LEON | ALCALA KNOWS SCHOOL LAW

The attorneys at Leon | Alcala, PLLC are experienced in representing public school districts and other governmental entities throughout Texas. The firm’s attorneys are regularly called upon by school districts across Texas to navigate the legal challenges associated with employment and discrimination issues, harassment and bullying concerns, taxes and bonds to finance new school projects, special education/Section 504 matters, school discipline, grievances, purchasing and contracts, Chapter 313 tax limitation agreements, and Covid-19 complexities. The firm is a proud supporter of the Texas Association of Community Schools and the school children they serve.

PROUDLY SERVING THE ENTIRE STATE OF TEXAS

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n 1973, Barbra Streisand sang the theme song to the movie The Way We Were with these opening lines:

Memories
Light the corners of my mind
Misty watercolor memories
Of the way we were

After over two years of disruption caused by the COVID pandemic, all educators can relate to the sentiment expressed in those lines. In our travels around the state meeting with superintendents, Crystal and I have stopped counting the number of times we hear, “I’m ready for things to get back to normal.” Most people love “the way things were”!

The truth, however, is things will probably never return to the way we remember them. Even when the pandemic wanes, Zoom will still play a big role in schools. Because of the tragedy in Uvalde, school safety will ratchet up to a level that few ever imagined. The things that so fiercely divide us now, show no evidence of letting up in the near future.

While we understand that change is inevitable, TACS, as an advocate for small, rural, and mid-size schools, can work to help policy makers understand that “one size fits all” remedies never work in a state as large as Texas. This is especially true in 2023 with the state legislators descending on Austin for the 88th Texas State Legislative Session.

You know that “parents’ rights”, vouchers, providing a better deal for charter school operators, and school safety, safety, safety will be on the minds of legislators during the session. TACS will be at the front of the effort to work with leaders of both parties to ensure that good public education policy results when the session gavels out after 140 days.

The legislative session is quite a challenge for an association as “lean and mean” as TACS. When you add to it our work with the State Board of Education to limit charter school expansion (as well as a host of other issues) and with the State Board for Educator Certification to find just the right way to ensure that Texas students can thrive in new teachers’ classrooms, one can quickly see the value of TACS membership.

Of course, the benefits of TACS membership only grow with the help of our corporate friends. Legal questions answered and free school board training opportunities with Leon & Alcala, Attorneys at Law, and dependable liability insurance at a reasonable cost from AIM just help to make TACS imperative for school districts.

No one can stop change, but at TACS we pledge to work diligently for changes that benefit our members and the school children of Texas!
TACS Corporate Partners

DIAMOND

PLATINUM

GOLD

SILVER

Please visit our website, www.tacsnet.org, for representative and contact information.
As I write this message, I cannot help but reflect on the obstacles the past couple of years in public education has given our teachers and staff to overcome. Educators across the state rose to meet the challenges brought on by the pandemic head on. Without doubt, we have absolutely seen some of the best teaching occur during this extremely difficult time. Educators across our great state have dedicated themselves to finding ways to meet the needs of our students, again and again. The COVID learning gap became apparent during this past year, again forcing educators to step up and push themselves and the students. These efforts helped close gaps and promoted student growth each day.

We as educators will be faced with more obstacles in our preparation for the upcoming year:

- STAAR Redesign
- School Safety
- Governor supported voucher system

I take comfort in knowing that TACS, led by Barry and Crystal, will be there to help and support our needs and our districts as we work to tackle these challenges. They work tirelessly to provide our small and mid-sized school districts across the state with much needed representation and resources.

The 88th legislative session will start up in January, work has already begun by this committee to create a strong and focused agenda to support our advocacy. Colby Nichols, along with Barry and Crystal, are all well respected in the legislature and will be diligent in the promotion of our organization’s needs. We are fortunate to have an excellent team to advocate for us, as you never know what the legislature will bring.

I look forward to this year and am honored to serve as the President of TACS, the absolute best organization for small and mid-sized schools. I know together we can move forward with strength as we face what challenges us this school year.

Chris Wade, TACS President
Superintendent – Smyer ISD
TACS Executive Committee 2022-2023

Chris Wade, President
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Superintendent - Lorenzo ISD

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Honey Grove ISD

Ted West
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7 • 2022 TACS Today
“We can, together...”

Crystal White
Deputy Executive Director

We can, together became our motto this past year while we created our new logo. A motto, according to Oxford Language, is “a short sentence or phrase chosen as encapsulating the beliefs or ideals guiding an institution”.

We spent a great deal of time thinking about what guides us as an organization and what our values as an organization are. We believe education is the great equalizer for so many students. One of our articles in this year’s magazine focuses on students who have been identified as homeless. Students become homeless for a variety of reasons, and, as educators, we recognize the needs students arrive on our campuses with are not just focused on instructional needs. San Elizario ISD has hired social workers to help the students have their basic needs met so that the students can focus their efforts on their education needs. Who doesn’t love having someone there to advocate on a student’s behalf?

Another district shared the story of a school district raising funds for a young student with cancer. The doctor who treated her reminds all of us that cancer doesn’t just affect the patient, it also impacts the whole family. Educators work with students and their families to assist in the learning process, but clearly focus on helping however we can.... just ask Maria Isabel Martinez what a difference the children at Los Fresnos Elementary School made!

In Longview ISD, a community member made large financial investment of $20,000 to make a difference for students struggling to read. The same person also sponsored a trip to a Dallas Mavericks game for every student who met his or her reading goal. This person made an investment in the future of each of the students in the program and gave them a hand up along with an experience they will never forget. A passion for learning while working with others are also evident in our other articles developing a friendship with a Pearl Harbor survivor, a student studying health sciences saving the life of her teacher, and a community working together to create a place of pride and reflection that honors the accomplishments of teams.

