

Texas Lone Star

A Publication of the Texas Association of School Boards | Volume 41, Number 3 | April 2023



MORE CYBER SECURE

TASB program aids districts' cybersecurity efforts

A JOB WELL DONE

Shining a spotlight on administrative professionals

POWERED TOGETHER

Students benefit from cohesive Quinlan ISD board

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- 6 • TASB Spring Workshop — San Angelo
- 11 • TASB Facility Services: Asbestos Designated Person Training — Amarillo
- 12 • BoardBook® Premier Basic Skills Training — Austin
- 12 • TASB Facility Services: Integrated Pest Management — Amarillo
- 12 • TASB Spring Workshop — Houston
- 13 • TASB Student Solutions Webinar Series: Documentation Review — What have we learned and what can we do? — Virtual Event
- 13-14 • TASB Conference for Administrative Professionals — Austin
- 19 • TASB SHARS Matters Webinar Series: Third Party Liability — Virtual Event
- 19-20 • TASB HR Services: Managing Personnel Records — Virtual Event
- 19-21 • TASB Legal Services School Law Boot Camp — Austin
- 25 • TASB Facility Services: Asbestos Designated Person Training — Waco
- 25 • TASB Spring Workshop — Uvalde
- 26 • TASB Facility Services: Integrated Pest Management — Waco

MAY

- 4-5 • TASB SHARS 2023 — Austin
- 10 • TASB Spring Workshop — Abilene
- 11 • TASB Spring Workshop — Huntsville
- 15 • TASB Spring Workshop — Nacogdoches
- 16 • TASB Spring Workshop — Alpine
- 16 • TASB Spring Workshop — Commerce
- 17 • TASB SHARS Matters Webinar Series: Documentation Requirements & 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



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

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Texas Lone Star • Volume 41, Number 3

Texas Association of School Boards
P.O. Box 400 • Austin, Texas • 78767-0400
512-467-0222 • 800-580-8272

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

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Advocacy Matters

We must all be the voice for public education

by Debbie Gillespie



Debbie Gillespie

Family vacations are a cherished time for me. We have been to beautiful sunny beaches, snow-covered mountains, and everything in between. One of my kids' favorite adventures was our trip to Washington, D.C., in 2010.

We spent nine full days visiting Mount Vernon, the Smithsonian museums, many memorials, the U.S. Capitol, and other sites. It was all so interesting, though after day seven, my son did ask why I had to make the vacation feel like a school field trip.

Federal advocacy conference

I was thinking about that trip and all that I learned then and on subsequent visits to Washington when I was back there in February for TASB's Texas Federal Advocacy Conference.

Our TASB Government Relations staff organized this great conference because they understand how important it is for members to be able to connect with officials at the federal level about public education issues.

Being in Washington with trustees from all over Texas was truly something

room watching the media set up for the event, we could feel the anticipation and excitement building.

Then, just two short weeks later, TASB and the Texas Association of School Administrators staff brought us together for a legislative conference and advocacy day in Austin. So many great speakers provided us with key insights, important information, and advocacy tips on navigating the 88th legislative session.

We rely on organizations such as TASB and TASA to be the eyes and ears for us, but they also need us to help advocate strongly on behalf of public schools.

The legislative conference gave us important tools to use in our advocacy efforts. I also find that reading, watching, and listening to a variety of resources, along with watching or attending public education hearings, can be very beneficial to my advocacy efforts.

TASA and TASB are valuable resources, and both do a remarkable job of providing us with real-time information we can use to be the voice for our students, staff, parents, and community members. It is up to us to make that information relatable to our districts and share it with our legislators.

"E Pluribus Unum" — "Out of Many, One." We as trustees, *we are the many with one mission*, which is to provide the best education and opportunities for all of our public school students. Let's be that voice!★

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

The legislative conference gave us important tools to use in our advocacy efforts. I also find that reading, watching, and listening to a variety of resources, along with watching or attending public education hearings, can be very beneficial to my advocacy efforts.

The Capitol tour began with a short video about how government was initially established in the United States. It discusses *"E Pluribus Unum,"* the Latin phrase with 13 letters meaning "Out of many, one." It represented the original 13 colonies and was the traditional motto for this nation until Congress adopted "In God we Trust" in 1956.

A simple motto with such a powerful message.

At the time, I had no idea I would be elected as a trustee just one year later. But that visit to our nation's capital sparked an interest in me that I never knew existed.

special. We were able to talk about federal issues and how they directly relate to Texas public schools. We got to know each other and better understand what is happening in different districts.

After a day of fantastic speakers and tons of information, we reserved the next day to visit with our congressional delegation and their staff to discuss issues and share stories with them about our districts. I took a tour of the Capitol with my fellow trustees. It happened to be the last tour of the day before the State of the Union address that evening. Standing in the National Statuary Hall Collection



TASB Risk Management Fund **EXCELLENCE** **2023 AWARDS**

Spotlight your organization with an Excellence Award!

The Excellence Awards celebrate the best in risk management solutions from Fund members. Recipients join an exclusive group of their peers recognized for their commitment to preventing workplace injuries, cybercrime, and other incidents.

The Fund will select up to 10 award recipients and celebrate their achievements with:

- \$1,000 honorarium toward continued risk management efforts
- Custom glass award to display
- Press release sent to local media
- Recognition in Fund and TASB publications

Visit tasbrmf.org/excellence for more information.

Valued Teamwork

TASB staff's skill and knowledge benefit members

by Laura Tolley



Laura Tolley

As I finished editing this month's cover story on a new cybersecurity program TASB has created for school districts, I Googled "school cyberattack," and a long list of unfortunate stories popped up.

The Tucson Unified School District was hit by a cyberattack earlier this year. It took nearly two weeks for the district, southern Arizona's largest, to get its internet and network access restored. On the other side of the country, Nantucket Public Schools had to close one morning because a virus shut down its computer systems.

Cyberattacks on K-12 schools are on the rise in Texas as well, resulting in disruptions to school and classroom operations. They can be costly to resolve.

of Defense primarily simulating foreign cyberattacks for NATO military forces, so his deep experience is incredibly useful in helping school districts deal with the cyber challenges they face today.

It's written by Beth Griesmer, a content marketing manager for TASB's Content Strategy team. Griesmer has many duties here at TASB, including writing insightful stories for *Texas Lone Star*. She brings an important perspective to her roles, having spent nearly 20 years as an educator, most recently as the journalism teacher and yearbook advisor at an Austin ISD middle school.

The April issue also features the work of another writer and former educator, Mary Ann Lopez, who writes on page 16 about the Quinlan ISD school board,

passion for public education. They add trusted experience to the pages of *Texas Lone Star* — as do so many other TASB staff members, who write columns, create interesting cover illustrations and other design features, provide photographs of TASB events, copy edit stories, and more. Each person who contributes to this issue and others also has several other duties to perform as well, so I am grateful for their skill, time, and commitment. It is definitely a team effort!

TASB member contributions

The magazine benefits from the ideas, expertise, and insight from our members as well. This month's issue includes interviews with school district officials on several stories, for example. Also, our story on page 12 features four administrative professionals who talk about their busy roles in their school districts. The story was done in honor of Administrative Professionals Day, which is April 26.

It's the second consecutive year we've done a story highlighting these unsung district staff members and their significant contributions to public education in Texas. Personally, I glean good advice — and wisdom — from these dedicated individuals.

I hope you enjoy the April issue.★

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laura Tolley". The script is fluid and cursive.

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

I truly appreciate their backgrounds in writing and teaching, as well their passion for public education.

New cybersecurity effort

TASB Risk Management Services' new program can help members develop cybersecurity action plans to help guard against attacks. This new initiative is yet another example of how TASB is always developing innovative ways to help its members with the many challenges they face. The story begins on page 8.

The new program involves Lucas Anderson, a privacy and cyber risk consultant with TASB Risk Management Services, who runs table-top cybersecurity exercises with member district personnel to assess their readiness. Anderson worked at the U.S. Department

of Defense primarily simulating foreign cyberattacks for NATO military forces, so his deep experience is incredibly useful in helping school districts deal with the cyber challenges they face today. It's written by Beth Griesmer, a content marketing manager for TASB's Content Strategy team. Griesmer has many duties here at TASB, including writing insightful stories for *Texas Lone Star*. She brings an important perspective to her roles, having spent nearly 20 years as an educator, most recently as the journalism teacher and yearbook advisor at an Austin ISD middle school. The April issue also features the work of another writer and former educator, Mary Ann Lopez, who writes on page 16 about the Quinlan ISD school board,

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MORE CYBER SECURE



TASB Risk Management Fund aids
districts' cybersecurity efforts

BY BETH GRIESMER

CYBERSECURITY is a topic of keen interest for school district officials these days. Lines for cybersecurity sessions snaked down the hallways at the recent Texas Computer Education Association conference in San Antonio. In one room, about 50 educators and administrators crowded around a tabletop exercise discussing phishing, ransomware, and other cyber issues. At the conclusion, Lucas Anderson, of TASB Risk Management Services, asked for a show of hands if the activity had been helpful. Every person raised a hand.

