

TEXAS

Athletic Administrator



State Conference 2026

Message from the Executive Director

Rusty Dowling

Welcome to the Kalahari Resort & Convention Center.

Welcome to the 55th annual Texas High School Athletic Directors Association State Conference. This will be a very rewarding State Conference, and your attendance and participation will continue to make our annual Conference successful. The State Conference allows all athletic administrators the opportunity to network with other state athletic administrators, visit and continue to do business with our Exhibitors and THSADA sponsors as well as listen to our line-up of excellent speakers, participate in our professional development sessions, and take advantage of all resources provided to continue to effectively do the work of an athletic administrator. CPE hours are again available for all the Professional Development activities. The theme for this year's State Conference is, **"Built on Tradition, Driven by Vision."** This theme adequately reflects the conference agenda that will be predominant at this year's State Conference. Professional Development and our TAAC sessions will again be the focal point of the State Conference as we will have a wide selection of professional development sessions along with our QUAD A program in addition to our other successful academic curriculum which is our JHAMS program, Junior High, and Middle School program for athletic administrators.

The 2026 State Conference will kick off with our annual THSADA-PBK Hall of Honor Celebration honoring Leslie Slovak-Richardson ISD, Stan Laing-Northside ISD and Lynn Pool-Austin ISD followed on Sunday, May 31st with a legal presentation by Mr. Jim Walsh of the firm: Walsh, Gallegos, P.C., and our annual Sunday Night Kickoff Reception hosted by Paragon Sports Constructors to end the day.

Monday will be a full day of professional development featuring UIL presentations, a presentation by Dr. Marty Crawford of Tyler ISD, an AD exchange similar to what we did at Spring Sponsor Showcase followed by region meetings, QUAD A sessions and a wide variety of sessions offered throughout the day. This conference will be the largest attended event we have hosted and there will be numerous times when we offer up to five concurrent sessions. We will host an afternoon Tradeshow for lunch then break into our professional development sessions followed by our Daktronics Tradeshow that will be open from 4:00 p.m.-6:00 p.m. with our Exhibitors, food, and beverage along with the



camaraderie that is always present at these functions.

Tuesday morning the annual Hellas Construction-Benny Carter Memorial Golf Tournament will be held at the Golf Club at Star Ranch as well as another new addition to the schedule that will be a morning Tradeshow featuring a light breakfast menu. Our JHAMS program will kick off the day along with our continuing QUAD A programs. An

expanded feature of the Tuesday agenda is a Resume Review Session followed by a Mock Interview Session conducted by ISD Superintendents. We will end the business day with our Tuesday PBK Tradeshow Festival.

Wednesday is the last day of the State Conference and will feature THSADA Committee reports, introduction of the new THSADA Board of Directors followed by presentations of our THSADA Scholarship recipients, recognition of the Texas Cup program, various THSADA announcements and rounding out the morning the State Conference Cash Drawings event.

THSADA membership is close to surpassing the 2,000 mark and with the added JHAMS category of membership, it should far exceed that number. Attendance at both Fall Forum and Spring Sponsor Showcase have exceeded expectations as well. The 2nd year of our JHAMS program has also reflected outstanding attendance as our 3 JHAMS events this past year have brought in a collective attendance of 400.

The new THSADA Board of Director/Chairs/Ex-Officio members will officially be installed Sunday morning before the Hall of Honor Ceremony. Taking over as President of the THSADA is Rob Davies-Harlingen CISD. Rob has served the THSADA as a Committee member, Region Director, President-elect and now as the President. Serving as the new president-elect will be Jennifer Frazier-Director of Athletics-McKinney ISD. We welcome a new Region Director to Region 4-James Nunn-Director of Athletics-Socorro ISD and Region 3-Jeff Smith-Prosper ISD. We thank the previous Board for their services and look forward to collaborating with the new members. Rodney Chant-Director of Athletics-San Angelo ISD will Chair the Professional Education Committee. Ex-Officio members will remain the same.

Take advantage of everything the State Conference has to offer. Again, welcome to the Kalahari Resort and Convention Center and enjoy the Conference.

Associate Executive Director's Update

Bob DeJonge

Spring Sponsor Showcase Re-Cap.

The 2026 THSADA Spring Sponsor Showcase was definitely a huge success! Two Hundred and seventy-seven THSADA members registered for the event as did over one-hundred and forty people representing fifty-three State Sponsors. That total of over four hundred is larger than most of the Athletic Director State Conferences across the Country! Way to go THSADA! This year's event began on Sunday afternoon with two great sessions featuring The Texas Way and Stephen Mackey followed by an AD Exchange for real time solutions to real time issues. We ended the day with the THSADA Sponsor Tradeshow and Reception. Needless to say, everyone enjoyed some quality time in a relaxing atmosphere!

Day two began bright and early with a series of TAAC sessions featuring Building Positive Relationships between the Athletic Department and District Leaders, a Student Athlete leadership Council featuring members of the Fort Bend Student Leadership Council and ended the TAAC sessions that morning with a session on New Coach Onboarding. The morning's Quad A sessions focused on the interview, a session on Transitioning from Coach to Athletic Administrator and

finished up with a tabletop session on Relevant Topics to Becoming an Athletic Administrator.

We enjoyed a Trade Show lunch break next, spending time with our State Sponsors while enjoying a delicious lunch provided by the Margaritaville Staff. – A few lucky attendees walked away with some fantastic drawing prizes!

The afternoon was set for the highlight of the day, which is always a presentation from our friends at the University Interscholastic League. UIL Director of Athletics Ray Zepeda thoroughly discussed the issues we currently face along with critical topics that lay on the horizon. In Today's rapidly changing environment it's vital that we all stay informed and prepared for the challenges of tomorrow.

I think it's safe to say that this year's Spring Sponsor Showcase left everyone thoroughly entertained and educated. I can't wait to see what lies ahead at the upcoming State Conference. See you at the Kalahari!



From the President

Andre Walker, Houston ISD

As my term as President of the Texas High School Athletic Directors Association comes to a close, I do so with deep gratitude, pride, and confidence in the direction of our organization. My presidency was guided by a simple belief: when athletic directors are supported, educated, and connected, studentathletes benefit. That belief shaped our priorities and informed every aspect of our work.