We all want to accomplish great things in our districts, and we can...together!

TACS is here for your district and wants to help however we can! Give us a call any time!

Best,

Dr. Crystal White
Deputy Executive Director
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The last week of school changed everything we thought we knew about the upcoming Legislative session. We just knew vouchers, accountability, and teacher workforce issues were going to dominate the bulk of our advocacy agenda. Unfortunately, evil struck in Uvalde ISD and filled our hearts with sorrow, anger, and our heads with so many questions. Due to the unspeakable acts on that day, we are finding ourselves once again discussing school safety. Like the tragedy at Santa Fe, we are talking about facility hardening, mental health, and safety protocols. After the Santa Fe shooting, the Texas Legislature appropriated money via the school safety allotment to equate to $9.72 a student. According to a self-reported survey of districts by the Texas School Safety Center, more than two thirds of school districts have used this money for security cameras. 20% used it for active-shooter response training. Nearly 40% of districts installed physical barriers with the allotment. Lawmakers must (and most probably do) recognize that this amount is insufficient to significantly “move the needle” on hardening schools. Additionally, hardening is but one aspect of the safety conversation, others include: mental health, interventions, culture, safety protocols, discipline, truancy, etc. The truth is there is not a panacea to the problem and it will likely take a multi-faceted approach with input from a variety of stakeholders.

One certainty for the Texas Legislature is that they will be working with a hefty budget surplus to help tackle some of the problems mentioned above and other issues throughout the state. Texas Comptroller Glenn Hegar announced recently that the state will have a surplus of approximately $27 billion. It is important to understand that our state has a multitude of items that may be addressed by utilizing some of these funds, such as: water, the grid, medicaid, property tax relief, the border, etc. However, TACS and our members know that the issues currently facing public education must be a priority for the 88th Legislature.

Perhaps the most prominent policy issue (outside of safety) that is facing our organization is the threat of voucher legislation. Before the Uvalde tragedy, it was clear that this was a priority for several in the House, Senate, and the Governor’s Office. Do not expect that drum beat to be any softer despite the tragedy and hardship that has struck our fellow educators. Vouchers will still be a threat to the state of Texas, our children, and our parents as we move forward. TACS is also aware and working with Legislators to help solve the tremendous workforce issues that remain in all schools, but especially rural and midsize schools. As I have told many, the teacher pipeline was a massive issue for the state, but at this point it is an epidemic that threatens our ability to adequately serve our students.

There are many policy issues we must solve in the coming months, but as we move forward as an Organization, as a State, and as Educators, towards the 88th Legislature, I hope you will join me in carrying the names below in your heart and mind and not let anyone forget the loss of these precious individuals. God bless them and their families.

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Trusted By Texas School Districts For Decades
Philippe Petit was a young French high-wire walker who on August 7, 1974, walked across a high-wire strung between the twin towers of the World Trade Center. In doing so, he not only had to contend with winds and flexing wire, but he also had to deal with buildings that were engineered to flex in the wind due to their height. To compensate for these realities, Petit expertly used his years of experience and a 50 lb. balancing pole. Shortly after 7:00 in the morning, Petit, gently stepped off the South Tower onto the wire and walked with confidence.

Petit not only walked, but (holding on to his balancing pole), he also knelt on one knee, laid down, conversed with seagulls, and taunted police officers who had arrived on the scene. In the end, Petit crossed the quarter mile long high-wire eight times that morning. 1,350 feet below, crowds gathered to gaze upwards with astonishment at Petit’s accomplished feat. The coverage of the seemingly spontaneous event was so extensive in 1974, that by today’s standards the event would be considered “going viral”.

When interviewed about this feat in later years, Petit revealed his motive was never to place his life in jeopardy, but simply to experience the beauty of life through his chosen passion of wire walking. While the twin tower performance may have seemed spontaneous, Petit approached the challenge after years of dedicated preparation. With passion, commitment, and heart, Petit was able to focus on the challenge that laid before him and accomplished it successfully.

Like Petit, effective school leaders possess a similar passion, commitment, and preparation for the art of education. Through years of experience and advanced education, school leaders are prepared to walk their own tight rope daily through their chosen passion for education. While most school leaders would prefer to avoid the spotlight, inevitably at some moment in his or her career, all school leaders operating a public school system will be faced with walking to the edge of that metaphorical high-wire. While trying to balance themselves on this imaginary wire stretched across two swaying structures, leaders reach for their training and experience as they take each deliberate step. As school lawyers, we strive to be the added safety of a balancing pole to allow school leaders to forge ahead on their dedicated walk on high-wire that lies ahead of them.

As one high-wire walker/Superintendent put it: “I know what the law says but I need someone to help me walk the fine line between what the law says and what my community wants me to do for their children.”

A school lawyer’s job is not just to read the law and say, “yes, you may” or “no, you may not.” Effective school lawyers need to understand the desired outcome, analyze the potential risks of non-compliance, and formulate pragmatic solutions that work for administrators at a campus level. Solutions should facilitate rather than complicate the performance of the educator’s high-wire walk. Our clients are real people who have real problems, that require timely, realistic solutions, they are not simply cases.

It is 6:00 p.m., the telephone rings. The wire-walker/school leader states they received a telephone call from law enforcement regarding the arrest of a popular coach for unlawful conduct with a minor. The community is publicly supporting the coach. “I’m trying to investigate but am getting no cooperation from the accused employee.” The school leader asks, “What can I do?”

