

TEXAS

Athletic Administrator
Spring 2026 Newsletter



Message from the Executive Director

Rusty Dowling

As we have just concluded, the 6th annual Spring Sponsor Showcase, we appreciate all our members and THSADA sponsors who have made the effort to support this event and all athletic administrators throughout the State of Texas. As we enter Spring, we are about halfway through the 2nd semester and as we all know the spring sport calendar has events and activities pretty much six days a week until mid-May. The challenges that await athletic administrators during the 2nd semester are always significant and seem to be never-ending. Personnel, Budget, Re-scheduling events, end-of-year Banquets and Award Ceremonies, Summer Planning and beginning of the school-year staff developments. We hope the mid-semester highlight event afforded you the opportunity to re-charge, engage with your colleagues and provide that push going into the last part of the school year.

One of the main initiatives that THSADA is involved with is The Texas Way Sportsmanship program. THSADA/THSCA and 2Words Character are in their 2nd year of facilitating and promoting Texas sportsmanship behaviors from all stakeholders. Many ISD's and High School campuses have done a tremendous job of implementing the Texas Way curriculum into their daily athletic schedules.

THSADA membership continues to rise as we currently sit at over 1,700 members and we increase every day as we move towards our State Conference. You must be a member to attend any THSADA event and the benefits you receive



are significant whether it's through our TAAC program, Region meetings, or any of our three THSADA-sponsored event throughout the calendar year.

This past December 3rd and 4th the THSADA Board of Directors and Committee Chairs met in Houston at the Hilton Garden Inn Hotel at Hobby Airport to conduct the business of the THSADA. As it always does, the Board meeting provided an opportunity for Officers, Region Directors, and Committee Chairs to not only conduct the affairs of the THSADA but also provided Board members the opportunity to discuss issues specific to athletic administrators during several social gatherings held in conjunction with the Board meeting. PBK again functioned as a host



THSADA Board of Directors December 2025



for the annual Board/ Committee Chairs dinner held Wednesday, December 3rd.

Several significant items and actions came out of the Board meeting. The Board approved the following:

1. Approve NIAAA Award recipients. Award winners on listed on the THSADA website.
2. Approve the THSADA Award recipients. Hall of Honor: Lynn Pool/ Stan Laing/Leslie Slovak
3. 2024-2025 Financial Report
4. State Conference Fee and Membership Fee Increase
5. **By Laws**
 - Section 4.04 Retired Membership – Eliminated a redundant sentence
 - Article V – Officers and Board of Directors
 - Renamed the Operations Committee to Management Committee
 - Changed the number of Ex-Officio officers from two to three
 - Elimination of the position of Senior Director

THSADA Board Financial Report

2024-2025 Expenses		2024-2025 Revenue	
Dues / Registration Fees	\$ 425.00	Memberships	\$ 97,690.00
Meals & Entertainment	2,658.88	Fall Forum	12,020.00
Operations	71,298.99	Spring Sponsor Showcase	20,520.52
		State Conference Registration	79,900.00
JHAMS	8,565.12	Golf Tournament	9,755.77
Fall Forum	31,543.23	Extra Badges	280.00
Spring Sponsor Showcase	59,545.21	Exhibitors	102,650.00
State Conference	29,850.76	Sponsorships	669,552.50
Contracted Services	608,087.05	Hall of Honor	2,920.00
Board Mtg. Exp.	7,877.47	NIAAA Webinar	3,475.87
NIAAA Conf. Exp.	2,122.02	NIAAA LTC Classes	665.00
Travel	22,826.63	Other/Red'd Petty Cash/Misc.	2,792.80
Total Expenses	\$844,800.36	Total Net Income	\$1,002,222.46

6. Addition of two awards:
 - NIAAA Hall of Fame
 - NIAAA Triple Legacy Award

THSADA Committee Chairs all gave updated reports on the work of their respective committees. THSADA committees are very important in the overall work of the THSADA as they lean on the experience and knowledge of all committee members to address any and all issues facing athletic administrators. The service each committee member provides is genuinely appreciated and makes a difference in the effectiveness of THSADA.

The 2026 THSADA State Conference and Tradeshow will be held May 31-June 3, 2026, at the Kalahari Resort in Round Rock, Texas. Pre-registration is currently open at www.thsada.com and we are looking at the largest attendance we've ever had. At the State Conference this year there will be several new features presented. The Tradeshow Hall will now be open on Monday for lunch and again at its regular time on Monday evening. The Tuesday Tradeshow will open first thing Tuesday morning for breakfast then again at its regular time Tuesday evening. There will be up to five sessions each hour with the additions of the JHAMS (Junior High and Middle School) program and the regular cur-



riculum of TAAC and QUAD A sessions will be held with the Resume Review and Mock Interview sessions increasing in the number of participants that can enroll in each session. This was very popular last year and so we are expanding the number of participants for each session. We will also conduct Region meetings during the State Conference

In closing I again want to thank everyone for your continued support of THSADA, have a great last half of the school year and we look forward to seeing everyone at the State Conference, May 31-June 3, 2026, at the Kalahari Resort and Convention Center in Round Rock!