We strengthened our commitment to professional development, ensuring that THSADA continues to set the national standard. Our conferences, certification opportunities, leadership workshops, and continuing education offerings remain the best in the country, not because of their size, but because of their quality, relevance, and purpose. From firstyear athletic coordinators to veteran leaders, our mission has been clear: meet our members where they are and help them grow as professionals and leaders.

Collaboration was another defining theme of this term. We enhanced and expanded partnerships with the UIL, school districts, corporate partners, and state and national organizations, all with the shared goal of elevating the profession of athletic administration. Today's athletic directors

operate at the intersection of compliance, leadership, finance, facilities, student safety, and community engagement. THSADA must reflect that complexity, and it does.

As we look ahead, the future of the Texas High School Athletic Directors Association is exceptionally strong. Our membership continues to grow and will soon surpass 2,000 athletic administrators, further establishing THSADA as the largest athletic director's association in the nation. This growth is a testament to the value of our professional development, the strength of our partnerships, and the trust our members place in this organization. As our influence expands, so does our responsibility to lead with innovation, purpose, and vision. I leave this role confident that THSADA's leadership and membership are well positioned to build on this foundation and continue advancing the profession of athletic administration for the benefit of all student athletes across Texas.



The Texas Cup: A Strong First Year for a New Tradition

Jody Hormann - Assistant Executive Director of Operations - THSADA

The inaugural year of the Texas Cup, introduced by the Texas High School Athletic Directors Association, has delivered exactly what it set out to do - shine a spotlight on the strength, depth, and consistency of athletic programs across the state of Texas.

Launched to recognize the highest-achieving overall athletic programs, the Texas Cup tracks success across all UIL-sanctioned team sports, awarding points based on advancement from district competition through the state level. The program honors one school in each classification (1A-6A), with champions to be recognized annually at the THSADA State Conference.

In its first year, the Texas Cup has generated excitement and engagement among athletic departments statewide. Weekly and periodic standings updates have created a new layer of interest,

giving schools a way to measure the collective success of their entire athletic program. Athletic Directors have embraced the opportunity to highlight multi-sport excellence, reinforcing the value of broad-based athletic success.

Another key impact has been increased visibility for programs that consistently perform at a high level across multiple sports seasons. By emphasizing year-long achievement, the Texas Cup aligns closely with the mission of education-based athletics which celebrates dedication, teamwork, and sustained excellence.

Just as importantly, the Texas Cup has created a shared point of pride within school communities. Coaches, athletes, and administrators are rallying around a common goal, strengthening program culture and fostering collaboration across sports.

At the conclusion of the baseball season the final Texas Cup standings will be announced. Adding a special, local celebration to honor their achievement, THSADA staff will personally deliver Texas Cup trophies to each winning school on a date in the fall determined in coordination with the recipients.

As the first year ends, the Texas Cup is already proving to be more than just an award. It's becoming a meaningful benchmark for excellence in Texas high school athletics. With a strong foundation now in place, the future of the Texas Cup looks bright as it continues to grow into a premier recognition program for athletic success across the state.

For information and standings in the Texas Cup, visit <https://www.thsada.com/awards/texas-cup/>.

Retired Athletic Director Spotlight:

Leslie E. Goldstein Fort Worth ISD - THSADA Hall of Honor Inductee, 1983

In the story of athletic leadership in Texas, few figures embody dedication, service, and lasting influence quite like Lon - a man whose career spanned classrooms, fields, and administrative offices, leaving a mark that continues to shape generations of student-athletes and athletic directors.

Raised in Fort Worth, Lon's journey in athletics began at Polytechnic High School, where he distinguished himself as a three-sport letterman. His passion for sports and education carried him to Texas Wesleyan College, where he earned his master's degree and laid the foundation for a lifelong commitment to teaching, coaching, and mentoring.

Following his service in the U.S. Army during World War II, Lon returned home and began what would become a 35-year career at Carter Riv-

erside High School in Fort Worth. His leadership eventually extended beyond a single campus as he took on the role of athletic director for Fort Worth ISD, guiding programs across the district until his retirement in 1985.

While his achievements in education and athletics were remarkable, Lon's influence extended even further through his involvement with the Texas High School Athletic Directors Association. As one of the organization's first officers, he played a foundational role in shaping what would become a vital support system for athletic administrators across the state. Serving as Secretary in 1974 and later as President, Lon helped establish the standards, relationships, and professional development opportunities that continue to define THSADA today.

Lon's excellence did not go unno-

ticed. Lon Goldstein was one of the original founders of the THSADA as he and a group of fellow athletic administrators met in Houston, Texas to begin discussions on what the THSADA would look like and represent. In 1975, he was named Texas Athletic Director of the Year, a testament to his vision and impact. His legacy is physically etched into the community as well, with the Fort Worth ISD baseball field bearing his name - a lasting tribute to his contributions to the game and to the city he served.

His life was also grounded in strong personal commitments. He shared 63 years of marriage with his wife, Geraldine, building a partnership that paralleled his dedication to his profession and community.

World-Class by Design: Melissa's Commitment to Kids, Community, and Connection.

Team Melissa - Melissa ISD Athletic Department and Administration

"To do the impossible, you must see the invisible." Duke Sparks, Director of Athletic Operations and Community Partnerships, often quotes Lane Kiffin when reflecting on the remarkable growth of Melissa ISD, especially the expansion of its athletic facilities.

Melissa has become one of the fastest-growing districts in the state, a transformation that would have been hard to imagine just fifteen years ago. In 2011, the district was celebrating a small-town 2A state football championship under the leadership of current Athletic Director Seth Stinton, with just over 300 students enrolled in the high school.

Today, the story is entirely different. The Melissa community is booming, and its athletic programs and facilities have grown right alongside it. Melissa ISD now serves more than 8,500 students, including approximately 2,200 at its now 5A high school. This is a powerful reflection of just how far the district has come. Melissa ISD will most likely be classified as a 6A district in the next UIL Realignment. Melissa Schools Superintendent Keith Murphy says, "It is absolutely amazing when you stop talking about what you don't want and start working towards well-defined desired outcomes. In Melissa, we desire to create world-class experiences for all our students. We love them and owe them our very best. None of this could have been done without the passion of our Board of Trustees and the support of our community."

When you step onto the campus of Melissa High School, it's easy to mistake it for a small college. The scale and quality of Coach Kenny Deel Stadium, The Championship Center, and the newly built state-of-the-art arena combine to make the campus



Melissa ISD Coach Kenny Deel Stadium

one of the most impressive high school environments in the country.

