A YEAR IN REVIEW

Texas Association of School Boards

A special edition of Texas Lone Star Magazine

Annual Report

Volume 39 Number 10

December 2021
The Texas Association of School Boards promotes educational excellence for Texas schoolchildren through advocacy, visionary leadership, and high-quality services to school districts.
Success for Local Education Leaders Means Tuning in—and Tuning Out

by Roger White

I t’s easy to say “ignore the noise,” isn’t it? But it’s not prac-
tical. One can’t simply dismiss the divisive and confusing
cacophony, the politically motivated rhetoric, the partisan
ever rising and often mean-spirited clamor of today’s cultural tug
of war. It’s all around us, in just about every aspect of life. Public
education isn’t immune. In fact, it has become a lightning rod
for no pay. School board members — citizens who volunteer their
precious time and talent poured out to the youth of our state by the most
dedicated people I’ve known.

In my life, I’ve seen very few folks who are willing to give
their time, who are willing to subject themselves to the rigors
and trials of an often thankless task, who are willing to make
a meaningful mark on the future — for no pay. School board
membership is the very definition of selfless service.

I am putting down my editor’s pen with this edition.
Though I’m retiring from TASB, I will remain a follower and
fan of Texas school board members and the local education
leaders. In my last few months at TASB, I’ve had the
realization that I will forever be a part of the TASB
community. My time was not a waste.

School board members — citizens who volunteer their
precious time and talent to make a difference in the education
of their communities’ children — have even been subject to
undue criticism, rancorous board meetings, and conflicting
directives from state leadership. Trustees in every school
district across the state are to be commended for their
continued service in these days of unprecedented upheaval
and challenge.

A Powerful Refrain
The simple, yet powerful refrain for education leadership
teams in every community is to tune in — and tune out. Tune
in to the task at hand — the very reason you ran for your local
board — to provide the best education possible for the chil-
dren of your districts. Tune out the rhetoric, the unproductive
banter that has resulted from today’s political climate.

The hope remains that we will eventually move on from
these days of uncompromising division and forge a more
united, open-minded way forward.

The hope remains that those determined to serve the
education needs of their communities’ children will be rec-
ognized for the difference they make and will be able to focus
their entire energies on their vital duty, without the distrac-
tion these times have wrought.

Stay the Course
For more than 30 years, I have been proud to be
associated with the school board members of Texas. As
managing editor of Texas Lone Star magazine, I’ve had the
great fortune of witnessing three decades of selfless service
and talent poured out to the youth of our state by the most
dedicated people I’ve known.

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Thank you for allowing me to chronicle your service
through the years. It has been an honor and a privilege.

Roger White recently retired as managing editor of
Texas Lone Star.

Stay the Course: Roger White

“Under Roger’s leadership, TASB’s Texas Lone Star magazine grew in readership, style, and sophistication. My monthly ‘President’ articles were always improved through his keen editor’s eye and succinct wordsmithing. We shall miss you and your talents greatly, Mr. White.”

— Jim Rice, TASB President 2020-21

“Roger took what I wrote and made my words speak to everyone! Though I am a plainspoken person, he edited what I wrote and made it send a clear message. He was so patient, funny, and encouraging! It was an honor to work with him. God bless you, Roger! May you never be at a loss for words.”

— Lee Lentz-Edwards, TASB President 2019-20

“Roger was an incredible asset during my year as TASB president. He helped me shape my monthly column in the Texas Lone Star, enabling me to communicate more effectively on key legislative issues during the pivotal 86th Legislative Session. Under his leadership, the Texas Lone Star has become a must-read for any advocacy-minded, Texas school board trustee.”

— James de Garavilla, TASB President 2018-19

“Roger, wishing you the very best in the next chapter of your life’s publication. Your skill set and writing abilities are phenomenal, and you exhibited it all through patience and under-
standing. Thank you for all you have done to support TASB presidents in their efforts to share thoughts and ideas with our colleagues. The safety net you provided was greatly appreciated. You were a joy to work with!”

— Teresa Flores, TASB President 2017-18

“I enjoyed working with Roger and always appreciated his help and at the same time, keeping my intent, personality, and flavor on each article. He is a smart, kind, and class-act individual who has been an asset to TASB and public education in Texas. I wish him a happy, healthy, and prosperous retirement and consider Roger a lifelong friend. My best to all at TASB.”

— Bret Begert, TASB President 2015-16

“Roger is a gifted, highly insightful writer. He has an uncanny ability to see to the truth of any matter and write eloquently about it. Roger frequently made me look much smarter than I really am by borrowing some of his
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STAYING IN THE FIGHT FOR OUR STUDENTS

by Ted Beard

Almost 30 years in the US Army supplied me with a surplus of life experience. As I reflect on my work as a school board trustee, I’m reminded of the many lessons learned during my time on the post boxing team while stationed at Fort Hood, Texas, which led to competing at the Golden Gloves level.