Associate Executive Director's Update

Bob DeJonge

Spring is THSADA's selection season. Many will call these two months the most important and crucial time of the year for our organization. THSADA benefits from a strong pool of accomplished leaders, enabling the organization to select highly qualified individuals for leadership roles. THSADA is recognized as the country's biggest and most impactful Athletic Administrator group at the state level, and it is also one of the leading athletic organizations in the state. This is true in great part because of the tremendous leadership we have on our elected board of directors. Our leadership model dictates that we have four annual elections that determine new leadership and recognize excellence among our 1800 members. It all starts in the month of February with President Elect nominations followed by the election. This year we had six nominees coming from regions 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, and 8. Regions 5-7 were not eligible to nominate someone because they currently occupy the President Elect and President offices. This year's nominees were



Region 1 Mike Meeks – Lubbock ISD
Region 2 Tracey Borchardt – Ector County ISD
Region 3 – Jennifer Frazier – McKinney ISD
Region 4 – Martin Segovia – Ysleta ISD
Region 6 – Jason Dean – Georgetown ISD
Region 8 – Jay Govan – North East ISD

The initial election did not have a majority winner, so we conducted a run-off election between Jay Govan and Jennifer Frazier. Jennifer won the Run-off and will take office as our President Elect in June at the State Conference.

Our second election is the Regional Athletic Administrator of the Year Election. Each Region elects one individual to be its Athletic Administrator of the Year. Nominations are Feb 24-25 and the election is February 26.

The third annual election is to elect four new Region Directors. This year we will elect a new director in regions 2, 4, 5 and 8. Next year we will have elections for 1, 3, 6, and 7. Nominations take place on March 18 and 19, with the election scheduled for April 2.

The newest Election THSADA conducts is for the Regional Junior High / Middle School Coordinator of the Year. Each region accepts nominations until April 1 and then a regional committee selects one person from the nominations to be their regional winner.

THSADA Introduces the TEXAS CUP Competition

The TEXAS CUP is an athletic competition sponsored by the Texas High School Athletic Directors Association that aims to determine the highest achieving high school sports programs in the State of Texas. Points will be earned by place finished in district, regional and state competition with a graduated system of points as a team advances in competition beyond district play. All SPORTS which UIL recognizes as a TEAM state champion will be awarded points.

The TEXAS CUP awards will be presented annually to six schools (1A-6A) in the Fall at an event determined by the Championship school.



The awards will be based on information gathered by the THSADA on

a point system that is devised and approved by the THSADA Board of Directors.

The first Texas Cup rankings were announced January 12th and included Team Tennis, Cross Country, Water Polo, Volleyball and Football.

The next rankings will be released on March 16th and will include Swimming & Diving, Wrestling, Girls Basketball and Boys Basketball.

For a full list of standings and more information on the Texas Cup visit the THSADA website and look on the Awards page. This is not a UIL sponsored award.



From the President

Andre Walker, Houston ISD

As the spring sports season across Texas is now well underway, we find ourselves in one of the most active and far-reaching periods of our athletic year. No other season involves as many student-athletes or touches as many programs. From track and field meets that fill entire campuses to baseball and softball competition, and to tennis and golf athletes representing their schools, spring is where our collective work is most visible.

This is also the season when our leadership is tested and when our presence is essential.

Each day, thousands of young people rely on us for safe, organized, and meaningful opportunities to compete, as well as for the academic structure that athletics supports. Spring sports require discipline, accountability, time management, and resilience. When

we support our programs effectively, we contribute directly to classroom performance, graduation rates, and long-term student success.

Athletics is not separate from academics. Athletics strengthens academics.

Our programs keep students engaged, connected, and motivated. They reinforce attendance, teach responsibility, and build habits that carry into every subject area. When we invest in athletics, we invest in the academic future of every student-athlete we serve.

Coaches look to us for guidance and stability as they manage the fast pace and challenges of the spring season. Communities rely on us to uphold the standards that make Texas athletics a model statewide. And our student-athletes depend on us to support both their performance and their



academic growth.

As president of THSADA, I appreciate the leadership you provide and the lives you influence. Spring sports highlight the importance of our work, because every athlete deserves adults who are committed, prepared, and focused on supporting both their athletic and academic development.

Thank you for the impact you make across our state. Let's continue to uphold the standard for excellence in Texas athletics.

CORE Behaviors: Building Championship Experiences

Rob Davies, THSADA President Elect, Harlingen CISD

Successful athletic programs are built on more than talent or wins. At Harlingen CISD, our most effective coaches lead through four CORE behaviors: **Communication, Organization, Relationships, and Expectations**. These fundamentals create championship experiences for student-athletes, coaches, parents, and our community.

Communication provides clarity and trust. When expectations, roles, and information are communicated clearly and consistently, student-athletes perform with confidence and parents feel connected to the program.

Organization reflects preparation and professionalism. Well-planned

practices, clear schedules, and attention to detail create environments where athletes can focus on growth and success.

Relationships are at the heart of coaching. Coaches who invest in meaningful connections build trust, accountability, and team unity—helping athletes thrive both on and off the field.

Expectations define the standard. Clear, fair, and consistent expectations promote discipline, effort, and character while teaching lessons that extend far beyond athletics.

When CORE behaviors are practiced daily, the result is more than competitive success—it's a champion-



ship experience for everyone involved. At Harlingen CISD, CORE behaviors are the foundation of excellence and the standard by which we build strong programs and strong people.



Retired Athletic Director Spotlight: Joe Tusa

Houston ISD | THSADA Hall of Honor Inductee, 1983

Joe Tusa's impact on Texas high school athletics spans decades and helped shape the foundation of athletic administration as we know it today. A standout student-athlete at Houston Reagan High School in the mid-1940s, Tusa excelled as a receiver and defensive end before serving briefly in the U.S. Navy during World War II. He continued his football career at Rice University and the University of Houston, later earning his master's degree from UH.

Following his playing days, Tusa returned to Reagan High School as an assistant football coach and quickly became a fixture in the Bulldogs' athletic program. Over the years, he coached nearly every sport offered at the school but is perhaps best remembered for leading the Reagan football team to back-to-back state quarterfinal appearances in 1958 and 1959, marking the program's final district championships



for the next 45 years.