Assistant Athletic Director Katie Stinton explains, "We are blessed to live in a community that values our schools and the overall experience we offer our students. This commitment is reflected not only in attendance at our events, but also in the way our community votes on measures that directly impact our schools and students."

These exceptional facilities were made possible by a \$150 million, voter-approved bond in 2016. The bond funded two elementary schools, additional phases of the high school, the Melissa Arts Center, land purchases, and renovations across the district, all investments that continue to benefit both students and staff. More information is available at www.melissaisd.org/growth.

"Now more than ever, students need community and connection. They need to see that what they do matters and that their actions impact the people around them," added Deputy

Superintendent Kim Boedeker. "There's no better way to reinforce that than by creating a space where the entire community can gather each week and support one another."

That's the need these facilities were built to meet. It's a community hub. Most nights of the week, you will find the community of Melissa coming together, utilizing these amazing facilities. Head Football Coach and campus athletic coordinator, Matt Nally says, "We know our kids need connection and a sense of belonging. These facilities bring our community together to celebrate our best. That's the investment we chose to make."

Passing a bond is only the beginning. What follows is an extensive design and construction process that requires thoughtful planning and collaboration. For Melissa Independent School District, that process brought together a diverse team of district administrators, coaches, board members, and community representatives to

Melissa Continued on next page



shape a shared vision for the future.

This team led the design efforts for the Championship Center, Coach Kenny Deel Stadium, and The Arena. To refine their ideas, they visited a wide range of standout facilities at both the high school and collegiate levels. In Texas, they toured campuses in McKinney, Prosper, Allen, Southlake, and Coppell. Furthermore, they traveled out of state to visit programs in Tulsa (home to Union and Jenks High Schools) and explored collegiate facilities at Texas Tech University, Baylor University, and Texas Christian University.

Athletic Director Seth Stinton reflected on the experience, “Touring other campuses and having open conversations with athletic directors and coaches was incredibly valuable. We appreciated the honest feedback on what they loved about their facilities and what they would change. That insight played a major role in guiding our decisions.”

The early stages of design and construction created lasting memories for the Melissa team and set the tone for what these facilities would become. Duke Sparks, Director of Athletic Operations, emphasized the philosophy behind the process, “What’s most important is that The Championship Center included input from our coaches. It was designed for coaches, for kids, and for the community. That same approach carried forward into the development of Coach Kenny Deel Stadium and The Arena. In Melissa, our coaches help design every room in our athletic facilities to meet the needs of each program, as we value the experience of all our kids. We might start with ideas sketched on napkins, whiteboards, and graph paper, but we hand those concepts to architects and contractors to bring to life—not the other way around. Our superintendent, Keith Murphy, fully supports that process. Because of that, we’ve been able to create facilities that are not only beautiful but also highly functional. It’s



Melissa Championship Center

truly a win-win for everyone involved.”

From the time conversations began with the architects to the time construction finished, it took roughly 18 months to complete each of the three projects. Kenny Deel, Executive Director of Operations, and the namesake of the stadium, states, “It’s such a blessing when the district, architects, and construction company can work together to solve issues and have the same end goal in mind, which is to serve the students of Melissa ISD. Building a relationship and sticking with an architect and construction company over multiple projects has proved advantageous in creating consistency, meeting deadlines, and upholding expectations.”

The Championship Center (Finished Fall of 2020)

The Championship Center Indoor facility was the first to open in the fall of 2021. Designing the Championship Center (CC going forward) marked the beginning of these three amazing athletic facilities. It was born out of extreme necessity and became both an exciting and fun labor of love for Seth Stinton, Kenny Deel, Superintendent Keith Murphy, Duke Sparks, and eventually our entire staff.

The vision began in the spring of 2016 during the construction of the new Melissa High School, which would open in the fall of 2018. Seth Stinton, the Head Football Coach and Athletic Director at that time, knew Melissa would quickly outgrow the 10,000 sq. ft. Girls and Boys Athletic Facility the

new high school would provide. He began the push for the Championship Center to accommodate the imminent growth. With encouragement from Superintendent Keith Murphy, the design process began in November 2018.

The Championship Center indoor facility is a 131,000 square foot facility with 74,000 of that being the 130-yard wall-to-wall turfed field area. This area includes baseball and softball infields, batting cages, and striping for a full soccer field. The remaining 57,000 sq ft consists of a 6,200 sq ft weight room, a 112-seat theatre seating film room, and a 5,000 sq ft. Champions Lounge, where we host regional AD meetings, sports banquets, and hold classes during the school day. There is also an additional 1,500 square foot classroom used for CTE classes. The Championship Center is equipped with a 3,300 sq ft training room, including three office spaces, an enclosed whirlpool room, and plenty of storage for large equipment. It also contains a 3,000 sq ft wrestling room along with ample space for locker rooms and administrative and coaching offices. Attached to the Championship Center is a leased 5,000 sq ft Private Physical Therapy Clinic, which benefits the students of Melissa ISD and the community.

The Championship Center is utilized by all Melissa ISD sports and fine arts programs, as well as our Melissa Cardinal youth soccer and football clubs. The Championship Center has served as the host site for our district

wrestling tournament over the past few years, and has also been used to host our three national signing dates for our athletes throughout the year. This facility is also used to unite our community through events that extend beyond athletics. Melissa has used the indoor facility, alongside the outdoor turf practice fields, to host our annual community Easter Egg hunt for our young Cardinals. This celebration includes games, food trucks, and bounce houses for all children in the community.

Coach Kenny Deel Stadium (Opened in May of 2023)

Coach Kenny Deel Stadium is named in honor of Kenny Deel, the longest-tenured employee in Melissa ISD, with nearly 40 years of service. Over the course of his career, Deel has served as a teacher, coach, Director of Transportation, and now Executive Director of Operations. In his current role, he oversees construction projects across the district and played a leading role in bringing the Championship Center, Coach Kenny Deel Stadium, and The Arena to life.

The stadium officially opened in May 2023, with its first event being the district’s graduation ceremony. As part of the grand opening, athletes, coaches, and community members participated in a beam-signing ceremony, leaving their marks on the first steel beam. Surrounded by his family, Deel addressed the crowd, expressing how meaningful it was to be recognized in such a lasting way. He shared, “I’m truly humbled and honored to have the stadium named after me. I feel incredibly blessed to represent Melissa schools, and having my parents there to experience the beam signing made it even more special. These are memories I’ll carry with me forever.”

