

TASN^{ews}

Winter 2026, Vol. 22, No. 2

A Publication of the Texas Association for School Nutrition



TASN 2026 ANNUAL CONFERENCE
June 28-30, 2026

Gaylord Texan Resort • Grapevine, Texas

A NOTE FROM OUR NEW
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

4

2026 ANNUAL CONFERENCE

13

NEW YEAR HOLDS UNLIMITED
POTENTIAL FOR LEARNING,
GROWING

43



TASN 2025–2026 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Area 7 Representative
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[Contact TASN HQ](#) if interested in this role



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Area 9 Representative
Open Position
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TASN^{ews} Winter 2026

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**New Year Holds
Unlimited Potential
for Learning,
Growing**

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at the
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Annual
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Executive Director

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Happy **MOO** Year

MOO NEWS: NEW YEAR EDITION

2022



Cheers!

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

FALL 2025

by Susan D'Amico
Aldine ISD
TASN President

MOMENTUM IS BUILDING!



We're energized by the incredible momentum across the Texas Association for School Nutrition (TASN) community as we head into a new era of leadership, collaboration, and professional growth. Here's a look at key updates and opportunities:

Welcoming Our New Executive Director

We are thrilled to officially welcome and begin the transition with our new TASN Executive Director, Lindsey Jost, CAE. Lindsey brings a wealth of experience in strategic leadership and member engagement from her years in the association world. Please join us in welcoming her! We are confident that her passion and creative ingenuity will guide TASN into a dynamic and impactful future.

Launching Our Future: Rising Stars Meetup

November 12 marked the launch of our very first Rising Stars meetup event! This program is designed to connect school and industry professionals, pairing experienced leaders as mentors with emerging talent as mentees. It's a fantastic opportunity to foster the next generation of school nutrition excellence in Texas. We look forward to seeing the powerful connections and knowledge-sharing that will emerge from this initiative.

Strategic Partnerships: Collaborating for Student Health

TASN is proud to continue an exciting collaboration with [Make Texas Healthy Again](#)

[\(MTHA\)](#). Working towards the common goal of keeping kids healthy in Texas, our partnership aims to bridge the gap between public perception and the reality of nutritious school meals. We are advocating together to shine a light on the incredible work school nutrition professionals do and to secure the support our programs need to continue leading the way in student health.

Upcoming Event & Leadership Opportunities

Partnership Collaboration Summit (PCS) in February: We are eagerly looking forward to seeing administrators and other key partners at the [Partnership Collaboration Summit](#) in Galveston next month. This event is a crucial platform for collective problem-solving and advancing our shared mission.

Board of Directors Nominations: We extend a warm welcome to new leaders in our association through the process of board of directors nominations for office. Strong leadership is vital to TASN's success, and we encourage capable and passionate members to consider this opportunity to shape the future of school nutrition in Texas.

Annual Conference in June: Get ready to reconnect and recharge at the fabulous [Gaylord Texan](#) in Grapevine this June! Join us for an unforgettable experience where you can connect with peers, make new friends, and leave with a wealth of new ideas. Highlights include a huge food show, great classes for professional development, and a truly beautiful venue to enjoy.

Thank You

Finally, a huge thank you to every single member for your unwavering dedication. Your tireless work fuels the health and success of Texas students every single day. We look forward to a rewarding year ahead!

HEADQUARTERS HIGHLIGHTS

by **Lindsey Jost, CAE**
TASN Executive Director
lindsey@tasn.net



Dear TASN members,

I am honored to serve as the executive director of the Texas Association for School Nutrition and I want to begin by sharing how grateful I am to join this community.

I have spent the past 17 years in the association industry supporting governance, events, strategy, operations, membership engagement, volunteer leadership development, and long term organizational planning. Sixteen of those years were with an education association, where I learned how to collaborate with committed professionals, guide complex initiatives and help the association grow with clarity and purpose.

I believe deeply in the work you do. I am a parent of three, including a 6'5" teenage basketball player, who rely on their school meals every day. I have seen firsthand how important your commitment is to the students you serve and I am proud to support you in playing such an essential role in their well being

As I step into this role, my goal is to first honor the strengths that have made TASN such a successful and trusted association. The team and I are also excited to take a thoughtful look at where we can continue to grow. I want to listen, learn and work alongside you as we build on such a solid foundation, strengthen the member experience and identify opportunities to innovate and improve in ways that support your work

I look forward to connecting with many of you at [PCS](#) in Galveston this February and throughout the year at TASN events. Please feel free to reach out to me at lindsey@tasn.net. I welcome the opportunity to collaborate and support the association together.

Lindsey Jost, CAE
TASN Executive Director

IMPORTANT DATES & DEADLINES

TASN 2026 Partnership Collaboration Summit (PCS)	February 2–4, 2026	Tremont House Hotel Galveston, TX
TASN Third Board of Director Meeting	February 2, 2026	Tremont House Hotel Galveston, TX
TASN Administrative Academy Part Two	February 2-3, 2026	Tremont House Hotel Galveston, TX
TASN 2026-2027 Election	March 1-31, 2026	Voting details coming soon
National School Breakfast Week	March 2-6, 2026	Nationwide
SNA Legislative Action Conference (LAC)	March 8-10, 2026	Washington, D.C.
TASN 2026 Annual Conference	June 28–30, 2026	Gaylord Texan Resort Grapevine, TX
SNA Annual Nutrition Conference (ANC)	July 12-14, 2026	Charlotte, NC

Greetings from the TASN President-Elect

IGNITE THE LIGHT: A YEAR OF REFLECTION, CELEBRATION, AND EXCITEMENT FOR TASN



As we move into a new year, the TASN Conference Planning Committee has been working hard to build an Annual Conference that feels energizing, meaningful, and full of moments worth remembering. The team has spent the past several months

shaping an agenda that blends learning, leadership, connection, and celebration. We want this experience to recharge our members and highlight the incredible work happening in school nutrition across Texas.