In 1960, Tusa transitioned into campus administration as an assistant principal at the newly opened Houston Waltrip High School. Five years later, he was named Athletic Director for the Houston Independent School District, a role he would hold for an impressive 24 years. During his tenure, Tusa played a critical leadership role in

guiding HISD through school desegregation in the 1960s, championed the expansion of girls' athletics in the 1970s, and oversaw athletic programs during a period of rapid growth in one of the nation's largest school districts.

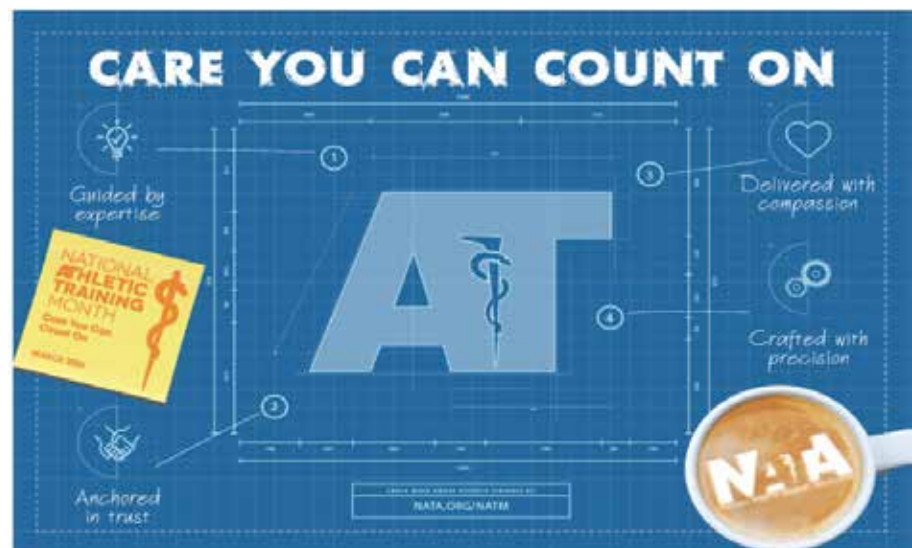
Beyond Houston, Joe Tusa's influence extended statewide. He was instrumental in the establishment of the Texas High School Athletic Directors Association and went on to serve as president of THSADA in 1974. He was inducted into the THSADA Hall of Honor in 1983 and into the Texas High School Football Hall of Fame in 2014.

In recognition of his lasting contributions to Houston ISD and Texas high school athletics, Delmar Stadium and the northside sports complex were officially renamed in Joe Tusa's honor in 2012, a fitting tribute to a true pioneer and servant leader in athletic administration.

March: National Athletic Training Month

Sonia Almanza, Northside ISD

Each March, the National Athletic Trainers' Association celebrates National Athletic Training Month (NATM) to recognize the vital work of athletic trainers across the country. The purpose of NATM is to raise awareness about the role of athletic trainers, educate the public on injury prevention and athlete safety, and celebrate the healthcare professionals who keep athletes safe. With year-round athletics, extreme weather conditions, and high participation rates, Texas athletic trainers serve as a cornerstone of student-athlete safety. Their expertise ensures compliance with state laws, UIL mandates, and best medical practices. Athletic Trainers are often the first responders in emer-



gencies and the steady presence behind every safe return to play.

Athletic Training Continued on next page



Role of a Texas High School Athletic Trainer

In Texas, high school athletic trainers are highly trained healthcare professionals who specialize in the prevention, evaluation, treatment, and rehabilitation of athletic injuries and illnesses. They work under the direction of a licensed physician and collaborate closely with coaches, administrators, parents, and other healthcare providers.

Under guidelines from the University Interscholastic League (UIL) and state law, Texas athletic trainers are responsible for but not limited to: Immediate care and emergency response, injury prevention, concussion management, rehabilitation and recovery, sport physicals, administrative & compliance duties. In addition to the above skills, Athletic Trainers also address the nutritional concerns related to sports. They help identify athletes at risk for nutritional disorders, monitor body composition to

help reduce the risk of injury.

Athletic trainers are an integral part of the Sports Medicine. They work one on one with athletes on a daily basis helping them restore function and return to activity as quickly and safely as possible. Athletic trainers work year-round with no off-season transition from sport to sport.

If you have not done so, thank an Athletic Trainer today for all their hard work keeping our student athletes safe and healthy all year long.

Implementing THSADA Sponsor Growth On Your Home Turf

Dave Stephenson, Director of Strategic Partnerships – THSADA

Nearly 25 years ago, when I was building and running the multi-media channels of Dave Campbell's Texas Football, a CEO from a fledgling apparel company on the East Coast called. From a landline with numerous extensions to my office phone with a massive dangling cord that could drag the floor. What a time to be alive.

The CEO was introduced to me by a close friend -- one of his first hires. Our first project together was the offer of banners promoting his logo placed at as many summer all-star football games that we could procure.

At that time, it was a slew of opportunities, with inter-state all-star games with California, Florida, Oklahoma and Louisiana in addition to the THSCA and area games.

Branding his apparel company around the nation's top high school football players was everything, he said. The CEO's shipment of signs arrived shortly from Baltimore. With zip-ties, tape and a camera to offer proof-of-performance, we were ready to meet his company's marketing goal that particular summer.

That CEO was Kevin Plank, who



Innovative Showcase Live! at the 2025 State Conference brought together 20 companies each presenting their brands in a two-minute segment on stage before nearly 200 attendees.

years earlier had launched Under Armour as a start-up from his grandmother's basement. Within 15 years, Under Armour generated \$1B+ in sales.

