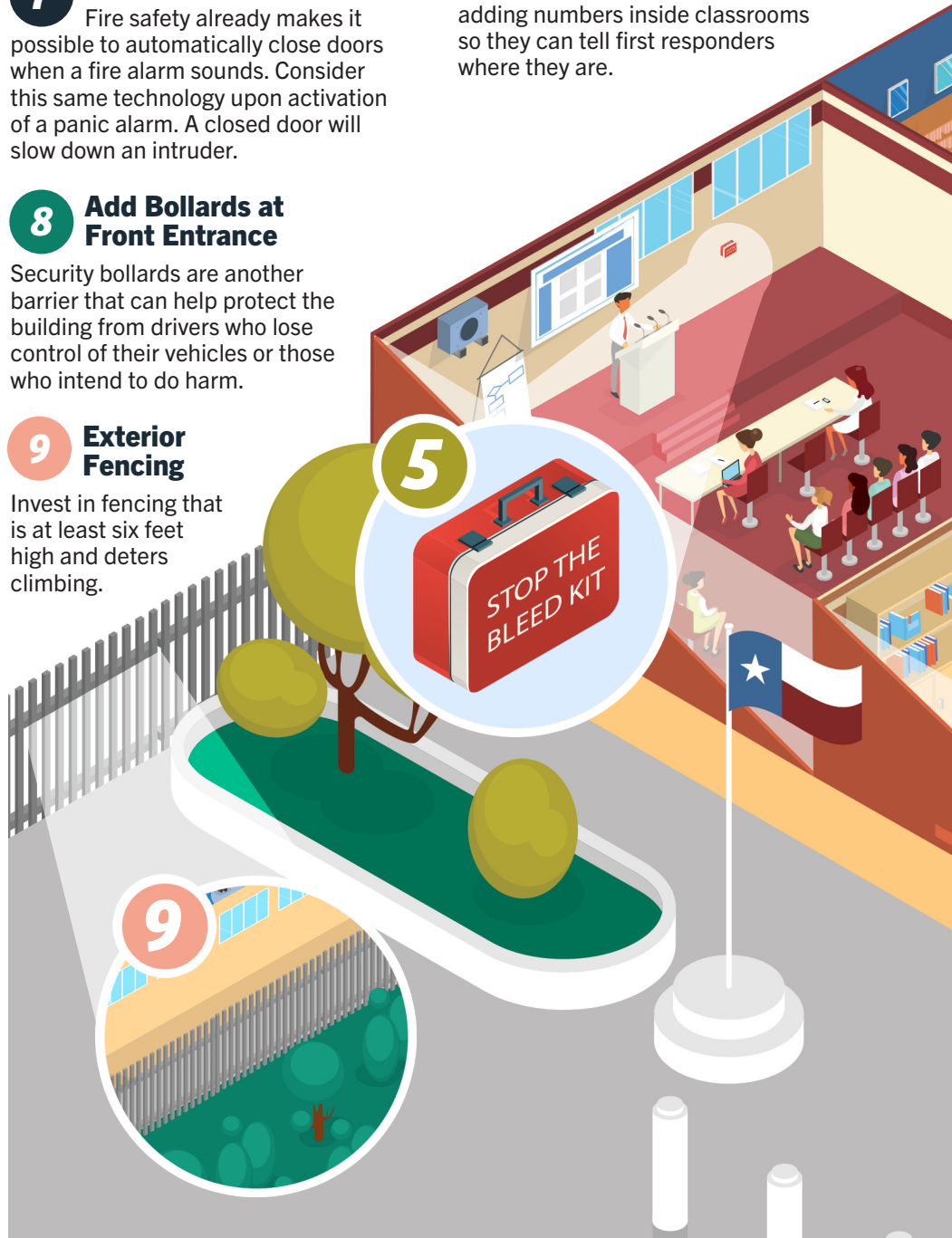
Security bollards are another barrier that can help protect the building from drivers who lose control of their vehicles or those who intend to do harm.

### 9 Exterior Fencing

Invest in fencing that is at least six feet high and deters climbing.

### 10 Number All Classrooms, Inside and Out, and Label Hallways and Doors

Make it as easy as possible for first responders to navigate to areas where students or staff may need help by adding visible numbers and other way-finding strategies. Aid students or staff who may be calling for help by adding numbers inside classrooms so they can tell first responders where they are.



\*This illustration was developed in part based on a presentation given at TASB's Governance Camp by Luling ISD and Claycomb Associates, Architects.





# School Safety and Security Audits

## TASB offers tips for getting reviews done by fall

Texas school districts must submit their state-mandated safety and security audits by Sept. 15, 2023. TASB Risk Management Services offers the following tips, information, and reminders to help school districts stay on track and comply with required tasks.

### What is a district audit report?

Texas law requires school districts to complete a safety and security audit at least once every three years. The audit report is a self-assessment of a district's progress toward providing safe, secure working and learning environments. The Texas School Safety Center spearheads the audit and produces a public report. Find the center online at [txssc.txstate.edu](https://txssc.txstate.edu).

### Tasks before the summer break

Districts should conduct climate surveys and intruder assessments before summer break, when staff, students, and visitors are still on campuses.

### Climate surveys

Climate surveys/interviews will uncover strengths and weaknesses in your security program. They also capture stakeholder expectations around safety and security.

These surveys cover such questions as: Do teachers feel safe on campus? Do nurses have a list of staff members trained in first aid and CPR? Do schools have automated external defibrillators?

Districts should include students, teachers, staff, and parents in their surveys.

The TxSSC provides sample surveys for each stakeholder group. (Go to [txssc.txstate.edu](https://txssc.txstate.edu). Under Tools and then K-12, find the School Safety and Security Audit Toolkit. In that toolkit, scroll toward the bottom and click on 1.0 under Section 1. Keep hitting Next until you find the listing for Sample Surveys.) Some districts use Google Forms or data collection software. Whichever format you choose, make sure survey questions meet your district's unique needs.

### Intruder assessments

During an intruder assessment, an audit team member tries to enter the facility as an unauthorized person. The goal is to test each facility's access control and visitor management procedures.

### Best practices for intruder assessments:

- Assessments should be unannounced. However, TxSSC recommends you notify local law enforcement and a district-level administrator in advance.
- Facility staff should not know the audit team members conducting intruder assessments.
- Don't enter aggressively.
- Let the TxSSC intruder assessment documentation form guide your work. (For information on these assessments and forms, go to [txssc.txstate.edu](https://txssc.txstate.edu). Under Tools and then K-12, find the School Safety and Security Audit Toolkit. In that toolkit, scroll toward the bottom and click on 1.0 under Section 1. Keep hitting Next until you find the Intruder Assessment section.)
- If anyone is on campus without a visitor tag, staff should be empowered to report them or escort them to the office. Don't resist if an employee intervenes.

## The Texas School Safety Center

TxSSC is a research center at Texas State University in San Marcos. It is tasked by the Texas Education Agency and Gov. Greg Abbott's Homeland Security Strategic Plan with key school initiatives and mandates.

The center serves as a clearinghouse for the dissemination of safety and security information for K-12 schools and junior colleges across Texas.

On the center's site at [txssc.txstate.edu](https://txssc.txstate.edu), you can find a range of toolkits that address safety and security, mental health, active threats, severe weather, hazardous materials, and other issues important to school districts. The website also features videos, podcasts, research, courses, and other information.



## Summer school audit tasks

### Facility assessments

For facility assessments, you and your team will walk through schools, administrative buildings, transportation shops, and other facilities and evaluate multiple aspects of security. Conduct facility assessments during the summer so you don't disrupt learning.

### Emergency operations plan updates

You might identify security gaps during your facility assessments. Address those gaps in your emergency operations plan. Go to [tasbrmf.org](https://tasbrmf.org), click on Resources, then click on Insights, and search for emergency operations plans.