We are excited to share that [Michael Ivanov](#) will be our keynote speaker for the [2026 Annual Conference](#). His message focuses on purpose, resilience, and finding strength in difficult times. It fits perfectly with this year's theme, *Ignite the Light*. We believe his keynote will inspire attendees and set a powerful tone for the entire event.

Ignite the Light is more than a theme. It reflects the heart of what school nutrition professionals do every day. You brighten your campuses by caring for students and supporting their success. You lift up your teams and help create a positive place for staff and students. Your light shows up in both the big efforts and the quiet moments that often go unnoticed.

To celebrate that spirit, we are launching the [Ignite the Light Video Challenge](#). We want districts to show how they bring this theme to life. Your video could highlight how your team “ignites the light” within your district or show how you are gearing up to “ignite the light” at the conference. It can be funny, heartfelt, creative, or simple. What matters most is that it reflects your team's energy and excitement for what is ahead.

by John Ceballos
Klein ISD
TASN President-Elect

As the holiday season wraps up and 2026 begins, I hope you take a moment to think about everything you accomplished in 2025. This past year brought challenges, but it also brought achievements worth celebrating. You served students with care, launched new ideas, supported one another, and continued to shine in ways that make a real difference for children across Texas. You should feel proud of the work you do.

Now it is time to look forward. The upcoming year holds a lot of promise for TASN and for our members. Our committee is excited to continue building a conference that reflects your voices, recognizes your contributions, and supports your professional growth.

Let's step into 2026 with purpose and excitement. Let's come together and *Ignite the Light* in our schools, in our teams, and within ourselves.



A MESSAGE FROM THE VICE PRESIDENT

by Jennifer Miller
Garland ISD
TASN Vice President



As we begin a new year together, I want to start by sharing my sincere hopes and wishes for each of you as we reflect on the 2025 holiday season. Whether spent with family, friends, or cherished colleagues, I hope your holidays were filled with joy, peace,

and moments that allowed you to truly rest and recharge. The work we do throughout the year is meaningful and demanding, and this season gives us a much-needed opportunity to pause, reflect, and renew our energy for what lies ahead.

This past fall was an especially productive and exciting time for TASN. As part of the Executive Committee, led by President Susan D'Amico, I have been grateful to be involved in important structural changes at TASN headquarters. These efforts are focused on strengthening our foundation, ensuring that our association continues to operate effectively and efficiently, and embracing innovative best practices that position us for long-term success.

At the same time, we remain deeply committed to preserving what matters most—our people and the values that have guided TASN for decades. Change is never simple, but I am confident that these thoughtful adjustments will better equip us to serve our members now and in the future.

In my role as the vice president, one of my primary responsibilities is planning our [Partnership Collaboration Summit](#) (PCS), and this work has been both energizing and inspiring. With our *Island Connections* theme guiding the vision, we are focused on creating a conference experience that features outstanding speakers while also creating space for meaningful collaboration—where relationships are strengthened, new partnerships are formed, and innovative ideas flow freely. PCS is about more than a schedule of sessions; it is about bringing people together in ways that

spark growth, creativity, and shared purpose. I am incredibly excited for what is ahead and cannot wait to experience it alongside all of you.



As we look forward to 2026, I encourage each of you to think about how you might become even more engaged with TASN. Our association thrives because of the passion, commitment, and voices of our members. There are many ways to be involved—volunteering on committees, participating in advocacy efforts, mentoring others, serving as presenters, or simply providing feedback that helps shape our programs and services. Your insights, experiences, and perspective matter. If you have ever wondered how you can make a greater impact within TASN, I invite you to reach out. I would love to connect with you, learn about your interests, and help you find a meaningful way to engage.

Together, we are building something truly special: an association rooted in service, strengthened by collaboration, and driven by the collective dedication of professionals across our state. Thank you for your continued support, your trust, and your commitment to TASN. I look forward to all that we will accomplish together in the year ahead.