In fact, boxing is an apt metaphor for school board service. For me, the relevance of boxing comes not from the arguments or debates but from the training and discipline required to stay in the fight.

Looking back, I can remember how thrilled I was when asked to join the team. I had wanted to box when growing up in Detroit, but my parents were less enthusiastic.

Of course, when I started boxing, I had a lot to learn. The training was challenging, especially for someone with a lanky build. I soon learned that success in boxing was not about muscling through. It called for mental and physical strength and the willingness to get up and keep going, even against difficult odds.

My first match was a three-minute, three-round bout. I remember entering the ring and sizing up my opponent, who was in my weight class but looked bigger and more muscular. When the bell rang, I came out doing what I had learned in my months of training — moving laterally around the ring, using my reach and jab to score points and stay on my feet.

At the end of the first round, I told my coach that the whole thing seemed pretty easy. In round two, I followed the same strategy and my complacency cost me. My opponent connected with a punch that sent me to the canvas. The referee counted. I got up, composed myself, and completed the round. I finished the fight but lost the match. The experience was humbling but served to push me back into the gym to keep training and, after much hard work, winning.

That formula applies to school board service. We train, we learn, we work hard. Winning means we’re advancing the fight for improved student opportunities and outcomes, working with our leadership teams (fellow board members and superintendents) and using all the resources we have.

TASB offers many ways to help and coach, from Summer Leadership Institute to Governance Camp and the annual TASA | TASB Convention. Every week I see webinar opportunities on the TASB website, and I remember that it’s important to keep training and learning because complacency is costly.

When I was boxing for the Army, the stakes were never high — just my pride and ego. Today, as school board members, we fight for something more important — the future of our students, who deserve the opportunity for success.

When I feel tired, like I want to throw in the towel, I think about what I learned while training for the boxing ring. It’s about having the strength and discipline to keep going, even when the odds seem insurmountable. It’s about staying in the fight for our students, so they can achieve their dreams.

Naturally, we’ll have spirited and sometimes combative debates about education policy, but it’s important to remember that the only way to win this fight is with words and reason. It seems appropriate, after all this talk about fighting, to conclude with the words of Martin Luther King Jr., who always advocated for a nonviolent response, even when threatened with harm: “I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality.”

Ted Beard, a Longview ISD trustee, is 2021-22 president of TASB.
A Year in Review

After unprecedented challenges created by COVID-19 in 2020, the year 2021 presented not only continuing issues from the ongoing pandemic but also a record-breaking winter storm, four legislative sessions, and growing teacher turnover. Texas school leaders and staff have had to work even harder and be more flexible than usual, and TASB’s programs stepped up to help them rise to the challenge.

At the same time, the Association continued to meet the needs of Texas schoolchildren by providing advocacy and guidance, launching and enhancing services, expanding the reach of key programs, and pivoting to virtual and hybrid learning.

Providing advocacy and guidance

Governmental Relations. During the 87th Legislative Session, TASB’s Governmental Relations (GR) team was at the Capitol advocating for the TASB Advocacy Agenda, passed by TASB members at the 2020 Delegate Assembly. GR tracked more than 1,000 bills, or almost 16 percent of all legislation filed this year. TASB advocacy efforts also generated 2,886 letters to lawmakers in support of the TASB Advocacy Agenda.

When the 2021 legislative season was unexpectedly extended with the announcements of three special sessions, the TASB GR team stayed on the job monitoring legislative activity on behalf of members.

Legal Services. TASB Legal Services attorneys reviewed education legislation passed during the multiple legislative sessions this year, including 1,073 bills from the regular session. The team summarized approximately 300 bills to help members understand the implications of legislative changes.

The online TASB School Law eSource had 47,558 visitors and continued to grow— with 10 new topics and updates to 53 resources. For members looking to stay on top of legal topics relevant to their district, the School Law Update newsletter was made available free in the TASB Member Center. And as a result of changing times, the new normal, Legal Services hosted the first-ever virtual legal seminar with around 250 attendees tuning in. Additionally, the team provided more than 40 training sessions for hundreds of attendees on more than 35 topics and answered 4,990 inquiries on the TASB Legal Line.

Policy Service. TASB Policy Service provided guidance on several time-sensitive topics, including new legislation, remote learning, and Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Funds. The division completed two rigorous policy manual updates, processed 1,475 local policy updates, and reviewed the policies of 50 districts.

In addition, Policy Service provided numerous training and education offerings, including the new quarterly Policy Spotlight newsletter, video overviews on policy and policy manual updates, presentations on equity and policy, online learning content for new board members, and regular webinars following updates to key publications.

Policy Service also began work on an upgraded version of Policy On Line, designed to make policy work easier, which will be released in 2022.