### Reporting to the TxSSC

The TxSSC was scheduled to send each superintendent a link to the audit portal on April 15. Use the link to submit your findings when

your audit is complete. If you need that link, go to [txssc.txstate.edu](https://txssc.txstate.edu) and click on Contact Us at the bottom of the home page.

### Report to your board

Create a district-level report to share audit results with your board of trustees before Aug. 31.

Stay updated on this issue and related topics by going to the TASB Risk Fund website at [tasbrmf.org](https://tasbrmf.org). ★

Climate surveys/interviews will uncover strengths and weaknesses in your security program. They also capture stakeholder expectations around safety and security.





Lumberton ISD Superintendent  
Tony Tipton, Ed.D.

# One District's Safety Journey

Lumberton ISD's approach focuses  
on preventative efforts

*by Tony Tipton, Ed.D.*

*Editor's Note: This month, we offer an expanded version of our District Voices column, which features articles on relevant topics written by local school leaders from across Texas. Tony Tipton, Ed.D., Lumberton ISD's superintendent, writes in depth about his own district's approach to the all-important, ever-evolving issue of school safety and security. This article is not intended to cover all requirements and recommendations for school safety, but rather to highlight one individual district's experience.*

**A**s a school superintendent, I am accountable to my board of trustees, parents, students, staff, and my community for everything that happens in my district — it rests directly on my shoulders. I am the “risk owner” in all areas, but school safety certainly is at the top of my list here at Lumberton ISD, as it is for every school leader in Texas.

We will never forget and continue to mourn the tragic deaths of 19 students and two teachers a year ago at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde on May 24, 2022. Nothing has been the same since Uvalde, the horrific 2018 shooting at Santa Fe High School, and other tragedies at Texas schools and across the country.

Lumberton ISD and all public school districts are dedicated to student safety and have been working under specific safety protocols for years. But as a direct result of the Uvalde tragedy, the Texas Education Agency and the Texas School Safety Center issued requirements that provide specific and strict accountability about safety, covering a number of topics, including door hardware and access, drills, meetings, staff training, security cameras, district planning, campus fencing, and keys to campus facilities.

Here at Lumberton ISD, our new motto is “Education is our business, but safety is our priority.” Our goals are focused on increasing safety, reducing risk and liability for all members of our school community, and professionalizing and normalizing the business of school safety.

Our school board has been intensely supportive of this work and, shortly after the Uvalde tragedy, approved the hiring of our first-ever director of safety and security. The board’s support of this critical position has launched us on a journey of safety and security that we could have only imagined before.

### Paper clips and impossibilities

Naturally, there remain many challenges to this school safety mission. I even created what I call the “Impossibility Theory” based on my continued experience addressing increased safety requirements. Let me explain.

As my team sorted through the TEA and TxSCC directives, we realized we could probably complete the summer partial safety audit on time. We had accounted for many of the items in our existing safety and security plan, and fortunately it was already very strong. However, it still took several employees the entire summer of 2022 to complete the partial audit and attempt to have our facilities in compliance before school started in August.

We were confident in our plan, our training, and our people. However, when school started and our 4,200 students and 550 employees returned to the buildings, we began to see some cracks in the system. This is when my Impossibility Theory began to take shape.



Let me give an example I often use to explain my theory. Have you ever opened a paper clip and bent it in one place, back and forth, repeatedly? What happens to the paper clip after a number of bends? It breaks, of course. But what if the paper clip is either super thick or very thin? What if it is coated in plastic? What if you bend it slowly versus quickly? What if it’s a fancy one made of brass? These paper clips may fail at different times based on several variables.

Now, think about the number of doors in our district’s five campuses. [I mention doors specifically because the former student of Uvalde ISD who carried out the massacre at Robb Elementary entered the school through an unlocked door.] We have hundreds of doors and sets of hardware ranging in age from three months to 50 years. We have steel frame, aluminum extruded, composite, hollow core, garage rollup, solid wood, panic bars, press bars, pull handles, pull-down handles, and dozens of other types of doors and handles without specific names.

How many times can we open and close each of these doors before “the paper clip breaks?” No one can be certain. We can report a “broken or malfunctioning” door or lock at 9 a.m., get it repaired, and it can be broken again by 3 p.m. the very same day, or it may not break for another 10 years.

On one of our campuses, we checked a specific door three times in one day as part of our normal routine and it was functioning perfectly. However, at some point that day, the hydraulic door closing mechanism “gave out,” much like my paper clip example, without notice or warning, causing the



The Lumberton ISD Board of Trustees. From left: Kimberly Olexa, Brett Yarbro, Kevin Edwards, James Kersh, board president, Chad Hammett, Lauren Rothe, and Sharon Spears.

Photos courtesy of Lumberton ISD





Tim Lane, Lumberton ISD director of safety and security, installs door numbers on an exterior campus door. Clear and visible door numbers on all doors help law enforcement personnel quickly identify a specific location in an emergency.



A demonstration of a visitor check-in device at a Lumberton ISD school.

Photos courtesy of Lumberton ISD

door not to latch upon closing. That same day we had auditors in the district from TSSC for our once-per-three-year audit.

Yep, you got it. The auditor pulled on the exact door, on the exact day, at the exact time it had malfunctioned and gained access to our building from an exterior door.

I thank God it was an auditor and not an intruder. But that's the Impossibility Theory at work. No one can ever know how many bends of the paper clip it will take before it breaks. The same goes for every single mechanical or technical system we have — doors, door handles, closers, latches, scanners, internet, cameras, gate controllers, servers, electricity, phones, intercoms, etc. — they will malfunction at some point, and they do not give us advance notice.

The most glaring example of the Impossibility Theory in action shows up when we add in the human factor. Schools are a hive of activity from daylight to dark almost year-round. People go in and out of doors repeatedly.

To believe or even pretend that every single one of those trips in and out of the building, and in and out of the classrooms, will result in a closed and securely locked door is foolish. But this is the task now being asked of schools.

We have dozens of staff members and security officers checking exterior and interior classroom doors multiple times every single day, including me and my cabinet-level team. However, inevitably, no matter what we do or say, we usually find at least one exterior door malfunctioning.

An expectation of 100% accuracy and compliance is almost impossible to fulfill. But we don't give up. We do what we always do: go to work, innovate, collaborate, and figure it out for the sake of our staff and students.

### Lumberton's safety plan

Lumberton ISD has created what we believe to be the fu-

ture of school safety and security for use today. We developed an operational framework and scorecard and we enacted all preventative measures. [See the adjoining sidebar for detailed physical and behavioral measures in the plan.]

This work is done in close collaboration with our three-member Board Safety, Security, and Health Committee, which provides guidance and recommendations on all manner of topics, including our scorecard, which measures 15 distinct physical and behavioral aspects of safety.

Each of these items receives a score that determines a campus's status and internal actions at any given time. In Lumberton ISD, we feel confident that our safety measures are strong and diligently followed.

This gives us a solid framework and allows us to function confidently. We can educate our kids without letting fear dictate our existence and provide peace of mind to parents and the community. Kids can be kids. Teachers can teach.

This gives us hope. This plan also is customizable to any community and any district based on individual circumstances.

### Operational risk management

It is important to note that we have strongly considered the possibilities of internal and external threats within our system.

Several of the physical and behavioral measures address the potential to encounter a threat of violence from one of our own, whether due to suicidal ideation, bullying, or other issues. Our "See Something, Say Something" umbrella in our overall plan is one of our best defenses against threats when others suspect a potential situation may be afoot.

We understand that a stranger-related active shooter situation is a high trauma event, but it is a lower likelihood event than other more common issues.

If we are confident, to an acceptable level of operational risk, that the systems we have created are robust, then we must assume some risk on a daily basis to have the kind of school environment we want for kids and staff, while still feeling safe. However, much like an airplane flight, even though the captain may turn off the seatbelt sign, it is probably smart to buckle your seatbelt while seated in case of turbulence.

