WHAT WILL
THE COMING
YEAR LOOK
LIKE?

Districts Are Applying
What They Learned In A Challenging Year to Plan for 2021-22
**MAY**

3 • TASB Delegate Assembly Registration Opens

4 • TASB 2021 Virtual Spring Workshop, Alpine

5 • TASB 2021 Virtual Spring Workshop, Huntsville • TASB Risk Fund “Capturing Up on 2021 Unemployment Compensation Trends” Webinar

5-6 • TASB HR Services “Managing Personnel Records” Virtual Event

6 • TASB Student Solutions “Goodbye 20-21 and Hello 21-22” Webinar

11 • TASB 2021 Virtual Spring Workshop, Commerce

12 • TASB 2021 Virtual and In-Person Spring Workshop, Canyon • TASB Risk Fund “Community Colleges: 60 Minutes to a Stress-Free Security Audit” Webinar

13 • TASB 2021 Virtual Spring Workshop, Abilene

19 • TASB 2021 Virtual Spring Workshop, El Paso • TASB Facility Services Asbestos Designated Person Training, Beaumont

20 • TASB Facility Services Integrated Pest Management Coordinator Training, Beaumont

21-22 • TASB 2021 In-Person/Virtual Spring Workshop, South Padre Island

**JUNE**

1 • TASB Facility Services Asbestos Designated Person Training, Amarillo

2 • TASB Facility Services Integrated Pest Management Coordinator Training, Amarillo

3 • TASB Facility Services Compliance Conundrums Training, Amarillo

9 • TASB Risk Fund “Simple Ways to Optimize Emergency Operations Plans with Tabletop Exercises” Webinar

9-10 • TASB HR Services “Understanding Compensation in Schools” Virtual Event

16-17 • TASB HR Services “Administering Pay Plans” Virtual Event

16-19 • TASB Summer Leadership Institute, San Antonio • TASB Post-Legislative Conference, San Antonio

23-25 • State Board of Education Meetings, Austin

23-26 • TASB Summer Leadership Institute, Fort Worth • TASB Post-Legislative Conference, Fort Worth

---

**14 Weathering the Storm**

Read about insights and lessons learned from TASB professionals who helped districts through the unprecedented, extended period of extremely cold weather this winter.

---

**20 Taking the Lead**

Longtime Aldine ISD Board Member Viola Garcia describes her goals and challenges as she takes office as 2021-22 president of the National School Boards Association.

---

**Web Watch**

SLI will be in person AND virtual this year. Visit tasb.org/sl21 to find out how you can attend.

---

For more information about these events or deadlines, visit the TASB website at tasb.org or call TASB at 512.467.0222 or 800.580.8572 toll-free.

---

For more information about tasb.org and our related sites, contact TASB Online Communications at 512.467.0222 or 800.580.8572 or visit tasb.org/help/index.aspx.
COMING JUNE 1

No More tiers

Board training credit reports are getting a makeover.

See more easily which of the requirements have been met. Look for these changes to be reflected beginning June 1.

Questions? Contact TASB at cec@tasb.org or call 800.580.8272, ext. 2453.

Tier 1 • Orientation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current</th>
<th>New</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tier 1 • Orientation</td>
<td>Topic 1 • Special Required Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statutory (Legislative)</td>
<td>Statutory (Legislative)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Open Meetings Act</td>
<td>• Open Meetings Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Public Information Act</td>
<td>• Public Information Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Cybersecurity</td>
<td>• Cybersecurity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tier 2 • Team Building

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current</th>
<th>New</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tier 3 • Board Development</td>
<td>Topic 2 • Team Building</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tier 3 • Board Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current</th>
<th>New</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Topic 3 • Additional Continuing Education</td>
<td>Topic 3 • Additional Continuing Education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Credit reports will indicate with a check mark when a Topic 1 requirement has been met.

The Difference You Make
High School Class of 2021 Graduations Are Here!

by Jim Rice

I t may seem just yesterday we were welcoming students back for a new semester, but it's almost that time of year again to bid farewell to the Class of 2021. High school graduations are upon us, along with all the joy and pride that comes from handing out diplomas to our kids. As each graduate walks across that stage, beaming parents and families clap and cheer and perhaps shed a happy tear or two.

These young adults came to us in pre-kindergarten or kindergarten and emerge 13 or 14 years later, embarking on a new journey to make their own way in the world. Getting to participate in these ceremonies every year is one of the most fulfilling parts of being a trustee.

Have We Done Enough?

But even as I happily share in sending these alumni out into the world, I sometimes cannot help but worry: Have we done our best to prepare them? I know as a parent this is a constant concern, and the same goes for board members.

Even more concerning, I think about the students who did not make it to the ceremony. It is a question that plagues me and my colleagues: What can we do to better support them?

The Diff erence You Make

Early in my Scout Leader career, I was on a weekend campout with my son and our troop. When Boy Scouts go camping, we have a creed to always leave the campground cleaner than we found it. This starts from the moment we arrive until the moment we leave. Sometimes, in our quest to impart all the wisdom we possibly can, we forget that even the smallest of actions can sometimes provide the biggest impact.

Never Underestimate Your Impact

Though I have never been a school-teacher, I was a Boy Scout Leader for eight years. As anyone who has been around children might tell you, I think I learned more from them than they learned from me. One thing I discovered was never to underestimate the difference I could make in their lives—for better or worse.

There are many stories I could share of those experiences, but I often come back to this one:

One thing I discovered was never to underestimate the difference I could make in children’s lives—for better or worse.

Jim Rice, a Fort Bend ISD trustee, is 2020-21 president of TASB.

Jim Rice

From the Top

Texas Lone Star Online | May 2021 | Texas Lone Star
Texans Are Stepping Up in Various National Leadership Roles This Year

by Roger White

If the flavor of the most recent National School Boards Association’s (NSBA) annual conference, held online April 8-10, had a distinctive Lone Star twang to it, it was for good reason. Several distinguished Texas public education leaders assumed prominent roles at the national level.

Aldine ISD Trustee Viola M. Garcia, a former TASB president and former president of the Mexican American School Boards Association, took the gavel April 10 as 2021-22 president of the NSBA Board of Directors. Garcia is the first Latina and third Texas school board member to serve as NSBA president.

Garcia assumes the leadership of the national organization during an uncertain and unprecedented time, as school districts struggle with the myriad challenges posed by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

When asked how school leaders across the country can work to correct the many inequities caused by the pandemic, Garcia emphasized local control. “I think one of the important things that we all need to remember is that all of the communities across the country are different.” She stressed that making generalizations about school districts and their communities would be a mistake. “It’s important that the opportunities for local control be at the center of any discussion.”

Read more about Garcia’s plans for NSBA in the coming year and about her remarkable tenure in service to public education in this edition. “Taking the Lead,” written by TASB’s Stephanie Butler, begins on page 20.

More Texas Leaders

Other Texas school board members and education professionals also are serving in NSBA leadership roles this year. Among the impressive list of Lone Star leaders:

- Jacinto Ramos Jr., Fort Worth ISD trustee, serves as the immediate past chair of the CUBE Steering Committee.
- Armando Rodriguez, Canutillo ISD trustee, is immediate past chair of the National Hispanic Council of School Board Members (NHC). Rodriguez is also Southern Region director of the National American Indian and Alaska Native Council of School Board Members.
- Holly Maria Flynn Vilaseca, Houston ISD trustee, is chair-elect of the NHC.
- Yasmin Wagner, Austin ISD trustee, was elected to the CUBE Steering Committee.
- And TASB’s own Joy Baskin, division director of TASB Legal Services, is chair of the Council of School Attorneys and will hold an ex-officio position on the NSBA Board. Read more about Baskin’s new position on page 32.

TASB sends a hearty congratulations to these Lone Star leaders representing Texas on the national level.

Roger White is managing editor of Texas Lone Star.
After one of the most challenging years in history for schools in Texas and throughout the country, where do districts go from here? Is it best to plan for a virtual offering or stick to in-person learning at all levels?

We talked with a handful of school board members and administrative staff to find out how they survived a pandemic-challenged year and what is helping them determine the best route for their school communities in 2021-22.

**Lockhart ISD**

When the Lockhart ISD (LISD) campus closed in March 2020 and moved to virtual learning, the LISD Board hit the ground running. Surveys revealed that many of the district’s 6,100 students had either unreliable or no internet service at all, so in early April the board approved budget amendments that enabled the district to obtain seven network towers to provide wireless internet to students and staff.