Community College Services. TASB’s Community College Services provided legal and policy education and resources to help colleges respond to several significant legal changes, including those from the legislative session. In addition to FAQs published on TASB College eLaw, Community College Services provided training at several virtual events, most significantly the TASB/TACCA Post-Legislative Seminar for Community Colleges and Their Attorneys. An associated bill summary was published, summarizing more than 300 bills impacting colleges.

This year the total number of colleges that maintain their board local policies with Community College Services grew to 39 of the 50 Texas community colleges.

Launching new offerings and enhancing services

HR Services. HR Services transitioned to a new system, TASB HRDataSource®, for online salary surveys, HRsurveys, and data reporting. District personnel and community college surveys saw notable increases in participation using the new online surveys. The superintendent survey had higher participation per week than in previous years, and members were running more data reports in the new system.

Additionally, resources and educational offerings were expanded, with 120 new documents and three sections added to the HR Library, 10 new free webinars, a new partnership with EdSol to present documentation training across the state, a new content track for HR Academy training, and 90 new model job descriptions for community colleges.

Special Education Solutions. At the beginning of the year, Special Education Solutions (SES) worked diligently to help districts submit their SHARS cost reports despite a reduced timeframe to meet deadlines, completing in one month what normally should have taken three months.

Continuing its new documentation system SMART Solutions, the next generation of the SMART application, SMART Solutions offers new tools to reduce provider documentation time, increase district reporting abilities, and better enable administrators to monitor staff productivity. The SES team continues to migrate districts to SMART Solutions so all are using the new application for the 2022-23 school year.

To share SHARS best practices and policies, SES launched the new SHARS Matters newsletter and hosted 350 attendees at the first fully virtual SHARS conference April 30-May 1. This year, Special Education Solutions helped districts receive $235 million in SHARS revenue.

Student Solutions. Introduced in 2020, TASB Student Solutions continued to support districts in the special populations areas of special education (Sections 504, English Learners, and gifted and talented) with customized services: workload staffing analysis for special education staff, program reviews, and capacity building, including executive coaching.

Student Solutions also introduced subscriptions to TASB Student Solutions, accessed through the Student Solutions Online™ portal, where subscribers can find special education operating procedures and receive timely training led by experts in the field.

Facility Services. TASB Facility Services worked with more than 440 districts on environmental, planning, staffing, and energy projects this year. The new multi-year Planning Membership assists districts with effectively maintaining and planning for the future of their facilities. The membership includes access to the new online TASB Facility Dashboard, where districts can see information on their facilities and track needed improvements.

Facility Services also made progress on transforming the OnSite Environmental Database into an online portal through which Facility Services’ Environmental Program members will be able to view compliance-related information, such as asbestos management plans, and other data. The project is expected to be completed in 2022.
BoardBook, BoardBook Premier®, the cloud-based application created to simplify the compiling and distribution of board meeting information, offered enhanced product features and improved settings this year, many of which were in direct response to customer requests.

BoardBook provided members with even more resources, including the new BoardBook Bulletin newsletter. BoardBook Bulletin was launched in the spring, delivering product updates, training opportunities, tips and tricks for using the software, and links to a library of self-training videos. This year, BoardBook created five video tutorials to train board members on specific functions of the program. BoardBook currently has 1,595 customers throughout the US and Canada.

**Expanding the reach of key programs**

- **BuyBoard**: The Local Government Purchasing Cooperative, or BuyBoard®, had a record-setting year in both purchase volume and rebates issued to members. Purchase volume for the 2020-21 year was just over $1.4 billion — an increase of $101 million over the previous fiscal year. The Cooperative issued rebates for the 2020-21 year in excess of $10.7 million, which also set a record.

- A new platform that launched in September 2020 continued to draw increased visitors as members enjoyed more advanced keyword searches, easier browsing and product price comparisons, and updated RFQ and PO processes.

- **TASB Risk Management Fund**: During the historic winter storm in early 2021, the Fund processed $125 million in property claims, and ultimately all Fund members completed the winter storm in early 2021, the Fund processed $125 million in property claims, and ultimately all Fund members completed the

- **Lone Star Investment Pool**: The Lone Star Investment Pool reached $44.6 billion in average annual assets, peaking at $10.6 billion, while continuing to provide competitive investment pool rates for school districts. This was the 10th consecutive year of Lone Star growth and the eighth straight year of reaching a new all-time high in average assets.

- During the February 2021 winter storm, the Lone Star Investment Pool aided districts in efficiently processing debt service, payroll, and operating expenses.

- **TASB Benefits Cooperative**: The TASB Benefits Cooperative saw overall participation grow to more than 102,000 employee lives. Districts use the Benefits Cooperative for services such as consulting or a portion of benefits administration.