If we have the behavioral measures in place and aligned across campuses, and continue to refine and improve our physical measures, we can put the odds heavily in our favor that we will have the safest school environment possible while maintaining the best parts of our schools that our communities, students, and teachers cherish the most.

By carefully analyzing all aspects of our multi-hazard environment using the carefully planned framework we have created, we can mitigate some of the factors that could contribute to a tragic incident.

This is our path at Lumberton ISD. We do this for our kids. We do this in remembrance of the lives lost at Robb Elementary and other tragic school shootings. We stand united with other school districts across Texas and the country in this important mission to protect our students and staff.★

*Tony Tipton, Ed.D., is superintendent of Lumberton ISD, located in Lumberton in Southeast Texas.*

Editor's note: We want to hear more about what is going on in local districts and invite you to send us submissions for our District Voices column. For submissions or questions, contact managing editor Laura Tolley at [laura.tolley@tasb.org](mailto:laura.tolley@tasb.org).



From left: Amanda Jenkins, Lumberton Middle School principal; Tim Lane, Lumberton ISD director of safety and security; Tony Tipton, Ed.D., Lumberton ISD superintendent; and Igor Gusakov, Lumberton ISD assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction. Jenkins and Gusakov were presented with Raider Stars awards for their outstanding dedication to the safety and security for students and staff. Raider Stars are given to an employee who exhibits the district's core values.

## Lumberton ISD School Safety Efforts

Lumberton ISD created a new detailed school safety and security plan. It consists of the following physical and behavioral measures:

### Physical measures:

1. A contiguous exterior safety fence with electronically controlled drive and walk gates at the middle and high school campuses
2. Locked and secured exterior doors installed throughout the district
3. Comprehensive districtwide communication system, including intercom, phones, and radios
4. A districtwide, fully functioning surveillance camera system
5. An organized system of local law enforcement (school resource officers or security), campus-based armed guardians, and all campus staff understanding various roles of supervision
6. Raptor early warning notification system installed throughout the district
7. Intruder film to be installed on strategically chosen exterior windows

### Behavioral measures:

1. Threat assessments and campus safety teams fully trained and operational
2. Traditional school counseling program, including bullying prevention
3. Crisis counseling and mental health services
4. Early recognition and intervention for potential threats
5. Districtwide behavior and social skills, and behavior intervention program
6. See Something, say Something – comprehensive school safety reporting system
7. Standard response protocol for the district
8. Relationship with law enforcement and other first responders

*Source: Lumberton ISD*

*Editor's Note: This plan is provided to illustrate Lumberton ISD's school safety and security efforts. It is not offered as a recommendation for other school districts or to be used as a substitute for any other safety plan. It is an example of what one school district has implemented for its own campuses.*



"We are a good example and a model of how a highly functioning school board operates, and we have such a tremendous team of eight, which I believe keeps us at the top of our game."

— Scott Campbell,  
East Chambers ISD Superintendent



Members of East Chambers Buccaneer Soccer huddle during a match.



# FULL FOCUS ON STUDENTS

## East Chambers ISD is small, but ready for anything

by Mary Ann Lopez

Back when he had three young children, Scott Jones made the decision to run for a seat on the East Chambers ISD school board. He enjoyed his community and was happy to give back by making a difference in the lives of students. Fast forward 27 years, Jones is still on the board, still serving his community, and still striving to do what's best for students.

Such dedication and service to the district and its students isn't unusual at East Chambers ISD, a district of 1,550 students located in the eastern part of Chambers County in Southeast Texas. In fact, no incumbent East Chambers ISD board member seeking reelection has lost in 26 years, which, according to East Chambers ISD Superintendent Scott Campbell, speaks directly to the trust and respect the community has for the district and its school board.

"We are a good example and a model of how a highly functioning school board operates, and we have such a tremendous team of eight, which I believe keeps us at the top of our game," Campbell said.

East Chambers ISD was one of five school boards recognized by the Texas Association of School Administrators as part of its 2022 TASA School Board Awards Program, which honored districts for making a positive impact on Texas public school students.

Campbell, who put forth the nomination for the award, knows his board well. He's in his 26th year as the district's superintendent and has worked in education for 40 years. "People speak of the stress of the superintendency and the



brief tenure of so many of us; however, in my case, it has been the honor and joy of my life and career to work here," he said.

### Serving by example

Nominating the board was a great way to show other districts what can be accomplished — no matter its size, Campbell said. "To be a great district, you must have a school board that gets things done and puts the needs of all children first."

Several of the board members also serve on the East Chambers ISD Education Foundation, and those who aren't part of the foundation participate in other ways, such as attending fundraisers and events, said Buck Thornton, past president, and a founding member of the foundation.

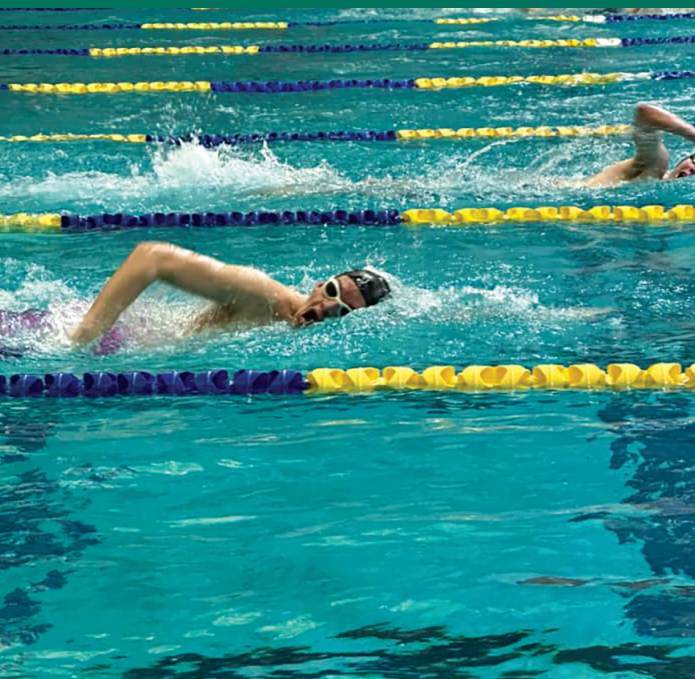
"It's a unique blessing and opportunity to donate your time to a foundation that the school and board are so supportive of," Thornton said. "Everyone is working together to benefit the students and further their education in ways that the normal budget couldn't accomplish."

Being honored for their efforts was a welcome surprise, but not completely unexpected to Jones and the other board members, whose district serves students in the communities of Winnie and Stowell located between Beaumont and Houston — about 15 miles inland from the Bolivar Peninsula and Gulf Coast.



Photos courtesy of East Chambers ISD

The 2022 East Chambers School Board. Front row from left: Frank Abalos, Richard Lee, Lisa Bauer, and Charlotte Edwards. Back row from left: Scott Jones, board president, Taylor Wilcox, and Kelley Touchet.



East Chambers ISD took five students to the regional swim meet and four of them placed. Brandt Meaux is photographed during the swim meet.

“For the board to be recognized, I think it shows that our board is united and has the best interests of the students, teachers, and community in our decision making,” Jones said. “We really were not surprised because we have achieved so much for a small school district. As board president, I was very proud that our board was honored, and I feel fortunate because I am sure there are many school boards that are very deserving of the recognition.”

The district faces many of the same challenges that others across the state must navigate, including responding to “ever-changing” state policies and funding issues, Jones said. East Chambers ISD has overcome these obstacles because the board does the work to meet its goals and plan for other contingencies, such as hardening its facilities against the weather — it has faced several hurricanes in the last few years — and ensuring its campus is safe and secure with updates and improvements, Campbell said.

“We are fortunate to enjoy widespread support in our community for the enhancements and investments we are undertaking,” Campbell said.