Secretary/Treasurer Corner

by Samantha Sims
Cypress-Fairbanks ISD
TASN Secretary/Treasurer

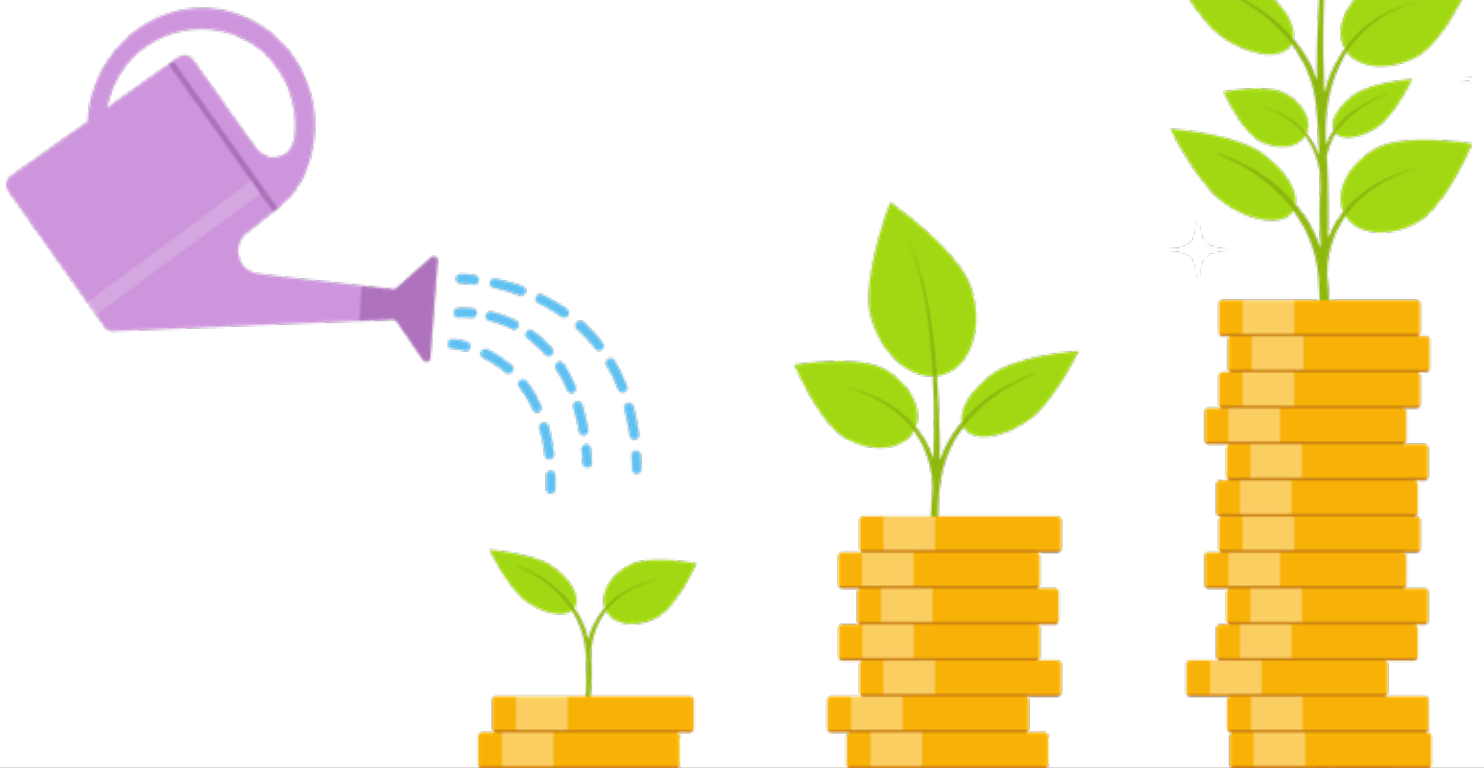


Happy New Year!

I hope everyone enjoyed the holiday season with the people who matter most. As we welcome a new year, may it bring hope, happiness, and renewed energy for us all. I'm truly grateful for the dedication and support of our members—thank you for everything you do for students across the state of Texas. Wishing you a warm, safe, and joyful new year!

As of September 2025, TASN expenses were \$235,131.85 and the total income was \$ 252,587.55.

I look forward to seeing many of you at the [Partnership Collaboration Summit](#) in Galveston next month!





Greetings from Area 3 Representative

**Teresa Evans
Crosby ISD**



AREA 3 INCLUDES SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN THESE COUNTIES:

Austin	Milam
Brazos	Montgomery
Burleson	Polk
Chambers	Robertson
Grimes	San Jacinto
Hardin	Trinity
Harris	Tyle
Houston	Walker
Leon	Waller
Liberty	Washington
Madison	

As we wrapped up the year, I thought about how much we've accomplished and how much fun we've had doing it. This fall Crosby ISD Nutrition Services team learned a lot, celebrated big, and kept that Texas pride front and center.

During **National School Lunch Week**, we took our students on what we called a "Waltz across Texas," and it was a hit. We brought in local products, regional favorites, and let the kids taste their way through the state—plus a few cultural stops beyond. The Texas Peach Parfait and Pozole with all the traditional fixins were huge favorites. Watching students get their "passports" stamped and seeing their faces light up when they tried something new... it reminded all of us that school meals aren't just meals. They're experiences.



And because great food starts in a safe kitchen, we made sure our team was fully trained and ready for anything. With the help of our local fire department, every staff member participated in fire and kitchen safety training, and even extinguished a real oven fire! Talk about earning your stripes! Our team walked away prepared and proud of their new firefighting skills.

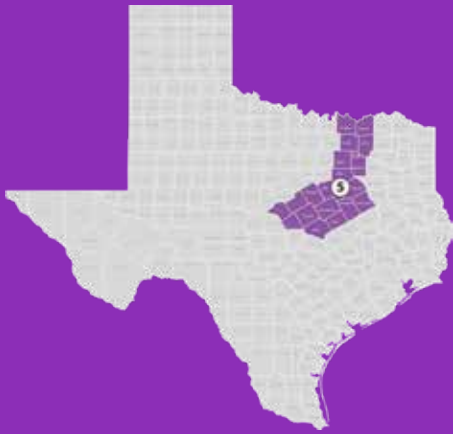
Of course, we don't believe in all work and no play. Our annual Halloween costume contest and winter elf contest brought out big smiles and even bigger laughs. We packed the holiday spirit so high this year that principals and delivery drivers joined the elf fun too!