The unanimous response showed Anderson, TASB's privacy and cyber risk consultant serving members of the TASB Risk Management Fund, that people are looking for guidance with this increasingly complex topic.

As the largest provider of risk management services to educational entities in Texas, the Fund is working to increase awareness among its members about the importance of protecting against cyber threats with cybersecurity action plans. The goal is to guide district personnel through real-world scenarios to identify needs in their systems and processes.

Such training is an integral part of the Fund's cybersecurity program available to participating members. Regardless of how districts opt to protect against cyber threats, however, it's essential to plan, prepare, and practice.

"The Fund underwrites and supports cybersecurity resources for its members in this critical area of district operations," said Mary Barrett, associate executive director of TASB Risk Management Services. "Innovative solutions and training help mitigate the risks associated with storing sensitive district data."

Increasing cyber threats 🔒

The stakes for school districts have never been higher. According to a November 2022 report by the Center for Internet Security, "schools are data-rich and can be resource-poor, making them particularly lucrative targets for cyber threat actors." The report cites the challenges school districts face due to deficient funding in the face of ever-increasing threats, staffing challenges, and a general lack of strategy and documented processes related to district cybersecurity.

"We recognize that public schools continue to be a target for cyber criminals

and other bad actors who want to steal data, disrupt operations, or extort money," Barrett said. "That's why the Fund in December awarded \$500,000 in grants to 178 members to help them improve their cybersecurity resilience and protect against threats and attacks."

According to the FBI Internet Complaint Center, school districts saw a 62% increase in ransomware attacks from 2020 to 2021. Ransomware, when a malicious actor holds a system or critical data for ransom, has targeted the education sector more than any other single industry since 2016.

"Ransomware has been a well-documented mode of exploitation of school districts over the last several years," Anderson said. "Districts should be concerned about malicious actors targeting data in a variety of ways."

Legal requirements 🔒

Texas school districts are required by law to have a cybersecurity plan. Districts can meet the legal requirements by developing a plan that is consistent with the Texas Department of Information Resource's Texas Cybersecurity Framework. The TCF includes identifying which district assets need to be protected, how to protect those assets, how to detect and respond to threats, and the steps to recover after a cybersecurity incident.

Every school district must also designate a cybersecurity coordinator

who serves as a liaison between the district and the Texas Education Agency. This coordinator is required to complete annual training from a program approved by the Texas Department of Information Resources. Districts are also responsible for reporting system or data breaches that meet requirements set forth by the Texas Education Code and Business and Commerce Code.

These legal requirements underscore the seriousness of cybersecurity threats to school districts.

"We're one click away from disaster," said Mark Gabehart, Round Rock ISD chief technology officer. As cybersecurity breaches became more prevalent in the K-12 sector in recent years, Gabehart began restructuring positions in his IT department to focus on cybersecurity and increasing training districtwide. His department regularly does exercises to test its cybersecurity controls.

Anderson stresses that all districts, regardless of size, have valuable data. While it can be overwhelming to know where to begin, starting with a tabletop exercise that works through various threats can help develop a cybersecurity response plan and pinpoint knowledge gaps within a district.

"You don't eat the elephant in one bite," said Karen Fuller, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD director of infrastructure and communications. "That's what cybersecurity does to us, making us feel like we have to



TASB Risk Management Consultant Lucas Anderson presents at a conference.

Photo by TASB Media Services

tackle the whole problem at once.”

Testing capabilities

Anderson has a deep background in cybersecurity training that he taps to help school districts with coverage in the Fund.

“I worked at the Department of Defense in Washington, D.C., and primarily what I did was simulate foreign cyberattacks for NATO military forces,” Anderson said, explaining that they were large-scale exercises conducted in a locked room with teams testing the cybersecurity capabilities of military entities around the world.

He wanted to use the idea of these drills to help districts test their own cybersecurity responses. Although school districts are required by law to hold a variety of safety drills throughout the school year, cybersecurity drills are not on the list. But Anderson thinks they’re a good idea. “A district is far more likely to experience a cyber threat than a fire.”

That’s where tabletop exercises, facilitated by someone with expertise in cybersecurity, can help.

“This is a thought exercise on the table with paper,” Anderson said. “We’re not actually moving into the realm of powering down a server and testing the actual system.”

Though there are many ways to facilitate a cybersecurity tabletop exercise, Anderson takes a four-step approach to help member districts recognize cybersecurity challenges and develop an action

plan. Among key steps are establishing roles and responsibilities: a cybersecurity coordinator, a public information officer, an employee responsible for the continuity of operations plan, and an information technology representative.

Once roles for the exercise have been designated, Anderson runs two different types of scenarios, giving participants about 20 minutes to work on the problem using their roles to respond. The goal is to devise an action plan to address the threat, prioritize steps that need to be taken, and then assign those steps to the designated roles at the table.

Often, districts come to a tabletop exercise with an incident response plan, an operations continuity plan, or even the cybersecurity plan that has been submitted to TEA, Anderson said. But if those plans haven’t been practiced, the gaps soon become apparent. “The primary function of executing this exercise is to prioritize steps and adjust plans as necessary,” he said.

Here are the scenarios:

1. Fraudulent instruction. In this scenario, a phishing email, a form of social engineering through electronic communication, has been sent to district personnel related to a recent bond project. The email appears to be from a vendor who won a contract asking for a substantial payment. This type of cyber threat where an email appears to be from a trusted source

far outpaces other types of incursions.

2. Ransomware. In this situation, a district’s network does not have a crucial patch and malware, a malicious software program, is able to hold sensitive data for a \$500,000 ransom. Patches address common vulnerabilities and exposures, and it is critical to network security to perform updates often.

“On average, malware sits dormant for 100 days doing surveillance of your network,” Anderson said. Sophisticated hackers are very good at entering a system undetected, he noted, adding that once they are in, they will spend a lot of time looking for assets and determining weaknesses in the network.

Prioritizing steps

For any tabletop exercise, the post-incident analysis is key. One participating district realized it didn’t have the tools it needed to address the threat, and as a result, the participants thought the exercise wasn’t as successful as they had anticipated. But Anderson assured them that it was an optimal outcome to have in a simulation.

“Now you know what you need to work towards,” he told the district. “You look back at the exercise and see where you failed and see where you can get stronger in that department. That after-action is the most critical component of the exercise.”

The final step in the exercise is corrective action. Participants must determine if the vulnerability that allowed the threat to occur was technical or human in nature. If it was technical, then the district may need to audit users and account access, patch and repair servers, or conduct backup checks among other steps, Anderson said.

If the vulnerability was caused by human error, Anderson stressed that it is important to see it as an opportunity to educate the district community about cybersecurity, rather than take punitive action. “These are your lessons learned,” he said.

Educating the community

Peter Apostolakos, Round Rock ISD’s director of information security, holds phishing training four times a month that



Photos courtesy of Round Rock ISD

Students from Round Rock ISD’s Great Oaks Elementary School work on laptop computers in the classroom. A best practice is to educate all members of the district community about cybersecurity.



Anyone with a Round Rock ISD email address receives training on cybersecurity. The district also holds regular training for staff on phishing scams.

focuses on employees who have responded to a fraudulent instruction email.

“The general rule in cybersecurity is not if something will happen; it’s when something will happen,” Apostolakos said.

To help mitigate the risk, the IT department trains everyone on cybersecurity who has a Round Rock ISD email address. Gabehart said the training resources available through the Texas Department of Information Resources are in both Spanish and English, which has been helpful in reaching a variety of groups in the community.

Fuller heartily agrees that training like a tabletop exercise can be helpful. “The most important thing a district can do is educate all stakeholders on cybersecurity.”

Along with training and educating members of the community, some school districts have developed other programs to improve their cybersecurity. For example, Round Rock ISD created three positions to work in tandem, including an expert in policies and procedures for cybersecurity governance; a position with a strong hardware background to focus on the firewall and the architecture; and an analyst who monitors different tools, looking at daily network traffic to determine if there are risks.

“We use a holistic approach to cybersecurity,” said Apostolakos.

“This did not happen overnight,”

added Gabehart. It was a five-year journey to create the staffing model the district currently uses. While funding has increased for the tools used to improve cybersecurity, Gabehart said he had to be resourceful when it came to staffing by shifting positions within the IT department to focus on cybersecurity.

Round Rock ISD also created a cybersecurity governance committee that meets six times a year to discuss new policies and procedures to better protect the district. Gabehart said this has created buy-in by including representatives from the different business areas of the district.

“School district culture is very open,” Gabehart said. “We don’t want to close our doors and limit innovation. It is a balancing act between innovation and security.”

Anderson agrees that districts can benefit by broadening and strengthening their cybersecurity efforts. He hopes the Fund’s efforts to raise awareness about cybersecurity threats, including its recent grant program, can help districts develop detailed efforts to protect their systems and data.

“The best thing any district can do when it comes to cybersecurity is just to do something, start somewhere,” he said.★

Beth Griesmer is a staff writer for Texas Lone Star.