The mission has changed dramatically in the sports marketing world since then.

It's no longer about hanging vinyl banners at venues as a foundational strategy to move the corporate revenue needle. Experiential access to a

brand's target audience reigns. Is there activation freedom and creative flexibility with customer engagements? Are there rights for social content creation as well as storytelling to make an impact? Is what you are offering measurable with data capture?

Simply, companies today want a platform with experiences and customer interaction - no longer solely

Sponsor Growth Continued on next page



logo placement on a vinyl sign or electronic board.

Since my arrival to the THSADA in 2018, delivering sponsors access to the membership of the THSADA with year-round exposure has been paramount. We supply that critical component largely through member access at Region Meetings, as well as at Spring Sponsor Showcase, State Conference and (for a limited number) Fall Forum, as well as engaging through the THSADA's digital assets.

Your support has been tremendous in understanding the valuable role that sponsors of the THSADA have in their financial support supporting the association's success and rapid growth. While our sponsorship revenue has tripled since my arrival, membership in the THSADA has scaled almost tenfold since Rusty Dowling arrived as the THSADA's first full-time Executive Director, in 2012.

We are so appreciative during Region Meetings that our Region Directors allow a few of our sponsors to speak about their products to begin each meeting. Ask any sales representative who visits your campus or you engage at one of our live events his or her biggest request in turning a prospect into a customer ... it's usually just an environment with critical mass and 2-3 minutes to speak about their product. We duplicate that exact scenario before professional development sessions at Spring Sponsor Showcase, State Conference and Fall Forum. Any logos or branded signage is simply a bonus.

One of our biggest launches in 2025 was Innovative Showcase Live! during our State Conference. Think of it as speed dating for 20 of our vendors, before nearly 200 attendees. We supplied a complimentary lunch when our attendees would otherwise be on their own. In exchange, we only requested an attendee's attention as each company rep was introduced A-to-Z and given a two-minute block

on a ballroom stage to promote their product. We captured the event on video to later share with every attendee and also spliced segments and shared on social to make our sponsorship feel more of an "always on" partnership with the THSADA.

Your support walking the aisles at our tradeshow at both Spring Sponsor Showcase and State Conference also help fuel our sponsorship success. In 2026, we will allow each of our vendors at State Conference for the first time a lead retrieval system. Tired of wishing you had a business card handy or having to scribble your contact information on a napkin? The QR Code on your badge will handle everything. It's a tool long missing from our tradeshow.

Our strongest addition of late, however, has been the THSADA growing its partnership with Kohan Content to make storytelling through the THSADA's social platforms a fixture. Our Director's Cuts allow athletic administrators off stage to share their professional expertise with peers. A consistent array of other short-video content (all produced by Kohan Content and managed by the THSADA's executive and media teams) have helped boost membership and attendance at our live events, among other benefits.

We understand our membership all has lengthy to-do lists ... and shortened attention spans. Mailing a lengthy newsletter or magazine or

sending a 60-minute video link is as appealing in 2026 as ... well, the strategy behind printing that vinyl sign. Quick, snackable content that is both educational and informational is our goal. And we deliver the same with a sponsor as a focus instead of an athletic administrator.

So how does understanding the sponsorship platform of the THSADA help your own small world in Texas? Consider aligning your assets with how some of these initiatives and strategies might just be incorporated to enhance the local companies who support your athletic department and your campuses. You can't transform your sponsor strategy alone: Recruit a team of creative thinkers committed to finding 2026 solutions to make the brands in your backyard true partners ... not landlords.

And every step of the way ... exceed their expectations. Just like you would perform if one of your grandparents founded the local company.

Dave Stephenson is the Director of Strategic Partnerships of the THSADA, managing its family of sponsors as well as the vendors in the tradeshow at State Conference, among other duties. With more than 30 years in sports marketing, Stephenson is the Chief Strategy Officer at Legacy Event Partners in the Dallas area. For questions, drop him an email: dave@legacyeventpartners.com.



How Goal Setting and Check-Ins Create Purposeful Evaluations

Written By: Cecilia Kellar - Director of Athletics, Ector County ISD

A well-rounded evaluation system is not built around a single meeting or form. It is an ongoing process that supports growth, clarity, and accountability throughout the year. When goal setting, check-ins, and evaluations are connected with intention, they create ongoing and meaningful conversations that guide leadership, strengthen programs, and support student-athlete development. As we approach the end of the school year and begin preparing for the next, this is an opportunity to reflect on how our evaluation processes continue to evolve and how they can better serve our coaches, programs, and departments over time.

Start With Strong Goal Setting

As we near the end of the school year and begin planning for the next, this is the right moment to focus on goal-setting. Not as a compliance task, but as the foundation for meaningful conversations throughout the year.

Strong evaluations begin with strong goals. If goals are vague, recycled, or disconnected from the needs of a program, the rest of the process struggles to gain traction. The most effective goals are original, data-informed, and centered on developing the whole student-athlete. The focus goes beyond competitive success and includes player development, leadership, accountability, academic responsibility, and culture.

Data should drive these goals. That data may come from competitive outcomes, retention, attendance, academic performance, behavior trends, or feedback from athletes and staff. When goals are grounded in real information, they naturally lead to more focused check-ins and clearer end-of-year evaluations.

As Athletic Directors, this is where we coach our coaches. Are we challenging surface-level goals? Are we pushing for clarity and measurability? Are we helping coaches connect their goals to the bigger picture of student-athlete development and district priorities?

When goal setting is done well, it gives purpose to every conversation that follows.