Continued

And beyond Crosby, Area 3 had so much to celebrate. We welcomed nearly 40 new TASN members this fall! I've reached out to every one of them, and can't wait to support their journey. My goal in 2026 is to visit as many Area 3 chapters and members as possible. No drive is too far when you get to cross this great state meeting passionate, dedicated TASN members.

So here's to what's ahead: more learning, more laughing, and more shared moments. I can't wait to see what 2026 brings, and I'm grateful to spend it with our TASN family.





Greetings from Area 5 Representative Suellen Atteberry Garland ISD



AREA 5 INCLUDES SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN THESE COUNTIES:

Bell	Hamilton
Bosque	Hill
Collin	Hunt
Coryell	Kaufman
Dallas	Lampasas
Ellis	Limestone
Falls	McLennan
Fannin	Mills
Freestone	Navarro
Grayson	Rockwall

Hello! The holidays have come and gone: Halloween, Thanksgiving, and Christmas! While winter in Texas can be quite varied, it is still a brief reprieve from the heat of our summers.

At our house we decorate and celebrate every season. This year was so much fun due to my grandson. Every item he sees is for the first time for whatever occasion is being celebrated at that time. He is especially mesmerized by anything that lights up.

I have been out for a while. I have had a complicated case of West Nile Virus. I am now back in the office for abbreviated days, and am continuing to get stronger, but it is a slow process. I am in the process of going through paperwork and emails. I promise that if you have sent me an email, I will respond!

If you are interested in forming or reactivating a chapter I am ready work with you this semester.

Here's hoping everyone had a wonderful holiday season!

Happy New Year! What a great time to be a member of the Eagle Mountain-Saginaw Child Nutrition Association. As we continue to grow our chapter and gear up for the TASN 2026 Annual Conference, here are a few things our district and chapter did for the holiday season.

Our chapter members put our heads together to come up with some ideas to help less fortunate families this holiday



season. We decided on two initiatives, a coat drive and a collection of food for a holiday meal. We are happy to say that we were able to collect six full size bags of coats and sweaters that equaled 150 coats! The coat drive supplies

received were donated to Union Gospel Church in Fort Worth. Our holiday meal was achieved by allocating some of our chapter funds to allow a purchase for a donated meal. With just \$45 dollars, were able to provide a family with a turkey, gravy, mac and cheese, potatoes, sweet potatoes, green beans, rolls and everything else needed for a great holiday meal.

For our holiday fundraiser this year, we decided to make fresh baked banana bread and sold tickets for Jeans Week. The homemade bread is baked by our very own EMS staff and TASN members. We sold a total of 78 loaves of bread and tons of Jeans Week tickets. Collectively, these two fundraisers brought in almost \$1,500 dollars. That money will go right back to our chapter to help our members cover some of the costs associated with TASN.

As a district, we would like to recognize everyone. With the combined effort of all staff and kitchens, we were awarded the [Healthy Meals](#)

[Incentives](#) recognition award. This award reflects exceptional efforts in enhancing the nutritional quality of school meals, and was part of a partnership with USDA and Action For Healthy Kids.



Once again, Happy New Year from EMS Child Nutrition Association.



Greetings from Area 6 Representative

Norma Riojas
Eagle Mtn-Saginaw ISD



AREA 6 INCLUDES SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN THESE COUNTIES:

Archer	Montague
Baylor	Palo Pinto
Callahan	Parker
Clay	Shackelford
Cooke	Somervell
Denton	Stephens
Eastland	Tarrant
Erath	Throckmorton
Foard	Wichita
Hardeman	Willbarger
Hood	Wise
Jack	Young
Johnson	

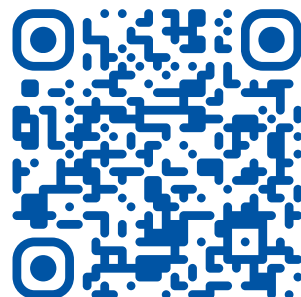


Fuel Your School with Hiland Dairy

At Hiland, we are proud to partner with schools to nourish students with the wholesome nutrition they need to learn, grow, and thrive. We recognize the vital role that school nutrition programs play in shaping healthy habits and want to do our part to support your efforts.

Visit our School Nutrition Resource Page including customizable lunch calendars, classroom worksheets, posters, and more, all updated quarterly!

HilandDairy.com/SchoolMilk





TASN 2026 ANNUAL CONFERENCE
June 28-30, 2026
Gaylord Texan Resort • Grapevine, Texas

2026

IGNITE THE LIGHT IN GRAPEVINE THIS JUNE!

WHERE TEXAS CONNECTS

Join TASN alongside ISD food service professionals and industry partners from across the state as we connect, collaborate, and advance K-12 child nutrition programs throughout Texas.

2026 Annual Conference sessions and exhibits will be located in the beautiful Gaylord Texan Resort and Conference Center in Grapevine, Texas. **Registration will open soon!**

WHO YOU'LL MEET

The TASN Annual Conference is designed for ISD K-12 food service professionals at every level—including employees, specialists, managers, directors, supervisors, superintendents, stakeholders, and industry partners.