CYBERSECURITY RESOURCES FOR SCHOOL DISTRICTS

The Texas Education Agency recommends a number of free and low-cost cybersecurity resources available to school districts:

The Multi-State Information Sharing and Analysis Center® (MS-ISAC®): A resource for cyber threat prevention, protection, response, and recovery for all U.S. state, local, tribal, and territorial (SLTT) governments. Membership is free for public K-12 education entities. learn.cisecurity.org/ms-isac-registration

Malicious Domain Blocking and Reporting (MDBR): A no-cost service available for MS-ISAC members that provides an additional layer of cybersecurity protection. MDBR technology prevents IT systems from connecting to harmful web domains, helping limit infections related to known malware, ransomware, phishing, and other cyber threats. mdbr.cisecurity.org

Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency Regional Resources: Provides systems reviews and workshops on a number of cyber threats. cisa.gov

Microsoft Learn: Free for everyone from classrooms to technical staff with a variety of topics on cybersecurity. microsoft.com/learn

Student-focused resources to learn about cybersecurity through gaming:

CyberPatriot: Created by the Air and Space Forces Association for K-12 students with a focus on careers in cybersecurity. uscyberpatriot.org

CyberStart America — Free to grades 9-12 and winners receive scholarships. cyberstartamerica.org

A JOB WELL DONE

Shining a spotlight on administrative professionals

by Beth Griesmer



Administrative Professionals Day is April 26, and TASB joins others in honoring the outstanding personnel working on the frontlines in our districts — the administrative team members who support our boards and our superintendents. These dedicated individuals serve districts with a passion to help the schoolchildren of Texas grow and learn.

On April 13-14, people from school districts across the state will gather in Austin for the 2022-23 TASB Conference for Administrative Professionals. In honor of the conference in April and another held in October, a few of them talked to *Texas Lone Star* about their experiences in this important, challenging role.



Amy Bly

Title: Administrative Assistant to the Superintendent

District: Galveston ISD

When did you start?
June 2020

Why did you choose to work for a school district?

I've always wanted to be a teacher. I finished my associate's [degree] at Galveston College in May 1997 while working full time as a paramedic. I intended to take off a semester since our first child was due in August and then finish at [University of Houston-Clear Lake] UHCL, but instead, I became a stay-at-home mom of three for 19 years. I loved it!

In September 2015, my husband died from a brain tumor. After having taken care of him for two years and with my past

experience working with EMS, I thought I would be a great nurse. After a semester of classes, I knew my heart just wasn't in it. I went back to the teaching path, took what classes I could at Galveston College, and then transferred to UHCL to finish my teaching degree. I loved the classes, but it was a real struggle with kids still at home.

I was sitting in a meeting one day and the rabbi of the temple right down the street from my house said he was looking for a new assistant. My friend who was also in the meeting and knew that I had done years of volunteer service in the church office told the rabbi I would be great for the job. I interviewed and got the job. I was there for two years. I was at a school function when I found out that the superintendent's administrative assistant was moving, and I applied for the job. Although I'm not teaching, I'm happy to be a part of education.

What do you like most about your job?

I like a lot of things, but if I have to pick one, it would be that I get to come in to work every day with people who want what's best for students. From my position, I get to see how hard everyone works and how all the departments work together. It feels good to be able to support the superintendent and administration by doing the behind-the-scenes work so that they are more able to focus on the students.

“I get to come in to work every day with people who want what's best for students.”

—Amy Bly, Galveston ISD

Describe a typical day for you:

A typical day is checking the calendars and then going through emails and voicemails. I keep a list in a notebook of things that I need to do, need to follow up on, or need to finish. I prepare for any meetings and do my best to keep up with my boss and to protect his time.

What would surprise people about your job?

I do a lot of different things working in GISD. Although a good portion of the job is general office work, there are times I get to be a party planner and a decorator. Not exactly surprising, but it was pleasantly surprising to me.

How does your position work with the school board?

I build the board book and set up for all of their board meetings. I let them know about various training opportunities and sign them up for trainings. I also keep a separate calendar for them, so they know about all events going on around the district.

A word from the boss:

"One of the greatest things about Amy is that I can be me around her. If that means that we are laughing about work or anything in our lives, or I am sad or disappointed, she is consoling and understands. She is protective of my time and guards against unnecessary interruptions. She is extremely loyal and always has my back. She is vested in the school district; in that she is a graduate of Ball High School and has had three children graduate from Ball High School as well. She wants to see our students do amazing things. She makes a tough job easier." — *Galveston ISD Superintendent Jerry Gibson*



Brittany Edgar

Title: Superintendent Secretary

District: Breckenridge ISD

When did you start?

I started with the district as the attendance clerk for the high school on Feb. 16, 2015, and

moved to my current position on June 1, 2016.

Why did you choose to work for a school district?

I grew up in Breckenridge and I'm not planning on going anywhere, so I thought I would work and try to give back to the district that I attended, which helped shape my life in so many ways. When the position at the high school came available, I had been looking for a change, so it worked out.

What do you like most about your job?

I like that no two days are the same. I like knowing that I am

supporting the administration and staff who are shaping the children in our community. I like building relationships and helping those who need me. I like that every day I feel like I am working to do something to make this place a little better.

Describe a typical day for you:

A typical day for me is coming in and getting the office going. I will then meet with the superintendent and go over the daily and weekly calendar. I try to list things to do for the day, but that list usually multiplies and changes at least 15 times a day. I stay available to the superintendent for whatever it is he may need me to do or help with, while answering calls and emails, working on board meeting agendas or any upcoming meetings, and filtering anything else that comes my way. Things are constantly coming along or being requested. There is always something to do or work on.

"I like that every day I feel like I am working to do something to make this place a little better."

—Brittany Edgar, Breckenridge ISD

What would surprise people about your job?

I think people would be surprised to know what all it is that I actually do. You think of a secretary, and a simple Google search tells you that secretary means "a person who works in an office and prepares letters, keeps records, schedules meetings, and makes other arrangements for a particular person or for an organization." And though that is true, and that is what I do, there is so much more to this job. This job is exciting and intricate. There is a lot more to do and process than "simple" office work.

How does your position work with the school board?

I handle all things pertaining to school board elections. I help the superintendent build and manage school board meetings. I take minutes during school board meetings and record them on the webpage. I schedule training and registrations. I support the board members with whatever they need help with if I am able.

A word from the boss:

"Brittany is an absolute joy to work with. Her positive attitude and commitment to continuous improvement is an inspiration to those around her. She works tirelessly to make my job easier, keeping me organized and on task. In our community, Brittany is "the go-to person" for any and all district information. She loves Breckenridge ISD, and her dedication to Buckaroo Pride is evident every day."

— Breckenridge ISD Superintendent Bryan Allen

**Organize.
Support.
Caffeinate.
Repeat.**



Brandy Godbey

Title: Executive Secretary to the Superintendent and Board of Trustees/HR Coordinator

District: Bonham ISD

When did you start?

I started in February 2015, working in the business office as a

payroll/insurance specialist; then I was reassigned in June 2021 to my current position.

Why did you choose to work for a school district?

It was a good opportunity for me to give back to my community and be more involved as a parent to my children. It eventually turned into me advocating for students who didn't have the support they needed. I love seeing our students and staff happy, laughing, and excited to be here.

What do you like most about your job?

I enjoy taking care of my superintendent, her needs, and the needs of my work family. The relationships you make with everyone. Most people just want someone to listen to them, and I'm honored they trust me, knowing I will take care of things for them.

“There is not a problem too big or too small that I'm not willing to help with.”

—Brandy Godbey, Bonham ISD

Describe a typical day for you:

I always tell my superintendent I love my job! Prioritizing, organization, and laughing are key to my current position. I do toggle between my duties as an HR coordinator and executive secretary to the superintendent. Most days I start off with one thing as a top priority, but that can change instantly depending on what small/large issue comes up. As for the HR side of things, it's a constant happy juggle between hiring employees and/or substitutes and making sure our current employees have what they need. There is not a problem too big or too small that I'm not willing to help with.

What would surprise people about your job?

It's a never ending, but always rewarding job.

How does your position work with the school board?

I'm the direct line of communication between the superintendent and school board.

A word from the boss:

“I am blessed to be able to work with Brandy each day. I have full confidence in her abilities to manage my schedule, the school board duties, and her HR responsibilities. One of the things I like most about Brandy is she is so personable. She can talk to anybody and make them feel comfortable. She makes people feel at ease when they call my office and gets all the information that allows me to help them in the best way.”

— Bonham ISD Superintendent Kelly Trompler



Photo courtesy of Canyon ISD

Mandy Carleton

Title: Executive Assistant to the Superintendent

District: Canyon ISD

When did you start?

I began working for Canyon ISD in 2008. After a few transitions, I moved to my current position with our super-

intendent in June 2018.

Why did you choose to work for a school district?

I began working as a substitute teacher when my son was in elementary school. I was very involved in PTA at that time and wanted to be more engaged with students. I found the flexibility of subbing beneficial as a mom of a young child. As my son grew older and more independent, I began working full time as a paraprofessional on campuses before moving into my current position. Supporting our teachers, SPED [special education] staff, and now our superintendent has been a purpose-filled and rewarding journey.