A school lawyer’s job is not only to recommend a solution, but to ask, “Will this solution work for you and your district?” The responsibility of a school lawyer is to understand what makes the situation and circumstance unique for each district and although the law may be the same, solutions are not always the same. It is the lawyer’s duty to understand all the issues (not just legal) and provide clear and concise advice and move forward to a resolution. At times the responsibility of a school lawyer can go beyond the law, but entails knowing the client’s history and their community which provide input toward solutions that enable school leaders to confidently move forward in their mission of educating those children. Every situation is unique, and most educators will find themselves in uncharted territory, but the school lawyer is present to guide them through the process and provide the confidence to not only
survive the current situation but gain knowledge to handle future incidents. Usually, the solution to the popular coach is self-evident when it involves the safety of children, but when the community demands a conviction, sometimes more careful maneuvers must be made to get to the necessary step while walking the high-wire in the center of the public eye.

The phone rings and the wire walker/Superintendent hesitantly asks, “What is the Public Funds Investment Act and what do I need to know about it?”

School leaders face a wide range of duties and responsibilities. The job of a school lawyer is not to be omniscient, but knowledgeable of school law, legal reference material, and state/federal publications that enable efficient identification of the rules applicable to the situation to enable high-wire walkers to successfully navigate the art of educational leadership. Your problem is our problem. A school lawyer’s job is to identify when a client needs a specialist or someone who can help connect them with the right person or the right resource for the issue the client is facing. This may include introducing them to another professional with the expertise and insight to enable our high-wire walker to successfully navigate the art of educational leadership.

It is 6:45 a.m., the smell of fresh coffee is still in the air. In the middle of reviewing emails, the phone rings, the wire-walker/school leader stressfully reports, “A student with a long history of discipline issues and a history of violence against his family is on campus threatening suicide and has pushed the principal.”

Like Petit’s 7:00 a.m. morning high-wire walk (planned before construction workers arrived that day), many school leaders find themselves walking the high-wire and needing to reach out to their school lawyers before the “normal” workday has started (and/or ended) for most. During crises, school lawyers must be accessible and aid in avoiding a major potential tragedy by providing careful guidance during emergencies. The education environment is a highly stressful one and school leaders and school lawyers do not have bankers’ hours. It is the school lawyer’s job to be present for whatever challenge may arise for the school leader at any time and provide assurance that we are on your team, and we can get through any high-wire challenge together.
WHAT TACS DOES...

For our schools

Advocacy

- Attend legislative hearings and provide testimony for legislation that will benefit our small, mid-sized, and rural schools.
- Collaborate regularly with Texas Education Agency and other education organizations to favorable influence rules for TACS members.
- Attend State Board of Education and State Board of Educator Certification meetings on our members behalf.
- Actively works for funding that protects and enhances the education of small and midsize districts’ students including the small and mid-size allotments.

For our members

Benefits

- Question Calls with Leon & Alcala, Attorneys at Law (excludes research and/or work product).
- One FREE workshop for school board members and administrators from Leon & Alcala. Attorneys at Law.
- Professional Liability Insurance for member school districts and their employees at a reduced rate through Association Insurance Management (AIM)

Events

- TACS Annual Fall Conference at Kalahari Resorts Texas (September 11th - 13th, 2022)
  - Golf Tournament (September 11th | 8:00 AM - 3:00 PM)
  - Round Rock Express Baseball Game (September 11th | 1:00 PM)
  - Workshop Sessions (September 12th | 8:00 AM - 4:00 PM)
  - Reception (September 12th | 5:00 PM - 7:00 PM)
  - Workshop Sessions (September 13th | 8:00 AM - 12:00 PM)
- Bond and Construction Conference: Everything AND the Kitchen Sink (October 4th, 2022 | 8:30 AM to 3:00 PM)
- Two fall legal conferences by Walsh Gallegos
  - Region 19 | November 9, 2022
  - Region 12 | November 9, 2022
- Two spring conferences (Tyler ISD Career and Technology Center, 2nd location TBD)
  - Tyler Spring Conference | April 5th, 2023
- Monthly webinars by Leon | Alcala, Attorneys at Law
- Book study opportunities
- Finance workshop on ESSER or other finance topics of interest
Azle ISD:

Azle High School Senior Brings Historical Piece to Azle ISD

Azle High School now has a unique piece of World War II history on permanent display thanks to AHS senior Brooke Schocke and her passion and dedication to ensuring future generations remember the legacies of our veterans.

Schocke secured a piece of the USS Arizona battleship through the USS Arizona Relics Program, which was dedicated to Azle High School during a special ceremony on Wednesday, March 31, 2022, and placed on permanent display in the school highlighting the attack on Pearl Harbor.

During the special dedication ceremony, guests heard from Nikki Stratton, who is the granddaughter of one of the few survivors of the attack on Pearl Harbor, Donald Stratton. Other speakers included JoAnn George whose father saved Stratton that day, and Teri Mann, whose uncle died during the attack. Other WWII veterans also attended the event.

Azle High School is the first high school in Texas and one of only a few in the nation to have a piece of the USS Arizona on permanent display.

Brooke’s passion for this project developed as a young 13-year-old Azle ISD student when she met her hero, Pearl Harbor survivor Donald Stratton. Her mission became to help Stratton fulfill his dream of making sure people remember what he and his USS Arizona shipmates encountered on that terrible day.

The impression Stratton made on Brooke led her to create a 501c3 nonprofit charity called “A Hero’s Dream” with the purpose of preserving the legacies and stories of all veterans.

“Donald Stratton opened my eyes to a new part of the world, gave me friendship and opportunities I never would’ve dreamed of, and made a lasting impression on my life,” said Schocke. “I aspire to be a professor teaching American history and continue to tell stories like Donald’s to future generations.”
Due to the global pandemic, education for children around the world was suspended and changed.