### Planning for successful outcomes

An area of success for the school board has been planning for the future and embracing change, including its increasingly diverse student population, which — according to data from the Texas Education Agency — shows a 25.8% increase in the number of economically disadvantaged students within the district from 2012-13 to 2021-22.

The board is made up of trustees who are also community leaders and strong-willed individuals, Jones said. “When it comes time for decision making, every trustee puts his or her personal views aside and does whatever is best for the school district.”

To work effectively together, the board participates in ongoing training, including the TASB Summer Leadership Institute, Jones said. Also, the board uses resources from its Region 5 Education Service Center.

“Our board receives yearly training, which consists of updating and policy reviews,” Jones said. “At this time, we also set achievement goals and evaluate the previous years’ goals. A lot of decisions are made at this time with the future of the district in mind.”

### Continuous improvement and new opportunities

The East Chambers ISD board has had a continuous plan to improve educational opportunities for students and to improve school facilities while also maintaining one of the lowest tax rates of any district in the area, Jones said. “The board, over the last 20 years, has tripled our fund balance while still achieving a capital outlay of over \$20 million.”

To that end, East Chambers ISD has enhanced and added programs that benefit students. Specifically, the district was able to upgrade its welding program, using a \$500,000 Texas Workforce Commission grant to buy new equipment, including welding simulators.



It also recently added a girls and boys soccer program, and this year it added a girls and boys swimming and diving program. Despite not having a natatorium available for students, it was able to work with Beaumont ISD, shuttling students to its facility. “We play up to the 4A level, and we have seen a high degree of success even without the benefit of a natatorium,” Campbell said.

And when it comes to academics, the district’s scores are good, so good that Campbell is hopeful they will earn an “A” rating this year. In 2022, the district received a B rating, 89.4, just shy of that A-rating status.

Campbell noted that the district’s University Interscholastic League academic program is comprehensive, and that East Chambers ISD regularly wins the district championship. Also, its theater program consistently receives recognition, advancing in annual competitions, often to the regional and state level.

The East Chambers ISD board continues to set achievable goals for its staff and students, while maintaining high

expectations, Jones said. He acknowledged that having a long-serving and effective superintendent, with a consistent, experienced, and cohesive board, has made a difference.

“It takes a team of eight, constantly working together as one, to be a successful board,” Jones said. “We are fortunate to have had the same superintendent for over 20 years. Without him, we could not have achieved all that we have. We owe a lot of our success to our superintendent.”

While Campbell says he appreciates the sentiment, he knows his school board is deserving of the recognition it receives.

“The fact is that the continuity of our school board and its relationship to the community are what drives the long-term success of the district,” Campbell said. “We see renewal with new board members, along with the stability of tenured board members all working together.”★

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

The East Chambers ISD board has had a continuous plan to improve educational opportunities for students and to improve school facilities while also maintaining one of the lowest tax rates of any district in the area.



The Lady Bucs placed third overall at the Texas High School Women's Powerlifting Association State Championship.



# Construction Projects

## When to hire an architect or engineer

by TASB Legal Services

**L**aws related to school district construction can be confusing, even for those who deal with the issues regularly. In this article, TASB Legal Services answers basic questions about hiring an architect or engineer. We will review the basics of procuring construction projects under Texas law in a future issue of *Legal News*.

### Legal background

The Texas Occupations Code, and administrative rules adopted under the code, set out requirements for architects and engineers and define the scope of an architecture or engineering practice in Texas. Some acts of engineering are within the practice of architecture. Consequently, architects can perform some services considered to be engineering. But only a limited number of engineers may legally engage in the practice of architecture. A construction project may require an architect, an engineer, or both, depending on the nature of the project. The project may, in fact, require multiple engineers if the project involves different engineering disciplines, such as geotechnical, structural, electrical, or mechanical engineering.

### When to hire an architect or engineer

**Engineers:** A district may not construct a public work involving engineering in which the public health, welfare, or safety is involved unless the engineering plans, specifications, and estimates have been prepared by an engineer, and the engineering construction is performed under the direct supervision of an engineer. Tex. Occ. Code § 1001.407. A public work generally includes the construction, alteration, or repair of a building or other

structure or improvement paid for in whole or in part from public funds.

The Engineering Practice Act provides two exceptions applicable to school districts. No engineer is required if (1) the project involves mechanical or electrical engineering and will cost \$8,000 or less or (2) the project does not require mechanical or electrical engineering and will cost \$20,000 or less. Tex. Occ. Code § 1001.053. The general rule and exceptions are shown in a helpful flowchart from the Texas Board of Professional Engineers, which can be found by going to [pels.texas.gov](https://pels.texas.gov), clicking on the Enforcement tab, finding “Is a Texas Licensed Engineer Required?” and clicking on Diagrammatic Interpretation.

**Architects:** If a district constructs a public building that will be used for education, assembly, or office occupancy, an architect is required for design and supervision, depending on construction cost at the start of the project and whether the project involves new construction or existing buildings. For construction of a new building, a school district must hire an architect if construction costs exceed \$100,000. 22 Tex. Admin. Code § 1.212(a). However, if the district alters or adds on to an existing building, the district must hire an architect if (1) the project requires removal, relocation, or addition of walls, partitions, or exits, and (2) construction costs exceed \$50,000. 22 Tex. Admin. Code § 1.212(b).

### Selecting an architect or engineer

As providers of professional services, architects and engineers must be selected in accordance with the Professional Services Procurement Act (PSPA). Tex. Educ. Code § 44.031(f). A district must

first select the most highly qualified provider of those services based on demonstrated competence and qualifications and then attempt to negotiate a contract at a fair and reasonable price. Tex. Gov’t Code § 2254.004(a).

It is important to follow the two-step process under PSPA. Professional rules for both architects and engineers prohibit disclosing cost information, or information from which cost can be derived, until after the district has selected a provider based on demonstrated competence and qualifications. 22 Tex. Admin. Code §§ 1.147, 137.53. In addition, the Texas Education Agency’s Division of Financial Compliance has authority to investigate a school district’s selection process and direct the district to take remedial action if a violation is found.

Unlike other forms of competitive procurement, PSPA does not require a specific process. For example, districts do not need to advertise in a newspaper. As





a best practice, school districts typically evaluate potential architects and engineers using a Request for Qualifications to solicit information from multiple firms and rank the firms on criteria such as experience, references, and financial stability. If the district cannot negotiate a satisfactory contract with the most highly qualified provider, it must end negotiations with that provider, select the next most highly qualified provider, and begin contract negotiations anew. This process continues until the parties enter into a contract. Tex. Gov't Code § 2254.004.

Because of the complexity of these issues, TASB Legal Services recommends that a district consult with its attorney prior to selecting an architect or engineer for a construction project. A district should always seek legal advice before signing any construction-related contract. An attorney with experience in school district construction can assist in modifying an architect or engineer's standard contract

language to ensure that the contract complies with Texas law and school district needs.

For more information, go to [schoollawsource.tasb.org](https://schoollawsource.tasb.org), click on Business in the Home section, go to Facilities and Construction, and find "A Legal Overview of School District Construction."★

*This article is provided for educational purposes and contains information to facilitate a general understanding of the law. References to judicial or other official proceedings are intended to be a fair and impartial account of public records, which may contain allegations that are not true. This 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.*



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# Advocacy Resolutions

## TASB seeks input from school board members

by Dax González

**M**ake sure your school board's advocacy issues are represented in the next TASB Advocacy Agenda by submitting your proposals during our call for resolutions. Advocacy resolutions guide TASB's response to legislative issues and are submitted directly by member boards. TASB is currently accepting submissions through June 15, 2023.

Since resolutions require board approval, I recommend you begin discussing proposed resolutions with your fellow board members now and get them on your agenda well before the deadline.

The current Advocacy Agenda will remain in effect through the Delegate Assembly in 2024. Take a moment to review the current TASB Advocacy Agenda Resolutions so your board can focus on issues that are not currently included. Current resolutions and more information can be found by going to [tasb.org](https://tasb.org), clicking on the Legislative tab and then finding TASB Advocacy Agenda.