Quick responses became the norm for the board-superintendent team.

“We never waited,” said Board President Steve Johnson. “We would make plans. If those plans didn’t work, we’d move to a new plan.” Johnson said their team of eight is more like a team of 20, as the board and superintendent are supported on all sides by district staff and the community.

“We have great input from within our own team and from parents and teachers,” he said. “No one’s idea is pushed away as not important.” Johnson emphasized how important it is to hear parent and staff concerns, a feeling that is echoed by Christina Courson, executive director of Communications and Community Services for LISD.

“We know we make better decisions when we hear from the people we serve,” she said. “We will continue to engage stakeholders in that dialogue about what’s important to them.” According to Courson, there has never been a greater time to have a group mindset.

“What has kept the staff on track is a shared vision and shared targets—growing every one of our students,” she said. “Because we have that unifying vision and specific goals, it was very easy for us to mobilize and make decisions…the board fully supported us in this crisis.”

The gradual move to in-person instruction this school year was supported by the majority of parents. Currently, about 70 percent of Lockhart ISD students are learning on campus, with 30 percent still attending school virtually.

Teachers were behind the return, as well. “It’s very difficult to teach in a classroom while also teaching online,” Courson added. “It’s difficult to track that engagement.”

Johnson says that for 2021-22, the district is currently planning to provide a virtual option, but only for grades 9-12.
“We feel high school students have adapted to learning in a virtual atmosphere,” he explained. “Younger students need one-on-one instruction and need to socialize. That’s a big part of how they learn.”

The board is waiting to see if the state releases federal relief dollars to schools. In the meantime, the Lockhart ISD Board will focus on moving forward with input from all concerned.

“Our team is a tremendous team,” Johnson reiterated. “We’ll find an answer to whatever problem there is. We’ll tweak it and make it work for our students.”

Johnson said that lowering the bar has never been an option—and never will be. “It might have been easy to do that, but we decided we are not lowering our bar to meet someone else’s expectations. Our parents have that expectation. Our students have that expectation. We want our kids to be ready for the world.”

**Longview ISD**

For Ted Beard, board secretary on the Longview ISD (LISD) Board, one of the main drivers for serving on the board has been opportunity gaps affecting student achievement in his district, which serves approximately 8,200 students.

Beard said that pre-pandemic, the LISD Board was making a concerted effort to address these opportunity gaps and seeing the results of these efforts. In fact, the district won a 2021 Magna Award from the National School Boards Association for helping to break down barriers for underserved students by creating a public Montessori campus.

But the pandemic added new obstacles and revealed an increasing threat to student success: opportunity gaps in the form of technology gaps.

“We have tried to knock down barriers and provide varying opportunities for students. The pandemic just threw a curveball on how those opportunities are being offered. The opportunity gap materializes right into the achievement gap.”

This school year, the LISD Board has supported the move back to in-person training. Currently, only about 12 percent of students are learning virtually.

“We understand the importance of human interaction in the learning process and how critical it is, when you look at the varying backgrounds of the students,” said Beard.

As they have made decisions, communication has always been key. “We need to always ask: Is this in the best interest of students? Is this about student achievement? Those are the important questions,” Beard said.

“So what’s the plan for 2021-22?”

“The number-one thing that I would say as to what’s on our minds right now: uncertainty. Because we just don’t know,” said Beard.

“But we as a district are looking at various options. The planning has already begun. A lot of this planning deals with making sure the teachers have what they need to ensure that our plan can be carried out, everything from the money side to evidence-based strategies. Especially on reading. That’s a big thing on our front.”

At present, LISD is planning for a virtual option for pre-K through 12. But there are still concerns. Although some students do well with virtual learning, there are others who don’t.

As every angle is considered and decisions are made, Beard said he wants LISD families to know that the board’s actions are fueled by genuine interest in their children’s education.

“We understand that parents and guardians love and care deeply for their children, and we as a district have an obligation to also show that love, care, and compassion for all of our students.”

**Frisco ISD**

In 2020, when Frisco ISD (FISD) returned from spring break, the district started planning for a switch to virtual. By the middle of that week, pre-K-12 students were online.

FISD Trustee Debbie Gillespie is incredibly proud of the extraordinary efforts she has seen throughout the district, which serves about 64,000 students. She said their team of eight has put a lot of thought into their responses to the situation.

“We have worked really hard to get the community involved,” she said. “We’ve set up all kinds of community committees and built a volunteer process so that people can sign up at any time. Our board has been very cognizant of pulling the community in together while following guidelines of TEA and local health authorities. We set up a dashboard so parents can access the information readily.”

When asked what she knows now that she didn’t know when the pandemic started, Gillespie responded: “The importance of grace. I knew we had it, but it really showed up with more people than I thought. I had no idea what it would take to pull off a virtual approach with 72 campuses.”

As for the coming school year, Gillespie noted: “We’re following legislation right now,” adding that they do hope to offer virtual learning across the board.

The question that comes up for many districts is whether a virtual school should be its own school of accountability.

Gillespie conjectured that many school boards are probably wondering if going back to exactly the way things were before the pandemic is the best solution.
"Do we want to go back to 'normal' or a different kind of normal? We need to take a step back and think of what normal should look like," she said.

At the forefront of the FISD Board’s decision making, according to Gillespie, is putting students and teachers first. “We’re all here to educate our kids. But we can’t do that without teachers and staff. I’m very worried about the mental health of our students, but also of our teachers. Many are trying to take care of their own kids, plus their students.” But Gillespie is quick to point to the positive. “There is energy out there,” she said. “We just need to get past this. We’re heading that way. A lot of good things are happening out there.”

Katy ISD

“I thought nothing could be as traumatic as Hurricane Harvey,” said Ashley Vann, Katy ISD (KISD) Board president. But that was before COVID-19 hit.

At KISD, which has about 85,000 students and 11,000 plus employees, response to the pandemic has required a lot of coordination—and a lot of planning by the board-superintendent team.

“We’ve been ahead of the curve in heading this off, going back to mostly in-person,” Vann said. About 70 percent of students are learning in-person now, as opposed to around 48 percent last August.

“Quick action, thoughtful decisions, and the board and superintendent supporting each other have all helped us be prepared. Dr. Gregorski has made such smart decisions, always keeping students and staff first,” she said, referring to KISD Superintendent Kenneth Gregorski.

The plan for 2021-22 will certainly be guided by lessons learned during a challenging year.

“When it comes to high school, our kids have done well in virtual. But junior high showed they were not doing as well as in-person students,” Gregorski shared. “We need those kids back in school.”

Input from parents shows that few prefer a virtual approach for their pre-K-8 students. A recent survey polled parents of students in grades 8-11, and less than 5 percent of respondents have said they are interested in virtual. A virtual school would be a school of accountability, without extracurricular options.

“Right now, we’re just waiting for guidance from the state,” said Gregorski. “We’ve had a lot of internal discussion with our education experts. We feel it’s best for our kids to not be in a 100 percent virtual situation, but possibly virtual will be available for high school.”

The trials of the past year have created issues Katy ISD—and all school boards—must deal with. “My concern is where students and staff stand with mental health. After this year of uncertainty and all the times kids have been tested, there are general fears,” said Vann.

“Another thing is filling those academic black holes for kids who didn’t have a successful school year virtually because of social distancing. It hasn’t been a natural school year.”

But there is still a lot of hope. “I’m hopeful that ‘new normal’ leaves our vocabulary and we get back to a real normal,” Vann emphasized. “We’re still a small town and have a tight-knit community, even though we’re a big district. I hope for all kids and staff that we get back to the Katy way soon.”

Iraan-Sheffield ISD

The COVID-19 shutdown in spring 2020 did not stop Iraan-Sheffield ISD (ISISD) for long.

“In two days, the teachers had figured things out. Students already had Chromebooks, and we were ready to go,” said Margaret G. Holmes, ISISD Board president. “Our teachers were just superstars.”

But that doesn’t mean there were no challenges for this rural district that currently serves 356 students, 16 virtually.

The COVID-19 shutdown in spring 2020 did not stop Iraan-Sheffield ISD (ISISD) for long.