The stadium seats 10,000 fans, including 6,000 on the home side and 4,000 on the visitor side, and features a five-story press box that serves multiple purposes. The first floor, known as the “Hall of

Fame,” highlights the district’s athletic history with images of standout coaches, athletes, and championship moments, including the 2011 state football title, wrestling championships, and back-to-back softball state titles in 2024 and 2025. This level also includes a reception area, ticket booths, and restrooms.

The second and third floors each house five classrooms used daily for academic instruction. The fourth floor features a community room with a capacity of 259 people, along with an outdoor viewing area overlooking the field. The fifth floor includes the audio/visual control room operated with the help of Career and Technical Education (CTE) students. This room also includes three broadcasting rooms, home and visitor press areas, and a double-deck film room.

Additional amenities include multiple restrooms, concession stands, and medical stations on both the home and visitor concourses. The stadium is also equipped with a 60-by-30-foot video board, enhancing the game-day experience for fans and the community alike.

During the school day, Coach Kenny Deel Stadium is far more than an athletic venue; it’s an active learning space. Classrooms are used by the district’s Teaching and Learning department, Gifted and Talented (GT) programs, and Career and Technical Education (CTE) students, who gain hands-on experience producing Friday

night game-day broadcasts. At any given time, multiple programs are operating, making the stadium a constant hub for student growth across a wide range of disciplines.

The stadium also plays a major role in fine arts. It is the only venue in Texas to host four different band competitions. Fine Arts Director Jerry Whorton explains, “Between the four band competitions we host, we serve close to 70 schools through the Director’s Assistant Marching Showcase, along with UIL Area and Regional contests.” Together, these events bring in approximately 18,000 student participants and draw crowds nearing 22,000 attendees from across the state.

Beyond academics and competitions, the stadium served as a gathering place for the community. Each summer, it hosts a Fourth of July fireworks watch party, offering a prime view of the city’s show and bringing residents together for a shared celebration.

One of the most meaningful events held at the stadium is the Special Olympics of Texas Summer Games. Melissa ISD is proud to host the 2026 games from April 30 to May 2, welcoming more than 3,000 athletes, 2,000 volunteers, and over 10,000 attendees. Competitions will take place across multiple district venues, including Coach Kenny Deel Stadium, the high school track, and gymnasium.



Melissa ISD Arena

Hosting events like these reflects Melissa ISD's commitment to inclusion, community, and opportunity, creating lasting memories while showcasing the spirit and pride of Melissa.

The Arena (Opening in August 2026)

The Melissa ISD Arena is the newest addition to Melissa ISD and is currently in its final stages of construction. Designed to seat just over 2,000 spectators, The Arena blends modern design with functionality to serve both athletics and the broader community.

One of its standout features is "The Flight Deck," a glass-enclosed hospitality room that spans the entire baseline, offering floor-to-ceiling views of the court. This space includes two kitchenette areas, four flat-screen monitors, and seating for more than 50 guests, making

it ideal for events and gatherings.

The Arena is equipped with three varsity locker rooms for girls' and boys' basketball and volleyball, each featuring college-style lockers, player lounge areas, and dedicated storage for uniforms. Additional amenities include two visitor locker rooms, two officials' dressing areas, a 20-seat film room, and a 2,100-square-foot weight room.

On the upper concourse, a large audio/visual production room allows students to gain hands-on experience broadcasting games and events. The facility is outfitted with cutting-edge technology, including nine cameras, ten LED displays, and on-court projection capabilities. Its advanced control room features more than 30 moving lights, full RGB lighting control throughout the venue, and a specialized sound system found in only a few arenas in North Texas.

Melissa ISD has ambitious plans for The Arena. Its debut event will be

the district-wide staff convocation, bringing together employees from across the district. The district has also submitted requests to the University Interscholastic League to host regional wrestling competitions and be considered as a host site for boys' and girls' basketball state semifinal games. In addition, the Arena is expected to host a national-qualifying cheer competition and color guard events.

Ultimately, the impact of these facilities goes beyond athletics. They have become gathering places that strengthen community connections and foster a sense of pride and belonging. With the continued support of the Melissa ISD Board of Trustees and the Melissa community and the leadership of Superintendent Keith Murphy, Melissa ISD remains committed to providing exceptional experiences for its students while bringing the community together in meaningful ways.

Empowering the Next Generation of Texas Coaches: The Future Coaches of Texas Association creates opportunities for high school students interested in the coaching profession

By Dena Scott, Future Coaches of Texas Program Director, Thornton - McFerrin Coaching Academy

The Thornton McFerrin Coaching Academy (TMCA) continues its mission of shaping tomorrow's athletic leaders by expanding its Future Coaches of Texas Association (FCTA) outreach. The past year has marked a significant period of growth and impact for the FCTA program, as it has welcomed 16 new high school chapters from across the state, further enriching Texas's vibrant coaching community. These chapters actively engage high school students, offering valuable, hands-on coaching opportunities. For instance, the Fort Bend Clements Chapter organized student versus faculty fundraiser games, giving members experience in holding tryouts, establishing selection criteria, making roster

cuts, designing and implementing practice plans, and coaching faculty participants during the games. Similarly, the Nikki Row Chapter empowered students to plan and execute a youth volleyball camp, overseeing every aspect of its operation and used the funds raised to support their chapter activities.

Growth and Engagement Across Texas

FCTA's expansion into new schools has offered high school students unique opportunities to develop coaching skills and build professional networks. In the last year alone, TMCA successfully hosted nearly 300 participants

across four student seminars held in the Brazos Valley (two sessions), North Texas (TCU), and South Texas (McAllen) regions. These gatherings provided students with hands-on coaching experience, enhancing their practical understanding of teaching, teamwork, and leadership in an athletic context. In addition, we are pleased to announce our inaugural annual FCTA State Convention, scheduled for May 16th. Several chapters from across the state will travel to Texas A&M University in College Station for a day filled with hands-on demonstrations, professional learning sessions, and valuable networking opportunities.

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Ongoing Opportunities for Professional Development

Looking forward, TMCA has scheduled additional FCTA student seminars, one at Texas A&M Victoria in June and another one at West Texas A&M University in November. These events promise to deliver deeper engagement, equipping students with essential coaching tools, practical instruction, and access to seasoned professionals in the field. Seminar activities range from facilitating drills and leading team sessions to participating in workshops focused on professional development, ethics, and modern coaching methods.