Use Check-Ins to Monitor Progress and Support Growth

By this point in the school year, we are in the full swing of routines, practices, and daily expectations. Some seasons have already concluded, others are in the middle of competition, and some programs are just getting started or preparing to begin. This makes check-ins especially valuable, not as a pause in the work, but as an opportunity to assess progress and provide support in real time.

Check-ins should be anchored to the goals established at the start of the year. What progress has been made? What obstacles have emerged? What support is needed right now? Depending on the sport and its competitive calendar, this meeting may serve different functions. For some programs, it is a true mid-season conversation focused on adjusting and supporting current work. For others, it becomes a post-season reflection centered on learning and improvement. In some cases, it may function as a preseason preparation, helping coaches reset and refocus as they prepare to begin. This flexibility allows for individualized conversations that reflect the reality of each program, while still remaining anchored to the goals that were estab-

lished at the start of the year.

This is also a key moment to evaluate leadership within the program. One important question to consider is whether the head coach is intentionally developing and collaborating with their staff. That includes who is having conversations with assistant coaches about their experience, growth, and role within the program, and whether expectations are being communicated clearly rather than assumed.

Effective check-ins reinforce alignment. Alignment with department expectations, program priorities or needs, and district goals. When alignment is strong, programs move forward together. When it is not, the check-in becomes the opportunity to address it early rather than waiting until the end of the year.

Purposeful Evaluations Provide Clarity and Direction

End-of-year evaluations should never exist in isolation. When goal setting and check-ins are intentional, evaluations become a continuation of ongoing conversations rather than a single high-stakes moment.

Evaluations reinforce alignment with athletic department expectations, leadership standards, and district goals. They also emphasize compliance competency. Understanding and consistently applying district, state, and governing body expectations is a fundamental responsibility of every coach. Compliance reflects attention to detail, accountability, and commitment to doing things the right way, even when it is inconvenient. Evaluations examine how well coaches integrate these expectations into daily work, in-

Purposeful Evaluations Continued on next page



cluding communication, supervision, documentation, and decision-making that protects student-athletes and the program. When gaps exist, they are addressed directly, with clear expectations and support provided as needed.

Clear communication is critical. Expectations for the role should be defined early and reinforced often. The evaluation should reflect what has already been discussed throughout the year, supported by observation, documentation, and data. There should be no surprises. When coaches are meeting standards, evaluations affirm that work and highlight opportuni-

ties for continued growth. This can include expanding leadership within the program, mentoring staff, taking on new responsibilities, or developing strategies that positively impact student-athletes. Evaluations celebrate successes while encouraging coaches to stretch beyond current strengths, keeping growth intentional and forward-focused.

At times, despite feedback and support, the fit simply does not align with the needs of the department or program. Conversations then shift from development to alignment while being direct, respectful, and grounded in facts. Avoid generalities. Speak to

specific behaviors, leadership practices, and outcomes. Be clear about what must change and the timeline for improvement. At the same time, be honest about the reality that continued misalignment impacts student-athletes, staff, and the program as a whole.

When handled well, even the most difficult conversations reflect professionalism, transparency, and care. They emphasize responsibility, growth, and alignment, reinforcing that the evaluation process develops coaches, strengthens programs, and ultimately benefits the student-athletes we serve.

The Cluster Cup: Building Pride and Engagement in Middle School Athletics

Johnny Garza - Athletic Coordinator/Head Football Coach, Rivera High School, Brownsville ISD

The Cluster Cup was an idea developed to promote our feeder middle schools and keep students engaged in athletics throughout the school year. The goal was to give 8th grade athletes something meaningful to compete for while also reinforcing expectations for attendance and academics so they remained eligible all year.

The competition took place between our feeder schools, Garcia Middle School and Perkins Middle School. A male and female trophy were provided and were up for grabs at every 8th grade A team competition. The trophies rotated between the schools based on

results, adding excitement, pride, and a sense of rivalry to each matchup.

We were also able to partner with

Rio Sports Live, allowing us to stream a middle school competition for the

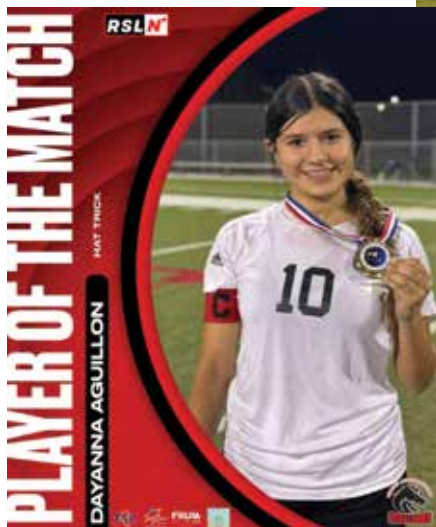
Cluster Cup Continued on next page



Cluster Cup Continued from last page

first time in BISD and provide greater visibility for our athletes and programs.

With the support of our high school staff, we handled the promotion and presentation, making the event special for the students. Overall, the Cluster Cup was a positive experience that strengthened the connection between our feeder schools, highlighted middle school athletics, and created lasting memories for the kids.



High School Athletics Has Changed; Has Your Communications Strategy?

Todd Lamb, Assistant Director of Athletics for Marketing & Communications, Dallas ISD

When I tell people my job title – Assistant Director of Athletics for Marketing & Communications for Dallas ISD – the first response is usually, “That sounds like a college role.”

That’s not far from the truth. The responsibilities closely mirror what you’d find in collegiate athletic departments: media relations, branding, production, sponsorships, digital strategy, and crisis communications.