“In two days, the teachers had figured things out. Students already had Chromebooks, and we were ready to go,” said Margaret G. Holmes, ISISD Board president. “Our teachers were just superstars.”

But that doesn’t mean there were no challenges for this rural district that currently serves 356 students, 16 virtually.

Delivering meals was an immediate concern, with Sheffiel students 8 miles away. Also, the board was scrambling to find reliable internet for students. A local business set up a hot spot in Sheffield, and a fellow board member helped address technical issues with that.

Holmes, a former teacher, said teaching remotely wasn’t a new thing, as there have always been homeschool students. “It was just the number of students learning virtually that made it more difficult,” she said.

But she remembers the hardest part was students missing each other—and parents being overwhelmed: “One day at the grocery store, a clerk who had a child in school loudly told me, ‘I am not a teacher!’ This single mom depended on the school to teach and watch over her kids while she worked. Even for parents who were tech savvy and had time to help teach, it was exhausting.”

At the start of this school year, most students returned to campus. “With the oilfield downturn in our area, some of our students were leaving the district,” said Holmes. “We were trying to keep up with where the kids were.”

To assist students who chose virtual learning, which was under stricter TEA regulations than in the previous spring, a liaison was hired to oversee technology and answer questions so teachers could focus on teaching.

The district is planning for in-person instruction next fall. Virtual options depend on state guidelines—and funding. The district sends 70 percent of revenue to the state in recapture. “Our tax base is very dependent on the price of oil,” she said. “So we’re waiting for values to come in. Then not getting the federal money funneled through to districts has been hard.”

Nevertheless, Holmes feels confident. “I’m hopeful that we’re combatting this disease and moving on. And I’m hopeful that this has refined our education system and clarified what is important and what’s not. I think we’re smarter now and have more tools in our toolbox. “We have a strong superintendent and a strong board that has an understanding of education. We’re going to work it out,” Holmes said, adding that she looks forward to focusing on the big questions. “Are we providing education for English language learners? What about special populations? That is what keeps me serving on the board.”
WEATHERING THE
Storm

A Q&A with TASB Professionals
On How Districts Addressed Major
Aspects of the Big Freeze of 2021

Q. What were the major concerns, situations, or
problems you saw that affected members in this
last weather event?

TASB Legal Services (Joy Baskin, Division Director):
Regarding school funding, as you know, schools are funded
based on their average daily attendance (ADA), and a week’s
shutdown would have a devastating financial effect if there
weren’t a waiver issued by the Texas Education Agency
(TEA) to basically take the days that the snowstorm was
affecting out of the calculation of the district’s ADA. (Here’s
the TEA attendance waiver information for the winter
storm: https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/covid/
TEA-Inclement-Weather-Update.pdf.)

Because of COVID-19, districts were already sort of
maxed out on their calculations and their waivers. So there
was a real concern about funding before the waiver was
issued.

With regard to local purchasing policy/emergency
spending, districts with burst pipes or damage of any kind
had to make quick emergency decisions about hiring con-
tractors. The way school district purchasing works is that
every board has a local policy that says superintendents
can make up to a certain dollar amount of decision making on
their own. Past that point, they need the board to vote to
approve the contract.

Although this is certainly not the first disaster our state
has faced, it has reached a point where we are experiencing
disasters at a rate that we need to accommodate and prepare
for disasters in local purchasing policy. While the law has
some emergency procedures, local purchasing policies
didn’t address emergency circumstances.

So going forward, we are going to recommend that
districts actually put in their local board adopted policy
a statement that if there is a catastrophe or an emergency that
requires an emergency purchase by the superintendent, that
the dollar amount is lifted. Essentially, the superintendent can
do whatever he or she needs to do in that instance to preserve
or replace the property. The superintendent would still be
required to follow laws and rules about purchasing, but it
wouldn’t require a board to approve the spending in a disaster
or emergency situation like the recent winter storms. TASB is
currently writing Update 117 to the Policy Manual.

With regard to emergency board meetings, very few
boards have emergency meeting language in their pol-
icy, because we hadn’t previously been recommending
that. That meant that the board did have to act. And for
the board to act, under those circumstances, the board
probably had to rely on an exception to the Open Meet-
ings Act (OMA) to be able to either meet remotely or meet
quickly without as much notice as they would normally
have. So the OMA has always included provisions about
the board meeting to take emergency action or the board
rescheduling a meeting that was interrupted because of a
catastrophe.

So these are just existing provisions that have been
around for a long time. But it was super interesting this
year, because there are also portions of the OMA that had
been suspended by the governor because of COVID-19.

The question becomes can boards use the suspended
provisions of the OMA to have a quick/emergency meeting?

Editor’s note: The extended period of extremely cold
weather that began in early February hit the entire state
with unprecedented severity. School districts across Texas
faced hardships and logistic challenges unlike any in recent
memory. Following is a Q&A with TASB personnel about
district questions, concerns, and solutions.
Texas Lone Star

If records can’t be salvaged. Permanent records, Archives Commission (TSLAC). TSLAC provided guidance

ous emergency closures, many districts wanted to continue

ature damage of systems that distribute or retain water

frozen and burst pipes, physical damage to buildings and

recent storms). Districts should consult with their attorney

the meeting was something other than COVID-19 (e.g., the

on site were better prepared to initiate response-type

dry out their schools, and even do some demolition work.

Some of the vendors were at capacity and had to bring in

and equipment to respond to an event of this magnitude.

received priority status. There weren’t enough resources

and the members that had already contracted with vendors

state were tapped out due to the extremely high demand,

a couple of months.

Every incident is different. Each experience is another

is here to help your district to prepare for what’s to

be more cognizant about emergency planning. TASB

and in the local purchasing policy so districts know

where to look when it comes up.

The main thing I have heard from three districts was that

they are dealing with last-minute and emergency bidding

for construction contracts because they had extremely
damaged (unsalvageable) buildings from busted pipes and

other issues where they are needing to rebuild them as

soon as possible. They called wondering if all of the same

protocols and processes had to be followed or if there were

exceptions for a disaster like this. These things would be

found in CH(LEGAL) and (LOCAL).

TASB Risk Management (Robert Piña, Property
Claims Manager): This was a really big event. As of April 30,

we had about 212 claims representing 43 percent of mem-

bers with property coverage. We provide coverage for about

half the eligible members in the state. Typically, we have an

average of 400 claims for the entire year.

The property claims team is relatively small, but with

help from Risk Solutions consultants, we were able to

respond—reach out and follow up with members about every

claim that was submitted. The majority of the claims

should be resolved (damages paid for and closed out) within

a couple of months.

Throughout the experience, a major problem was with

access to mitigation companies. Those resources across the

state were tapped out due to the extremely high demand,

and the members that had already contracted with vendors

received priority status. There weren’t enough resources

and equipment to respond to an event of this magnitude.

Some of the vendors were at capacity and had to bring in

crews from different states. The mitigation work provided

is removing damaged property and water from facilities.

Because the vendors were hard to come by, many

members had to do the work themselves. Many

small and medium-sized districts had to cut off their water,

dry out their schools, and even do some demolition work.

Many members were at capacity and had to bring in

equipment on site worse prepared to initiate response-type

work immediately. Others that weren’t in the same situa-
tion were struggling to find such materials.

While it may seem like a simple thing, the loss of power

certainly impacted the community. Part of the winterization

techniques we recommend include keeping buildings from

getting to freezing temperatures. However, with power out-

gages, schools couldn’t keep their pipes from freezing—both

lines to things like sinks as well as to their fire suppression

(sprinkler) systems. Some schools were able to mitigate the

extreme losses by turning off water and draining the lines in

some of their buildings.

Initially, it was thought schools could continue virtual-

ly. However, as events cascaded, the need to cancel schools

became apparent across the state. Many schools opened

for warming shelter locations, providing a safe, warm

place and warm meal for their communities. As the storms

cleared and operations resumed, schools were faced with the

restoration of utilities, particularly water. Recovery

efforts included flushing systems and setting up temporary

fire suppressions in standpipes, as well as assessing losses

from extreme cold that caused additional infrastructure
damage.

Q: What were most districts unprepared for that they
could prepare for next time?

TASB Legal Services: So what can the district do to

be more prepared in the case of emergencies? The short

answer is to prepare:

• Move paper records to electronic format so that they
can be preserved safely.