Impact and Future Direction

By connecting aspiring coaches with meaningful, hands-on experiences and robust professional development, the FCTA program is laying the groundwork for excellence in athletic leadership across Texas. The program's rapid growth and expanding partnerships position it as an indispensable resource for high school students interested in pursuing coaching as a lifelong career.

With its commitment to state-wide accessibility and continuous



Future Coaches instructing fellow students with basketball passing techniques.

improvement, the Thornton -McFerrin Coaching Academy's FCTA program is paving the way for a stronger future, cultivating the next generation of coaches one student at a time.

Personal Reflection

As a former athletic director in Fort Bend ISD, my involvement with FCTA began in 2022, when we brought students to the Brazos Valley seminars, allowing them to explore the coaching profession firsthand. This experience inspired several campuses to establish FCTA chapters, which became a strategic response to our ongoing teacher/

coach shortage. By "growing our own," we provided valuable opportunities for students interested in coaching.

If you are an athletic director facing challenges with hiring coaches, I strongly encourage you to send students to these seminars and consider establishing chapters at your high schools. Doing so not only builds a sustainable pipeline of future coaches but also deepens student engagement and leadership within your programs.

For information about starting a chapter, attending student seminars, or sponsoring FCTA activities, please visit futurecoachesoftexas.org.



Spring 2026 Brazos Valley Student Seminar.

The AI Advantage in Athletics

Cecilia Kellar - Director of Athletics, Ector County ISD

Why AI Matters in Athletics

Texas high school athletics has always been built on adaptation, preparation, and the willingness to evolve. The programs that consistently succeed are usually the ones willing to embrace change before everyone else catches up. Artificial Intelligence is quickly becoming a turning point. AI is no longer some futuristic idea reserved for major corporations. It is already changing how schools operate, communicate, organize, teach, and lead. In the athletic arena, the reality is simple: if we are not learning how to utilize these tools, we are missing opportunities to improve efficiency, reclaim valuable time, and better serve our athletes and coaches. More importantly, we risk falling behind programs that are already integrating these systems into their daily workflow. AI will never replace strong leadership, relationships, culture, or the lasting impact a great coach has on students and the school community, but it can absolutely strengthen the people leading those areas.

AI Tools for Athletic Directors

For Athletic Directors, AI can become one of the most practical and time-saving tools in the department. The key is to use it intentionally in ways that support organization, communication, and consistency.

Centralized Knowledge and Quick Access to Information

One of the most effective platforms available today is NotebookLM. By uploading district handbooks, UIL policies, transportation procedures, facility schedules, coaching manuals, and other key documents, an AD can quickly search and summarize information without digging through multiple files or emails. Instead of spending valuable time searching for a policy clarification, answers can be generated in seconds with clear, usable summaries.

Planning, Scheduling, and Communication Support

Platforms like ChatGPT or Claude can assist Athletic Directors with building professional development schedules, creating campus presentations, generating staff meeting agendas, drafting emergency action plans, and organizing travel itineraries. These tools help streamline planning while keeping communication clear and consistent across the department.

Operational Systems and “Go-To” Documents

Athletic offices can use AI to create “go-to sheets” that organize facility usage, transportation schedules, game workers, meal planning, and supervision assignments in one shared location. In addition, AI can help build check-

lists, step-by-step processes, onboarding documents, and game-day operation guides that can be reused year after year. This creates consistency across seasons and ensures expectations are clearly communicated to all staff.

Long-Term Efficiency and Leadership Focus

When these systems are in place, communication improves, and departments avoid reinventing processes every year. More importantly, AI does not replace leadership work, but it does reduce the time spent on repetitive administrative tasks. That time can then be redirected toward people, culture, and program development, where leadership has the greatest impact.

Practical AI Tools for Coaches

At the middle school and high school level, coaches may benefit from AI even more because of the constant demand on their time. Coaches are balancing classrooms, practices, parent communication, film breakdown, athlete development, and personal time every single day. AI can help simplify many of those responsibilities. Many filming platforms already allow programs to speed up film review through automatic tagging and trend analysis. Beyond film, platforms like ChatGPT and Claude can generate practice plans based on a coach’s philosophy, build offseason workout templates, organize position meeting notes, and even help draft individualized player feedback. Coaches can also use AI to quickly create study guides for athletes in athletic periods or leadership lessons for team development. At the middle school level, especially where one coach may oversee large numbers of athletes across multiple sports, these tools can help bring structure and consistency while allowing coaches to focus more energy on teaching, relationships, and accountability.

Getting Coaches Comfortable with AI

The biggest challenge for many athletic departments is not access to AI. It is helping coaches feel comfortable enough to start using it. The best way to create buy-in is to introduce AI during professional development sessions as a practical time-saving tool rather than another initiative added to their plate. Start simple and give coaches tools they can use immediately.

One of the most important things for coaches and administrators to understand is that the quality of the response depends heavily on the quality of the prompt given. AI works best when it is provided with clear direction,

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specific details, and the desired outcome. Instead of asking for a “practice plan,” a coach should explain the sport, grade level, number of athletes, practice length, offensive or defensive emphasis, and specific goals for the day. The more specific the input, the more valuable and usable the output becomes. Learning how to communicate effectively with AI platforms is quickly becoming a skill that can save coaches and athletic departments countless hours.

Here are three easy entry points for coaches:

• ChatGPT or Claude

These platforms can help coaches draft parent communication, create weekly newsletters, build social media captions, organize practice schedules, generate practice plans, create weekly schedule and program overview documents, assign coach responsibilities for the week or game days in a clear and organized format, and create shared checklists, travel itineraries, game day operation sheets, and process documents that save time and improve communication from season to season.

PD Practice Prompt: “Create a weekly practice plan for a high school varsity team. Include a structured breakdown for a 2-hour practice: warm-up, skill development, team concepts, situational work, and conditioning. Organize it clearly by time blocks. Also include a simple coaching responsibility chart that assigns roles to each assistant coach and highlights key coaching points for each segment.”

• Microsoft Teams

The transcription and recap features can automatical-

ly summarize staff meetings, scouting sessions, and coordinator discussions so coaches can stay engaged in conversation instead of trying to write down every detail.