What do you like most about your job?

Our leaders all have a servant heart! Working with wonderful people who are passionate about educating children and supporting their initiatives reminds me daily of our purpose. I am also a people person, so I greatly enjoy the relationships I am able to build with staff, students, and individuals throughout the community.

Describe a typical day for you:

One reason I love my job is that my days are rarely typical! There is some routine of course, but I enjoy the variety and have learned to expect the unexpected. My superintendent and I always try to start the day with a morning meeting to touch base about the schedule and priorities for the day. From there, my day consists of preparing for meetings with administrators, possibly traveling

to a campus with lunch for teachers as a part of our “Lunch and Listen” program, making travel arrangements, preparing for the upcoming board meeting, fielding calls for the superintendent, and always working the calendar to try to fit everything in.

“One reason I love my job is that my days are rarely typical!”

—Mandy Carleton, Canyon ISD

What would surprise people about your job?

People might be surprised by the amount of fun I have in my job. We deal with some serious topics and the weight of running a school district, but we still have fun. The people I work with create a fun work environment. Recognizing student achievements and planning big events for our district also fall into the fun category for me.

How does your position work with the school board?

As we do not have a separate position, I also serve as the secretary/assistant to the board. I work with our current board members and candidates during election season on their filings and share pertinent information relating to elections. I track board training, share district communications with them, prepare all things for school board meetings, and assist them with any other need related to their position as a board member.

A word from the boss:

“Mandy brings energy and efficiency to our office! I am so grateful for her work and commitment to our district. With the many time demands on my role, she manages my calendar and has a good sense of high priority areas. She is cordial and patient with the occasional challenging phone call. I really appreciate the way she supports the needs of our board of trustees. She holds the board in high regard and goes to great lengths to make them feel welcome and comfortable. Mandy’s relationships with all of the departments in the central office foster a collaborative spirit in the workplace.” — Canyon ISD Superintendent Darryl Flusche. ★

Beth Griesmer is a staff writer for Texas Lone Star.

**Let’s talk
about our**

amazing

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Powered Together



*Students
benefit from
cohesive
Quinlan
ISD board*

by Mary Ann Lopez



Photos courtesy of Quinlan ISD



From left: Quinlan ISD Board Vice President Rusty Case, Annette Chreene and Board Member Dale Chreene, and Quinlan ISD Board President Kenny Stone, (in the background) pass out candy during a parade.

Kenny Stone, Quinlan ISD board president, recognizes the 1998 and 2002 championship Basketball teams during a homecoming football game. From left: Debra Crosby, Donnelle Sterling Cueller, Melissa Anderton Warden, Amanda Dyess Morrison, Jennifer Ford Weir, and Stone.



When Kenny Stone first ran for a seat on the Quinlan ISD Board of Trustees, the district was in crisis. As the district's board searched for a new superintendent, it faced mounting financial problems, its teachers were leaving, the town was divided about what to do, and the district's students were paying the penalty.

"I understood that not only were the adults unhappy, but the students were losing," Stone said.

After some deliberation and discussion with the new superintendent, who had a long history in other roles in the district, Stone decided to run for a seat on the school board. That was 25 years ago. And even though his children have long since graduated, he remains on the board as its president.

Like Stone, most of Quinlan ISD's board members have served for significant periods of time. And over the years, the incumbent board members — when challenged — have never lost an election, which is a testament to the community's faith in its trustees, Stone said.

The lengthy tenure of its board members has helped create a cohesive team, which according to Stone and Quinlan ISD Superintendent Jeff Irvin, has allowed the board to put aside any differences they may have to focus on what matters most: Doing what's best for students.

Recognition for its work

The Texas Association of School Administrators recognized Quinlan ISD as part of its 2022 TASA School Board Awards, which honored five school boards for making a positive impact on Texas public school students. This was the second time Quinlan ISD was named to the Honor Board; the first time was in 2002.

Irvin nominated the board of trustees for the honor. In his nomination, he said, "This group of individuals has worked together cohesively to achieve enormous impact within the district at all levels and in all aspects. The cooperative efforts of this board have proven to be a benefit to the educational programs of Quinlan ISD in addressing the unique needs facing the district. They have provided support, direction, stability, and a foundation for the future of the district."

Stone wasn't entirely surprised that the district received the honor for a second time. "We are still doing what we did when we were honored the first time. We're not changing what we're doing," he explained. "I felt very honored but not surprised because our board is great. And as far as I'm concerned, we're going to continue what we are doing because we're successful. And if we aren't, we will make a change and keep going."



Quinlan

The district is about 45 minutes northeast of Dallas, serving about 2,800 students from a 150-square mile area. The town is small with a population of 1,200, so most students live in the county outside of the city limits. Most of the district's students, about 76%, are economically disadvantaged.

Irvin is in his seventh year at the district and fifth at its helm. Having worked in education for 37 years, he said he knows all too well that not all boards and superintendents cooperate or have good working relationships. But that hasn't been the case with the Quinlan ISD board.

"They function as a team. And when I say they focus as a team, I mean they have the best interest of students and employees in mind," Irvin said when asked what impressed him most about the board.

Success based on teamwork

Stone agrees that the board is made up of a collaborative team of people who are focused and don't play politics.

"We believe in checking our egos at the door and handling the business for the children," Stone said. That means when the board discusses an issue, if it seems most trustees are leaning in one direction, everyone gets on board to have productive discussions and to come to a consensus.

**"They function as a team.
And when I say they focus as
a team, I mean they have the
best interest of students and
employees in mind."**

— Jeff Irvin, Quinlan ISD Superintendent

Growing up in Quinlan, Stone admits he wasn't the best student, but he understood the importance of a good education. Later, as an adult, he wanted the best not only for his children, who were students in the district at the time, but for all the students in the small community. Most of the other board members either attended Quinlan ISD schools or are parents to children who have, which has made them all extremely invested in the outcomes.

Since Irvin has been superintendent, the board has made it a priority to attend TASB's Summer Learning Institute in Fort Worth, with Quinlan ISD attending as a cohesive Team of Eight for the last five years.

"They want to be informed and strive to exceed compliance trainings," Irvin said. "They become educated on the issues and upcoming challenges. They want to be prepared so that once we make a decision, they are ready to go forward."

Over the years, Stone has taken his share of phone calls from folks in the district. "People may call, and I am honest with them. I tell them we [the board] are there for oversight; we are not micromanagement. We give them the chain of command and tell them this is how to handle your issues."

Dealing with differences

While the Quinlan ISD board usually comes to unanimous decisions, with most votes 7-0 either for or against whatever issue they are deliberating, there are times — though few and far between — when the board members aren't all on the same page. That is exactly what happened when the district was considering the move to a four-day school week.

"We had two members who were concerned it wasn't in the best interest of the students," Stone said. "They felt strongly enough, and I said, 'It's okay.'"

"I had the opportunity to work closely with the board for several years. They are exceptional individuals who are committed to maintaining a focus on what is best for Quinlan ISD students."

— Debra Crosby, vice president for Programs and Administration, Quinlan ISD Education Foundation

When the vote was taken, it was 5-2 in favor of the four-day school week.

"We've gone to the four-day week and teachers love it, administrators love it, and the parents and students love it," Stone said, adding that it took a lot of planning and



The Quinlan ISD school board poses for a photo during School Board Recognition. Todd Darter, Eric Kleiber, Dale Chreene, and Rusty Case, board vice president.

organization on the administration's part to get everything in place to make it happen.

Thanks to the four-day school week, the district has seen positive outcomes particularly in attracting and retaining teachers, which was one of the main goals for the switch.

Despite its small size, the Quinlan ISD board has worked to ensure students have an array of innovative courses and college and career readiness options, which the Honor Board selection committee recognized.

One of those innovative programs the board was instrumental in helping to launch was the Paris Junior College Dual Credit program, which allows students to earn between 12 and 60 credit hours toward their associate degree while still attending high school. Each year, 35 to 40 sophomores begin the program, and so far about 700 have participated, with the district expecting its 200th graduate this year.

Students earn the college credits at no cost to them, and some graduate with an associate degree a week before they graduate with their high school diploma, Irvin said.

The board seeks to provide students with the best educational opportunities available. They hope that by offering access to a variety of courses and programs, they are showing students that even though they live in what both Irvin and Stone describe as a low-income community, students feel they are getting an excellent education with access to opportunities, just as students from wealthier districts would.



Photos courtesy of Quinlan ISD

Recognition Month. From left: Kenny Stone, board president, Rick Grant, Billie Miller,

Debra Crosby, who served as the district's deputy superintendent and then as superintendent for five years prior to Irvin taking over, and who is now the vice president for Programs and Administration for the Quinlan ISD Education Foundation, said the board is "very deserving" of the TASA honor.

"I had the opportunity to work closely with the board for several years. They are exceptional individuals who are

committed to maintaining a focus on what is best for Quinlan ISD students," Crosby said. "Several board members are graduates of Quinlan ISD. They have a strong desire to 'give back' to the district and to the community."