- The TASB Benefits Cooperative began offering the TASB Benefits Health, Dental, and Vision Plans when Senate Bill 1444 was signed into law on September 1, 2021. This gives Texas school districts that choose to opt out of TRS-ActiveCare an affordable option to address their health care needs.

- **TASB Energy Cooperative**: The Energy Cooperative had its second consecutive year of expansion, growing to 217,253 MWh annually and 1,329,969 MWh through the full terms of the agreements with 11 new members and 24 renewals. During the year, 60 members purchased gasoline and diesel products amounting to 3,577,405 gallons of fuel under the fixed-rate program and 6,317,277 gallons under the spot program. The fixed-rate volumes were lower than expected, while the spot program was higher, resulting in total volumes that met targets.

- **Lone Star Growth and the Eighth Pool Rates for School Districts**: This was the 10th consecutive year of reaching a new all-time high in average assets.

Additionally, Fund members’ employees completed more than a million on-demand training courses and benefited from video, phone, and email consultations and expert-led webinars.

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**Pivoting to virtual and hybrid learning**

- **TASA | TASB Convention**: The largest convening of Texas public education policymakers transitioned back to an in-person event for 2021 at the Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Center in Dallas, September 24-26, and attendance was strong. With a sold-out exhibit hall, txEDCON21 had the highest number of sponsors to date.

- Highlights included inspiring presentations by executive coach Sylvia Balfour, aerospace engineer Shyla Rivera, and mind-wellness expert Jessica Rector. Speakers in the Learning Lounge focused on how school districts are dealing with loss of learning caused by the pandemic and how the board can positively affect student achievement through its leadership role.

- Of those who responded to the txEDCON21 evaluation, 84 percent indicated they felt better prepared to serve the public school children of Texas; 85 percent said they felt energized about working with their board and superintendent; and 87 percent said they felt inspired to improve student learning in their district.
Governance Camp: The 2021 Governance Camp, held March 3-6, was virtual but filled with both prerecorded and live sessions. The preconference was a live TASBopoly game where the audience watched Leadership TASB Alumni experience different forms of privilege and wealth. Keynote speakers for the conference included nationally known speaker Mawi Asgedom and student voice expert Anindya Kundu.

Each year, Governance Camp programs give attendees an opportunity to hear from students. Participants recognized four student scholarship winners, and Student Voice sessions covered topics ranging from drumline leadership to one-act plays to learning during a pandemic.

Spring Workshops: TASB staff worked with various site coordinators to deliver 13 virtual Spring Workshops between March and May. More than 700 trustees and administrators from across the state participated and had the opportunity to earn up to 10 continuing education credit hours.

SLI: Summer Leadership Institute (SLI) 2021 was the first in-person event for school board members since February 2020. SLI kicked off in both locations — San Antonio and Fort Worth — with an experiential poverty simulation and closed with TASB Governmental Relations’ Post-Legislative Conference. Mixed in between were lively presentations of best practices and interactive thought exchanges. General session speakers included educator and acclaimed speaker Rick Rigsby and education advocate Pearl Arredondo.

In San Antonio, for the first time, attendees staying in the conference hotel were able to watch SLI presentations from their hotel rooms. SLI Fort Worth was a hybrid event, with both in-person and virtual attendees watching sessions together.

A Year in Review: At a Glance

TASB Governmental Relations

Tracked more than 1,000 bills over the course of four sessions

Generated 25,886 letters to lawmakers in support of your Advocacy Agenda

TASB Policy Service

Completed two rigorous policy manual updates and 2,342 policy edits and processed 1,945 local policy updates

Helped districts update codes of conduct and student handbooks in response to legislative changes

TASB Legal Services

Provided more than 200 legal FAQs in TASB School Law eSource with 41,358 visitors last year

Answered 4,300 legal inquiries on the legal phone line

TASB Board Development Services

Provided learning to 4,536 trustees from 798 districts

Delivered 51,404 credit hours through both virtual and in-person learning
Developed more resources to streamline the work of HR managers
- Three new sections of the HR Library
- 120 new documents, forms, and articles
- A new content track for the HR Academy

Launched HRDataSource, making it easier for districts to access HR surveys and data

Helped districts recover after Winter Storm Uri — processing $125 million in property claims
Provided unemployment coverage to more than 500,000 school district employees

Gave back more than $10.7 million in rebates to districts
Made purchasing easier for districts by launching a new BuyBoard platform

Assisted more than 102,000 school district employees with benefits
- Supplemental benefits
- Dental plan
- Medical plan

Second year of expansion, growing to 217,253 MWh annually and adding 13 new members

Was entrusted by districts with $19.6 billion in overall assets, an all-time high
Aided districts in efficiently processing debt service, payroll, and operating expenses during Winter Storm Uri

Helped districts receive $235 million in SHARS revenue and released SMART Solutions documentation system

Grew customized services for Section 504, English Learners, and gifted and talented programs and introduced subscriptions to Student Solutions Online portal

Made district facility planning easier by creating the TASB Facility Dashboard and continued progress on new online portal for Environmental Program members

Provided training to community college members at virtual events and published a summary of more than 300 bills impacting colleges

Offered enhanced product features and improved settings and introduced BoardBook Bulletin newsletter
Ted Beard  
President

Beard was elected to the Longview ISD Board in 1998 and has served as assistant secretary, secretary, vice-president, and twice as president.