If you're involved in child nutrition, this conference is for you.

WHAT YOU'LL GAIN

Over four days, you'll hear from inspiring keynote speakers and participate in engaging sessions focused on real-world ideas you can bring back to your district. You'll also have time to connect with exhibitors, explore the exhibit hall, network with peers, and enjoy the energy that makes this conference a favorite each year.

School nutrition professionals from more than 150 different school districts and academies attended the TASN 2025 Annual Conference in Corpus Christi!



THE GAYLORD TEXAN

Resort & Conference Center



TASN 2026 Annual Conference learning sessions, meals, and exhibits will all be hosted at the Gaylord Texan Resort & Conference Center, which will also serve as the conference host hotel.

The Gaylord offers a one-of-a-kind setting for this year's conference.

With its sweeping atriums, Texas-inspired architecture, and world-class amenities, the resort provides the perfect backdrop to connect, learn, and recharge.

Just as our theme, ***Ignite the Light***, celebrates energy and inspiration, the Gaylord Texan delivers a vibrant atmosphere where ideas spark and community shines.

Hotel reservation link will be provided upon registration for the conference.



THE GAYLORD TEXAN

1501 Gaylord Trail
Grapevine, TX 76051

Gaylord Texan Resort Facts

- **More than 1,800 guest rooms!**
- **Numerous dining choices from casual to fine dining**
- **Onsite fitness center and spa, plus pool & cabanas for rent**
- **Nightly light show in the atrium at 9 pm**

KEYNOTE SPEAKER



At 18, after a humiliating college speech, Michael vowed he'd never take the stage again—yet today he's a game-changing speaker and best-selling author who has impacted thousands with a message of resilience.

Born in Kiev, Ukraine, and raised in the shadow of his family's survival through the Siege of Leningrad and Dachau, Michael brings masterful storytelling that energizes audiences and drives action. His success principles cut through fear, limitations, and excuse-driven thinking, leaving people inspired and reequipped to act on their inspiration.

[READ MICHAEL'S FULL BIO](#)

MICHAEL V IVANOV

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Lena Wilson is the Assistant Commissioner for the Food and Nutrition Division at the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA). She oversees all activities related to compliance with regulations for the 12 federal nutrition programs administered by the agency. Lena, a registered dietitian, has more than 20 years of experience with federal nutrition programs. She has worked at the state and local level with every USDA nutrition assistance program. Her background also includes 13 years as a director of school meal programs. Lena offers a practical look at operations from differing perspectives to apply a common-sense approach for program oversight.

[READ LENA'S FULL BIO](#)



LENA WILSON

IGNITE THE LIGHT VIDEO CONTEST



Lights on—it's time to shine! We're kicking off a social media video contest to get our members fired up for the Annual Conference at the Gaylord Texan Resort this June. With this year's theme, Ignite the Light, we want to see your creativity, energy, and personality come through on camera.

Starting with our launch in mid-January, your team can submit a short video that brings the theme to life for a chance to win, whether you rally the crowd for Fan Favorite or impress the TASN team with your creative take on the theme!

Prizes:

- Winning videos will be highlighted throughout the TASN 2026 Annual Conference, on social media, and in other TASN publications
- Other prizes to be announced!

Click [HERE](#) for rules, guidelines, and resources!

#IgnitetheLightTASN

TASN ANNUAL CONFERENCE CALL FOR PRESENTATIONS

TASN is currently seeking speakers for the 2026 Annual Conference in Grapevine, Texas, June 28-30, 2026. If you are interested in presenting a learning session, please check out the guidelines below and apply to be a speaker!

In an effort to expand our educational reach to members, we are also seeking Spanish session presenters for the conference. If you are able and willing to present in Spanish we highly encourage you to do so!

Submission Deadline: Monday, February 16, 2026

Some of the topics we're looking for include:

Recruiting and Retaining Employees
Staff Management
Leadership
Food Quality Presentation
Emotional Intelligence
Kitchen Equipment
Farm-to-School
Menu Management
Human Resources
Special Diets
Bid Specification
Self-Development
Customer Service
Listening Skills
Reimbursable Meals
Maintenance
Legislative

Innovative Standardized Recipes
Inventory Best Practices
Marketing/ Social Media
Summer Feeding
Commodity Processing
Communication Practices
Team Building
Personnel Skills
Food Safety
Menu Planning
Roundtable Discussion
AI Tools
Tray Line Presentation
Innovative Serving
Ice Breakers
Buy American



FULL INFO & SPEAKER APPLICATION

Local News

Area 2

Beeville ISD

Fresh From the Garden to the Griddle!

This week, one of our talented AC Jones High School Career and Technical Education (CTE) culinary students led an inspiring cooking demonstration, preparing bell pepper quesadillas for our RA Hall Elementary School *Learners to Leaders* students, and it was a delicious success!

What made this demo extra special was the seed-to-table journey behind every ingredient. The vibrant bell peppers, fragrant herbs, and crisp veggies used in the recipe were grown right here in our campus gardens. Students had the opportunity to see firsthand how food they planted, nurtured, and harvested could be transformed into a flavorful, nutritious meal.