At Judson STEAM Academy, a new program is aimed at helping students from 6th to 8th grade bounce back from the setback to their reading progress. The first year of the program is drawing to a close, but the district is proud of the progress that every student has made and glad that the Judson campus created such a helpful program to our students.

Bounce Back Reading Club, which launched in the fall of 2021 is a safe place that allows students who need to improve their reading levels while doing so in a more relaxed atmosphere.

“At the beginning of the school year, we had a large number of students that were struggling in grade-level reading and content areas because they were two, three, four, or more years behind in reading,” said Patricia Duck, the Bounce Back Reading Club teacher.

Thanks to a generous donation from a member of the community, the new program had a lot of help getting off the ground, as well as having amazing incentives to help keep the children motivated in their reading progress.

“A community member purchased the Fountas & Pinnell Intervention Kit at a cost of $20,000,” Ms. Duck said. Fountas & Pinnell Leveled Literacy Intervention System is a supplementary intervention system that they say is proven to improve literacy achievement of struggling readers in grades K through 5+ with engaging leveled books and fast-paced systematically designed lessons.

“The same community member also sponsored a trip to a Dallas Mavericks game for students that reached their reading goal!”

The club is an elective class at Judson for students that are struggling with reading and is only available through a recommendation from a teacher. For its first year, the club has 70 students, spread out among six classes, each lasting 48 minutes. Students choose from a library full of books on many topics. This allows the students to read books that will keep their interest.

“There are kids that are stepping up as leaders that have never had the opportunity to be leaders in their class. You just see a whole different way, and the way they carry themselves, they’re getting comfortable,” Ms. Duck told the Tyler Morning Telegraph. “They’re like ‘Hey, what’s this word?’ where they would’ve tried hiding that struggle before.”

“They have worked extremely hard. They have set goals for each 6-weeks and most have met and exceeded those goals. They are very proud of their accomplishments,” Ms. Patricia said, “Parents have been very supportive of the club, especially when they see the difference it is making.”
Los Fresnos Students Raise $2,500 for Classmate

For the better part of a year, students and staff at Los Fresnos Elementary School have rallied behind classmate Isabella Arce as she battled leukemia at Driscoll Children’s Hospital in Corpus Christi.

On Wednesday, the #Bella Strong fundraising movement at the school handed over $2,500 raised since Bella and her family returned to Brownsville from Corpus Christi, where they had relocated while she received grueling cancer treatments.

“The school just decided to rally with Bella returning home,” Alma Arce said. “We decided to do something for Driscoll because they were just so amazing. They literally saved my daughter’s life, and so we kind of took it from there,” she said.

“It was just so beautiful. ... The children raised funds and then they’d write their name on their tag and put it on the wall, the heroes wall for the kids that helped. It’s amazing. They raised like $2,500. The children were all rooting for Bella, even the children that were not in her grade. It’s just beautiful how everybody really came together. They’re all rooting for Bella, and helping other children, not just Bella. They all have such big hearts and it just really touched us.”

The doctors at Driscoll Children’s Hospital in Corpus Christi fly into Brownsville once a week to treat patients at Driscoll Children’s Specialty Clinic, which made it possible for Bella to receive maintenance treatments in Brownsville once she progressed to that point, her mother said. “We live in Brownsville; I was teaching at Los Fresnos Elementary and she and my son were students there. They know everyone there. It’s like family to them.”

Dr. Ndina Nhlane, Bella’s doctor and a specialist in pediatric hematology and oncology, said she has been a wonderful patient. He said receiving the kind of support Bella received from her classmates makes a big difference in a patient’s recovery. “You have to remember that cancer doesn’t just affect just the patient, but also the family, so any type of support is greatly appreciated. It makes a big difference,” he said.

Grimaldo said fourth-grade teacher Maria Isabel Martinez was the mastermind behind the fundraisers held throughout the year.
Midway ISD: A Midway ISD student with aspirations to pursue a career in the medical field was able to put her training into practice earlier this spring by saving the life of a teacher. During lunch on a Friday afternoon in April, Midway High School student Aaliyah Dabera noticed teacher Nicole Miles walking through the high school library eating a snack when it became stuck in her throat. She coughed to try and clear her airway but began having trouble breathing and started gasping for air. As soon as Aaliyah saw the teacher in distress, she ran over and began performing the Heimlich maneuver while calling out for help. Thanks to Aaliyah’s swift response, Mrs. Miles was finally able to clear her throat and take a full breath. Aaliyah is enrolled in health science classes through Midway and is a student at the Greater Waco Advanced Health Care Academy (GWAHCA). The medical training she received through Midway’s career and technical education classes and GWAHCA has given her the tools to be prepared in emergency situations like this. In fact, Aaliyah earned her Certified Nursing Assistant certification Monday of the same week as the choking incident. As a result, Aaliyah knew exactly what to do when she saw that Mrs. Miles couldn’t breathe and was able to act quickly while remaining calm and collected. Midway ISD is currently in the process of expanding their career and technical education programs with the addition of a new two-story, 57,000 sq. ft. CTE wing at Midway High School. The new wing will incorporate both a health science lab and an innovative biomedical lab designed to mimic a hospital. The district currently offers health science training through a wide range of in-house courses and local partnerships, and with the CTE building expansion, even more students like Aaliyah will have the opportunity to explore their interests in real-world environments and build strong foundations for their future careers. Aliyah was honored for her heroic actions by becoming the first-ever student recipient of the Midway Extra Mile Hero Award. This award is presented by Midway ISD to individuals who go above and beyond in service to their school community. Aliyah received a standing ovation from everyone in attendance at the district’s April School Board Meeting as she was presented with the award. “There is no doubt in my mind that Aaliyah saved my life and no coincidence that she was in the library at that exact time,” Ms. Miles said. “I’m beyond grateful for Aaliyah and can’t wait to see all the amazing things she will continue to do in the medical field.”
Midway Student Selected for Prestigious Internship at The University of Texas to Analyze NASA Earth Science Data

Midway High School student Aaron Powers has been selected for the highly regarded Student Enhancement in Earth and Space Science (SEES) summer internship to be held at The University of Texas at Austin’s Center for Space Research. This nationally competitive program sponsored by NASA's Texas Space Grant Consortium selects motivated students who are interested in increasing their knowledge of science, technology, engineering, and math through earth and space exploration.