In 2007, he was appointed to the TASB Risk Management Fund Board and currently serves as chair. He is a 2012 graduate of Leadership TASB and a past president and current member of the Texas Caucus of Black School Board Members.

Beard is a retired sergeant major from the United States Army and a combat veteran of Desert Shield/Storm and Iraqi Freedom. He also retired from the Social Security Administration, where he worked as a technical expert and equal employment opportunity counselor. Beard earned a bachelor’s in human services from LeTourneau University.

Debbie Gillespie  
President-Elect

Gillespie was elected to the Frisco ISD Board in 2011 and was elected to the TASB Board in 2014. After graduating from Southwest Texas State University, she worked in interior design and fashion merchandising before accepting a job at Dell Corporation. She moved to Frisco with her family in 1995 and became an active community volunteer.

Gillespie was a longtime volunteer with Frisco Family Services and held various officer-level positions in the Frisco ISD Council of PTAs, multiple local PTA boards, the PTO board, Frisco High School Band Boosters, National Charity League (NCL), and Young Men's Service League (YMSL).

She is an active volunteer with Frisco Fastpacs and Frisco Women's League, as well as a vocal advocate in legislative agendas for several local organizations. She is a 2014 graduate of Leadership TASB (LTASB), a member of the LTASB Alumni Association, and an Honorary Life Member of PTA.

Bob Covey  
First Vice-President*

Covey has served on his local board, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD, for more than 16 years and has held the positions of president, vice-president, and secretary. A Leadership TASB graduate and Master Trustee, he is an active member and former director of the Gulf Coast Area Association of School Boards.

Covey is founder and president of Go Public Gulf Coast. He also is active in Impact with the Harris County Department of Education.

Covey earned his bachelor’s degree at Texas State University. He has held numerous leadership positions with the university’s alumni associations, including serving as past president of the Texas State Alumni Association and a member of the College of Education’s Alumni Advisory Committee for 10 years. He retired from American Alloy Steel Inc. after 35 years before returning eight years ago.

* Bob Covey joined the TASB Board in December 2022

Armando Rodriguez  
Second Vice-President

Rodriguez is serving his fifth term on the Canutillo ISD Board, where he has served as president, vice-president, and secretary. Rodriguez is a Leadership TASB graduate and Master Trustee.

A graduate of Canutillo High School and The University of Texas at El Paso, Rodriguez is one of the founding members of the Canutillo Alumni Foundation for Education — the only organization specifically designed to award scholarships to Canutillo graduates.

He currently serves on the boards of the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials, National Council of American Indian/Alaska Native School Board Members, and National School Board Action Center. He is a past chair of the National Hispanic Council of School Board Members, past president of the Far West Texas School Boards Association, and past president of the Mexican American School Boards Association. Professionally, he is the business development manager of Helias Construction Inc.

Jim Rice  
Immediate Past President

Rice joined the Fort Bend ISD Board in May 2010 and has served as both board president and secretary. He currently serves as board vice-president.

Elected to the TASB Board of Directors in 2012, he is a 2013 graduate of Leadership TASB. Rice is the founder and president of Rice and Gardner Consultants Inc., an engineering and construction management firm. In addition to his professional duties, he currently serves as the Fort Bend Chamber of Commerce’s Education Division vice-chair and is a 2005 graduate of the Fort Bend Chamber of Commerce’s Leadership Forum Class.

He is cofounder of the charity Fort Bend Cares, which benefits underprivileged youth in the community. Rice is involved in numerous other civic organizations, including the Fort Bend Literacy Council, the Fort Bend P-16 Regional Council, and the Greater Fort Bend Economic Development Council.

Rolinda Schmidt  
Secretary-Treasurer

Schmidt has served on the Kerrville ISD Board since 1996 and has held the positions of board president, vice-president, and secretary. She is currently the board president.

Before serving as a trustee, she was involved in campus PTOs and was a board member and volunteer for the Kerrville Public School Foundation. Schmidt has been actively involved in local youth education programs, including the Salvation Army Boys and Girls Club, Rotary Club Foreign Exchange Student Program, Head Start, and the Kerrville ISD sixth-grade outdoor education program. She was named Families and Literacy’s 2014 Champion of Education.