• Most importantly, debrief the recent incident and

update the Multi-Hazard Emergency Operating Plan

(MHEOP). Review and make adjustments to MHEOP as

needed and debrief from the recent event while it’s

still fresh in everyone’s mind.

• Be aware of the emergency provisions in the OMA

and in the local purchasing policy so districts know

where to look when it comes up.

• Although we may not be able to fully anticipate all

aspects of an emergency or disaster, districts need to

be more cognizant about emergency planning. TASB

is here to help your district to prepare for what’s to

come. Visit tshb.org/services/legal-services/tasb-
school-law-resource/business/safety-and-emergency-

management.aspx for more information.

Every incident is different. Each experience is another

opportunity for learning and incorporating emerging tech-
nologies to have technology now that when districts

may have created their original emergency operations plan.

Districts may not have had all the technical advances that are

available now to do messaging and outreach more seamlessly.

But the fact that districts can reach people with more effi-
ciency does not change the fact that they need to know what

they’re saying.

The incident command is a function of emergency

operation planning. It’s important for districts to really

understand and plan for messaging and communications

based on the rules regarding COVID-19 if the reason for
the meeting was something other than COVID-19 (e.g., the
recent storms). Districts should consult with their attorney
about the best way to give notice and conduct a meeting
under those circumstances.

Regarding damage to records, the law and rules on
record keeping are overseen by the Texas State Library
and Archives Commission (TSLAC). TSLAC provided guidance
on how to dry out records and how to report to the com-
mission if records can’t be salvaged. Permanent records,
such as board meeting minutes, should be stored in the
safest possible way to avoid damage from fires, water, etc.

TASB Facility Services (Jeff Clemmons, Division
Director): Our consultants received a lot of calls regarding
frozen and burst pipes, physical damage to buildings and
structures from the extreme low temperatures, infrastruc-
ture damage of systems that distribute or retain water
sources, power outages, and water damage in general.

TASB HR Services (Amy Campbell, Division Director): The most common questions we received from districts
administrations were about employee pay during
closures and employees’ entitlement to leave. As with previ-
ous emergency closures, many districts wanted to continue
to pay staff to support employee retention and morale
and sought help to do that in a compliant way. Some also
wanted to pay premium pay to staff who worked during the
closure, securing buildings, responding to building issues,
etc., to reward their efforts to continue working to support
the district during the emergency.

District staff also needed help with figuring out em-
ployee leave entitlement because some staff continued to
have issues that required them to be absent even when the
district reopened (e.g., COVID-19, lack of water and power,
damage to their home).

TASB Policy Service (Susan Acevedo, Program Coordi-
nator): The most common question I got from districts was
about policies and procedures around paying employees
during an emergency closure. We can help districts under-
stand their policies at DEA(LOCAL), and we have sample
resolutions in the Regulations Resource Manual (RRM)
for the board to authorize pay during closure, including pre-
mium pay for employees (such as maintenance personnel)
who actually had to work during the closure (for example,
winterizing the buildings or taking care of burst pipes).

Most districts are unaware of the resources in the
RRM. The RRM is a collection of sample administrative regulations. These
samples include:

• Procedures, plans, resolutions, and forms required by
law or local policy
• Procedures, plans, resolutions, and forms that are either
requested by districts or recommended by TASB staff
• Links to resources provided by collateral agencies
authorizing wage payments for employees during the
closure

16 Texas Lone Star | May 2021 | texaslonestaronline.org
**TASB Risk Management:** The cascading events that occurred with the winter storms and swept across Texas were hard to prepare for; many schools did their best to winterize facilities, but the loss of both power and water complicated things.

Although this was an unprecedented event that would have been difficult to prepare for, one thing schools can do in addition to regular winterization is develop relationships with vendors so that there’s less time spent waiting in line when a crisis strikes.

Some other loss prevention tips to consider well in advance of an emergency or storm weather:

- Winterizing pipes and major equipment is vital to preparing for cold weather. Boilers and hot water heaters have their own winterization steps depending on size and type.
- Roofs should be inspected ahead of winter weather, including clearing drain lines and gutters, and periodic inspections for ice dams.
- Fire suppression systems operate in different ways. Cutting off water may not be an option, so checking the operator’s manual and discussing the issue with the vendor is important. Also, your local authority having jurisdiction may have to approve cutting water to suppression systems.
- Powering down and cutting water to school buildings take time to complete. The process needs to be developed and practiced several times before implemented.

Additionally, problems with computer servers caused longer disruption of educational services. Many server rooms have fail-safe backup power systems that automatically engage in the event of a power outage. These range from gas-powered generators to rechargeable battery cells. However, gas generators need to be refueled, and batteries need to be recharged. Without physical access to campuses, it was difficult for many to maintain their emergency backup systems. As a result, servers lost power without being properly shut down. There is a specific sequence of processes established to power down each unique server, and if it is not followed, bringing these systems back online becomes an even more complicated process than usual.

This, unfortunately, further delayed reestablishing network connectivity.

Q: Which of your resources/services can school districts take advantage of for this kind of emergency?

**TASB HR Services:** Beard resolutions typically are needed to continue pay for employees during an emergency closure, so knowing how to access the TASB template in the Policy Regulation Resource Manual at DEA (LOCAL) will be helpful so boards can take quick action next time they encounter an emergency requiring closure.

**TASB Risk Management:** In more service-specific terms, we highly recommend asbestos testing and planning, mold testing, and indoor air quality testing. Pending results and needs, districts can then use one of TASB Facility Services preferred providers.

**TASB HR Services:** We have helpful documents available in the HR Library in the Leaves and Absences section, but these are in the password-protected myTASB area, so they are available only to district administrators.

We also have HR Exchange (HRX) articles addressing pay and leave administration issues during closures, which are publicly available.

**TASB Risk Management:** Regional Texas Department of Emergency Management (TDEM) partners are available for assistance with recovery programs, including applying for individual or public assistance. More information about recovery programs is available through the TDEM Recovery Website (https://tdem.texas.gov/recovery/).

In addition, schools may wish to partner with or work through the recovery process with their local offices of emergency management. They can do so by retaining their abilities to file for assistance independent of their local jurisdiction.

Q: What’s something districts might not know that you can help with relevant to this kind of event?

**TASB Policy Services:** The cascading events that occurred with the winter storms and swept across Texas were hard to prepare for; many schools did their best to winterize facilities, but the loss of both power and water complicated things.

Although this was an unprecedented event that would have been difficult to prepare for, one thing schools can do in addition to regular winterization is develop relationships with vendors so that there’s less time spent waiting in line when a crisis strikes.

Some other loss prevention tips to consider well in advance of an emergency or storm weather:

- Winterizing pipes and major equipment is vital to preparing for cold weather. Boilers and hot water heaters have their own winterization steps depending on size and type.
- Roofs should be inspected ahead of winter weather, including clearing drain lines and gutters, and periodic inspections for ice dams.
- Fire suppression systems operate in different ways. Cutting off water may not be an option, so checking the operator’s manual and discussing the issue with the vendor is important. Also, your local authority having jurisdiction may have to approve cutting water to suppression systems.
- Powering down and cutting water to school buildings take time to complete. The process needs to be developed and practiced several times before implemented.

Additionally, problems with computer servers caused longer disruption of educational services. Many server rooms have fail-safe backup power systems that automatically engage in the event of a power outage. These range from gas-powered generators to rechargeable battery cells. However, gas generators need to be refueled, and batteries need to be recharged. Without physical access to campuses, it was difficult for many to maintain their emergency backup systems. As a result, servers lost power without being properly shut down. There is a specific sequence of processes established to power down each unique server, and if it is not followed, bringing these systems back online becomes an even more complicated process than usual.

This, unfortunately, further delayed reestablishing network connectivity.

Q: Which of your resources/services can school districts take advantage of for this kind of emergency?

**TASB Facility Services:** For our members, our Facility Services team is available to discuss facility-specific questions. Our team is here to guide districts through the steps that need to be taken, answer questions, and direct district personnel to the appropriate contacts.

**TASB Policy Services:** TASB Policy Service has sample resolutions regarding wage payments during emergency school closings. It is recommended that boards pass a resolution to authorize pay for staff during any emergency closures, such as the closure caused by the winter storms. A TASB Policy consultant can guide districts to these resources and point out provisions in the district’s DEAL/LOCAL policy that should align with the board adopted resolution.