For 20-plus years, that was my professional occupation, holding athletics communications roles on university campuses at UTSA, Rice, Clemson, Ohio State, and for the Southland Conference office in Frisco, as well as during a stint as the manager of baseball communications with the Texas Rangers.

The difference now is that our high school programs, especially in Texas, operate at a scale that increasingly demands that level of professionalism. Stadiums rival small colleges, live web streams draw audiences around the globe, and communities expect real-time updates and polished content. In that environment, dedicated communications leadership is a strategic necessity.

What a Communications Role Actually Does

At its core, a sports information director (SID) or an assistant AD for communications is the chief storyteller and media liaison. In college, that has traditionally meant stat keeping, press releases, credentialing, and archival work. Today’s SIDs have evolved into brand strategists, content producers, digital marketers, crisis communicators, and revenue partners. They write game recaps and feature stories, manage social and web platforms, supervise live broadcasts, develop



Todd Lamb (right) at 2022 UIL State Football

sponsorship packages, and coordinate media access on game days.

Those college-level skills translate directly to the high school and district environments. A college SID background lets someone elevate a high school program from “scores and schedules” to a fully realized communications system.

How This Plays Out in Texas

Across North Texas, districts are approaching athletics communications in a variety of ways.

At Dallas ISD, my role in Athletics includes branding, sponsorship programs, website and social media oversight, in-venue fan engagement (video boards and event presentation), livestream initiatives, media credentialing, management of the Athletic Hall of Fame, and other duties as assigned. The position is focused entirely on athletics communications and engagement.

As Vince Reyes, our assistant

superintendent for athletics, has said, “Having someone in this role can aid in publicity for the athletic department, its coaches and student-athletes, while also strengthening community engagement through the website and social media. These efforts can provide meaningful value and budget relief for school districts across Texas during a time of continued financial challenges.”

Dallas ISD is just one example, but it’s not the only one. Other districts take different approaches. Jennifer Frazier, director of athletics for McKinney ISD, describes a strong collaborative model between athletics and district communications.

“Currently, our branding, media relations, and digital strategies are executed through a strong collaborative partnership between athletics and the district communications team,” Frazier said. “This shared model ensures our message aligns with the district’s broader vision. However, given the

Communications Continued on next page



unique, fast-paced nature of athletics from real-time fan engagement to game-day content, it makes sense that districts might want to establish a role dedicated exclusively to the athletic environment.”

That perspective highlights an important reality: centralized communications can provide alignment and consistency, but athletics operates on a different timeline. Athletics requires real-time responsiveness that doesn't always fit neatly within traditional district structures.

Frisco ISD follows a different but complementary model: Matt Wixon, a former sportswriter for the Dallas Morning News, serves as Facilitator for Athletics and serves as the district's primary media contact for credentials, broadcasts, and scouting coordination. His journalism background brings strong media relationships and credibility to the district.

Rockwall ISD exemplifies a marketing-driven model. Chris Curtis, who began his career in television, is the sports marketing, media, and broadcast manager, coordinating sponsorship outreach, driving award-winning promotional campaigns, and digital engagement. Having moved from the district communications office to the athletics department before the 2025-2026 school year, he now oversees the newly created Rockwall ISD Sports Network, all videography and photography.

Other districts embed athletics within central communications teams. Royse City's Tayler Young and Tyler ISD's Reese Lannon provide district-level communications leadership that includes athletics among many priorities – an efficient model for districts that prefer centralized messaging and shared resources.

At the campus level, particularly in large private schools, the model often mirrors the collegiate sports information director structure. SID Brian Henry at Jesuit College Preparatory School of Dallas oversees communications for



Todd Lamb at 2025 UIL State Girls Basketball

800 student-athletes who participate in 22 sports, develops sponsorship initiatives, and even moderates a 95-member student broadcast organization. Henry previously held college sports information roles at UTEP and Lamar in Texas, as well as positions at Missouri and Vanderbilt, to name a few.

Jay Parker, a former sports information assistant at Dallas Baptist University, is the sports information director at Trinity Christian Academy in Dallas and leads athletics storytelling and digital media with a background

in collegiate athletics communications, like both Henry and myself.

Many athletics communicators remain connected to professional organizations such as College Sports Communicators (CSC), while district-level professionals often engage with TSPRA and NSPRA. These networks provide valuable education and professional development, particularly since there is not yet a dedicated association for high school sports communicators.

Communications Continued on next page



These high school sports-specific positions show how a dedicated SID can generate revenue, create educational opportunities, and substantially increase program visibility.

Why Athletic Directors are Interested and Why Some Hesitate

I've talked about this with several athletic directors across Texas. William Mitchell, the Chief Athletic Director at Duncanville ISD, framed it like this: adding a dedicated marketing and communications position allows his department "to tell our story consistently, highlight student achievement, strengthen community engagement, and create opportunities for partnerships that can help offset budget challenges."

In short, communications strengthens relationships and creates revenue pathways.

But I also hear the practical constraints. M.T. Tyeskie became the Director of Athletics at DeSoto ISD this past November and acknowledged that the district's current priority is to add a new assistant athletic director first; a specialized communications role will be evaluated later when resources permit.

That's real – staffing and budgets vary widely, and sensible phased approaches are common.

The Return on Investment

So, what does this role actually return? The payoffs are both tangible and intangible:

- **Revenue & Partnerships:** Structured sponsorship packages and professional presentation of inventory (video boards, programs, livestreams) can create meaningful sponsorship dollars.
- **Recruitment & Recognition:** Consistent storytelling lifts student-athlete profiles, aids college recruiting, and increases community pride.