### Houston ISD takeover

TASB Executive Director Dan Troxell expressed his disappointment with the Texas Education Agency's decision to remove the elected trustees of Houston ISD. "Here at TASB, we believe that the challenges facing public school districts — particularly the largest one in the state — are best addressed by adhering to the state's long tradition of local governance, with school board trustees who are elected and accountable to the voters in their communities," said Troxell. "By appointing a board of managers not elected or accountable to the voters in HISD, TEA is diminishing the opportunity for parents and community members to have a choice

and voice in the governance of their schools."

Read the full statement by going to About on [tasb.org](https://tasb.org). Find Statements under News and Media, then click on "TASB Responds to the State Takeover of the Houston Independent School District."

### Anti-lobbying bill

The Senate State Affairs Committee heard and passed Senate Bill 175 in March. Sen. Mayes Middleton (R-Galveston) laid

out the bill, saying that many political subdivisions — such as cities, counties, and school districts — use taxpayer funds to lobby against taxpayer interests.

Testimony against the bill was provided by sheriffs, mayors, and county commissioners, who said that they work to represent their constituents and cannot do the work of a lobbyist while performing local responsibilities. Stephanie Luper, a Bullard ISD trustee and TASB's 2022 Advocate of the Year, testified against the bill on behalf of TASB. She noted how expensive it would be for taxpayers if she was to serve as a lobbyist for her district and how silencing school board members' voices is effectively silencing taxpayers and constituents they represent.

### Property tax bills

The Texas Senate on March 22 passed two bills designed to reduce Texans' property taxes. Senators had a robust discussion on the bills and unanimously passed the legislation. Some legislators did raise the concern that compressing school tax rates and increasing homestead exemptions places more pressure



Photo by TASB Media Services

Delegates at last fall's TASB Delegate Assembly in San Antonio.



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## The current Advocacy Agenda will remain in effect through the Delegate Assembly in 2024. Take a moment to review the current TASB Advocacy Agenda Resolutions so your board can focus on issues that are not currently included.

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on the state to maintain the same level of funding if the state economy experiences a downturn. In their discussion, senators also noted that increasing the state share of public education funding after compression helps to lower district recapture payments.

SB 3 by Sen. Paul Bettencourt (R-Houston) would increase the homestead exemption from \$40,000 to \$70,000, and increase exemptions for disabled adults or homeowners 65 or older from \$10,000 to \$30,000. SB 4, also by Bettencourt, would compress school district tax rates by the amount appropriated by the Legislature for that purpose, which is estimated to be a bit more than \$5 billion and translates into about a 7-cent compression. The bills head to the

Texas House for committee referral and consideration.

### School voucher bills

The Senate Education Committee heard several voucher bills in March. The priority school choice bill is SB8 by Senate Education Chair Brandon Creighton (R-Conroe), which would create education savings accounts administered by third-party entities. Other education savings account proposals include slight differences in their programs around which kids would be eligible and how much would be deposited in the accounts. Under SB 8, each participating student would receive \$8,000 per year. For school districts with 20,000 or fewer students, the district will receive \$10,000 for the

first two years a student participates in the program.

Testimony on the ESA bills stretched into a second day. Those supporting the bills voiced a number of arguments, including parents' right to choose a school for their children and the need to help private schools grow. Those testifying against the bills generally explained that ESAs include no accountability for public tax dollars, have poor track records in other states, support religious schools with state funds, fail to protect students requiring special education services leaving public schools, and would lead to a decrease in overall public education funding over time. The committee approved SB 8 on March 28. In early April, the Senate passed the bill over to the House on a vote of 18 to 13.

For more information on TASB Governmental Relations, visit [gr.tasb.org](http://gr.tasb.org) or contact Dax González at 800-580-4885 or [dax.gonzalez@tasb.org](mailto:dax.gonzalez@tasb.org).★

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

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# Minimizing Distractions

Tips for staying focused on student outcomes

by Robert Long III

**W**ith state lawmakers meeting in Austin for the biennial session, politics are naturally the focus of many conversations — including among the more than 7,000 school board trustees in Texas.

With so many critical education issues being discussed — from vouchers and school safety to funding — it would be impossible for anyone who cares about public education to not have positions or opinions.

The real challenge for school board members is keeping politics out of the

boardroom so that student outcomes, not partisanship and divisiveness, remain the focal point of discussion. The key to success in this journey is nothing less than great governance.

Of course, that's easier said than done, especially in today's politically charged climate. So, it's worth considering what school boards can do right now to minimize external pressures and distractions to create an environment that is student focused.

Here are three tips to help your board stay grounded in the principles of good

governance, no matter what's going on outside the boardroom.

## 1. Remember systems and processes

This tip on systems and processes is right out of the Framework for School Board Development, as adopted by the State Board of Education in 2020.

Simply put, it means effective school board teams are staying focused on actionable steps to advance their district's vision and goals. This can be as simple as adopting a planning calendar that ensures the board is tracking all state requirements, key budget dates, regular oversight of the superintendent, and any other statutory duties throughout the year.

There's a lot to do as an elected board member and it's easy to get distracted by competing priorities and interests. When this happens, boards should weigh what they're doing against what is laid out by the SBOE to make sure they're not wasting energy and resources on items not included in the Framework. A back-to-basics approach can go a long way to refocusing everyone on the essentials of good governance.



The key is to have some ground rules so that disagreements don't become distractions. Remember, every school board member has the opportunity to set the tone for meetings simply by displaying courteous behavior to other trustees both in and out of the boardroom.

## 2. Use data and documented evidence

School board trustees have an obligation to do what's best for all students after considering all the data and information. Board members should not be swayed by personal agendas or external pressure from others with political or personal agendas.

But making an informed decision in a board meeting requires preparation, including reading up on supporting materials, asking questions, and listening to those who may be impacted, including parents, students, teachers, administrators, and community members.

New trustees often comment on the amount of preparation needed to get up to speed on the issues. That kind of homework is part of the job, but school board members should remember that there are some strategies to help. They include listing questions ahead of time and sending them to the superintendent so staff can be prepared to answer either ahead of or during the meeting.

If there's a particularly complex or contentious issue coming before the board, another way to allow plenty of time for discussion and questions is to schedule a special workshop outside of the regular meeting time.

## 3. Cultivate connection and collaboration

It's unrealistic to think that all board members will always agree unanimously on all issues. But it's not unreasonable to set the expectation on your board that differences in opinion will be conveyed in a respectful manner.

Even more importantly, after a divided vote is cast, the board must move forward and avoid a situation where those who may have disagreed with the outcome are actively working and speaking against the majority, in person, on social media, or in other community settings.

The key is to have some ground rules so that disagreements don't become distractions. Remember, every school board member has the opportunity to set the tone for meetings simply by displaying courteous behavior to other trustees both in and out of the boardroom.

Want to reset the focus of your board on good governance practices? Consider customized training or consulting with TASB Board Development Services. For more information, email us at [board.dev@tasb.org](mailto:board.dev@tasb.org).★

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

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

► **Bloomington ISD:** Deadline, TBA

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# Leadership TASB

## Trustees expand governance knowledge, networks

by Mary Ann Lopez

For 30 years, experienced school board members — who were ready to take their understanding of education governance to the next level — have found the tools and support they've needed through Leadership TASB. And with 900 graduates and counting, the program is continuing its mission to help school board members from across Texas be better leaders.

Trustees accepted into LTASB learn and grow with other board members, becoming part of a supportive network of school board members aiming to expand both their leadership skills and their knowledge of school governance. Applications for the program are being accepted from May 1 to July 1.

Kay Douglas, LTASB program director and a TASB board development

services consultant, said LTASB has continued to be a pillar of support for those in school governance for 30 years because of the “thoughtful planning that went into its design and implementation.”