**TASB Risk Management:** TASB staff can provide support with the recovery process, including answering questions about the public assistance process and acting as a liaison between the school and local or state emergency management partners.

For more information, read the InsideRM article entitled “How to Apply for Winter Storm Disaster Relief” at tasbrmf.org.
Aldine ISD Board Member Garcia Sworn In as 2021-22 NSBA President

by Stephanie Butler

When asked, “What does it mean to you to be the first Latina president of the National School Boards Association (NSBA)?” Viola M. Garcia, Aldine ISD trustee, said, “That I’m not going to be the last.”

She recalled a visit during her time in Leadership TASB in 1994 to an El Paso-area school. The community had not had a doctor until a young man who was from the area went away to medical school, became a doctor, and decided to come back and establish a clinic. “The most striking thing that he said during his presentation to us was, if the kids don’t see someone who looks like them in this role, they’ll never aspire to do that—to be that,” she said.

The doctor’s words stuck with her. She realized that if young people don’t see someone like them in leadership roles, they may be discouraged and not realize that they can achieve the same thing.

And throughout her tenure, Garcia has certainly made her impact on Latina education leaders in Texas, such as fellow Aldine ISD trustee Rose Avalos. “To me, growing up in a very traditional Hispanic household, I was not accustomed, nor did I have many opportunities to see women leaders, especially Hispanic women leaders,” Avalos said. “And as I’ve gotten to know Viola, I see that more, but it also gave me encouragement and it gave me motivation to continue the work myself.”

Garcia took the reins as NSBA president April 10, at the conclusion of the organization’s annual conference.

Dedication to Education

Garcia was appointed to the Aldine ISD Board in 1992 and has served ever since. She was initially selected because she was well known for her dedication to education. She had been the leader of three Girl Scout troops for her daughters, was heavily involved in the PTA, and was herself an educator. She retired in 2015 as a faculty member at the University of Houston-Downtown.

During her years of service at Aldine ISD, the board has received numerous accolades, including Region 4 Outstanding School Board, Texas Award for Performance Excellence from the Quality Texas Foundation, Magna Award from the American School Board Journal, and Outstanding School Board Award from the Texas Association of School Administrators.

“We need to develop and nurture in our own communities—parents, business partners, church leaders, anyone working with us—so we have followers who will support our students as we want them to be supported.”
Rising through the Ranks

Garcia has been a strong leader at the state level, serving as president of both TASB and the Mexican American School Boards Association. Fay Beaulieu, longtime Hurst-Euless-Bedford ISD trustee, served as TASB president-elect while Garcia was president. “She has always served as a role model for me,” Beaulieu said. The two got to know each other personally during their service on the TASB Board. “She’s warm; she’s funny; she’s generous. And yet at the same time she’s poised, and she has that carry of a leader that makes people want to follow her.”

Now Garcia is tackling her most prominent leadership role yet, and at one of the most uncertain times in education in modern history.

On the National Level

NSBA represents more than 90,000 school board members from across the United States. The association advocates for locally elected school boards before Congress, federal government agencies, and the courts, and is also a resource to state school boards associations, like TASB. Garcia will lead the organization during an uncertain time, financially and for students across the country. The association is dedicated to “proposing sound policies that ensure all students everywhere have access to a great public education where they live.”

However, the COVID-19 pandemic has made this a bigger challenge than ever before. The ongoing pandemic has exacerbated existing inequities in education. Poor, rural, and nonwhite students are more likely to lack the resources they need to participate in virtual learning. Communities of color are being disproportionately affected by COVID-19.

When asked how school leaders across the country can work to correct these inequities, Garcia emphasized local control. “I think one of the important things that we all need to remember is that all of the communities across the country are different.” She stressed that making generalizations about school districts and their communities would be a mistake. “It’s important that the opportunities for local control be at the center of any discussion.”

Get Involved

As someone who has seen public education from the local, state, and national levels, Garcia calls on Texas trustees to be more involved nationally. She said that while school board members are diligent about forging relationships with state lawmakers, it’s also important to know the legislators who represent your area on the national level. She cited the federal stimulus money for education as an example. Recent stimulus packages have included funds just for school districts. Even though federal funding constitutes a small revenue stream for districts, it tends to help the neediest kids, she emphasized.

“If we do not advocate and make a lot of noise to say, ‘Hey, that money was intended for schools and for the children in the schools,’...it’s a current example of why louder, more robust participation by local school board members on national issues is needed,” Garcia said. “It’s important for us to be able to harness our voices, bring our voices together...We are more effective together than we are alone.”

Stephanie Butler is a TASB content marketing/outreach specialist.

Garcia will lead NSBA during an uncertain time, financially and for students across the country. The association is dedicated to “proposing sound policies that ensure all students everywhere have access to a great public education where they live.”

She also emphasized communication, noting that transparent and consistent communication with parents, teachers, staff, and lawmakers is key.

After a year of the pandemic—with schools being shut down, reopened, shifted to virtual learning, and the mental health toll that all takes—it’s become clear that the effects on learning will be long term. Garcia said she believes the effects will be wide reaching and that we will see the effects on students for years to come.

Garcia added that the solution to these issues is to create and uphold rigorous expectations. Districts may need to extend summer instruction, share best practices with other districts, take a deeper look at online learning, and adapt academic calendars. She called on lawmakers to have flexibility with academic calendars and options for online instruction.

When it comes to leadership, she emphasizes starting at home. “We need to develop and nurture in our own communities—parents, business partners, church leaders, anyone working with us—so we have followers who will support our students as we want them to be supported.”

From an advocacy standpoint, focusing on the local level is also important. She encourages school board members to continue to invite state lawmakers into local schools so they can see firsthand the support of parents, teachers, and business partners.

“So much of what is represented, oftentimes, in the Legislature, are the perceptions that individual lawmakers have of our public schools and until they have a more realistic look at what actually occurs and the challenges faced by teachers and administrators—and parents as well—that they really do not understand the underlying challenges.... So I would encourage everyone to focus on what is going on in our individual, local schools, and encourage lawmakers to come into our local schools rather than talk about public education more broadly.”

Garcia (at right), who served as TASB president in 2012-13, is shown here handing the ceremonial president’s gavel off to 2013-14 TASB President Faye Beaulieu of Hurst-Euless-Bedford ISD.
A Matter of Ceremony
A Q&A Regarding Legal Issues in Graduation

by Sarah Orman

It is a truth universally acknowledged that a student earns the right to graduate and receive a high school diploma by fulfilling all state and local requirements. Whether a student has the right to participate in a graduation ceremony, and the content of the ceremony, can be more complicated. Below are some frequently asked questions regarding legal issues at graduation:

Q: How many credits does a student need to graduate?
A: Under the High School Foundation Program, students must earn at least 22 credits and demonstrate proficiency in four credits of English, three credits each of math, social studies, and science, two credits in languages other than English (which computer programming may satisfy), one credit each of fine arts and physical education, and five credits of electives. Students must also earn an endorsement to graduate unless the student and parent complete counseling and fill out a form designated by the Texas Education Agency after the student’s sophomore year. Tex. Educ. Code § 28.025.

Students can obtain an endorsement by earning additional credits and completing curriculum set by the State Board of Education in the areas of STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics), business, public service, arts and humanities, and multidisciplinary studies. Tex. Educ. Code § 28.025; 19 Tex. Admin. Code § 74.13.

Districts may choose to create additional requirements in the district’s policy under EIF(LOCAL) and other publications. For more information, see TASB Legal Services’ article entitled “Texas Promotion, Graduation, and Credit Requirements” at legal.tasb.org.

Q: Can a student graduate without passing the STAAR End-of-Course (EOC) tests?
A: Students must pass five EOC assessments to graduate (Algebra I, Biology, English I, English II, and US History). This requirement is in effect in the current academic year even though other rules have been suspended due to COVID-19. A student in 11th or 12th grade who does not perform satisfactorily on the STAAR test in no more than two courses may be permitted to graduate if an individual graduation committee determines the student is qualified to do so. Tex. Educ. Code §§ 28.025, 39.023(c); 19 Tex. Admin. Code § 101.022.

Q: What about students who receive special education?
A: Like other students, a special education student is entitled to receive a diploma after successfully completing the standard requirements for graduation. A student in special education may also earn a diploma by completing his or her individualized education program (IEP). Tex. Educ. Code § 28.025c.