A graduate of San Jose State University with a bachelor’s in social services, Schmidt is a managing partner in her family-owned-and-operated commercial real estate development and management company.

Immediate Past President

Rice joined the Fort Bend ISD Board in May 2010 and has served as both board president and secretary. He currently serves as board vice-president.

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TASB Statement of Activities for the Year Ending August 31, 2021

Revenue

- TASB Membership Fees $4,337,015 6%
- Risk Management Services 30,197,407 40
- First Public 6,624,384 9
- Business Services 15,185,853 20
- Governance Services 13,253,039 18
- Organization and Planning Services 373,988 1
- Royalties 3,866,087 5
- Other 582,187 1
Total Revenue 74,619,960 100%

Expenses

- Employee Compensation and Benefits $54,305,708 72%
- Purchased and Contract Services 13,945,757 18
- Supplies and Materials 883,311 1
- Other Operating 3,574,233 5
- Depreciation and Amortization 2,765,066 4
Total Expenses 75,464,075 100%

Change in Net Assets from Operations (844,115)

Non-Operating Activities:

- Net Investment Income 6,848,425

Change in Net Assets $6,004,310

TASB has expendable net assets of 51.7 percent of annual operational expenditures as of August 31, 2021.

These figures are subject to Board approval.

*Anne Sung is in a runoff election in December 2021.

**Bob Covey leaves the TASB Board in December 2021.
TENACIOUS AND COMMITTED: PORTRAIT OF A PUBLIC ED ADVOCATE

How TASB’s 2021 Advocate of the Year, Coppell ISD’s Tracy Fisher, Champions Texas Public Schools

by Sylvia Wood

Tracy Fisher is a self-described military brat, whose father’s service gave her the unique experience of living in Texas, Alabama, Germany, Belgium, and Nebraska. That journey included one elementary school, two junior highs, four high schools, and a public university. She credits those moves and transitions with teaching her how to walk into any situation with confidence and ease. “I can go to different meetings all over the place and not know a single soul,” said Fisher, who was reelected in May to another term on the Coppell ISD Board of Education. “It doesn’t make me anxious at all. I’m an extrovert and that’s something that plays into it. I get my energy from people.”

Combining her outgoing personality with a passion for public education has been a winning strategy for Fisher. She has not only been elected four times to her local school board but earned the Texas Association of School Boards’ inaugural Legislative Advocate of the Year award, presented at the TASA | TASB Convention in Dallas in September.

“Tracy is the consummate advocate, pairing dedication and a willingness to learn about multiple facets of public education with a passion for those relationships,” said the Rev. Charles Johnson of Pastors for Texas Children, a ministry that serves neighborhoods public schools through prayer, service, and advocacy. “She’s smart, she’s strong, and she’s fearless.”

In today’s polarized environment, Fisher’s approach to advocacy — learning all she can on the issues and being able to communicate on behalf of all children — makes her especially effective. “Trustees model civil leadership for the community, and nobody does it better than Tracy,” Johnson said.

Fisher isn’t easily deterred from her mission, no matter what kind of things you’re facing.”

In working to become a successful advocate, Fisher has taken advantage of opportunities to learn and grow. She earned her Master Trustee designation from Leadership TASB in 2015 and has served in many roles for the organization, including on the Legislative Advisory Council and as a board Legislative Committee member. During her district board meetings, she makes a point of discussing a legislative item or topic. “I started doing that when I was board president,” she said, “and I’ve just continued. It’s another way to build capacity in your fellow trustees and let your community know what kinds of things you’re facing.”

Fisher said. “Our independent school districts are local and not one size fits all — the beauty of community. If I don’t know how others are impacted, my advocacy is not as effective. By connecting to fellow trustees, we have rich conversations and develop wonderful relationships that help Texas children. I feel blessed to know so many amazing advocates across the state.”

TASB’s 2021 Advocate of the Year, Coppell ISD’s Tracy Fisher (third from left) leads a group from Coppell ISD as they arrive at the Capitol to meet with legislators during the 86th Legislative Session. By Sylvia Wood
Heather Sheffield just missed getting the most points in TASB’s inaugural Legislative Advocacy Game but she’s taking the long view, especially when it comes to encouraging lawmakers to share her commitment to public schools.

“Lawmakers will respond to advocates who are polite and who want to work with them, and who try to bring solutions to the table, rather than those who just yell at them,” said the Eanes ISD trustee. “In order to get things done, I have learned that patience is the biggest thing.”

As the mother of two children and a former first-grade teacher, Sheffield has had a lot of practice in that area. Her experience as a frontline educator and a parent is what pushed her to run for the Eanes ISD School Board in 2019. She was already attending board meetings and volunteering in her children’s schools. As she learned about the challenges facing public education, especially school finance, she knew she wanted to do more.