Being recognized as an honor board has larger benefits for the district, Crosby added. "The board serves as the foundation for the district and represents what Quinlan ISD believes in," she said. "This creates the positive culture within the district, which attracts quality employees to want to become a part of QISD."

The Honor Board selection committee also praised Quinlan ISD for taking care of its staff. In the last few years, to improve teacher retention rates, the district has increased annual teacher salaries by as much as \$10,000. To address teacher shortages while also encouraging educational and career growth of their own students and residents, the district has instituted two innovative programs. The Quinlan ISD Grow Your Own program offers high school juniors and seniors a pathway to becoming educators, Irvin said.

Students who are part of the Grow Your Own program spend time in Quinlan elementary, intermediate, and middle school classrooms observing teachers, planning lessons, and providing student support in small group settings, all part of the education and training pathway of classes. By the end of the program, the high school students have had the opportunity to earn their instructional aide certification, Irvin said.

Another program designed to entice Quinlan ISD graduates to return to the district's classrooms is Panther PATH, which uses financial incentives to attract Quinlan ISD graduates. Those who complete their education and return to teach at Quinlan ISD are rewarded with an additional \$2,000 a year for five years. In addition, paraprofessionals that work for the district and become certified teachers are eligible for this stipend.

"We are trying to make a path for them to graduate and set them on the path to being certified one day," Stone said, adding that while superintendents may come and go and aren't expected to stay at the district forever, locals like him stick around. "It's a good feeling when people want to stay home and do something for their community." ★

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



A student in the Grow Your Own program greets classmates as they board one of the district's CTE busses used to transport program participants.

District Ratings

What does a 'D' mean?

by TASB Legal Services

Educators may be responsible for assigning letter grades to students, but many educators are understandably confused about what happens when the Texas Education Agency issues a “D” rating to a school district or campus.

In an A-F grading system, any grade of “C” or higher is traditionally considered to be passing, while an “F” is traditionally considered to be failing. However, the treatment of a “D” varies, and nowhere is this truer than in the Texas A-F accountability system. This article will explain the

consequences of a “D” rating issued to a district or one of its campuses.

For each letter grade, the corresponding rating labels are as follows:

- A Exemplary
- B Recognized
- C Acceptable
- D Needs Improvement
- F Unacceptable

Many programs use the academic performance rating to determine eligibility, including districts of innovation under Texas Education Code Chapter 12A.

When these programs refer to acceptable or unacceptable performance, TEC Section 39.0543 provides a methodology to determine whether the “D” rating will be treated as acceptable or unacceptable. This article will refer to this methodology as the general rule.

Under state law, interventions and sanctions are driven by consecutive years of unacceptable performance. A different statute, TEC Section 39A.118, provides a methodology to determine whether the “D” rating will increase the count of consecutive unacceptable performance ratings. This article will refer to this second methodology as the special rule for interventions and sanctions.

Because the methodologies differ, it is possible that a “D” rating will be treated as unacceptable under the general rule but will not increase the number of consecutive years of unacceptable performance ratings for purposes of interventions and sanctions.

The performance chain

When determining the impact of a “D” rating, the district will need to examine the ratings history for the district or campus. The starting point for this anal-



When determining the impact of a “D” rating, the district will need to examine the ratings history for the district or campus. The starting point for this analysis is the last school year the district or campus earned a rating of “C” or higher.

ysis is the last school year the district or campus earned a rating of “C” or higher. If the district or campus is new, then the analysis starts with the first rated year. This article will refer to this set of ratings as the performance chain.

The general rule

When the law refers to acceptable or unacceptable performance, Section 39.0543 governs the determination as to whether a “D” rating is treated as an acceptable or unacceptable. Regardless of whether the rating is treated as acceptable or unacceptable, the rating label for “D” will remain “Needs Improvement.”

Generally, a “D” rating will be considered to be an acceptable rating, except in two situations. The first situation is when the district or campus has previously received an “F” in the performance chain. Table 1 on the following page demonstrates this situation and its impact on a district’s eligibility to become a district of innovation (the district is eligible if its most recent performance rating is at least acceptable).

The second situation where a “D” rating is treated as an unacceptable rating is when the chain of unacceptable performance ratings includes two or more ratings of “D” as illustrated by Table 2 on the following page.

Special rules

The first or second “D” in a performance chain will not increase the count of consecutive years of unacceptable performance.

On the district level, this applies

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General Session Speakers



CHRIS BASHINELLI

Chris Bashinelli is celebrated diversity and inclusion speaker who 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 is a mother, educator, and co-founder of Safe and Sound Schools.



ANTHONY ROBLES

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

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Table 1

	Year 0	Year 1	Year 2
Performance rating	C or higher	F	D
Is the performance rating considered to be Acceptable or Unacceptable?	Acceptable	Unacceptable	Unacceptable "D" rating is considered to be unacceptable because there is a prior "F" rating in the performance chain. All future "D" ratings will be considered to be unacceptable until a "C" or higher is earned.
Eligibility to become a district of innovation	Eligible	Not Eligible (current unacceptable rating)	Not Eligible (current unacceptable rating)

Table 2

	Year 0	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Performance rating	C or higher	D	D	D
Is the performance rating considered to be Acceptable or Unacceptable?	Acceptable	Acceptable "D" rating is considered to be acceptable because there are no prior ratings of "F" or "D."	Acceptable "D" rating is considered to be acceptable because there are no prior "F" ratings and only one prior "D" rating.	Unacceptable "D" is considered to be unacceptable because there are two or more prior "D" ratings. All subsequent "D" ratings will be considered to be unacceptable until a "C" or higher is earned.
Eligibility to become a district of innovation	Eligible	Eligible	Eligible	Not Eligible. The most recent rating must be at least acceptable.

Table 3

	Year 0	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7
Performance rating	C	F	D	F	F	F	D	D
Number of consecutive school years of unacceptable ratings under 39A.118	0	1	1 The first or second "D" in the chain does not increase the count.	2	3	4	4 The first or second "D" in the chain does not increase the count.	5 The intervention is no longer paused because this is the third "D" in the performance chain.
Campus Intervention				Turnaround Plan				Campus Closure/Board of Managers

The first or second “D” in a performance chain will not increase the count of consecutive years of unacceptable performance. On the district level, this applies to changes in accreditation and annexation.

to changes in accreditation and annexation. On the campus level, this applies to the campus turnaround plan and the associated commissioner’s approval or non-approval of the turnaround plan at year two, and campus closure or assignment of a board of managers at year five.

Table 3 illustrates how the pause would impact campus interventions and sanctions.

In this example, each “D” would be

treated as unacceptable under the general rule due to the “F” in year one, but the count of consecutive years of unacceptable ratings is not increased by the first or second “D” rating.

TEA is required to notify school districts each year about the number of consecutive years of unacceptable ratings for a school district and each of its campuses. School officials should carefully review this information because any challenge to the rating or the consecutive year count must be included in the accountability appeal.★

This article is provided for educational purposes only 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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Setting Priorities

Legislative activity increases in both chambers

by Dax González

I'd like to start off this month's column by thanking the more than 300 school trustees and administrators who traveled to Austin to attend the TASA/TASB Legislative Conference on Feb. 21. There was so much dedication and energy in the room, and the invited legislators who spoke at the conference could feel it. It was also heartening to see so many school leaders walking the halls of the Capitol afterwards. Y'all are the best! You can read more about the conference on page 32.

Now, on to the news...

The Texas legislative session is picking up steam and state leaders have identified their priorities for the session. Expect the pace to pick up even more as House and Senate committees get through their organizational hearings and begin taking testimony on bills.

House Speaker Dade Phelan (R-Beaumont) has announced his committee assignments for this session, allowing House members to start hearing bills and getting them moving along in the process.

The House Public Education Committee has a new chair, Rep. Brad Buckley (R-Salado). He did serve on the committee last session and is a former trustee with Killeen ISD. Houston Democrat and former educator Alma Allen is the vice chair.

Across the Capitol rotunda, Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick has announced his priority bills for the session. The authors and text of those bills were not available for my column deadline, but of interest to school board members are the following bills:

- Senate Bill 3: Would increase the homestead exemption to \$70,000

- Senate Bill 4: Would add additional property tax relief
- Senate Bill 5: Would increase the business personal property tax exemption
- Senate Bill 8: Would empower parental rights, including school choice
- Senate Bill 9: Would empower teacher rights, provide teacher pay raise
- Senate Bill 10: Would add 13th checks for retired teachers
- Senate Bill 11: Would address school safety

A story on his priority bills can be found at ltgov.texas.gov in the News section.

Governor's priorities

South on Interstate 35, Gov. Greg Abbott unveiled his priorities as legislative emergency items during his State of the State address, which he delivered from a business in San Marcos. Regarding education, Abbott touted education savings accounts as key to "achieving education freedom." He also noted that the state must reform its curriculum to "get kids back to the basics of learning" and must empower parents through a parental bill of rights.

"Parents also deserve education freedom. Without it, some parents are hindered in helping their child succeed," Abbott said. "The way to do that is with school choice through state-funded education savings accounts. We've seen them work in other states — and here in Texas.