“The concept of selecting a diverse group of experienced trustees and exposing them to speakers and site visits throughout the state still serves to help those trustees see educational issues from a macro level,” Douglas said. “The conversations and connections that are formed prepare them to serve and lead Texas public schoolchildren in a deeper way.”

Each year, a cohort of up to 36 experienced board members are selected to participate in the program based on their demonstrated leadership in their local district and communities, and for their representation of the diversity of Texas school districts. Those selected to participate in an LTASB cohort commit to the traditionally year-long program, which consists of five sessions over the course of the year, each lasting two-to-three days



LTASB participants gather for a session during a visit to Alief ISD.



LTASB participants visit Galveston ISD in 2017.



In 2018, the LTASB cohort made a visit to El Paso ISD.

Photos by TASB Media Services

and typically being held Thursday, Friday, and a half-day on Saturday.

“LTASB is both a point of pride and tradition for participants and for us here at TASB,” said Robert Long III, division director of Board Development Services. “This standout learning experience is one of the important ways we support our members with the tools, training, and resources they need to become governance leaders in their schools and communities.”

### A life-changing experience

Darlene Breau, Alief ISD school board president, a TASB director, and the founder and CEO of an educational consulting firm, is a 2021-22 LTASB alumna who applied after learning how transformative the experience was for other school board trustees. “I heard so many great reflections from LTASB alumni about life-changing experiences during the fellowship and the life-long relationships that they have developed,” she said.

When Breau applied to the program, she thought it would broaden her network and provide greater access to school board trustees from across Texas, she said. But being part of LTASB did much more.

“I gained a broader understanding of the challenges that districts face,” Breau said. “Spending time in rural, urban, and suburban districts helped me to better understand how policy affects districts differently. As board members, we have to keep an open mind when considering policy changes and the focus of our advocacy efforts because, although we are elected to serve a particular district, each district has their own unique thumbprint.”

The program sessions rotate among different Texas cities and include visits to Texas public schools to learn about innovative ways to govern. Participants gain access to nationally known speakers in education and business who speak on a variety of topics ranging from teamwork to visionary leadership and trusteeship.

### Intensive training awaits

Experienced board members are encouraged to apply for the program. “LTASB is not appropriate for new board members since they must first learn their new role and responsibilities,” Douglas explained. “Only after they have a bit of experience can they truly benefit from the intensive training they receive in LTASB. I

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had served on my board nine years before I applied. The knowledge that I gained prepared me to serve two terms on the TASB Legislative Advisory Committee and the TASB Risk Management Fund board.”

For board members who may be on the fence about applying for the highly selective program, Douglas said she encourages anyone who meets the eligibility requirements to apply if they can devote the necessary time and effort. “Many of our participants were not selected the first time they applied, and we encourage them to reapply.”

Applications are now available for the upcoming class of 2024. Completed applications must be submitted by July 1. The program kicks off in September at the TASA | TASB Convention and will conclude in 2024 during Summer Leadership Institute. Enrollment is limited and participants must meet certain continuing education qualifications. Learn more and apply at [tasb.org/ltasb](https://tasb.org/ltasb).★

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

## Want to apply to LTASB?

Here’s what you need to know.

To be eligible for the LTASB cohort, an applicant must:

- Be currently serving on an active member school board for the preceding 18 months
- Have proof of completing the minimum required training at the last statutorily required reporting period
- Have demonstrated leadership ability on their board and in their community

The TASB President appoints an ad hoc Selection Committee each year from LTASB graduates. Identity of the committee members remains confidential. All applications are processed and reviewed by the Selection Committee at a meeting in July.

Selection will be based on the following criteria:

1. Commitment to the goals of the program
2. Commitment to personal growth
3. Commitment to board service as a means of improving student performance
4. Leadership contributions to the local board
5. Levels and types of participation in school board-related activities outside the local district (TASB activities, area association activities, etc.)
6. Levels and types of participation in other organizations within the local community

For more information on Leadership TASB, contact [leadershiptasb@tasb.org](mailto:leadershiptasb@tasb.org).



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## Safety Agency Appointees

Governor names 6 to Texas School Safety Center Board

Gov. Greg Abbott has appointed six people to the Texas School Safety Center Board of Directors. The board reports to the governor, the Texas Legislature, the State Board of Education, and the Texas Education Agency on school safety and security and advises the center on its function, budget, and strategic planning initiatives.

Abbott appointed Melissa Dunbar and reappointed Edwin Flores, James Mosley, Noe E. Perez, Michael Slaughter, and Jill Tate to the board for terms set to expire Feb. 1, 2025. The appointments are subject to Texas Senate confirmation.

Dunbar, a resident of Center Point, is a principal for the Medina Independent School District.

Flores, a Dallas resident, is the managing partner at Chalker Flores, LLP and is a member of the Dallas ISD board of trustees.

Mosley, a resident of Borger, is the judge of the 316th District Court in Hutchinson County. He was previously appointed by Abbott to the Crime Victims' Institute Advisory Council.

Perez, a resident of Laguna Vista, is a social studies teacher for the Los Fresnos Consolidated ISD, where he teaches U.S. government and personal financial literacy at Los Fresnos High School.

Slaughter, a resident of Wylie, is an assistant principal at Princeton High School in Princeton, Texas, and an ordained minister. He is currently pursuing a doctor of philosophy in general psychology from Grand Canyon University.

Tate, a resident of Colleyville, is a former small business owner and served as a project manager at Turley Associates Inc. and as an assistant property manager at Trammell Crow Company.



TxSSC, located at Texas State University in San Marcos, is tasked with key school safety initiatives and mandates. It serves as a clearinghouse for the dissemination of safety and security information through research, training, and technical assistance for K-12 schools and junior colleges throughout Texas. Read more about the center at [txssc.txstate.edu](https://txssc.txstate.edu). ★

# Summer Leadership Institute

Find inspiration, community at TASB events

by Savanna Polasek

Every summer, TASB's Summer Leadership Institute brings together thousands of school board members and administrators, giving them the opportunity to learn not only from top-tier sessions, but also from one another.

Held in June, TASB members can attend the conference that best fits their schedule and location preference — San Antonio or Fort Worth. The two events are nearly identical in schedule, session offerings, and speakers.

## Create your learning journey

SLI is designed to be a place for school leaders to create their own learning journey and to ask bold questions.

"We call it a learning laboratory because members are able to take ownership of their learning," said TASB Executive Director Dan Troxell. "It also speaks to the spirit of innovation at the event."

With practical, evidence-based sessions and curated tracks for both new and experienced trustees, attendees choose the sessions that meet their needs. These include interactive, facilitated dialogue sessions, which are PowerPoint-free and led by experienced board members.

## Legislative review

During a time when public education is under unprecedented attacks, it's more important than ever to stay informed. Both events will offer a post-legislative session the Saturday after each SLI, which will provide attendees a review of the major legislation passed by state lawmakers. Attendees also can learn about new legal requirements related to district operations, school finance, special education, and more.

## Finding community

SLI, TASB's flagship conference, inspires, informs, and connects members. "My favorite part of SLI is the way it builds relationships and community," said Kathy Dundee, event organizer. "The conference thoughtfully brings people to-

gether in an organic way, through shared meals and breaks."

The events are held in June for a reason: It's the month following May school board elections. After these elections, it's an annual tradition for many board teams to unite and prepare for their new roles and the school year ahead. It's the perfect opportunity to foster new connections and strengthen existing ones. At the same time, members earn required continuing education credit.

## General session speakers



Chris Bashinelli

### Chris Bashinelli

Bashinelli, better known as "Bash," has traveled the world for more than a decade sharing a message of empathy and understanding.

He hosts *Bridge the Gap*, a television series featured on PBS and the National Geographic Channel, where he experiences life in someone else's shoes.



Michele Gay

### Michele Gay

Gay is a mother, educator, and co-founder of Safe and Sound Schools. After losing her daughter Josephine Grace Dec. 14,

2012, in the Sandy Hook school shooting in Newtown, Connecticut, Gay has channeled her energy into advocating for improved safety and security in schools and communities across the country.