“It really just lit a fire within me to get more involved,” she said. When she learned about TASB’s Legislative Advocacy Game, she didn’t hesistate to sign up.

“I’m very passionate about public education and making sure that our students have everything they need. As a parent and trustee, it’s come to my attention that sometimes legislators don’t always know what is needed in a school system,” she said. “It’s kind of one of those things that if not me, then who? I have the time and the ability.”

For Sheffield, the most powerful part of advocacy is making connections with lawmakers and “giving them the inside scoop about what’s happening at the ground level in our schools.”

Other issues that Sheffield cares about include special education, especially dyslexia. During the last session, she enjoyed working on behalf of House Bill 3880 that would have included dyslexia among special education services, giving more students access to full and individual evaluations (FIE), and help bring “Texas in line with federal law.”

The bill did not pass, but Sheffield said the work was taken up by the State Board of Education to incorporate changes into the Dyslexia Handbook. “That was a great example of what advocacy can do to make a meaningful change in the lives of students,” she said.

Looking ahead, Sheffield plans to run for reelection in May 2022 so she can continue to fight for students and a stronger public education system.

“I really just want the opportunity to continue to serve my school district and our students,” she said. “Whatever I can do to help, that’s what I’m here for.”

2020-21 Advocacy Game

Winner: Tracy Fisher, Coppell ISD

Runner-up: Heather Sheffield, Eanes ISD

Tier 2: 6,000-9,999 Points

Trish Bode, Leander ISD

Ana Cortez, Manor ISD

Tony Grimes, Irving ISD

Kristi Hassett, Lewisville ISD

Stephanie Lupe, Bullard ISD

Paula McDonald, Granbury ISD

Vernagene Mott, Pflugerville ISD

Georgan Reitmeier, Klein ISD

Tracy Scott Miller, Lewisville ISD

Robert Seward, Mesquite ISD

Becky St. John, Grapevine-Colleyville ISD

Andrea Walton, Midlothian ISD

THE SECRET TO EFFECTIVE PUBLIC ED ADVOCACY: PATIENCE IS KEY

Eanes ISD’s Heather Sheffield talks about taking the time to get Texas students what they need

THE SECRET TO EFFECTIVE PUBLIC ED ADVOCACY: PATIENCE IS KEY

Eanes ISD’s Heather Sheffield talks about taking the time to get Texas students what they need
THE ROAD TO TASB’S ADVOCACY STARTS WITH YOU

When TASB Governmental Relations team members walk through the front doors of the Texas Capitol building on the first day of the legislative session, they’re not there for themselves. They’re there representing the largest group of locally elected officials in the state, the more than 7,000 Texans who faithfully serve their communities — Texas school board members.

School board members are farmers, real estate brokers, mothers, grandfathers, and educators. They are diverse in nearly every way imaginable. Yet they all have one common purpose: Making sure kids in their community get the best education possible.

TASB’s Advocacy Agenda, the action plan TASB uses to advocate at the Capitol, is made up of Priorities and Resolutions, and it all starts with you. Make sure your board is part of this important journey.

GET STARTED NOW!

TASB staff will be hitting the road soon, traveling the state to hear from trustees like you at regional Grassroots Meetings. These meetings allow school district leaders to discuss the most important legislative issues facing their schools.

2022 Grassroots Meetings

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Region 1</td>
<td>January 27</td>
<td>Edinburg</td>
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<tr>
<td>Region 2</td>
<td>February 23</td>
<td>Corpus Christi</td>
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<td>Region 3</td>
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<td>Houston</td>
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<td>February 22</td>
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<td>Kilgore</td>
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<td>Region 8</td>
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<td>Region 9</td>
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<td>January 27</td>
<td>Midland</td>
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<td>El Paso</td>
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<td>Region 20</td>
<td>February 16</td>
<td>San Antonio</td>
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HOW TASB’S ADVOCACY AGENDA IS CREATED

Priorities

January-March 2022

Grassroots Meetings

Local school leaders work together to develop regional priorities. Representatives are elected to the TASB Legislative Advisory Council (LAC).

TASB advocates at the Capitol on behalf of the 1,024 Texas school boards

The Advocacy Agenda is the action plan and guide for TASB staff working on your behalf at the Capitol.

Resolutions

March-June 2022

Districts submit advocacy resolutions

School districts submit stances to TASB to help guide the Association’s response to issues that might arise before the Legislature.

Legislative Session

January 2023

April-June 2022

LAC meetings

LAC members identify common priorities from regional meetings and recommend a list of priority statements to the TASB Board.

Delegate Assembly

September 24, 2022

Texas school boards appoint one delegate and one alternate to attend TASB’s annual business meeting. The Assembly debates and votes on:

- Advocacy Priorities
- Advocacy Resolutions
- TASB leadership (board and officers)

The Advocacy Agenda is adopted.