- **Operational Efficiency:** Centralized media credentialing, prepped interview procedures, and crisis readiness reduce friction for coaches and ADs.
- **Educational Value:** Student broadcast programs and internships develop workforce skills while expanding production capacity.
- **Brand Protection:** Strategic messaging and real-time monitoring reduce risk and preserve the district's reputation.

Those benefits explain why districts of every size are testing different models – district-level leaders, embedded communications specialists, and campus SIDs – to find the right fit.

Why It Matters

Texas high school athletics now operate at a level that mirrors many collegiate programs.

Without dedicated communications leadership, athletic directors often find themselves trying to manage media requests, social media updates, branding questions, sponsorship conversations, and event presentation – on top of compliance, staffing, facilities, and competitive oversight.

When someone is tasked specifically with marketing and communications, it allows the athletic department to:

- Promote student-athletes consistently and professionally
- Strengthen community engagement
- Create structured sponsorship opportunities
- Improve in-venue and digital fan experience
- Ensure brand consistency across campuses
- Respond strategically during crisis situations

Most importantly, it allows athletic directors to focus on leading their programs while knowing their story is being told well.

Looking Ahead

The question for many districts is timing and structure. Do you build a district-level leadership role? Do you embed communications within your central department? Do you support larger campuses with SID-style positions?

There is no one-size-fits-all solution.

When you step back and listen to leaders across Texas, what stands out isn't disagreement; it's momentum.

Reyes speaks to the value of communications in elevating student-athletes and strengthening community ties during challenging financial times. Mitchell sees it as a way to honor tradition while building new opportunities through partnerships and visibility. Frazier highlights the importance of alignment with district messaging while recognizing that athletics moves at a unique pace. And Tyeskie reminds us that growth must be strategic and sustainable.

Different districts may be at different stages, but they are all moving in the same direction: toward more intentional storytelling, stronger branding, and greater engagement.

Texas high school athletics have always been special. As expectations rise and digital platforms expand, how we tell that story matters more than ever.

Whether through centralized collaboration or a dedicated athletics communications role, investing in professional storytelling is ultimately an investment in our student-athletes. And when we tell their stories well, we strengthen not only our programs, but the communities we serve.

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Balancing Rigor and Academic Eligibility

Megan Symank, Assistant Athletic Director, College Station ISD

Texas school districts work to maintain strong academic expectations while also supporting student participation in athletics and other extracurricular activities. For athletic administrators, the most important connection is how districts identify **honors courses** under the Texas Administrative Code and how that identification affects **No Pass No Play** academic eligibility. This article provides a clear overview of the TEA Rules and the

most common district approaches.

TEA Side By Side Summary

Under the UIL webpage, the TEA Side by Side is most helpful in providing administrators a foundation for navigating the No Pass No play rule as it relates to honors courses. In summary, TEC 33.081 lists all College Board advanced placement courses and International Baccalaureate courses in

all disciplines and high school/college concurrent enrollment classes in ELA, LOTE, Math, Science and Social Studies. Additionally, it states that districts may identify additional honors courses in the subject areas of ELS, Math, Science, Social Studies, Economics, or LOTE as long as the courses are identified prior to the semester in which any exemptions related to extracurricular activities occur. <https://www.uil-texas.org/policy/tea-uil-side-by-side>

Texas District Models and Examples

Across multiple Texas districts reviewed, a variety of methods were used to identify honors courses exempt from No Pass, No Play eligibility requirements.

Model A: Published Exempt Course List

- The district publishes an annual list of honors courses that qualify for exemptions.
- If the student fails one of those courses, they may remain eligible.

Model B: Exempt List + Limits

The district allows exemptions but adds limits such as:

- One exemption per grading period, semester, or year
- Exemptions only for grades in a specific range (example: 60–69)
- Campus principal approval required

Model C: Exempt List + Required Support

The district allows exemptions only if the student agrees to:

- Tutorials or academic support sessions
- Progress monitoring
- Academic improvement plans

Sample Guidelines

A student seeking a no-pass, no-play waiver for an advanced or honors course must fill out the district waiver form. Students in a regular class are not eligible to apply for a no-pass, no-play waiver. A student may only apply for an advanced or honors course waiver if their failing grade in an advanced or honors course was between a 60 and a 69. A student may receive a maximum of three waivers (all subjects combined) during the school year.

Qualifying Courses:

All courses designated with H for Honors

All courses designated with Pre-AP for PreAdvanced Placement

All courses designated with D for Dual Credit

All courses designated with AP for Advanced Placement

Conclusion

Honors course exemptions under 19 TAC §74.30, combined with eligibility requirements under TEC §33.081, allow Texas districts to support rigorous academic coursework while keeping students engaged in athletics and extracurricular programs. A clear district course list, a consistent exemption process, and strong communication are the best tools for preventing confusion and ensuring fair eligibility decisions.

No Pass No Play Exempt Courses 2024-25

<https://www.fortbendisd.com/site/handlers/filedownload.ashx?moduleinstanceid=82820&dataid=200178&FileName=No%20Pass%20No%20Play%20Exempt%20Courses.pdf>



Indoor Athletic Facilities: The Shift from Luxury to Necessity

NeKisha Durham, Director of Athletics, Waller ISD

Across the Lone Star State, demand for indoor and covered athletic facilities — from practice fields to multi-sport courts — is rapidly outpacing supply. Texas has long embraced the philosophy that “everything is bigger,” and that mindset is clearly reflected in the scale and sophistication of its athletic infrastructure.

These facilities range widely in design and scope. Some districts have constructed simple outdoor pavilions with turf fields that provide shade and weather protection. Others have built fully enclosed, climate-controlled complexes featuring complete HVAC systems, attached weight rooms, coaches’ offices, meeting spaces, and even cutting-edge amenities such as hydraulically banked indoor tracks, like the facility set to open in Crowley ISD.