Eric McElvenny

### Eric McElvenny

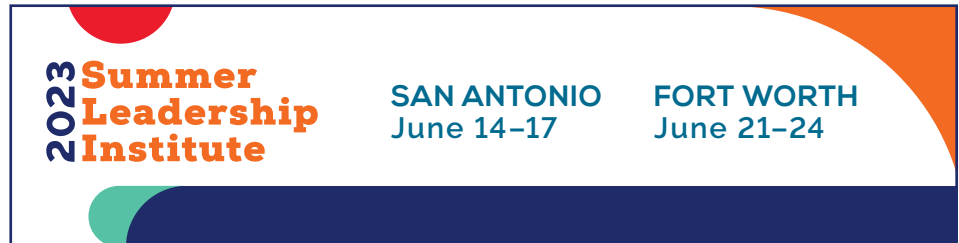
McElvenny is an amputee endurance athlete living in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. A graduate of the U.S. Naval

Academy, he was deployed three times as a Marine. His final tour was in Afghanistan, where he was wounded after stepping on an IED. After his right leg was amputated, McElvenny made a vow to run an Ironman Triathlon. He realized that the techniques he used to go from the hospital bed to the finish line could be used to help others.

## Attend SLI

Visit [tasb.org/sli](https://tasb.org/sli) to learn more about the conference and to register.★

Savanna Polasek is a staff writer for Texas Lone Star.







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# Texans Polled on Vouchers

Survey shows bipartisan support against proposals

by Sylvia Wood

The more Texans learn about voucher programs, the less likely they are to support them, according to a new poll by TASB that surveyed attitudes across the state on proposals to divert taxpayer money into private, religious, virtual, or home schools.

“These results highlight bipartisan support against shifting public money into a new, costly entitlement program that would mostly benefit wealthy families in urban areas to the detriment of our public schools,” said TASB Executive Director Dan Troxell. “At the same time, the poll shows that Texans want their elected officials to make public education a priority this legislative session with the focus at the Capitol to be on raising teacher salaries.”

The poll of 804 registered voters was conducted in February on behalf of TASB by Perception Insight, an Austin-based opinion research firm. Among those responding, 48% reported voting for Republicans most often, compared to 30% indicating a preference for Democrats. Another 14% reported voting independent of party.

“Regardless of party affiliation, the majority (55%) of those responding to the poll reported being less likely to support vouchers knowing that these proposals would give private schools, not parents, the right to choose,” Troxell said. “There’s also a concern among a majority of those polled that vouchers or education savings accounts would operate outside of any taxpayer accountability on academic performance.”

Among the voucher proposals being considered during the legislative session are ones that would exclude rural districts, where private school options are few and far between. But when asked about whether a rural and/or small district exclusion would sway their opinion on voucher programs, those responding to the poll came out nearly even with 35% in opposition and 34% in support. Another 31% said it “depends” or they were “unsure.”

“Lawmakers should listen to Texans, who aren’t buying what the voucher supporters are selling. Creating a voucher program that would harm rural communities to benefit children in urban and suburban areas isn’t a Texas value,” said Troxell. “We need to look at strengthening all of our public schools, not looking for ways to further polarize our communities.”

Other major poll findings include:

- Texans support their local public school teachers, with nearly 70% reporting a positive impression of the educators in their school district.
- When asked about whether the state of Texas currently provides enough funding to public schools, 56% reported no, compared to only 35% who believe funding is adequate.
- When asked to rank education priorities for elected leaders, school safety was the number one item on the list, followed by curriculum/instruction. Concerns over library books came in last.

Troxell said the poll was done to provide additional research on the attitudes of Texans after TASB members already came out against vouchers in their Advocacy Agenda, approved last September at the Delegate Assembly.

“Across the state, among our active members — all 1,025 school boards — there’s strong consensus that vouchers or educational savings accounts would do real harm to our public school students and waste taxpayer money,” he said. “As the largest group of elected officials in the state, we hope that Austin lawmakers prioritize the issues we know need attention — namely teacher salaries, school safety, and special education services. Vouchers would create new problems — not solutions.”★

*Sylvia Wood is a staff writer for Texas Lone Star.*



## LEGAL QUESTIONS?

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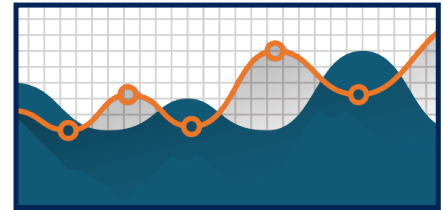
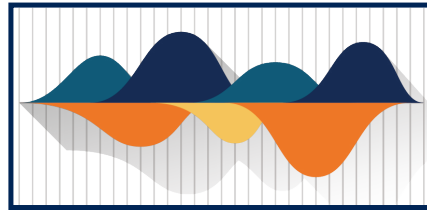
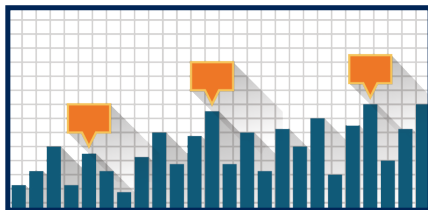


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# Texas Trustee Institute

TASB launches program for new board members

by Mary Ann Lopez

TASB is launching an immersive learning experience designed to help newly elected school board members be successful in their roles as trustees.

Known as the Texas Trustee Institute, this program will provide a specialized training opportunity for new board members seeking a strong foundational understanding of board governance and its role in improving student outcomes.

“We understand that once a board member is elected, there is a lot about board governance that they need to learn very quickly,” said Dan Troxell, TASB executive director. “For a new trustee, getting started can feel daunting, but the goal of the Texas Trustee Institute is to provide the support they need to get up to speed, feel confident in their role, and build much-needed support networks with other school board members.”

The institute will be offered at locations around the state, and at most TASB events, including Summer Learning In-

stitute, which is held in San Antonio and Fort Worth. In addition to governance and student outcomes, some of the topics that will be covered during the institute include:

- Board member roles and responsibilities
- Community engagement
- Important legal, policy, and budget issues
- Tips and strategies for success

Participants in the institute will benefit from an in-person learning journey designed specifically for newly elected board trustees. Sessions will be led by TASB’s Robert Long III, division director of Board Development Services, in addition to former and current trustees and education leaders.

Along with gaining the much-needed foundational knowledge that allows board members to be effective trustees, the institute will offer them the opportunity to

strengthen and expand their relationships with other board members.

“Through the use of cohorts, we can connect board members who come from communities with similar needs, challenges, and goals,” Long said. “The institute is not only an opportunity for new board members to get much-needed information, but also to network with other board members who may become future collaborators and thought partners.”

Those who take part in the Texas Trustee Institute will have an opportunity to earn continuing education credits, receive a certificate of completion, and return to their districts with practical tools and strategies for success in their roles.

For more information or to register for TASB’s Texas Trustee Institute, contact Board Development Services at [board.dev@tasb.org](mailto:board.dev@tasb.org). ★

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



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# TASB James B. Crow Award

## Innovation in Governance Award announced

by Sylvia Wood

Faye Beaulieu, a former longtime school board member for Hurst-Euless-Bedford ISD and a retired senior vice president of the United Way of Tarrant County, has been selected as the inaugural recipient of TASB's James B. Crow Innovation in Governance Award.

The James B. Crow Innovation in Governance Award was established in 2022 in honor of its namesake, who retired as executive director of TASB in August 2021, after 40 years of service to the Association. Crow was known for relentless commitment to improving public education by supporting excellent local school board governance through visionary leadership. Those eligible for the award include trustees, district administrators, education professionals, and public school advocates — both active and retired — who have significantly influenced effective school district governance practices at the state or local level.