PD Practice Prompt: Have coaches open Microsoft Teams during the first part of your session, then insert the transcription into ChatGPT or Claude using this prompt. “Summarize this staff meeting transcript into key takeaways, action items, and responsibilities for each coach. Format it in bullet points and include deadlines where possible.”

• Canva

Canva and its Magic Studio features allow coaches to create professional graphics, recruiting visuals, game-day posts, banquet presentations, and schedule graphics without needing advanced design experience.

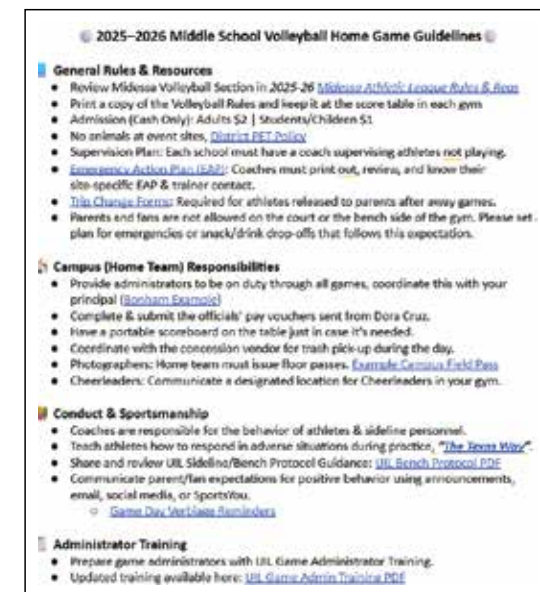
PD Practice Prompt: “Create a game day social media graphic for a high school (Insert Sport Here) team playing a district game. Include opponent name placeholder, game time, location, and a motivating slogan. Make it clean, bold, and school-spirited.” If you want to make it more detailed, upload your school logo and colors, as well as any other school-approved graphics.

Giving coaches a few immediate wins with AI often creates the confidence needed for broader integration across the department.

Using AI Responsibly

As we continue moving into this new artificial intelligence era, athletic departments must also remain commit-

AI Continued on next page



Game Day Guidelines Example



Feedback Survey Summary



Summer Camp Flyers Example



ted to protecting student information and maintaining strong security practices. AI should always be used responsibly and within district guidelines. Coaches and administrators should never upload confidential student records, medical information, disciplinary history, or personally identifiable information into public AI systems. It is also important to work closely with district technology departments before purchasing outside software or subscriptions, since many districts already provide approved platforms that are secure and available for staff use. At its best, AI is not about replacing people. It is about helping people operate more efficiently so they can focus on what matters most. Relationships, leadership, culture, and student development will always remain at the center of education-based



Notebook LM

athletics. AI simply gives us another tool to help support that mission more effectively than ever before.

Preparing for Success: THSADA Programs that Build Stronger Athletic Leaders

Johanna Denson - Assistant Executive Director of Professional Education - THSADA

Success in athletic administration is built long before an opportunity arrives. It grows through preparation, professional learning, and the support of a strong network. THSADA's educational programs are designed to help members strengthen their skills, expand their leadership capacity, and prepare for long-term success in Texas athletics.

TAAC: Establishing a Strong Professional Foundation

The Texas Athletic Administrator Certification (TAAC) provides essential, Texas specific training that prepares administrators for the daily and long-term demands of leading athletic programs. TAAC is built on Five Pillars that form the core of effective athletic leadership in Texas:

- Compliance & Governance
- Operations & Program Management
- Finance & Resource Allocation
- Leadership & Personnel Management
- Safety, Risk & Crisis Response

Together, these pillars ensure that TAAC Certified administrators are equipped with the knowledge, confidence, and credibility needed to lead with excellence.

QUAD A: Elevating Leadership & Career Readiness

QUAD A supports administrators who are ready to advance their leadership journey. Members gain access to high-level professional development and exclusive career

building opportunities, including:

- **Mock Interviews** with experienced leaders
- **Mentor Program** connections for ongoing guidance
- **Resume Review** support to strengthen professional presentation

These resources help QUAD A members prepare for future roles and stand out in competitive hiring processes.

JHAMS: Developing the Next Generation of Leaders

The Junior High and Middle School Program (JHAMS) equip rising leaders with the tools to manage junior high programs successfully while preparing for future transitions into high school, district level leadership or successful leadership at the middle school or junior high level. JHAMS builds confidence early and fosters a strong pipeline of future athletic directors.

In addition to the three professional education programs, THSADA provides a wealth of web-site resources for active members. Procedures for onboarding new employees, videos by experienced athletic administrators on a variety of topics, to creating a quality, inclusive District Athletic Handbook are available to THSADA members.

THSADA's educational pathways—TAAC, QUAD A, and JHAMS—ensure that every member has access to the training, support, and opportunities needed to grow and succeed. Whether building foundational knowledge, advancing leadership skills, or preparing for the next career step, THSADA is committed to helping athletic administrators thrive in a constantly changing environment.