"To be clear, under this school choice program, all public schools will be fully funded for every student," Abbott added.

His seven emergency items included education freedom, school safety, cutting property taxes, ending COVID restrictions, ending revolving-door bail, secur-



From left: Dax González, division director of TASA Governmental Relations, moderates a panel at the TASA/TASB Legislative Conference that included Sen. Royce West, D-Dallas, and Reps. Gina Hinojosa, D-Austin, and Hugh Shine, R-Belton.

Photo by TASA Media Services

Regarding education, Gov. Greg Abbott touted education savings accounts as key to “achieving education freedom.” He also noted that the state must reform its curriculum to “get kids back to the basics of learning” and must empower parents through a parental bill of rights.

ing the border, and fighting the fentanyl crisis. By declaring these issues emergencies, the Legislature may immediately consider and pass bills addressing these issues, foregoing established prohibitions on actions on legislation before certain dates.

Education board meets

And finally, the newest iteration of the Texas State Board of Education met last month to conduct its first meeting with six new members joining nine returning members. The meeting featured a lot of organizational actions, such as adopting the board’s operating rules, making committee assignments, and

electing officers.

The board chair is appointed by the governor, and Keven Ellis (R-Lufkin) continues to serve in that capacity. Board members elected Pam Little (R-Fairview) as vice chair and Pat Hardy (R-Fort Worth) as secretary.

The SBOE has three standing committees that provide recommendations to the full board on various issues. The committee makeup for this year will be:

Committee on Instruction:

Evelyn Brooks (R-Frisco), Aicha Davis (D-Dallas), Pam Little (R-Fairview), Melissa Ortega (D-El Paso), and Audrey Young (R-Trinity)

Committee on School Finance/
Permanent School Fund: Ellis, Hardy, Aaron Kinsey (R-Midland), Tom Maynard (R-Florence), and Marisa Perez-Diaz (D-San Antonio)

Committee on School Initiatives: Rebecca Bell-Metereau (D-San Marcos), Staci Childs (D-Houston), LJ Francis (R-Corpus Christi), Will Hickman (R-Houston), and Julie Pickren (R-Pearland)

The SBOE also revisited its recommendations to the 88th Legislature. Notably, the board removed the recommendation opposing school vouchers or any mechanism that reduced funding for public schools.

Well, that’s it for this issue. Tune into the *TASB Legislative Report* for important news coming out of the Capitol by going to tasb.org, clicking on the Legislative tab, then hitting the Sign up link under Legislative Report.★

Dax González is division director of TASB Governmental Relations.



A festive poster for the SHARS Conference. The background is dark blue with gold stars, red and blue swirls, and balloons. A large, glowing red-outlined sign with a yellow border contains the text "SHARS CONFERENCE" in white, bold, serif font. To the right of the sign, the text "SIGN UP TODAY!" is written in white, bold, sans-serif font, followed by "COME ONE, COME ALL!" and "MAY 4-5, 2023" in the same style. At the bottom left is the TASB logo (a blue square with a white star and the letters "TASB" below it) and the text "Student Solutions". At the bottom right is the URL "bit.ly/SHARS-2023". The bottom of the poster features a row of red dots and a stylized illustration of a person in a gold dress jumping or dancing.

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Funding Special Ed

Panel proposes changes for certain services

by Karlyn Keller

With the Legislature in session, it is important to stay engaged in discussions and decisions impacting the children we serve.

Chief among these is the need to take a critical look at how schools are funded for serving students with disabilities. To address this issue, the Texas Commission on Special Education Funding was created by House Bill 1525 during the last legislative session. The commission issued a series of recommendations that lawmakers are expected to consider this session.

The state's special education allocation formula in Chapter 48 of the Texas Education Code has not substantially changed in decades. More money is being spent to serve the total number of students identified for special education due to significant enrollment increases, not because of an increase in additional funding to support each student served. The needs and intensity of services continue to ramp up while funding has remained the same.

Local educational agencies are dependent on state funding to satisfy the mandate of delivering a free and appropriate public education to each student with a disability under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. This funding is based solely on student attendance and is calculated based on the percent of time in the instructional day that students in special education are placed in classes with general education students, with differing weights for students in settings such as the hospital, homebound, or other specialized needs.

The current structure focuses on where a student receives instruction rather than the level of instruction they

receive. Few to no dollars are allocated for additional services such as mental health needs, counseling, and physical and occupational therapy. Nor is funding provided for the assessment and evaluation of students or those identified with a need for Section 504 support.

As an educator for more than 30 years, with the majority of that time in special education, I've witnessed the impact the current funding methodology has had on schools. I've had to ask teachers and paraprofessionals to take on more responsibilities because I couldn't afford to hire another teacher. Once I didn't have the money to buy the best stander for a student, so I had to repair equipment

that was decades old to meet their special needs. Those are just two examples of budgetary challenges SPED teachers still face across the state.

In all, the special education commission issued 14 recommendations and devised three formula-based and 11 non-formula-based funding recommendations.

The commission's recommendations include allocating more funding to schools per student based on their specific needs, increasing funds to help cover the additional cost of transportation and assessments, paying for educators to become certified in special education, and covering portions of their salaries.

Formula-based funding recommendations

1. Transition to a Service Intensity Based Formula System
2. Provide a cost offset for full and individual initial evaluations
3. Increase the per-mile reimbursement rate for special education transportation

Non-formula-based funding recommendations

4. Provide funds to cover the retire/rehire penalty for special education staff as a commitment to



- recruit and retain qualified staff
5. Provide funding for special education teacher certification exam fees for the first attempt
6. Appropriate funds to offer salary stipends for special education teachers and paraprofessionals
7. Increase local educator capacity by establishing targeted grant programs similar to TEA's Grow Your Own Program
8. Continue and provide increased funding to the SSES program
9. Increase the College, Career, and Military Readiness (CCMR) Outcomes Bonus for students served by special education
10. Provide a grant program for nonprofit agencies dedicated to

working with students served by special education in public schools

11. Maintain at least the current funding levels for dyslexia and autism grants
12. Increase regulatory authority of TEA regarding nonpublic day and residential facilities to improve LEA capacity and ensure parents have accurate information regarding the State Supported Living Centers (SSLCs) as an option for students receiving significant special education services
13. Increase capacity and available options of nonpublic day programs across Texas

14. Consider Educational Savings Accounts

These are only recommendations, and it is up to the Legislature to decide whether to adopt any of them. As the legislative session continues, it is essential that each of us speaks up about the funding challenges faced by our schools in serving the neediest of our students. Without the context of how current funding affects the students in your district, those who approve this funding may not realize how your students are impacted.★

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

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Legislative Lessons

LTASB's Austin trip includes Capitol tour

by Polly Montgomery

LEADERSHIP TASB

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

Educational trips to the Capitol and the Texas School for the Deaf were highlights of the third session for the Leadership TASB Class of 2023. We also spent valuable time collaborating on projects, an important part of our leadership journey.

On the first day of the Feb. 16-18 trip to Austin, we visited the Texas School for the Deaf, which serves special education children and young adults ages 3-22 who are deaf or hearing impaired. Students can be served through the day school or within the campus housing program, and

many students have additional related services and support.

I did some of my student teaching at the Texas School for the Deaf when I was at The University of Texas at Austin. Years later, I lost some of my hearing due to an illness, so the trip to the school was a memorable full-circle experience for me.

This unique school provides a full-scope school program with aligned curriculum, assessments, career pathways, and graduation requirements equal to those in Texas public schools.

On our campus tour, we got to see how the youngest learners socialize and actively participate in ASL conversations with their peers. We also visited the historical museum, which dates back to 1856.

During our delicious, well-balanced lunch, prepared and served by culinary arts students, a number of juniors and seniors met with us. They excitedly talked about their experiences at the school, the skills they have learned, and their future plans. They all said the school's culture of

embracing learning, growth, and a sense of belonging has made a huge difference for them. It was truly moving to realize what a meaningful impact the school has made in the lives of so many deaf students in Texas.

The second half of the day involved an in-depth overview of the Texas legislative process presented by Robert Long III, TASB's division director of Board Development Services. We ended the day watching Gov. Greg Abbott's State of the State address and listening to a debriefing about the education issues he discussed.

The second day began with an informative trip to Austin ISD's Ann Richards School for Young Women Leaders. We then went to the Capitol, where we toured the "Pink Dome," and participated in a fun scavenger hunt with legislators' staff members. Many trustees also were able to connect with their hometown state lawmakers and talk to them about their concerns and their districts' needs.



Robert Long III, TASB's division director of Board Development Services, gives an overview of the Texas legislative process to Leadership TASB class members.

Photos by TASB Media Services



Leadership TASB class members walk to the Capitol for a tour.



View of the Texas Capitol's dome ceiling.

Following a tour of the Capitol, we gathered for a session with Christy Rome with the Texas School Coalition regarding recapture funding in Texas.