Beaulieu, who served 26 years on the Hurst-Euless-Bedford ISD board of trustees before retiring May 2021, was chosen for the honor by the TASB Member Services Committee. The award includes a \$10,000 contribution to a Texas public school district associated with the recipient.

"On behalf of the committee, we're thrilled to be able to recognize Faye Beaulieu, whose commitment to improving the lives of students through excellent board governance was so evident in the supporting nomination," said Kerrville ISD Trustee Rolinda Schmidt, who chaired the selection committee and is TASB Board first vice president. "What especially stood out was her approach to building strong systems and processes that not only delivered better outcomes for students but also fostered a culture of respect and collaboration on the board. She is clearly a servant leader with a passion for improving lives."

During her tenure as a trustee, Beaulieu helped author the board's initial



Faye Beaulieu speaking at a Summer Leadership Institute.

Board Operating Procedures, creating a framework to formalize practices and focus on student outcomes. She also served on the board during the adoption of several successful programs in the district, extensive building projects, and the hiring of two superintendents, who served for 14 years and 11 years respectively.

"James Crow left an amazing legacy at TASB, and when our Board of Directors said they wanted to establish an award in his name, we knew that was a fitting way to honor his years of service while also recognizing others in public education who are also doing outstanding and innovative work," said TASB Executive Director Dan Troxell. "I want to thank the Member Services Committee for all their work in launching this award and for selecting such an accomplished inaugural recipient. Faye Beaulieu is an excellent choice."

Upon learning of her selection for the award, Beaulieu said she was surprised and honored by the unexpected recognition.

"Words cannot express how excited I am to be named the inaugural winner of TASB's James B. Crow Innovation in Governance Award," said Beaulieu. "I considered the opportunity to work

with Jim as a TASB director, officer, and ultimately president to be the best leadership development training I could have experienced. His wisdom and knowledge of school governance, along with his calm demeanor and even-keeled approach to crisis, set an amazing example, and his humor and friendship kept it real for all of us who worked with him. I am humbled and blessed to be the recipient of an award named for him."

Beaulieu served as a TASB director from 2005 to 2015 and was TASB President in 2013-14 year. Over the years, she has received many accolades including the highest individual award of the HEB Chamber of Commerce; the Clyde Mooney Award; the Northeast Leadership Forum's Distinguished Leadership Award; and the Girl Scouts of Texas and the Oklahoma Plains awarded her the Woman of Distinction Connector Award. In 2020, HEB ISD's board was named as the TASA Outstanding Board of Texas.

Nominations for the 2024 James B. Crow Award Innovation in Governance Award will open at the end of the year.★

*Sylvia Wood is a staff writer for Texas Lone Star.*

Photos by TASB Media Services

# Bulletin Board

## TASB Announces Student Video Contest Winners

Three school districts have been selected as winners of TASB's biennial Student Video Contest, which showcases the strength and success of Texas public schools. A prize of \$5,000 will be awarded to the following school districts:

- Large district: Socorro ISD
- Medium district: Bullard ISD
- Small district: Forsan ISD

Texas school districts were asked to create a one-minute promotional video for their schools with students as the stars. The videos focus on what makes public schools the best choice while highlighting the success of individual school districts.

The contest was open to all Texas school districts. Entries, which were divided into three categories based on average daily attendance, were judged on creativity, message, and technical quality.

TASB Executive Director Dan Troxell said he always looks forward to seeing the Student Video Contest entries. "Watching these videos brings such joy. It's a great reminder of why we do what we do and the great things happening in public schools across the state every single day," he said.

All contest entries can be viewed by going to [tasb.org](https://tasb.org). Click on About TASB, find News and Media, click on news releases and find "2023 Student Video Contest Winners Announced."

## TEA Releases Annual Report

The Texas Education Agency has released its 2022 Annual Report, which highlights the progress made in Texas public schools.

Texas Commissioner of Education Mike Morath said in a message accompanying the report that Texas students, educators, and families have shown "tremendous grit and determination" as the state continues to emerge from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"That resolve has paid real dividends. While much work remains in mathematics, results from the last school year show that Texas students have largely reached pre-pandemic levels of proficiency in literacy, and Texas high school graduates are showing higher levels of career readiness," Morath said.

"There are key strengths in Texas education worth celebrating, but there are also challenges," he said. "Together, we will continue to help students maximize their potential so they graduate prepared for lives of purpose and productivity."

The report can be found by going to [tea.texas.gov](https://tea.texas.gov), clicking on the About TEA tab, and then clicking on Annual Reports under News & Multimedia. There are a number of sections, including ones on A-F accountability, special education, school safety, school finance, and TEA's strategic plan.

## Call for submissions to District Voices!

We want to hear more about what is going on in local school districts around Texas and invite you to send us submissions for our new, occasional feature, District Voices. Do you have an interesting program to discuss? Lessons learned as a school board member? For submissions or questions, contact managing editor Laura Tolley at

[laura.tolley@tasb.org](mailto:laura.tolley@tasb.org).

We look forward to hearing from you and your district!

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

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# School Board Elections

Nonpartisan races benefit students

by Tiffany Dunne-Oldfield



Tiffany Dunne-Oldfield

With the May school board elections coming up, I was reminded of a call I got from my youngest son last November, before he headed to the polls. “Mom, who should I vote for in the school board elections?”

He hadn’t done his research or attended any campaign events or voter forums, so all he saw was a list of unknown names. Of course, candidates for school board races in Texas don’t carry a party affiliation on the ballot. This tradition has a long history in our state and dates to a time when political party affiliation wasn’t part of most local election discussions and debates.

school board races is just another distraction from the real work at hand — educating our students so they can become productive, civic-minded citizens who will help our state prosper.

We can all agree that Texas would not be the state it is today — with the ninth-largest economy in the world — without our public schools and elected school boards. The tradition of nonpartisan local governance has opened the door to global opportunities for generations of students. We should be careful about tinkering with a process that has served us so well.

Historically, candidates for school

As we know, times have changed. I’m not naive enough to think we’ll ever put the genie back in the bottle, and I expect that we’ll continue to see a push for partisan school board elections. Yet no matter what happens in the Legislature, it’s essential we don’t lose sight of what really matters when voting for a school board candidate.

Their responsibilities are defined by the State Board of Education and commissioner of education rules and are all the same — regardless of party. The work of a school board member is also equally challenging whether you’re a Republican, Democrat, or an Independent, and simply put, isn’t for the faint of heart. It involves late nights, many meetings, a lot of reading and analyzing, and as any trustee will tell you, time spent connecting with parents and community members to answer questions, explain policies, attend events, and much more.

So, as we consider a future where partisan school board races might be the norm, let’s not forget what’s really at stake. Do we want to define school board service through a lens that divides communities, or do we want to work together to build stronger schools and stronger communities for everyone?

As for my son, he’s promised to do his homework and get to know his school board candidates before Election Day rolls around again.★

*Tiffany Dunne-Oldfield is deputy executive director of TASB.*

**We can all agree that Texas would not be the state it is today — with the ninth-largest economy in the world — without our public schools and elected school boards.**

Much has changed since then, and there is a growing demand for school board candidates to run with a party affiliation. The claim is that seeing Republican, Democrat, or Independent next to a candidate’s name will give the voter a better understanding of that person’s values and views.

Would my son have benefitted if he’d had party affiliation information in the voting booth? Maybe. But I strongly believe we should think twice about changing a longstanding tradition that has the potential to dramatically alter the public education landscape in Texas.

Infusing partisan politics into local

board races often are known in their communities. Some have been longtime PTA volunteers, retired educators, or just regular attendees at school board meetings. In those instances, voters have been able to make informed decisions on Election Day because they have seen those candidates in action. They could tell if someone was running for school board for the right reasons, rather than just trying to make a name for themselves or to launch a political career. It certainly didn’t matter if they were a Republican, Democrat, or Independent. If they were committed to kids, that’s what stood out, that’s what mattered.



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