Advocacy Priorities reviewed

The TASB Board of Directors reviews the Priorities and makes a recommendation to the Delegate Assembly.

Resolutions reviewed

The TASB Board of Directors reviews proposed Resolutions and makes a recommendation to the Delegate Assembly.

TASB’s Advocacy Agenda is a biennial agenda, and the Delegate Assembly can update or amend it during odd-numbered years following the regular legislative session.
NEW YEAR’S RESOLUTION: KEEP ON KEEPIN’ ON

by Dan Troxell

In all my years working in public schools, December was a month to love. There was always a feeling of joy and gratitude with the holiday events and concerts that brought our community together and showcased the incredible talent of our students and staff.

Yet there was also a sense of disquiet with the end of the year so close. Anyone who is accustomed to the school calendar knows that December marks the annual midpoint and is a stark reminder that time is running short to accomplish everything that needs to be done in terms of teaching and learning. That’s why this December, my thoughts are firmly with our trustees, superintendents, administrators, and educators across the state. I know you’re running a marathon at sprint-speed and there’s no time to catch your breath — at least until winter break.

Here at TASB, we’re here to cheer you on as you make the most of every day on the calendar. We all know 2021 has been quite the year, from a legislative session that included three additional sessions to the ongoing pandemic mitigation efforts in school districts and the Herculean effort to accelerate learning in the classrooms.

When I became executive director of this great organization on September 1, I knew the work ahead would be challenging. More than three months in, I appreciate more than ever the decades of service from my predecessor and friend, James B. Crow, who retired after building TASB into a resilient organization able to adapt and thrive, no matter the circumstances. Thank you, Jim, for setting up TASB for more than ever the decades of service from my predecessor and friend, James B. Crow, who retired after building TASB into a resilient organization able to adapt and thrive, no matter the circumstances. Thank you, Jim, for setting up TASB for the most of every day on the calendar. We all know 2021 has been quite the year, from a legislative session that included three additional sessions to the ongoing pandemic mitigation efforts in school districts and the Herculean effort to accelerate learning in the classrooms.

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This issue of our magazine highlights our work in 2020-21. Some of it was tied to the legislative session, like tracking more than 1,000 bills and processing nearly 2,000 local policy updates. Our TASB team answered 4,400 legal inquiries and provided more than 200 legal FAQs for our members. An educator at heart, I’m especially proud of our work providing learning to 4,526 trustees from 798 districts. That amounted to 51,401 credit hours through both virtual and in-person learning.

And, as we kicked off the 2021-22 year, more great in-person learning took place during the TASA | TASB Convention in Dallas with more than 4,700 in attendance on behalf of the more than 3.5 million public school children in Texas. It was a great reminder that our voice as public school advocates is a powerful instrument in the quest for excellent, equitable outcomes for all students across the state.

Of course, with the New Year just around the corner, it’s important to look forward and set some additional goals. I’ll confess I’ve never been great at making or sticking with resolutions that involve diet and exercise, but my goals for TASB in 2022 are resolute.

First, I’m committed to ensuring TASB remains a valuable source of training, information and support for you, our members, especially as you navigate ongoing challenges like student learning loss, staffing shortages, and supply chain issues.

That’s why we have big plans for the year at TASB, including new applications for Policy On Line, SMART Solutions, and Asbestos Management. In addition, we’re going to improve the web experience for our First Public members, expand our work in benefits management, align our work more closely with what’s happening in districts, and continue to become a more data-driven organization so we can be sure our work reflects your needs and preferences.

For now, I’m urging everyone not to lose focus on our students and educators as we close out this unforgettable year. I’m hoping to add a few school district holiday events to my calendar so I can continue to experience the joy that sustained me when I was working as a district administrator during this busy month.

For all our members across the state and our TASB employees, I want to thank you for the honor and privilege to serve you and wish you a peaceful holiday season surrounded by loved ones. As you juggle all your commitments and obligations, remember winter break will be here soon!

Dan Troxell is executive director of TASB.

LOOKING AHEAD TO 2022

School Board Recognition Month
January

Grassroots Meetings
January-March

Superintendent of the Year nominations
January-April

TASB Conference for Administrative Professionals
February 10-11

Governance Camp
March 2-5

Spring Workshops
March-May

Call for resolutions
March 15-June 15

Leadership TASB applications accepted
May 1-July 1

Summer Leadership Institute
San Antonio: June 15-18
Fort Worth: June 29-July 2

TASA | TASB Convention
September 23-25

Delegate Assembly
September 24

TASB Conference for Administrative Professionals
October (dates TBD)

Fall Legal Seminars
November (dates TBD)

Check the TASB Events calendar at events.tasb.org for our full list of events and training opportunities for 2022.