As a rising senior accepted into the SEES internship program, Powers will have the opportunity to conduct hands-on activities and field investigations, attend presentations by NASA scientists and engineers, network with other students, and conduct research while being mentored by NASA subject matter experts all before his senior year of high school.

Almost 1,100 applications were received this year for both on-site and virtual internship positions, and the top 25% chosen for virtual internships will work remotely with their project scientist during their internship. Powers, along with other chosen applicants, will collaborate with scientists and engineers to conduct authentic research from data received from NASA's earth-observing satellites as well as have the opportunity to design Mars habitats, work with Lunar Exploration, and analyze images from the International Space Station.
Today we have the honor of introducing you to Mr. Weldon McClane. Weldon was born in Gainesville, Texas in 1924, and began attending Sadler Elementary School in 1930. He hardly missed a day of school because he lived, literally, behind the school. Weldon's house was located right behind where the old school cafeteria was.

Weldon's home and the school shared a fence, and it wasn't uncommon for Weldon to sneak back home during recess to take a nap in his barn or for him to see his grandfather working outside during school hours. Weldon always had chores as soon as school was out, but his family believed in the importance of education and insisted that Weldon and his brother, Tommy, went to school. Weldon can tell many stories of he and his brother being "up to no good" around Sadler.

Weldon was well-known for his antics around Sadler too - he once tried to ride a donkey from home into the schoolhouse. It wasn't a teacher that stopped him but the old donkey that decided she didn't much like the idea. The old donkey would only go up a few steps and refused to go further.

Because Weldon lived so close to the school, his family was one of the first to raise the alarm that the school was on fire in February 1939. His family was sponsoring the high school Ag teacher at the time and one evening the teacher was staring out the window according to Weldon announced to everyone, just as calmly as could be, "I believe the school is on fire."

Nobody paid much attention, but Weldon went over to the window to see for himself. Weldon then shouted to everyone "The school IS on fire!" then suddenly everyone jumped into action.

Weldon and his grandfather ran outside to protect their barn which was in danger of burning too. Unfortunately, the entire schoolhouse by that time was totally engulfed and burned to the ground.

The school was soon rebuilt, and Weldon was a part of that too. He helped carry bricks to the brick masons working on the brick walls. He didn't get paid for that and just wanted to help.

It was at Sadler High School that Weldon met the love of his life, June Cooper. But when Pearl Harbor was attacked by the Japanese in December 1941, Weldon decided that America was more important than his education. He dropped out of high school and attempted to join the military and fight in World War II.

There was only one problem for Weldon, he was not eighteen and the military turned him down and told him to come back when he was of age.

Disappointed but still determined to help the war efforts he began working at an airplane factory in Ft. Worth, Texas making B-24s. These airplanes were "work-horses" for the war efforts and would transport cargo, supplies, and soldiers overseas.
He worked there until he turned 18 and was finally able to join the Army - coming home on his first leave after to marry June Cooper before being shipped out to the front lines in Europe.

Weldon was headed to the beaches of Normandy and while he was meant to be there on D-Day, his boat broke down and he arrived on D-2. There were so many soldiers still lying on the beach and in the waters. At only 18 years old, as Weldon waded through the dead and onto the shore, the reality of war hit home. Teachers were a thing of the past. He had to grow up immediately. His life—and the future of America, Europe, and the entire world, depended on it.

Like many of his fellow soldiers, Weldon was wounded during battle. He was shot in the leg and was hit by shrapnel by a bridge destroyed by enemy Air Force bombers. He said they “were a little too close when the air support arrived!” Weldon was then taken to a hospital in Europe where he was treated and sent back to fight again during the Battle of the Bulge to which he commented “if your blood was warm, you went back to fight.”

Weldon served with the 297th Combat Engineers and as the war was ending, he and the 297th liberated the Dora-Mittelbau Concentration Camp in Germany. Weldon said that experience was one of those worst things he had witnessed in the war, as he saw firsthand what the enemy soldiers did to those innocent people.

After Weldon returned home, had trouble finding a job—due to his lack of a high school diploma, according to him. He did what he could to earn a living, putting up phone lines, electric lines, and water lines right here in Sadler. He worked as a lineman electrician for many years and stayed in the community. His legacy of Sadler graduates includes all four of his children as well as two grandchildren. As a Free Mason, he was included in the dedication of the S&S High School in 1997. He always believed in and supported education.

The Texas Education Agency recognizes certain wartime veterans who sacrificed their education for our country deserve their diploma. After receiving his high school records as well as his military records, TEA has certified that Weldon McClane meets all the requirements to receive this recognition and his high school diploma that he would have received 80 years ago, at Sadler High School.

Thank you Weldon for your service to America, the world, and this great town of Sadler, Texas!
SAN ELIZARIO, TEXAS – The San Elizario Independent School District (SEISD) has fifty-eight McKinney-Vento students in attendance throughout six campuses in the district. What is the McKinney-Vento Assistance Act? The McKinney-Vento Assistance Act is a federal law created to support the enrollment and education of homeless students. McKinney-Vento provides homeless students the same educational opportunities as housed students by removing barriers.