Like other students, a special education student is entitled to receive a diploma after successfully completing the standard requirements for graduation.

Q: Can a student graduate from high school before completion of a senior year?
A: Yes. A parent is entitled to request, with the expectation that the request will not be unreasonably denied, that the parent’s child be permitted to graduate from high school earlier than the child would normally graduate, if the child completes each course required for graduation. Tex. Educ. Code § 26.005(a) (3)(C). A child who graduates early under this provision must be permitted to participate in the graduation ceremony at
Once a student has completed all the state and local requirements for graduation, the student has a right to a diploma.

Q: Can a diploma be awarded posthumously?
A: Yes. Once a student has completed all the state and local requirements for graduation, the student has a right to a diploma. Tex. Educ. Code § 28.0254.

Q: Can a student be banned from the graduation ceremony for disciplinary reasons?
A: Yes. Once a student has completed all the state and local requirements for graduation, the student has a right to a diploma. Tex. Educ. Code § 28.0254.

Q: If the graduation ceremony occurs at the end of the school year in which the student died while enrolled in the district at the time the child graduates, Tex. Educ. Code § 28.0254.

If a graduation ceremony is scheduled to take place during a student’s placement in a DAEP (Disciplinary Alternative Education Program), then the student should not participate. See Tex. Educ. Code § 37.006(g) (prohibiting students removed to DAEP under statutory removal provisions from attending or participating in school-sponsored or school-related activities).

If the graduation ceremony occurs after the DAEP placement has ended, then—absent further disciplinary action—the student will be free to participate in graduation. If the district plans to prevent such a student from participating in graduation, the district should state its intent clearly in a student handbook, the student code of conduct, or in the individual student’s DAEP placement order.

Q: Can there be prayer at graduation ceremonies?
A: Whether you call it a prayer, a blessing, an invocation, or a benediction, the legality of prayer at graduation ceremonies depends on whether the speech is considered school-sponsored. A prayer offered by a school official or local clergy is likely to be considered school-sponsored, and, as such, an unconstitutional endorsement of religion. See Lee v. Weisman, 505 U.S. 577 (1992).

Prayers offered by students are more complicated. Courts have viewed some school activities as school-sponsored, including student-led prayer over the loudspeaker at football games. Santa Fe Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Doe ex rel. Doe, 530 U.S. 290 (2000). To complicate matters further, the Texas Religious Viewpoint Anti-Discrimination Act (RVAA) requires a school district to treat a student’s voluntary expression of a religious viewpoint on an otherwise permissible topic the same way it would treat voluntary student expression of a secular viewpoint. Under the RVAA, districts must adopt a policy that meets certain requirements, including the establishment of a limited public forum for student speakers at all school events at which a student is to publicly speak and nondiscrimination against student speakers who express religious viewpoints. The RVAA also requires districts to use a disclaimer to avoid any mistaken perception that the school has endorsed the student speech. Tex. Educ. Code §§ 25.151–.154.

Most districts have adopted student speaker policies at TASB Policy FNA (LOCAL). Other districts, working with local counsel, have decided not to adopt a policy in response to the RVAA but to focus instead on First Amendment principles.

While there is no risk-free answer to this complex question, the wise school official will have a plan before graduation day. Student speakers should be chosen based on neutral criteria, and any parameters for their speeches should be communicated in advance.

Student speakers should be chosen based on neutral criteria, and any parameters for their speeches should be communicated in advance.
State Leaders Announce Distribution Of $11.2 Billion in Federal Dollars

by Dax Gonzalez

Texas Governor Greg Abbott, Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick, and House Speaker Dade Phelan announced on April 28 the release of $11.2 billion out of $18 billion in federal funds to help public schools address student learning loss and costs incurred as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

These one-time funds are intended to support a comprehensive learning recovery effort in Texas over the next three years. Due to federal requirements, two-thirds of the funds are available immediately under grants administered by the Texas Education Agency (TEA), with the final one-third to be distributed at a later date. The state is still awaiting guidance from the federal government regarding funds from the second round of the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER II).

Specifically, state leaders need information on the timing of the funds and maintenance of effort provisions related to higher education. ESSER II funds are expected to be available no sooner than the end of the legislative session at the end of May.

End-of-School Advocacy Tips

Being a school board member means being an advocate for your district. Here are a few activities you can do as we wrap up another school year:

1. Communicate with legislators now about legislation and other issues that will impact your district. As the legislative session comes to an end, be sure that you are communicating with your local legislators as to bills that will impact your district. Make sure you are communicating about issues such as:
   - Federal pandemic recovery funds intended for school districts that are being withheld by the state
   - Bills that would facilitate the unchecked expansion of charter schools

2. Communicate to parents, taxpayers, and others about how new legislation will impact your district. The Texas Legislature is set to enact several new laws that will directly impact public schools. Learn about what those bills will do and share that information with your communities.

TASB will produce legislative summaries on recently enacted legislation and will provide legislative updates from TASB staff. TASB’s Post-Legislative Conferences, which provide Tier I credit, are scheduled for Saturday, June 19, in San Antonio and Saturday, June 26, in Fort Worth. Both are held in conjunction with the TASB Summer Leadership Institute conferences.

3. Make plans for a “Back to School” event. Start making plans now to hold a “Back to School” event in August or September. Such events are a great time to invite parents, taxpayers, legislators, candidates, and the media to visit one or more of your district’s campuses. Have key district officials deliver presentations on different aspects of your district, such as the district’s mission, goals, and challenges, changes in student and teacher demographics, accountability ratings, the district’s budget, etc.

Staff can also explain how changes in state funding affect services at your district, how your district is addressing student needs, and what parents can do to help.

Too often relationships begin (usually badly) when a problem is at hand. Giving policymakers, the media, and the community an opportunity to meet district officials in a friendly atmosphere at the beginning of the school year helps foster positive relationships.

Taxpayers will have a better understanding of why districts must make difficult choices regarding the budget; parents will learn what the district is doing to improve accountability ratings; and legislators can see firsthand how the laws they pass in Austin are impacting your district.

Advocacy Resources

TASB Governmental Relations staff is available to answer any questions you may have regarding advocacy, the Legislature, or the TASB Advocacy Agenda. You may also call or email Dax Gonzalez with TASB Governmental Relations (dax.gonzalez@tasb.org or 800.550.4858) for more information.

Dax Gonzalez is TASB Governmental Relations division director.

Awaiting Federal Guidance

Two-thirds of the money made available by the American Rescue Plan (ARP) will be available as soon as grants are approved by TEA, with the rest to be distributed at a later date. The state is still awaiting guidance from the federal government regarding funds from the second round of the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER II).

Specifically, state leaders need information on the timing of the funds and maintenance of effort provisions related to higher education. ESSER II funds are expected to be available no sooner than the end of May.

End-of-School Advocacy Tips

Being a school board member means being an advocate for your district. Here are a few activities you can do as we wrap up another school year:

1. Communicate with legislators now about legislation and other issues that will impact your district. As the legislative session comes to an end, be sure that you are communicating with your local legislators as to bills that will impact your district. Make sure you are communicating about issues such as:
   - Federal pandemic recovery funds intended for school districts that are being withheld by the state
   - Bills that would facilitate the unchecked expansion of charter schools

2. Communicate to parents, taxpayers, and others about how new legislation will impact your district. The Texas Legislature is set to enact several new laws that will directly impact public schools. Learn about what those bills will do and share that information with your communities.

TASB will produce legislative summaries on recently enacted legislation and will provide legislative updates from TASB staff. TASB’s Post-Legislative Conferences, which provide Tier I credit, are scheduled for Saturday, June 19, in San Antonio and Saturday, June 26, in Fort Worth. Both are held in conjunction with the TASB Summer Leadership Institute conferences.

3. Make plans for a “Back to School” event. Start making plans now to hold a “Back to School” event in August or September. Such events are a great time to invite parents, taxpayers, legislators, candidates, and the media to visit one or more of your district’s campuses. Have key district officials deliver presentations on different aspects of your district, such as the district’s mission, goals, and challenges, changes in student and teacher demographics, accountability ratings, the district’s budget, etc.

Staff can also explain how changes in state funding affect services at your district, how your district is addressing student needs, and what parents can do to help.

Too often relationships begin (usually badly) when a problem is at hand. Giving policymakers, the media, and the community an opportunity to meet district officials in a friendly atmosphere at the beginning of the school year helps foster positive relationships.