Our CTE student chef guided the class through each step:

- sautéing freshly picked peppers until tender and aromatic
- layering warm tortillas with melted cheese
- adding garden herbs for a burst of bright flavor
- and folding everything together into a golden, sizzling quesadilla

Learners to Leaders students enjoyed not just the taste, but the experience as they learned how growing, cooking, and sharing food connects us all. This hands-on demonstration truly showcased the power of agricultural education and culinary creativity working together.

We're proud of our students for cultivating both skills and sustainability—one garden, one recipe, and one meal at a time.

Area 3

Aldine SNA



Hello TASN members! The past couple of months have been busy in Aldine ISD Child Nutrition (ASNA). During our October General ASNA meeting, we discussed our upcoming fundraiser and reviewed the ASNA budget.

Following the meeting, we held a Halloween costume contest. Congratulations to our winners: Norma Hernandez, first place
Maria Segovia, second place



Norma Hernandez
first place winner



Maria Segovia,
second place winner



ASNA members!

In November, ASNA members and Child nutrition staff participated in the 41st Aldine ISD Turkey Trot, which was a three-mile race/walk or one-mile race/walk. Gift cards and frozen turkey were awarded during the event.

Our November pecan pie fundraiser and garage sale was successful. Lastly, we wrapped up the month with our annual Child Nutrition office luncheon. Our maintenance man Rickey King blessed the meal and we all dined together.



ASNA members at the Turkey Trot!



Pecan pie fundraiser



Garage sale



Thanksgiving luncheon



From the Aldine ISD ASNA members and child nutrition staff family,
Happy New Year!

Local News

Area 3

Sheldon ISD



by Jennie LaCour

We have lots of amazing things happening in Sheldon ISD!

Assistant Director Jennie L. LaCour's book *The 7-Day KINDness Challenge* is now available in Spanish and is titled *El Reto de AMABILIDAD de 7 Dias*! Click [here](#) to purchase on Amazon & Kindle.

In November Sheldon ISD's Child Nutrition Department prepared and served over 7,000 Thanksgiving meals to students and their parents at each early childhood academy and elementary school campus. Here are pictures from some of our Thanksgiving luncheons.



Area 3

Tomball ISD



by Aaron Boner

Tomball TASN has hit the ground running this year! In September we held our first official meeting for the 2025-2026 school year, where members learned all about what TASN is and how to earn their levels, and they also got a first look at the TASN 2026 Annual Conference!

For our October meeting, our chapter gave back to the community by hosting a food drive for our community fridge! These guys and gals opened their hearts and pantries so big that it completely stocked the fridge for those in need! We are so proud of our members for stepping up to pay it forward!



November "rolled" in with our first fundraiser of the season! Tomball TASN started off selling Texas Roadhouse rolls and butter for the second year in a "roll"! Employees, staff and families across the district were in "kneed" of these famous treats and we answered the call!

We also dropped our name in our district's concessions lottery hat for the opportunity to man a concession stand for play-off games! We "scored" the opportunity to "suit-up" for two games this season. Our members had the BEST time serving our visitors, and working as a team with friends we don't get to see every day!

Tomball TASN donned our aprons in December for our second annual cookie exchange and holiday game Christmas party! We couldn't wait to get "wrapped up" in all the Christmas cheer this holiday season!

Happy New Year from all of us at Tomball TASN!

YES Prep Public Schools

by Jessiica Howell, PhD

Hydroponic Garden Initiatives at YES Prep Public School Campuses – Houston, Texas.

This school year, the YES Prep Child Nutrition Department launched an exciting wellness initiative by installing hydroponic gardens at Hobby Secondary and Southside Elementary. This project began in late October as a pilot in two of the 26 YES Prep campuses, with the goal of exploring innovative ways to introduce fresh produce, sustainability concepts, and hands-on learning opportunities into our school environments. While the initiative is still in its early stages, it has already generated significant enthusiasm—particularly



The first harvest of fresh greens marks an exciting milestone for the hydroponic garden pilot

among the kitchen teams, who have been fully engaged in setting up, maintaining, and monitoring the garden systems.

The initial launch focused on establishing the hydroponic towers, ensuring proper

nutrient balance, and learning the system's operational needs. Thanks to the dedication of the kitchen staff at both campuses, the first harvest was successfully achieved at the end of November, just a few weeks after installation. Staff members played a vital role in tracking growth, adjusting water and nutrient levels, and documenting the progress of the plants. Their involvement has been key to understanding how hydroponic systems can support child nutrition operations and future wellness programming.



Goal for Student Engagement and Nutrition Education:

As the project grows, one of our primary goals is to incorporate student-driven

Ivan, Lunch Program Monitor at Southside Elementary, proudly holds greens from the first harvest

nutrition education through experiential learning. Future phases of the initiative will allow students to observe the full life cycle of produce—from seedling to harvest—while building awareness of the importance of fresh fruits and vegetables, sustainability, and how modern growing methods like hydroponics can support food access in urban school communities.

Garden progress today. The gardens continue to grow and thrive with daily care from the kitchen teams



Our long-term vision includes integrating the gardens into wellness lessons, enrichment activities, and hands-on demonstrations aligned with USDA nutrition standards and the district's wellness policy. This student engagement phase is planned for future implementation once the systems are fully established and routines are in place for consistent garden upkeep.

Both campuses have already celebrated the success of their first harvest, marking an early milestone for the pilot. The gardens continue to flourish, and the kitchen staff remain committed to sustaining the systems while preparing for the next phase of student-centered activities.