Over the past decade, homeless children have more than doubled. Unfortunately, many go unaccounted for because their families move frequently, try to live invisibly, and avoid authorities for fear of losing custody of their children. Information received from Melissa Urenda, the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) Coordinator for SEISD, homeless students are identified more specifically based on one of the four living arrangements. A student identified as doubled up means the student is living with another family. A student identified as unsheltered is due to the student’s nighttime residence, whether public or private such as on the street, a car or park or any substandard living condition. Identified homeless students also live in motels or hotels. The final identification for homeless students is those who live in a shelter.

As hundreds of homeless children go in and out of public schools, the SEISD is strategic in serving McKinney-Vento students so they succeed. The SEISD assists the McKinney-Vento population by funding two social workers for campuses in the district. Teresita Parra and Sylvia Graves are the District Social Workers. The social worker liaisons promptly assess the community’s needs, provide supportive guidance, and monitor students’ progress. The social workers provide referrals for medical, housing, and other appropriate services. In addition, social workers ensure students experiencing homelessness enroll immediately and provide equitable access to school success.

Social Worker Parra states, “The saying ‘it takes a village’ is a commitment to assure that the entire district supports students identified as homeless.” With the assistance of the district social workers, the SEISD services McKinney-Vento students from the elementary level as early as pre-k through the secondary level up to the twelfth grade. The Ann M. Garcia Enriquez Middle School has the highest number of identified McKinney-Vento students, particularly at the seventh-grade level. District Social Worker Parra states, “During the intake assessment, we found that these particular students needed school supplies, hygiene products, and uniforms.” The unstable living conditions of McKinney-Vento students impact everyone in the family. That impact is felt especially among siblings. Social Worker Parra adds, “Parents have a hard time purchasing these items due to job loss or buying too many items for several students in the family.” As a result, families in this complicated living situation make difficult decisions on food, shelter, and school supplies.

As the district started implementing new plans, students started graduating, and post-secondary education became an obtainable goal, but students experienced additional challenges with the onset of the pandemic. Data obtained from PEIMS Coordinator Urenda indicates that from 2019 to 2020, SEISD graduation rates for homeless students declined from 100% to 83.3%. The pandemic impacted the decline in the homeless students graduating, but the difficulty of their living status was also a factor. Social Worker Parra states, “We found it hard to locate families. Many families moved to other areas in El Paso and were untraceable.

During the second year of the pandemic, the SEISD returned to a 100% graduation rate among homeless students. Students saw that they could achieve any goal and dream despite their difficulties, the pandemic included. Social worker Parra attributes the success rate increases to “we brought students back; it was difficult to identify students’ needs at home.”
San Elizario ISD:

San Elizario High School Reveals 9th State Championship Monument

You have probably heard about San Elizario High School (SEHS) through the success of many of our student-athletes in cross country and soccer, as they have won numerous team state championships. The San Elizario Independent School District (SEISD) has taken purposeful focus on creating a place of pride and reflection by honoring student-athletes with the Pathway of Champions Plaza. The SEISD is on track to reveal the ninth Texas-shaped monument on the Pathway of Champions, better known to the community as the Paseo de Campiones, in honor of the SEHS Boys Cross Country team who brought another state title home in November 2021.

The SEISD has been winning state championships since 1977, when Mr. Ray Johnson won the state UIL Track & Field - 1600M and defended that state title again in 1978. The SEHS has 34 state wins between individuals and teams’ efforts to date. Since 2007, the SEISD has welcomed consecutive state championships in Skills USA and Athletics and even garnered a 2013 Texas Elementary Teacher of the Year state win. Each win proves that the district’s small size and the zip code location are not barriers to success.

The success of our teams demonstrates the strong resiliency of the student-athletes. The Pathway of Champions will serve the district of San Elizario and the Community of San Elizario to continue providing future generations a place of reflection and pride. San Elizario students continue to have a clear Pathway of Champions that they will forge for themselves and future generations.

Pictured left to right: Dr. Rogelio Segovia, Assistant Superintendent; Dexter Harmon, Supervisor, Support Services/Transportation; Beto Rivas, Chief Financial Officer; April Mari-oni, SEHS Principal; Dr. Jeannie Meza-Chavez, Superintendent; Blanca Cruz, Human Resources Director; Christine Jaksch, Athletic Director; Jesus Martinez, Support Services Director; and Horacio Hernandez, Technology Director.
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- Raymond Trotter
- James Wann
- Newell “Bud” Woolls
- C. W. Wright
2022 Regional Superintendents of the Year

Congratulations to everyone nominated for TASB’s Superintendent of the Year award. Superintendents are nominated by their school boards for their exemplary work in educational leadership and outstanding service to their district. We’re proud to see several TACS Members and committee members included in the list below!