The final day provided time for us to work on our projects. We all will be presenting a group project in June at the Summer Leadership Institute in Fort Worth that will provide a deep dive and focus on a specific area of need for local Texas school districts. Since we are spread out across the state, this time together is cherished.

We have bonded as a group, and the more we meet, the more we find that we share many similarities. The love, commitment, and passion for Texas public education and our students are alive and well within the LTASB Class of 2023!★

Polly Montgomery is an Allen ISD board member and a member of the Leadership TASB Class of 2023.



Leadership TASB class members tour a classroom at the Texas School for the Deaf.



The Leadership TASB Class of 2023 poses at the Texas School for the Deaf.



From left: Leadership TASB class members Niki Rhodes, a Friendswood ISD trustee, Megan Parsons, a Liberty Hill ISD trustee, and Cassandra Hatfield, a trustee at Carrollton-Farmers Branch ISD, listen to a session at the Texas School for the Deaf.

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Governance Camp's Student Voice Highlights Power of Public Education

Governance (Gov) Camp brought hundreds of school trustees from across Texas to Galveston on March 1-4 for an event packed with opportunities to learn from experts and peers, as well as gain insight into the student experience with a day of "Student Voice" panels, exhibits, and sessions.

"We've got to be inventive to survive as a small district," said Michael Derry, Utopia ISD superintendent, who brought his entire board from their community west of San Antonio to Gov Camp. "Two of my board members are forfeiting their salary to be here this week. That's how important it was to us."

Gov Camp kicked off with a school safety session. Experts from TASB and districts throughout the state shared ideas on how to manage the new Texas Education Agency safety standards and create a culture of safety on campuses. "I just want to get home safe," said panelist Ashton Lux, a Tomball ISD senior, expressing a sentiment shared by district leaders, parents, and students.

Bringing trustees together

Longtime Galveston ISD Trustee David O'Neal, who has served on the board since 1995, was joined at Gov Camp by many who are just starting their service to public education. "I have learned so much from talking to other board members," said Cornelius Hambrick, who at 23 is starting his second term as a trustee for LaPoynor ISD in East Texas.

"The conversations you have at the table are so valuable," TASB's Advocate of the Year and Bullard ISD Trustee Stephanie Luper said during the "Lunch and Advocacy Story" session.

Gov Camp attendees were able to choose from nearly 60 breakout sessions that focused on innovative programs, governance, and leadership, starting with a pre-conference gathering and extending through the final day of training. By the end of the conference, trustees had the opportunity to earn up to 19.5 hours of continuing education credit, all with the goal of better serving Texas public school students.

"I feel like this conference is a little more intimate and you really get to talk to people," said Lisa Meysembourg, superintendent of Woodville ISD in East Texas.

Strong student voices

Part of what makes Gov Camp a special event is the full day of presentations, demonstrations, and insights from dozens of Texas students who shared their experiences both in and out of the classroom on March 3. The "Student Voice Scholarship Panel" was moderated by Paula Maddox Roalson from the law firm and event sponsor Walsh Gallegos Treviño Kyle and Robinson. She declared the students on the panel, "Such a testament to public education."

The panel discussion included the students' future plans, mental health issues, COVID impacts, school safety, and even school meals. They discussed their favorite parts of high school and the programs that had the biggest impact on them. "The arts are so important. Being in theater has taught me how to speak in public and know myself on a deeper level," said Wyatt

Grubbs, a senior at Sunnyvale ISD in Dallas County.

Students led sessions on everything from starting an on-campus preschool to suicide prevention. Trustees walked away inspired not only by innovative programs, but also the young people who work hard to make them successful.

Tami Keeling, Victoria ISD trustee and a member of TASB's Board of Directors, was so proud of the students from her district who presented on participatory budgeting. "They did an amazing job and showed how giving students a voice can change a campus," she said.

The two keynote speakers brought unique experiences and perspectives to the opening and closing sessions. Holly Hoffman drew from her time on the reality television show *Survivor* to assure board members that doing hard things is worthwhile. Educator and motivational speaker Adolph Brown gave an entertaining and thought-provoking session on the stressors and past grievances people carry around with them. "Today's young people are carrying a lot of stuff."

Brown also reminded board members that in these divisive times, "If they are talking behind your back that means you are leading. Keep leading."★





Preceding page, top: The Student Voice Scholarship Panel showcases exceptional seniors from Texas public schools. From left: Lynlee Dimitry, Kirbyville CISD; Brady Burlison, Thrall ISD; Paula Maddox Roalson, moderator; Wyatt Grubbs, Sunnyvale ISD; Nitya Kodali, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD; Joel Rowlett, DeSoto ISD.

Bottom: Educational speaker Adolph Brown entertains and inspires trustees in the closing session.

This page, top left and right: Students create name tags and grab stickers from the name badge station to start their Gov Camp experience.

Middle row, left: Dickinson ISD students demonstrate their "Safe and Seen" platform to promote positive mental health.

Right: Aransas County ISD staff members discuss their innovative maritime program in a session.

From left: Ted Beard, TASB's immediate past president and a Longview ISD trustee, dances with keynote speaker Holly Hoffman at the beginning of her session.

Right: DeSoto ISD senior Joel Rowlett laughs during the closing session with educational speaker Adolph Brown.

Photos by TASB Media Services



School Board Members, Administrators Gather for TASA/TASB Legislative Conference

by TASB staff

More than 300 school board members and other district leaders from across the state gathered in Austin to learn about pressing legislation and advocate on behalf of public education at a conference hosted by TASB and the Texas Association of School Administrators.

The day-long conference, held Feb. 21 at the Sheraton Austin at the Capitol, featured lawmakers and other policy officials who discussed a range of legislative issues during several sessions. Afterward, conferees went to the Capitol to visit with legislators and their staff members to discuss issues important to public schools in Texas.

"They did a really good job of explaining the issues, telling us what we can do, how we can be involved, how to talk to legislators," said Paola Gonzalez Fusilier, a Pasadena ISD board member. "I really like how they have broken down the information" into separate sessions.

It was the first TASA/TASB Legislative Conference for Fusilier and fellow Pasadena ISD board members Crystal Davila and Casey D. Phelan, who were all elected to their board in 2021. The three trustees, who sat together at the conference, said they learned a lot and were excited about visiting with several lawmakers at the Capitol. Fusilier also is a Legislative Advisory Council representative on the TASB Legislative Committee.

Davila said the first half of the day definitely prepared them to be champions for public education in their talks with lawmakers, even those who may not agree with them on every issue.

Top education issues

The morning sessions included a panel featuring Senate Education Chair Brandon Creighton, R-Conroe, and House Public Education Chair Brad Buckley, R-Salado, who both praised attendees for their hard work and dedication and said that they would be looking to the group for their expertise on public education issues.



Photos by TASB Media Services

Legislative conference attendees listen to a session featuring House Public Education Chair Brad Buckley, R-Salado, and Senate Education Chair Brandon Creighton, R-Conroe.



Attendees gather before the start of the TASA/TASB Legislative Conference at the Sheraton Austin at the Capitol.

The two chairmen discussed the state's record \$32.7 billion surplus and how it presents opportunities for change in many areas, including public education. They said top education issues this session include an across-the-board teacher pay raise, school safety, funding, teacher rights, parental rights, and school choice. Property tax reductions also will be a top issue for lawmakers, though the details have yet to be



From left: House Public Education Chair Brad Buckley, R-Salado, and Senate Education Chair Brandon Creighton, R-Conroe, discuss public education issues the Texas Legislature will debate during a session of the day-long TASA/TASB Legislature Conference.

determined.

"I think we'll put between \$600 million and a billion dollars in school safety initiatives and maybe another safety allotment like we did last time around," Creighton noted.

Buckley, who once served as a school board member for Killeen ISD, said he also will be working on making sure that "high-quality instruction materials are available for all of our schools."

In addition, Buckley said he has been thinking a lot about the challenges districts have in hiring and retaining teachers. "What are we going to do to make it cool to be a teacher again? What are we going [to do] to drive the best and brightest to the classroom?"

Buckley said another priority for him is revising House Bill 4545, which has created significant staffing concerns for various districts. The bill, passed in the previous session in response to student learning challenges prompted by the pandemic, included strict requirements related to tutoring students who struggled with state exams. Both chairmen said flexibility in the bill was needed.

There have been bills filed about changing the school funding methodology from using average daily attendance to enrollment-based funding. Creighton said such a change will be up to the "will of the Legislature."

Regarding the controversial issues of school choice, or specifically vouchers, the two chairmen said there will be various proposals discussed. But neither predicted any specific outcome.

"I think we'll have a very balanced consideration of these [different proposals], and again, we will be listening to you and others on preferences for how we proceed," Creighton said.

Buckley noted that there are many different opinions on the school choice issue in the Texas House.

"I believe we're a deliberative body. I believe we need to have all of the discussions that we can have" on the issue, he said, adding that he has constituents on both sides of the controversial issue.

Discussions with legislators

As attendees prepared for the afternoon discussion with legislators, Buckley urged them to have frank conversations

about topics of importance to them.

"Get into the details about what will help your school district," Buckley told the group. "Show them the diversity and differences and unique nature of what you do. And do not ever leave without telling a legislator that good story."