These garden installations represent just the beginning. The Child Nutrition Department plans to expand hydroponic learning opportunities across additional campuses, empowering more YES Prep students to explore agriculture, wellness, and healthy living in a hands-on, exciting way.

Kitchen staff at Southside Elementary pose with the newly installed hydroponic garden during the pilot setup



Area 4

Quitman ISD

by Shannon Almand

We are excited to share that Quitman ISD was selected to be featured in the [USDA HMI Action](#)



[for Healthy Kids – Cafeteria Chronicles](#) series this fall. ACTION for Healthy Kids visited our Elementary campus to film food preparation,

meal service, and several on-site interviews. Their final video, which highlights the hard work and dedication of our nutrition team, is linked below.

In addition, Quitman ISD had the honor of hosting a Southwest Regional meeting with Action for Healthy Kids on September 23, 2025.

This special gathering was designed to spotlight the outstanding accomplishments of School Food Authorities (SFAs) across Texas. Multiple districts were recognized during the event.



Following the recognitions, participants engaged in a collaborative roundtable focused on innovative school meal practices, celebrating the commitment of school nutrition professionals, and sharing new ideas to enhance the nutritional experience for all students.

[WATCH VIDEO](#)



Texarkana ISD

by Catherine Pennington



The Child Nutrition department at Texarkana ISD has shifted its focus over the last 18 months from simply feeding more kids to *engaging* more kids. A multi-tiered approach has been taken, starting with exciting new recipes and revamped menus, and going as far as a competition among art students to give more of a sense of ownership to our daily diners. Focus groups have also been conducted at all grade levels to ensure all of our customers have a say in what they eat! These are some of the highlights of the last year and a half:

Culinary Cubs Elementary School Focus Group

The principal selected a group of students from Theron Jones Early Literacy Center to participate in a focus group to try new products and recipes. The students started the day with a blind taste test game and afterwards sat down to try new recipes and products, and to give feedback on the current cafeteria offerings and offer suggestions for future menus. The feedback was taken into consideration, and two of the three dishes were added to the menus across all 27 sites and are favorites among the students today.



Texas High School Focus Group

The student leadership group was selected to sample several new items that are now being offered on the menus across all high school and middle school sites. These included two types of egg rolls, as well as recipes created in-house, such as an apple pie

parfait, Nashville hot chicken tenders, and a peppery pickle ranch. Students sampled the new dishes and shared their favorites, and also discussed



[CLICK TO READ ARTICLE](#)

Continued

the exciting new menu additions for this school year.

Texas High Cafeteria Art Contest

The Child Nutrition department reached out to the Arts Department at Texas High School to charge their students with creating the artwork to adorn the newly rebranded lines and newly added coffee bar. The students entered their submissions and held a school-wide vote, garnering nearly 500 votes from the student body. The winning designs were sent to Fast Signs for printing and installation in the cafeteria. The student artists, as well as those who participated in the vote, have expressed how much they enjoy having a say in their dining environment. Check out the post and pictures [here!](#)

Linden Kildaire High “Tiger Takeover” Competition

The Culinary Arts class at Linden High piloted the first “Tiger Takeover” event, in which students created a recipe using USDA commodity protein and ingredients from the district’s full line purchasing bid. The dishes were graded on taste, creativity, and the ease of reproducing the recipes in a cafeteria setting. State Representative Gary VanDeaver was the special guest judge for the inaugural event. The winning team will see their dish featured on the menu in January and will work with the cafeteria staff to prepare it for their fellow students.



from the
Cass County Citizen's Journal-Sun • November 12, 2025

Cervantes, Linwood win “Tiger Takeover” event

By Tim Emmons
temmons@casscountynow.com

Linden-Kildare High School chefs competed in the pilot program called the “Tiger Takeover” for an opportunity to have their creation on the school menu on Nov. 4.

L-K Culinary Arts students began planning and practicing recipes in September for the honor and the winners would get to work with the cafeteria staff to prepare their dish.

On Oct. 29, local judges narrowed it down to two dishes from the original five.

On Nov. 4, Superintendent Rex Burks, State Representative Gary VanDeaver, Chef Matthew Murr (Menu Development Specialist-Texarkana ISD) and Chef Ann Knopp (Culinary instructor at L-K CISD) judged the final four competitors.

The teams were comprised of Executive Chef Caitlyn Stiger, with Sous Chef Hannah Sullivan and Executive Chef Rosie Cervantes, with Sous Chef Aniyah Linwood.

When the competition was over Cervantes and Linwood were declared the winners.

“I am so proud of all the culinary students and the hard work they put into everything they do. They are all winners in my book,” Chef Knopp said. “These teams competed hard. This was a hard decision for the judges; both dishes were executed perfectly.”

The competition overview was that students chose 1-of-3 available proteins that are USDA ingredients provided for K-12 schools that can be used in a variety of ways to create recipes. The ingredients were pulled pork, diced chicken and fajita chicken.

Students were allowed to choose the remaining ingredients to customize their dish from the ingredients on the 25-26 purchasing bid.

Students were to create a dish that can be made in a school cafeteria with a focus on taste, presentation and ease of recipe production in a school cafeteria setting.