Tony Lara, South Texas ISD, Region 1
José Moreno, Robstown ISD, Region 2
Micah Dyer, Cuero ISD, Region 3
Jeny McGown, Klein ISD, Region 4
Lisa Meysembourg, Woodville ISD, Region 5
Jeff Burke, Splendora ISD, Region 6
Thurston Lamb, Henderson ISD, Region 7
Jason McCullough, Mount Vernon ISD, Region 8
Tony Bushing, City View ISD, Region 9
Doug Williams, Sunnyvale ISD, Region 10

Taylor Williams, Slidell ISD, Region 11
Bobby Ott, Temple ISD, Region 12
Doug Killian, Pflugerville ISD, Region 13
David Young, Abilene ISD, Region 14
O.K. (Buddy) Wolfenbarger III, Comstock ISD, Region 15
Darryl Flucsche, Canyon ISD, Region 16
Chris Smith, Brownfield ISD, Region 17
Scott Muri, Ector County ISD, Region 18
Jeannie Meza-Chavez, San Elizario ISD, Region 19
Saul Hinojosa, Somerset ISD, Region 20

2022 Regional School Boards of the Year

Twelve Texas school district boards of trustees were selected as regional nominees for the 2022 TASA School Board Awards. Congratulations to each of these for working hard to collaborate and lead their districts with pride. The regional nominees for 2022 Outstanding School Board of the Year are:

Region 1 - Lyford CISD
Region 2 - Robstown & Santa Gertrudis ISDs
Region 3 - Victoria ISD
Region 4 - Goose Creek CISD
Region 5 - East Chambers ISD
Region 6 - Navasota ISD
Region 10 - Quinlan ISD
Region 11 - Joshua ISD
Region 13 - Lockhart ISD
Region 16 - Highland Park ISD (Amarillo)
Region 17 - Lubbock-Cooper ISD
Region 20 - Seguin ISD
One District's Game-Changing Name

By Laura Tolley, managing editor of Texas Lone Star magazine, a publication of the Texas Association of School Boards

Exactly how little Floydada, Texas, got its name isn’t crystal clear.

The original Floyd City name was unacceptable after the town got a post office because Floyd, Texas, already existed. Floydalia may have been the next choice, but as the Handbook of Texas recounts, the name may have been garbled in a transmission to Washington. The Floyd County town was established in 1890 on land donated by James B. and Caroline Price, and his mother was named Ada. Caroline’s mother was also named Ada, and her dad was Floyd. Thus, Floydada!

No such mystery surrounds a more recent name change in this northwest Texas farming community of cotton, pumpkin, and wheat growers, among other crops. School trustees voted earlier this year to officially call the school district Floydada Collegiate ISD (FCISD) to reflect its membership in the Collegiate Edu-Nation (CEN), a nonprofit organization working with high-performing rural schools to better prepare students for college and skilled career paths in their own communities.

FCISD is still in the planning stages of this new educational program, but school administrators decided to go ahead with parts of the initiative, including the new name.

“With CEN, we kind of dove in headfirst. We’re not real patient. If it’s good for the kids, we want to do it,” said FCISD Superintendent Gilbert Trevino. “The hope is that through this process, we are able to develop our rural community. We’re trying to address the (student and workforce) needs of our community.”

What Trevino and others value in the CEN concept is a nontraditional approach involving free dual-credit courses, focused staff support, structured learning paths, apprenticeships, internships, and other opportunities that can benefit all students, but especially those who may have few opportunities once they walk the graduation stage.

While urban and suburban school districts have long touted dual-credit and internship programs, these academic options can be limited, even nonexistent, in rural areas. Young men and women who’ve grown up on farms and ranches feel compelled to leave their hometowns after graduation for better opportunities. If they stay, the academic and workforce training possibilities are few. Both the students and the rural communities suffer.

CEN’s main goal is to help K-12 public schools, post-secondary education institutions, and the business community work together to improve the available economic and educational options.

“A lot of the time in rural areas, we have a lot of untapped resources,” said Shauna Lane, dean of academic affairs at FCISD, where about 75% of its estimated 700-student population is considered economically disadvantaged. “But just because we are a rural community doesn’t mean our students shouldn’t have those (additional) opportunities.”

How it started

The CEN seeds were sown more than two decades ago in Roscoe, about 130 miles south of Floydada. CEN Founder and President Kim Alexander was working as principal of Roscoe High School, where he saw that his rural students often did well academically but had trouble moving forward after graduation.

“Our disadvantaged students would do well in school, but then once they crossed the graduation stage, it was like they were walking off a cliff. The best part of their lives was behind them,” Alexander said.
In 2001, Roscoe (now Collegiate) ISD partnered with West Texas College in Snyder to begin a dual-credit program, and in 2009 it became the first Early College High School (ECHS) in rural Texas. In 2017, it became the first rural school-wide Pathways in Technology Early College High Schools (P-TECH) academy.

According to Alexander, Texas Education Agency (TEA) Commissioner Mike Morath approached him in 2019 about using the district’s model to establish a nonprofit that could help other rural schools implement similar programs, and CEN became a reality.

Startup funding for CEN schools comes from the TEA School Action Fund and P-TECH grants, which are designed to give students least likely to attend college an opportunity to receive a high school diploma and a credential and/or an associate degree.

Ongoing funding comes from additional Career and Technical Education (CTE) and College, Career, or Military Readiness (CCMR) student outcome bonuses authorized by Texas House Bill 3 in 2019. That bill sought to incentivize public schools to increase post-secondary credential attainment.

Overall, the CEN network serves more than 4,000 students in eight rural school districts in Texas, and several more are scheduled to join next year. The potential for additional growth is great: The U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics reports that Texas has more rural schools than any other state in the nation, with more than 20% of campuses located in rural areas.

Alexander said in addition to few opportunities and economic hardships, rural students often don’t have a strong support system to help them succeed.

“All students, regardless of their background, can be extremely successful if they have a strong support system,” Alexander said, adding that has tended to mean parents with money.

“We’re trying to level the playing field, so it doesn’t matter where students come from — [it matters] where they want to go.”

One early CEN success

Veronica Cuellar, a lifelong resident of Roscoe, has defied the odds. She earned her bachelor’s degree, is debt-free, and is now working at RCISD, where she’s a CTE teacher.

Cuellar, now 21, and several other students were the first students in RCISD’s CEN program to obtain their bachelor’s degrees. Without the support of CEN, she said she would not have had the financial means for college.