Texas Comptroller Glenn Hegar also spoke to the group, discussing the Texas economy, the record budget surplus, and other financial issues. He also thanked the group for "what you do every day."

Another panel consisted of Sen. Royce West, D-Dallas, and Reps. Gina Hinojosa, D-Austin, and Hugh Shine, R-Belton, who all expressed support for several issues important to public education. Hinojosa voiced strong opposition to school vouchers.

West urged attendees to make their voices heard at the Capitol, but also back in their own communities. "If you want to make an impact, you've got to make it an issue back home," he said.

Shine also suggested that attendees set up weekly conference calls with their legislators as a way to provide information and guidance on legislation affecting public education.

In closing the educational part of the conference, Dax González, division director of TASB Governmental Relations, thanked the group for making the trip to Austin and specifically to the Capitol to advocate on behalf of public schools.

"Make contact. Make it personal. Make it count," González said, urging attendees to continue their outreach to lawmakers throughout the legislative session. "Thank you all for taking the time to be here."★



TSPRA Recognizes TASB at Annual Ceremony with 21 Awards

TASB was recognized by the Texas School Public Relations Association with 21 Star Awards for excellence in communications during the 2021-22 school year, including four Best of Category awards.

The awards were presented Feb. 23 during the 2023 TSPRA Annual Conference Star Awards Banquet in Fort Worth. Every year, TSPRA recognizes exceptional work in print, electronic, and visual communications from school districts and related entities across the state.

Judges evaluated more than 1,600 submissions and determined the winners based on criteria set by TSPRA. School districts were judged in three separate categories: fewer than 15,000 students, 15,000 to 40,000 students, and more than 40,000 students. As an association, TASB competes in the large district category.

"These awards reflect TASB's commitment to public education, excellent school board governance, and our mission to serve our members with stories, training, and services that support the work of educating students in Texas," said TASB Executive Director Dan Troxell. "We're grateful to our Board of Directors for their support and for our members who trust us to share their success stories — whether in *Texas Lone Star* magazine, on our website, at training events, or on social media. We couldn't do this work without them."

TSPRA is a nonprofit, professional organization dedicated to promoting public schools through effective communications. TSPRA, an award-winning chapter of the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA), was chartered in 1962 and incorporated in 1977. With more than 1,000 members, TSPRA is made up primarily of public information and communications professionals who serve the public school districts and education organizations of Texas. For more information on TSPRA, visit their website at [TSPRA.org](https://www.tspira.org).

Below is a list of TASB's winning entries and their categories.

Best of Category:

- **Brochure**
The Public Education Dollar at Work

- **Social Media Campaign**
Public Ed Offers School Choice
- **Handbook/Manual**
A Toolkit for Divisive Times
- **Published News Release or Feature**
Portrait of a Public Ed Advocate

Gold Star:

- **Brochure**
The Public Education Dollar at Work
- **Program**
Governance Camp
Summer Leadership Institute
- **Annual Report**
2021 Annual Report
- **Handbook/Manual**
A Toolkit for Divisive Times
- **Magazine**
Texas Lone Star Magazine — Jan/Feb 2022
- **Writing**
Taking Time to Acclimate and Welcome New Board Members

- **Published News Release or Feature**
One District's Game-changing Name
Portrait of a Public Ed Advocate
Vegging Out
- **Video-Promotional**
BoardBook
- **Social Media Campaign**
Public Ed Offers School Choice
School Board Recognition Month — 2022

Silver Star:

- **Writing**
Plainview ISD Leader Wins 2021 Superintendent of the Year Award
- **Published News Release or Feature**
Catching Up
- **Marketing Campaign**
BuyBoard Search Campaign

Bronze Star:

- **Magazine**
Texas Lone Star Magazine — June 2022★

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Session Applications for txEDCON23 Open April 1

April is the month for application submissions for those who would like to present at the txEDCON23 TASA | TASB Convention, which is scheduled for Sept. 29–Oct. 1 in Dallas.

Potential presenters must use the Session Selector at tasa.tasb.org/program/session-selector to submit applications. Applicants will receive notification of session decisions and next steps by mid-June.

TASB's Board of Directors provided input on topics they would like to see covered at Convention. The following were the most popular topics:

- Teacher Recruitment and Retention
- Student Academic Performance
- State and Local Accountability Plans
- Marketing and Messaging of Public Schools
- Practices for Engaging Students, Parents, and Other Community Members
- District Culture

Attendees provide input in May

In early May, board members, superintendents, and administrators will be invited to review submitted applications and share their feedback on which topics are of interest this year. Feedback must be offered through Session Selector.

Key dates

- April 1–May 1: Session Selector is open for presenter submissions.
- May 8–May 19: Voting on session topics is open.

Submission requirements

- Applications are accepted online only.
- Sessions are one hour in length.
- Session formats include open discussion, panel, or presentation.
- Sales presentations will not be accepted.
- No more than three applications per school district or organization will be eligible for consideration.
- All sessions regarding legal topics must include at least one licensed attorney in the presenting group; preference will be given to presenters who are members of the Texas

Council of School Attorneys.

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

Session categories

- Vision and Goals
- Systems and Processes
- Progress and Accountability
- Advocacy and Engagement
- Synergy and Teamwork

Final selection process

After attendees vote on sessions, TASA | TASB will evaluate the proposals based on various criteria, including:

- Presenter knowledge in the topic area
- How likely conference participants will attend or recommend someone attend the session

Note: Submission of an application does not guarantee selection. Notification of acceptance or rejection of applications will be emailed by mid-June.

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



Attendees at the registration booth at the txEDCON22 TASA | TASB Convention.



Attendees at a breakout session at the txEDCON22 TASA | TASB Convention in San Antonio.

Photos by TASB Media Services

Looking for resources to help your board focus on what really matters?

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- *Getting Started as a New Board Member*

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Bulletin Board

Nominations Open for School Board and Texas Teacher of the Year Awards

Nominations are open for two special awards from the Texas Association of School Administrators: The School Board Honor Awards and Texas Teacher of the Year.

School Board Honor Awards

Beginning April 3, eligible Texas school superintendents may nominate their boards of trustees to their regional education service center. The deadline for submissions is May 30.

Each ESC has until June 26 to submit a nominee to TASA, which selects up to five Honor Boards. The winner is announced in October at the TASA | TASB Convention in Dallas.

For more information, visit tasanet.org/awards/school-board-awards/.

Texas Teacher of the Year

Texas school districts and charter school operators conduct their own selection process to choose District Elementary and Secondary Teachers of the Year. Those selected are eligible to advance to the regional/state levels. To do so, they must complete an online application by June 1.

The regional selection process is conducted in June-July by the 20 ESCs, with each naming a Regional Elementary and Secondary Teacher of the Year.

The regional selections are considered in a process conducted by TASA. Six finalists are selected, three elementary and three secondary. Finalists are interviewed in September-October by a panel that selects the Texas Elementary and Texas Secondary Teachers of the Year.

For more information, visit tasanet.org/awards/texas-teacher-of-the-year/.

Teacher Task Force Issues Recommendations

The state's Teacher Vacancy Task Force has released its final report on staffing challenges, focusing recommendations on compensation, working conditions, and training and support.

The 46-member task force, appointed by Gov. Greg Abbott, released its report in late February. Recommendations include:

- Funding an increase to overall teacher salaries through an increase to the basic allotment, an increase in the minimum salary schedule, and expansion of strategic compensation systems
- Expanding high-quality Grow Your Own pathways, teacher apprenticeships, and full-year paid teacher residencies
- Funding for and increasing the scale of the Mentor Program Allotment
- Funding, professional learning, and support for teachers to access and use High-Quality Instructional Materials
- Conducting teacher time studies and providing technical assistance for districts to develop strategic staffing and scheduling models that respect teacher time

Find out more about the recommendations by going to gov.texas.gov, clicking on the News tab, and going to: Governor Abbott, TEA Release Teacher Vacancy Recommendations.

Superintendent of the Year Award Nominations Due in April



April 21 is the deadline for applications for TASB's Superintendent of the Year award to be submitted to regional education service centers.

Presented annually since 1984, the SOTY award spotlights outstanding district leaders. The selection process begins with regional interviews, conducted by each ESC in late spring. A regional winner is named in every ESC region where a superintendent is nominated.

The winner is announced each fall at TASA | TASB Convention. For more information, visit tasb.org/soty.

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

- ▶ **Venus ISD:** Deadline, TBA
- ▶ **McGregor ISD:** Deadline, TBA

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





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session SELECTOR

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Session Selector is open
for session proposals to
be submitted.

MAY 8-19

Session Selector is open
for attendee feedback.

RESOURCES

Want to write session titles
and descriptions that pack
rooms? Ready to submit
your session proposal?

Visit tasa.tasb.org for details.

Top requested topics for txEDCON23 include:

- Teacher Recruitment and Retention
- State and Local Accountability Plans
- Marketing and Messaging of Public Schools
- Practices for Engaging Students, Parents, and Other Community Members
- District Culture
- Student Academic Performance