Innovative Sport Scheduling for Junior High

Megan Symank, College Station ISD Assistant Athletic Director

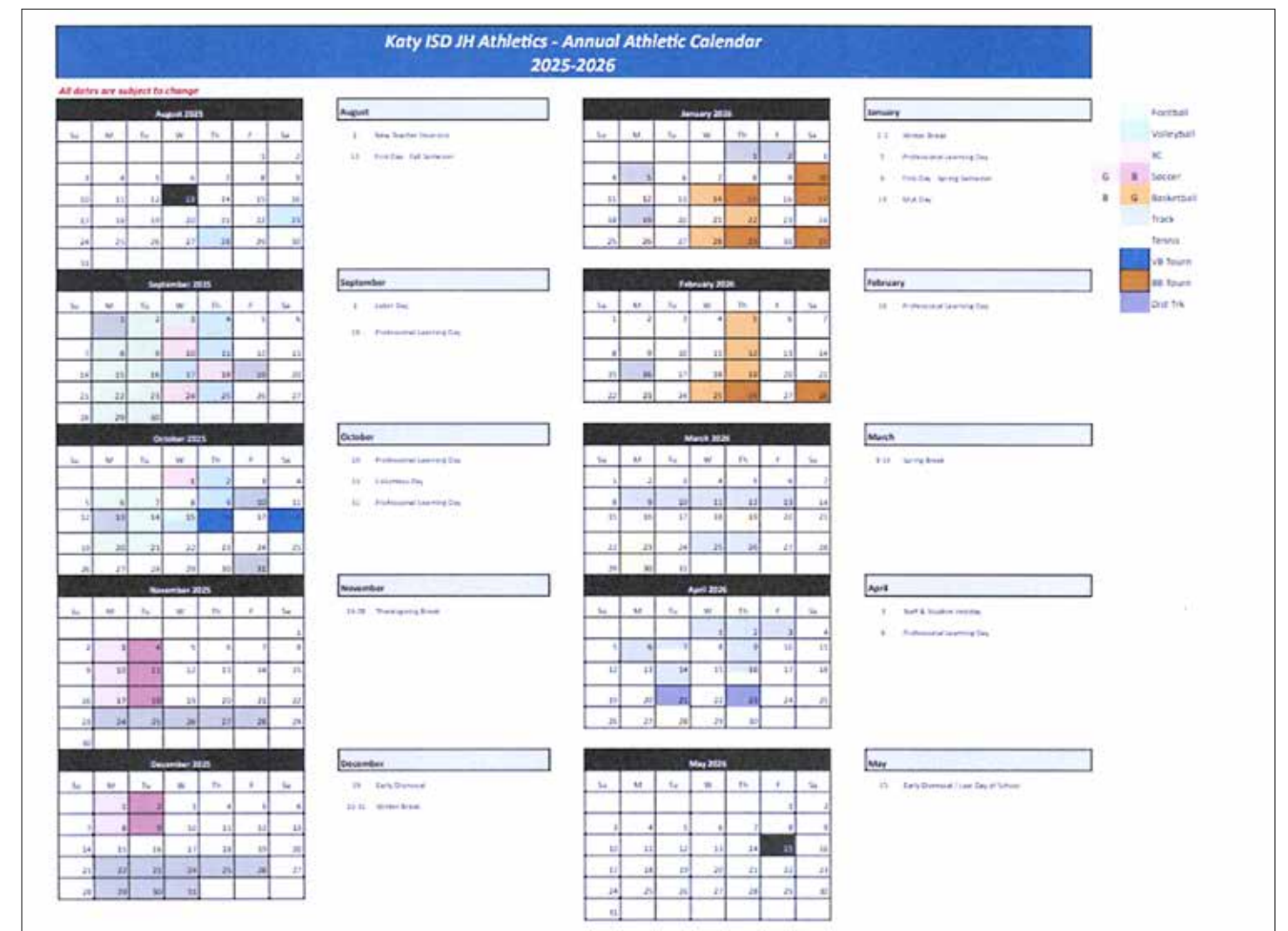
Across Texas, junior high UIL athletic programs are evolving as school districts search for ways to maximize participation, improve scheduling, and better support student-athletes and coaches. Traditionally, junior high athletics have followed a familiar structure with football and volleyball in the fall, basketball in the winter, and track and field in the spring. While this format remains common, some districts are implementing innovative scheduling models to better align with weather, staffing, and officiating needs.

Several districts have explored adjusting the order of sports seasons to create more balanced opportunities throughout the school year. In one example shared by Socorro ISD, baseball, softball, and soccer are conducted during the first nine weeks, allowing high school coaches to assist while not in season and easing the shortage of officials. Football, volleyball, and cross country move to the

second nine weeks when cooler weather improves outdoor participation and additional coaching support is available. Basketball remains in the third nine weeks because indoor competition is less impacted by weather, while track and field concludes the year during the fourth nine weeks, providing flexibility around testing and end-of-year activities.

Districts such as Katy Independent School District have also made adjustments to their junior high schedule as shown in the 2025-2026 example below. Katy ISD adopted this schedule to coordinate facilities, officials, and seasonal transitions effectively.

In conclusion, Athletic Directors are not married to a traditional schedule when considering junior high athletics. These innovative approaches demonstrate how Texas schools continue adapting athletic programming to better serve students and communities.



Student Led Leadership Summits

Sonia Almanza, Northside ISD

Over the course of one school year, students from each high school in Northside ISD met with Stephen Mackey to develop their own Student Leadership Summit on their campus. The idea of the summit was to address the needs of the campus delivered by students to their peers, develop leadership skills, improve organization and communication skills, teamwork and create opportunity for future athletes to lead their own summit.



Each session had a specific leadership trait the students learned to apply to their own summit. 1st goal the students needed to accomplish was to define their mission statement based on what they wanted the outcome of their student summit to be. Students had to brainstorm ideas and identify the specific needs to their campus. Once the mission statement was created students had to create roles and responsibilities, and committees. Committee included students overseeing logistics, hospitality, scheduling speakers, and a group working directly with their coaches and administrators. The committees would meet throughout the year go over their part and make sure they were in line with their mission statement. Once their mission statement and committees were organized, students the worked the

anatomy of the event/agenda. Students were given several different templates to create their agenda for the day. Once the students had all this information for their agenda and ideas organized their next step was to set up a meeting with their campus principal to establish a location and date that best fit the campus. When the date and location were set, students began planning for their summit. Some schools used the traditional conference model where they had guest speakers come and address the campus. Speakers ranged from professional athletes, to the mayor of San Antonio, to former students. Speakers focused on how to build a championship work ethic and the skills you learn in high

school are assets in the real world. Other some campuses focused on adversity and building teamwork and trust with their teammates.

At the end of the year, students had to opportunity to reflect and share feedback with other schools about their summit. Students has to use the five H's (Highlight, Hard, Hope, Helpful, Hand Off) to describe their event and share out with other. Even though the summits were successful overall, there were still challenges that the students faced throughout the year. Common issue with the groups was the overall planning process. There were setbacks throughout preparation, including miscommunication with coaches and difficulties organizing certain details. Another issue was that some speakers were arranged too late in the process. One important lesson learned was to “plan for the plan,” meaning there should always be preparation for unexpected situations.

Majority of the students believed the summit fulfilled its mission statement by encouraging teamwork, leadership, reflection, and student involvement. Despite challenges along the way, students adapted, improved, and made a meaningful impact on the students at the summit and created a pathway for future student leaders to follow.