At one point, investments of this magnitude were often characterized as competitive — a way for districts to “keep up with the Joneses,” as Dallas Morning News reporter Corbett Smith once observed. However, the conversation has shifted significantly.

From Luxury to Necessity

With the introduction and enforcement of Wet Bulb Globe Temperature (WBGT) guidelines recommended by the University Interscholastic League (UIL), indoor facilities are increasingly viewed not as luxuries, but as essential safety infrastructure.

WBGT standards account for temperature, humidity, sun exposure, and wind speed to determine safe practice conditions. In Texas, especially during late summer and early fall, readings frequently require practice modifications or cancellations.

Districts with indoor facilities are far better positioned to mitigate these challenges by:



Melissa I.S.D

- Eliminating solar radiation (direct sunlight), the largest contributor to high WBGT readings
 - Stabilizing temperature and humidity through climate control
- These two factors significantly reduce schedule disruptions during critical training periods and, more importantly, lower the risk of heat-related illness among student-athletes. As Texas continues to experience increasingly extreme heat patterns, these protections become even more critical.

Expansion Across the State

While indoor facilities were once most common in the Dallas–Fort Worth Metroplex and North Texas, they are now appearing statewide.

In the greater Houston area, districts such as Sheldon ISD, Galeana Park ISD, and Tomball ISD have invested in indoor practice complexes. Further south, Gregory-Portland ISD recently unveiled a \$65 million athletic facility, underscoring that this trend is no longer regional — it is statewide.

The Financial Reality

If asked, nearly every coach of an outdoor sport would advocate for an indoor practice facility. However, even a basic structure — including turf, lighting, and minimal support space — can cost between \$2 million and \$5 million, which presents a significant financial hurdle for many districts. Research suggests that the average



Sheldon ISD - C.E. King

cost for facilities being built by school districts in Texas range from \$25-\$45 million.

So how are districts constructing top-tier facilities? Simple. Pass a voter approved bond! Despite the challenges associated with passing athletic-related bonds in Texas, many districts have succeeded by clearly communicating the purpose and value of these facilities to their communities. Conversations with district leaders and reviews of pre-election materials reveal three key factors that positively influenced voter support:

1. Student Safety

Emphasizing WBGT compliance, heat mitigation, and athlete protection resonated strongly with voters.

2. Multi-Purpose Use

Facilities were presented not as “football-only” buildings, but as shared spaces serving multiple programs — including soccer, band, dance, drill team, cheer, ROTC, physical education, and community events.

3. Community Access

Districts highlighted how facilities would serve the broader community,



Gregory-Portland I.S.D.



hosting youth programs, camps, and events, increasing overall value to taxpayers. When positioned as safety-driven, multi-use, community-centered investments rather than luxury athletic upgrades, indoor facilities gained broader support.



Galena Park I.S.D.-North Shore

In conclusion, indoor athletic facilities in Texas are rapidly shifting from perceived luxuries to operational necessities.

Driven largely by compliance with UIL-recommended WBGT safety standards and increasingly extreme climate conditions, these facilities help districts eliminate solar radiation, stabilize temperature and humidity, reduce practice disruptions, and protect student-athletes from heat-related illness.

Although construction costs — ranging from \$2–\$5 million for basic

structures to tens of millions for comprehensive complexes — present financial challenges, districts have successfully funded projects through voter-approved bonds by emphasizing three priorities: student safety, multi-purpose functionality, and community access.

As demand continues to grow across all regions of Texas, indoor athletic facilities are becoming a central component of modern school infrastructure rather than optional enhancements.

Regional News Updates

Region 1

- Dumas ISD will soon have a new Superintendent.

Region 2

- Abilene ISD will announce a new superintendent soon.

Region 3

- Duncanville ISD announces William Mitchell as the new Chief Athletic Director. Mitchell joined Duncanville in 2023 as the Assistant Director of Athletics. He replaces Derek Roberson who was recently named the Executive Director of Fort Bend ISD.
- McKinney ISD Director of Athletics, Jennifer Frazier, is the THSADA new President Elect. She currently serves THADA as the Region 3 Director in the DFW area.

Region 4

- Fabens ISD welcomed Emanuel (Manny) Estrada in February as their new Athletic Director. He recently served as an Assistant Principal and cross-county and track coach at Riverside HS.
- El Paso ISD and Canutillo ISD

welcomed new Superintendents to start 2026. Dr. Josue Borrego at Canutillo ISD and Dr. Brian Lusk at El Paso ISD.

Region 5

- The Woodlands HS State Tennis Champions won a State Championship in Tennis for the first time in school history
- Notable Recognition - Pasadena HS (Pasadena ISD) 1st Place (Greater Houston High School Football Class 5A) Sportsmanship Recipient

Region 6

- Waco ISD welcomed Lanny Williams as the Director of Athletics in January. Williams has 26 years of experience and most recently served as the director of athletics for Manor ISD.
- Manor ISD welcomed Carlesa Dixon as its Athletic Director in January. Dixon joins Manor ISD from Humble ISD where she served as Assistant Athletic Director and Interim Athletic Director. Welcome to Region VI



Coach Dixon.

Region 7

- La Joya ISD officially unveiled the newly renovated Coach Rod Softball Field, celebrating a coach who built more than teams - he built character, pride, and unity.

Region 8

- New Region 8 Athletic Directors: Dustin Davidson Medina Valley ISD, Joey Cantu - Pearsall ISD, Austin Smithey - SACS
- San Antonio, TX will host the Boys and Girls Basketball Championships at the Alamodome