Taxpayers will have a better understanding of why districts must make difficult choices regarding the budget; parents will learn what the district is doing to improve accountability ratings; and legislators can see firsthand how the laws they pass in Austin are impacting your district.

Advocacy Resources

TASB Governmental Relations staff is available to answer any questions you may have regarding advocacy, the Legislature, or the TASB Advocacy Agenda. You may also call or email Dax Gonzalez with TASB Governmental Relations (dax.gonzalez@tasb.org or 800.550.4858) for more information.

Dax Gonzalez is TASB Governmental Relations division director.

Get Reimbursed for Medicaid Program Administration

Your district works hard to provide students with Medicaid-eligible services through School Health and Related Services (SHARS). Now we can help you get reimbursed through the Medicaid Administrative Claiming (MAC) program for your behind-the-scenes work, including:

- Medicaid outreach
- Program planning and interagency coordination of medical services
- Referral and coordination of Medicaid services
- Monitoring Medicaid service components of the Individualized Education Program
- More!
When Brad Hunt began his tenure as superintendent for Coppell ISD in 2017, he collaborated with the district’s Communications and Community Engagement team to develop a comprehensive strategic communications plan. The plan was designed to build trust, authentic relationships, and collective engagement with internal and external stakeholders. Innovative technology has been an important tool in implementing this plan.

As part of its strategic communication plan, the district gathered feedback from parents and community members through an internal audit of listening channels and social media. It then adapted its communication channels based on those stakeholders’ feedback.

For leading this comprehensive effort, Hunt has been honored with the National School Public Relations Association’s (NSPRA) 2021 Communication Technology Award for Superintendents.

 '"Hobbies with Hunt”

During the pandemic, Coppell ISD also began using flash briefings on Alexa in response to the need to reach people in their homes. District stakeholders receive a “mindful minute” from Hunt each day as part of their flash briefings. In addition, users can hear an on-the-go version of the YouTube series #CatchupWithHunt on their Alexa device.

Hunt also launched “Hobbies with Hunt” on YouTube, where students at home teach him different hobbies such as cooking, playing the guitar, and making candles. According to the NSPRA award release: “Hunt’s leadership and strategic approach to using technology keeps his community connected. He’s a forward thinker who leads with his heart, and he was also one of NSPRA’s 2020-21 Superintendents to Watch honorees.”

A Career in Education

Prior to the Coppell ISD Board naming him superintendent in July 2017, Hunt served the district for almost 30 years as a teacher at Coppell High School, assistant principal of Coppell Middle School West, principal of Coppell High School, and assistant superintendent for Administrative Services. Under Hunt’s leadership, in fall 2017, Coppell ISD embarked on a new strategic design effort to collaboratively create CISD’s next set of priorities and giving the district a renewed vision for the upcoming years,” Hunt said. “It is my privilege to serve you, your child, and CISD.”

The theme for the district is #CISDOurStory. Many people—most importantly families, educators, and the community—play an integral role in students’ stories by providing support along their journey from pre-kindergarten to graduation and beyond.

“My focus is on celebration, communication, collaboration, and commitment in working to ensure each child’s story is known, encouraged, and supported,” Hunt said.

Award Info

NSPRA’s Communication Technology Award for Superintendents recognizes a superintendent of a K-12 school system, intermediate unit, BOCES, or County Education Office for leadership in redefining, upgrading, and integrating cutting-edge communication technology to improve and expand outreach and engagement with education stakeholders—both internal and external.

NSPRA and Blackboard Edtech are cosponsors of the Communication Technology Award for Superintendents.

Previous national award winners were:

- 2020: Kenny Rodriguez, Ed.D.
- 2019: Matthew Miller, Lakota Local School District
- 2018: Meria J. Carstarphen, Ed.D.
- 2016: Susan Enfield, Ed.D.

Previous national award winners were:

- 2020: Kenny Rodriguez, Ed.D.
- 2019: Matthew Miller, Lakota Local School District
- 2018: Meria J. Carstarphen, Ed.D.
- 2016: Susan Enfield, Ed.D.

Previous national award winners were:

- 2020: Kenny Rodriguez, Ed.D.
- 2019: Matthew Miller, Lakota Local School District
- 2018: Meria J. Carstarphen, Ed.D.
- 2016: Susan Enfield, Ed.D.
On the National Scene

TASB Legal Services Director Named Council of School Attorneys Chair

by Roger White

TASB Legal Services Director Joy Baskin has been named chair of the National School Boards Association (NSBA) Council of School Attorneys (COSA) for 2021-22, NSBA announced recently.

Baskin has been director of TASB Legal Services since 2005 and worked for the division since 1996. She has been a regular contributor to the “Legal Brief” column in the American Association of School Administrators’ School Administrator magazine as well as a regular contributor to Texas Lone Star.

She is also a frequent presenter on school law topics in Texas and at NSBA events and a guest lecturer on school law and ethics at The University of Texas and Texas State University.

“A few years ago, the Texas comptroller did a study of school district legal fees with an eye toward reducing costs. The study came back with a surprising recommendation—not for school districts to call their lawyers less, but rather that they call their lawyers sooner,” Baskin noted. “School lawyers play an important supporting role in public education by helping school districts with legal compliance and ensuring that school dollars are directed toward education rather than legal squabbles.”

‘Chance of a Lifetime’

In addition to the state and national councils of school attorneys, Baskin is an active member of the School Law Section of the State Bar of Texas, including serving as chair in 2010-11. By appointment of the Texas Supreme Court, she served as a member of the Permanent Judicial Commission for Children, Youth, and Families Education Committee.

Baskin received her bachelor’s degree with honors from Stetson University in 1992. She earned her law degree with honors from The University of Texas School of Law in 1995.

“I love being a school attorney, and I love working with the crackerjack team in TASB Legal Services,” she said. “Having this additional opportunity to serve the school law community nationally is the chance of a lifetime, and I am sincerely grateful.”

Roger White is managing editor of Texas Lone Star.

COSA’s Mission

COSA supports school attorneys in their representation of public school boards by providing leadership in legal advocacy for public schools. The national council provides a forum for the discussion of legal issues and problems encountered by school attorneys in providing legal counsel, advice, and representation to school boards and school boards associations.

The organization also promotes closer relationships and better understanding between school attorneys and their clients, school boards, and school boards associations and provides information and practical assistance to more than 3,000 attorneys representing K-12 public school districts.

As COSA chair, Baskin will serve as an ex-officio member of the NSBA Board of Directors this year.

A Vital Role

“It’s a great honor and opportunity to serve as the 2021-22 chair of the national Council of School Attorneys,” Baskin said. “I am especially delighted to serve on the NSBA Board for the year that Viola Garcia of Aldine ISD will be our NSBA president.”

A Texas Council of School Attorneys member for more than 20 years, Baskin has witnessed the growth of school leaders’ and state and national policymakers’ understanding of the importance of proper legal representation of school districts and school boards.

TASB’s Legal Services Director Joy Baskin

“School lawyers play an important supporting role in public education by helping school districts with legal compliance and ensuring that school dollars are directed toward education rather than legal squabbles.”

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

- El Paso ISD. Superintendent. Deadlines to be determined.
- Miller Grove ISD. Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction. Application deadline: May 17.

For more 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.

Only $10 for TASB Members!

Our School Official’s Quick Guide series offers convenient flip-chart publications that cover the basics on:

- Nepotism and Other Conflicts of Interest
- The Texas Open Meetings Act
- Grievances

Visit store.tasb.org to order or to find out more.

Need Quick Answers to Legal Questions?
Six Schools Named 2021 Student Video Contest Winners

Six schools have been selected as winners of the biennial Student Video Contest sponsored by TASB. This year’s videos focus on overcoming challenges, pushing past adversity, and showcasing the strength, resilience, and success of Texas public schools.

The contest was open to all Texas elementary and secondary public school students, and winners were selected in three categories: elementary school, middle/junior high school, and high school.