LEADERSHIP SUMMIT ITINERARY

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 4TH, 2026 | JOHN JAY HS AUDITORIUM | 7811 MARLBACH RD | 9:00 AM - 12:00 PM

9:00 AM - 12:00 AM EVENT TIMEFRAME

- 9:00 - 9:10: WELCOME: TAJARI WELLINGTON (MC)
- 9:12 - 9:25: F.A.M.I.L.Y.: CHLOE WHITFIELD & AVYAKTA KANTESH
- 9:30 - 9:55: BREAKOUT SESSION: TEAM BUILDING
- 10:05 - 10:15: FIRST SPEAKER - MAYOR GINA ORTIZ JONES
- 10:25 - 10:40: INTERMISSION
- 10:40 - 11:00: SECOND SPEAKER - JOSH REYNOLDS
- 11:05 - 11:25: BREAKOUT SESSION - EFFORT, ATTITUDE, TOUGHNESS
- 11:30 - 11:50: THIRD SPEAKER - DEMTRIA SANCE
- 12:00: LUNCH & FELLOWSHIP BEGINS

CONCLUDED AT THE ENDING OF LUNCH

FORGET ABOUT ME I LOVE YOU

Regional News Updates

Region 1

- Canyon ISD names Jeff Lofton Boys Coordinator/Head Football Coach for West Plains High School
- Shallowater ISD Rodney Vincent - Athletic Director and Head Football Coach is a finalist for the “Coaching Beyond the Game” Award

Region 2

- Lou Mora, Assistant Athletic Director at Abilene ISD, is retiring with Aaron Roan taking over his position.

Region 3

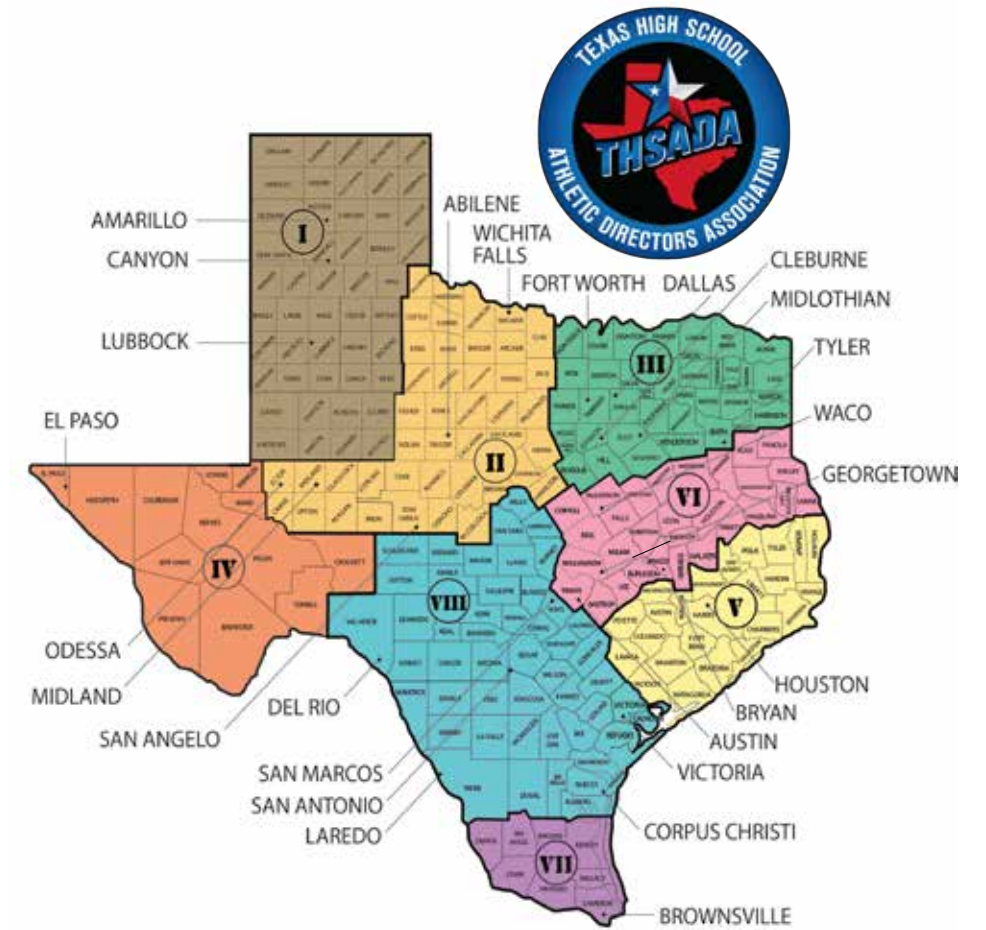
- Dallas ISD passed a \$6.2 billion bond; the largest bond passed in Texas history.
- Duncanville ISD named Tameka Butts as their new Assistant Athletic Director.
- Grapevine Colleyville ISD name Billy Skinner as their new Executive Director of Athletics.
- Little Elm ISD named Matt Harbin as their new Athletic Director.
- Midlothian named Rusty Purser as their new Athletic Director and Jimmy Spradley as the Assistant Athletic Director.

Region 4

- Karen Nagues from Gadsden ISD (NM) and Michael Mackeben from Clint ISD are retiring at the end of June. Maria Kennedy (former El Paso ISD AD) will take over Gadsden and Arturo “Rocky” Cruz will take over Clint.

Region 5

- 1,001 student-athletes from CFISD’s 12 high schools were THSCA Academic All-State



- during the 2025-2026 school year.
- Flag Football Pulse
- Aldine ISD had two State Track and Field qualifiers.
- Ahona Chowdhury from Woodlands HS was the 6A Girls Tennis Champion
- College Park HS coached by Mike Jasowiak won the 6A Boys State Soccer Championship
- Jeremy Wade, the Woodlands HS Swim and Dive Coach was the THSCA Swim/Dive Coach of the Year

Region 6

- Congratulations to Lynn Davis Pool on her remarkable career and retirement from Austin ISD. Lynn has made a lasting impact through commitment, leadership,

and passion. We wish her the best in her next chapter.

Region 7

- Sharyland ISD celebrated its 2nd Annual Hall of Honor.
- McAllen ISD voters approved a \$335 million bond for district improvements.

Region 8

- North East ISD and Northside ISD in San Antonio held the UIL State Tennis Tournament May 8-9.
- Northside ISD also held the THSCA Leadership Tour of Texas on May 6 at Northside Sports Gym.



Stan Laing
Northside ISD (retired)

HALL OF HONOR INDUCTEES

2025-2026

Lynn Pool
Austin ISD



Leslie Slovak
Richardson ISD (retired)