“I’m very thankful for this opportunity,” she said. “I’m the first student to get a bachelor’s degree in my family. It was a struggle, but I did it.”

Cuellar wants to continue her career — and life — in her hometown, where her family still lives.

“I have no plans on leaving at all. I love Roscoe. I also like the opportunity to help others ... I want to let students know there are opportunities out there,” she said. “There’s lots of support at school. And not just the school, the whole community. If you need help, they try to pitch in. We always figure something out here in Roscoe.”

Floydada program taking shape

FCISD is in year two of the CEN program, and already has chalked up several accomplishments besides the name change. At the heart of FCISD’s program — and other school districts in the CEN network — is helping high school students obtain an associate degree and an industry certification upon graduation by offering dual-credit hours at no cost to the student, including books. The savings can amount to $150 per class, excluding the cost of books, which varies.

“To take cost out of the equation, we feel we’ve leveled the playing field for all students in Floydada,” Trevino said. “To not have to pay for 30 hours (of college), that’s a game-changer for a lot of families here.”

Last fall, the district officially launched its planning year for its P-TECH program. However, some students started taking virtual dual-credit courses as early as the fall of 2020 in partnership with South Plains College in Levelland, located about 85 miles southwest of Floydada. The 2023 freshman class will be the program’s first true cohort.

Continued...
Ryan Fitzgerald, dean for dual enrollment and distance education at South Plains, said that while the college does offer course discounts, the no-cost aspect being used by FCISD can make a big difference for many students in a region where “post-secondary opportunities don’t abound.”

FCISD’s overall goal is to have 90% of each class graduate with both an associate and industry-based certificate. That means that graduates will have a debt-free jumpstart on college or a pathway into a meaningful career. P-TECH pathways will include education, law enforcement, business, renewable energy, and health care therapeutics.

Another facet of CEN that FCISD is still developing will provide students with local apprenticeships and internships. The district also is planning a program where graduates can continue their college education in the community and complete a virtual bachelor’s degree from home in some fields. And if a high school student needs a little extra time to complete the online associate degree, they could use those two extra years at home to do so.

The hometown factor is big. Moving away to attend college can be difficult financially, if not impossible, for many students. But leaving family and community can also be challenging.

“It can be scary. Being from family is tough for those who have never been away from them before,” said Lane.

The early results at FCISD are impressive. In spring 2020, about 21% of high school students took a dual-credit course, but that jumped to about 51% in spring of 2021 once the free classes were offered. Last fall, about 65% of students were taking dual-credit courses through the partnership with South Plains.

There have been some challenges as students adjust to the pressures of the increased workload and the online courses, said Kristie Rehkopf, FCISD counselor/academic adviser.

We’ve learned every semester how to make the next semester better,” she said.

Lane and Rehkopf said the extra workload can be difficult for some students, but that’s where extra support from teachers and staff can help. CEN also provides mentoring and other support services for teachers and staff, including assistance in applying for grants.

“We’re learning as we go,” Lane said. “We’re creating high expectations, but we’re setting up our students for success.”

FCISD freshman Katelynn Ramirez, 14, is taking a business computer information systems course this year and plans to take advantage of the free dual-credit courses throughout high school.

“It’s been a little difficult with the work, but I think I can manage it,” she said, adding she gets a lot of support. “Having them [offered for] free really does help. If they weren’t free, I probably would not have been able to participate. I always planned on going to college, but I knew it would be hard financially.”

The FCISD website features an infographic about collegiate schools and the district’s P-20 journey.

https://www.floydadaisd.esc17.net
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Walsh, Gallegos, Treviño, Kyle, and Robinson P.C.

Scholarship Winner

SADIE STEVENS
Sterling City ISD - Region =

Walsh, Gallegos, Treviño, Kyle, and Robinson P.C.

Proud sponsor of the TACS & representing school districts across the state of Texas.

Call 512.454.6864, email info@wabsa.com, or check out WalshGallegos.com for upcoming trainings and events.
TACS 2022 Regional Spring Conferences

Each year, TACS holds two spring conferences: our West Texas Conference at the Hartford Professional Learning Center in Abilene and our East Texas Conference at Tyler ISD Career & Technology Center in Tyler. Both events were a great success, with expert speakers and a wonderful turnout!

West Texas Conference in Abilene: March 30, 2022

East Texas Conference in Tyler: April 6, 2022
Linebarger has been a proud supporter of our public schools for over 40 years

Our property tax and school finance professionals offer unmatched white-glove services allowing School Districts to focus on their most important priority; educating our Texas children.

Our employees dedicate their time to serve as student mentors, support school bond issues, and work with local groups that expand quality education opportunities for Texas school children.

We offer our school clients complimentary services to help them navigate the complex funding and regulatory environment that governs public education in Texas.

With Linebarger’s help, our school clients are more likely to have the revenue needed to fund essential school services.
Educators and administrators have increased risk for allegations of wrongful acts from performing their everyday duties. They also are subject to wrongful termination and other employment rights. Unfortunately, having a lawsuit brought against you personally could put all your hard-earned assets at risk or deplete your savings defending yourself against employment rights. Educators Professional Liability Insurance is tailored to the needs of educators.

**Coverage Highlights:**
- Liability Limit $1,000,000 per Occurrence
- Attorney Fees Reimbursement $5,000 (For favorable rulings. Includes wrongful termination cases)

**Who is Eligible?**
Most Full-Time Employees of Your School District Including:
- Teachers
- Superintendents
- Administrators
- Principals
- Educational Aides
- Band Directors
- Coaches
- Curriculum Directors
- Department Heads or Chairs
- Other Professional Providers

*TACS Member Annual Premium: $55.00*