First-place prizes of $5,000 each will be awarded to the following school districts for use in the students’ classroom or campus:

- Elementary School: Frances E. Norton Elementary School, Allen ISD
- Middle/Junior High: Spring Forest Middle School, Spring Branch ISD
- High School: Bridgeland High School, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD

Second-place prizes of $2,500 will be presented to the following districts:

- Elementary School: Berta Palacios Elementary School, Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD
- Middle/Junior High: Coppell Middle School East, Coppell ISD
- High School: Cypress Creek High School, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD

‘A Positive Message’

“This school year has posed unique challenges for Texas public schools, and I am beyond proud to see our students united and working hard on projects like this that send a positive message while also furthering the students’ technological skills,” said TASB 2020-21 President Jim Rice. “Thank you to the students, teachers, and staff who all contributed their time, skills, and knowledge to this project. It’s wonderful to hear about and celebrate the success of Texas public schools despite the undeniable adversity they have faced.”

In addition, a People’s Choice Award in each of the three categories was chosen based on the videos most viewed from start to finish by visitors watching in the online gallery. Although these winners receive no monetary prize, they are included among the videos displayed statewide at various TASB events:

- Elementary School: Frances E. Norton Elementary School, Allen ISD
- Middle/Junior High: Lincoln Junior High School, Coldspring-Oakhurst CISD
- High School: Warren High School, Northside ISD-Bexar County

Overcoming Barriers

Students were asked to highlight how their schools have overcome barriers to support students, teachers, and public education as a whole—and what makes Texas public schools the best choice.

For more information, including product demonstrations, visit boardbook.org.

In-person, virtual, or hybrid board meetings—we do it all!

- BoardBook® Premier—User-friendly board agenda preparation software for compiling meeting documents, agendas, and minutes.
- BoardBook® Manuals—Quick and easy document management hosting software for policies, regulations, and codes.

For more information, including product demonstrations, visit boardbook.org.

Create comparison reports using market data from our surveys.

TASB HR DATASOURCE™ will help you:

- Compare districts or community colleges by size, region, or individual selection.
- Access reliable and current benchmark data instantly online.
- Download reports in PDF or Excel format

hrservices.tasb.org • 800.580.7782

Priddy ISD Trustee Passes Away

Priddy ISD Trustee Ray Gutierrez, Jr., passed away on Tuesday, April 6, 2021, in Austin. He was 44.

A strong family man, Priddy was a longtime employee of Texas Department of Transportation and served the Priddy ISD Board with pride. He was noted for always being willing to lend a helping hand in community affairs.

Gutierrez is survived by his wife, Jessica Gutierrez of Priddy; daughter, Alexis Gutierrez of Priddy; son, Hunter Gutierrez of Priddy; parents, Raymond and Esmeralda Gutierrez of Gustine; brothers, Mark Gutierrez and wife Michelle of Priddy, and Luke Gutierrez and wife Kim of Early; sisters, Sylvia Gutierrez of Comanche and Jennifer Solis and husband Mike of Belton; parents-in-law, J.R. and Debbie Tiemann of Priddy; sister-in-law, Mikayla Moreland and husband Kyle of Georgia; brother-in-law, Justin Tiemann and wife Jamie of Priddy; and numerous nieces, nephews and cousins.
Progress is being made in reopening the nation’s public schools for either full-time or a combination of in-person and online learning, US Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona said in late March. “Today’s findings from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) show encouraging early progress in states’ and communities’ efforts to reopen schools safely and quickly,” Cardona said March 24. “As of February, 76 percent of schools were open for full-time or hybrid learning. While schools continue to show us what’s possible as they work to open their doors and meet students’ needs, we know that we still have a lot of ground to go. Data from January show there were critical gaps in access to in-person instruction, particularly for communities of color and students disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.”

Cardona added, “At the Department of Education, we are committed to working with schools all across the country to get them reopened quickly and safely and to build confidence among families and educators. We owe it to our students—especially students in underserved communities and students with disabilities—to get all our schools opened safely and to meet the social, emotional, mental health, and academic needs of all students. Between the critical funds allocated from the American Rescue Plan and the bold initiatives this department is putting forward, I am confident that we can bridge the gaps that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated and build a better educational system for all of our students.”

Cardona’s remarks came at the virtual National Safe School Reopening Summit, following the earlier passage of the American Rescue Plan recently signed by President Joe Biden. The summit included remarks from First Lady Jill Biden and Rochelle Walensky, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The summit also included three panels of health experts, educators and education leaders, and students.

“Since day one, my top priority, and a top priority for President Biden and Vice-President Harris, has been to get kids safely back into schools full time,” Cardona said. “To accomplish this, we need to bring together students, educators, and school district leaders to listen and learn from one another as we work together to reopen schools quickly, safely, and equitably, and address the academic, social, and emotional needs of our students.”

Overdue special education operating procedures?

We can help your district meet the new TEA regulation quickly by:

- Personalizing our model procedures, reviewed by attorneys and special education professionals
- Submitting them to the Legal Framework for you
- And more

Ask us about a Student Solutions membership and our comprehensive customization services!
Virtual Opportunity

The Move to Online May Have Opened Doors To Better Appreciation of School Board’s Role

by Tiffany Dunne-Oldfield

I attended my first school board meeting August 8, 2013. The meeting started promptly at 5 p.m. and ended—not so promptly—at 8:14 p.m. Having just moved from a corporate position to working for a school district, my induction to school board meetings was both swift and intense. I can only imagine that lots of folks used “deer in headlights” to describe me in those early days.

Truth be told, I was taken aback by the work involved in preparing for a productive board meeting and surprised by the passion that trustees, district leadership, and community members had for the long-standing traditions involved in board meetings.

Well, I think we can all agree that it’s a good thing when community members trust and appreciate their local education system. That was the case with my parents, and that was the case with my sons. We loved our schools, and we loved our teachers and school administrators. Daily life, though, was busy.

When I was young, my parents worked full-time jobs. Then when I was raising my sons, I, too, managed a hectic work schedule. School events and activities, of course, were precious to us, and time was carved out for events. Unfortunately, there never seemed to be enough time or need to attend a school board meeting.

Perhaps, if this awful pandemic has a silver lining, it’s the opportunity it has opened to solve what had seemed unsolvable: improved understanding and perception of the vital work of school boards.

As school board members well know, my family is a typical family—regularly attending their school’s open house but seldom ever making it to a school board meeting. This, of course, makes life difficult for dedicated board members who often find themselves explaining—and sometimes defending—the role of a school board trustee.

Sadly, this lack of understanding existed before any of us ever attended school and has continued despite herculean efforts to educate and engage community members in the important work of school board governance.

A Silver Lining

Perhaps, if this awful pandemic has a silver lining, it’s the opportunity it has opened to solve what had seemed unsolvable: improved understanding and perception of the vital work of school boards.

Doing what I do now for a living, it astonishes me how clueless I was—the first 40-plus years of my life—to the importance of school boards and their connection to strong student outcomes.

I’m public school educated—a proud graduate of Northeast ISD in San Antonio. My two sons also attended public schools in Conroe ISD, outside of Houston, where I was an active parent. Yet, despite all this, I had never attended a single school board meeting until that hot summer day in 2013.

A Lack of Understanding

So why is this important?

Perhaps, if this awful pandemic has a silver lining, it’s the opportunity it has opened to solve what had seemed unsolvable: improved understanding and perception of the vital work of school boards.

Life changed, though, with the pandemic. And for all of us who care deeply about school governance, let’s look for the opportunity and the silver lining in this change. I believe it’s there for the taking. Hopefully, as busy parents are provided easier ways to participate and engage with school board members, gone will be the days when trustees spend so much time explaining what they do.

And, importantly, citizens may gain a deeper understanding and greater appreciation of the essential role the local school board has in the success of each community’s most precious resource: its children.

Tiffany Dunne-Oldfield is TASB associate executive director of Marketing and Communications.

A Final Note

For more information about preparing for new officers and school board members, visit the resources section of tasb.org/board-dev.

Team Building that Meets Your Board’s Unique Needs

For information on any of these offerings:

800.580.8272, ext. 2453 • board.dev@tasb.org

tasb.org/board-dev • onlinelearning.tasb.org

Reminder: Comprehensive board development for new members, officers, and all trustees will be available at TASB’s Summer Leadership Institute (tasb.org/sli).
Benefits as unique as your school district.

The TASB Benefits Cooperative can help you customize the benefits you offer.

Since we’re carrier-neutral, you can choose the carriers that work best for your district. And your employees can choose the plans that work best for them.

**Benefits for everyone.**

benefits.firstpublic.com
800.558.8875