State Representative Gary VanDeaver takes a photo with the winners of the L-K CISD “Tiger Takeover”. From left: VanDeaver, Sous Chef Aniyah Linwood and Executive Chef Rosie Cervantes. Photos by Casey Williams



These four ladies made it to the final round of the “Tiger Takeover” culinary competition. From left: Sous Chef Hannah Sullivan, Executive Chef Caitlyn Stiger, Executive Chef Rosie Cervantes and Sous Chef Aniyah Linwood.



The four competitors in the “Tiger Takeover” culinary competition are pictured here with the judges of the event. From left: Chef Ann Knopp (Culinary instructor at L-K CISD), Superintendent Rex Burks, Sous Chef Hannah Sullivan, Executive Chef Caitlyn Stiger, Executive Chef Rosie Cervantes and Sous Chef Aniyah Linwood, Chef Matthew Murr (Menu Development Specialist-Texarkana ISD) and State Representative Gary VanDeaver.



Cafeteria posters and video shared by Pamela Cline



Click to play cute video

Here's your milk
Just choose 1



Now you have
your DAIRY
done

Eating just 1
FRUIT a day.



Helps keep the
doctor away!

This institution is an equal opportunity provider
This product was funded by USDA

Have some
VEGETABLES
Take 1 or 2



They make you
strong, That's what
they do!

This institution is an equal opportunity provider
This product was funded by USDA

Pick a tray with
PROTEIN,



Food that keeps
you healthy and
lean

This institution is an equal opportunity provider
This product was funded by USDA

Environment, Efficiency, and Empowerment: Austin ISD's Transition to Self-Service

by Lindsey Bradley

Austin ISD Food Service Marketing Manager

Austin ISD has been on a multi-year journey to transform how fruits, vegetables, and condiments are offered to students. What began as individually portioned items, which required extensive labor, generated excess waste, and resulted in inconsistent presentation, has evolved into a districtwide model of self-service that benefits both students and staff.

Where We Started:

In earlier years, kitchens spent a significant amount of time portioning fresh produce and condiments into individual containers. This approach took valuable labor away from culinary tasks, impacted storage space, increased costs, and produced large amounts of packaging waste. The shift toward self-serve began as a targeted effort to improve efficiency and reduce waste while also enhancing the student dining experience.



The Evolution of Self-Service:

Austin ISD's transition occurred in phases which included various pilot programs, ultimately leading to bond-funded modernization efforts. In 2016, the district introduced made-to-order themed salad bars in elementary schools, giving students an early taste of choice and customization. By 2018, self-serve fruits and vegetables were launched in middle and high schools, followed by a 2020 pilot introducing self-service in three elementary schools.

A major milestone came with the 2017 Bond modernization projects, which produced the first serving line configurations designed specifically for self-service. These designs were refined further through 2022 Bond funding, resulting in an elevated, more efficient model of serving lines that aligns with a modern retail aesthetic rather than traditional institutional cafeteria service.

Today, the district continues to expand self-serve access: 58 new serving lines funded through the 2022 Bond are being rolled out, with 31 installed in the 2024–25 school year and 27 more planned for 2025–26.

Benefits for Operations:

The operational improvements have been

significant. By shifting away from individually portioning items, kitchen teams can reallocate labor toward more meaningful tasks, such as scratch cooking, quality control, and student engagement. Serving bulk produce saves storage space and reduces disposable container waste.



Self-serve also streamlines service, helps reduce food waste, and allows for more attractive, retail-looking presentation. When locally grown produce is available, a self-serve format makes it easier to highlight these items prominently so students can see, choose, and enjoy them.

Benefits for Students:

Self-service also supports student development in various ways. This model gives children greater autonomy and encourages them to take ownership of their meal choices. Students practice using utensils, making decisions, and selecting portions based on hunger cues, skills that support building lifelong healthy habits.

Self-service encourages students to try new fruits and vegetables, while increasing exposure to a wider variety of foods. By empowering students to serve themselves, Austin ISD is supporting

Continued on next page

Local News

Area 10

Austin ISD continued

confidence, independence, and curiosity in the cafeteria.

Ensuring Compliance and Flexibility:

To balance autonomy with compliance, the district uses tools such as 2-oz spoodles to prevent over-portioning and to support meal pattern requirements. Condiments are offered in squeeze bottles labeled with reusable rubber bands.

Finally, Austin ISD shares that self-service can work in any setting, even campuses without new serving lines.



With creativity, schools can get started by using existing pans, spoodles, and tongs, adjusting sneeze guards, and starting small with easy items like apples and oranges.

Connect with Austin ISD Food Service on social media @AustinISDFood on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), or [X](#) to learn more about their initiatives.



Manor ISD FNS: Cultivating Health, Community & Innovation

by Ryan Cengel

Bringing Local Food & Student-Grown Produce to the Cafeteria

In a time when school nutrition programs often rely heavily on large supply chains, Manor ISD is proving there's a powerful alternative: local farms and student-grown produce. As part of the 2025 Central Texas Food Hub Pilot, the district has partnered with regional producers and nonprofits to deliver fresh, locally-grown foods to campus cafeterias — bypassing complex procurement barriers and investing in the health of students *and* local agriculture.



When the distribution hub coordinates logistics, small farms (such as area producers involved in the pilot) can reliably supply produce, proteins, and other foods — and Manor ISD can access them affordably and regularly. According to the district's FNS leadership, this model makes local sourcing “doable, sustainable and scalable.”

The result? Fresh, regional foods on student trays — and a district backing a more sustainable, community-centered meal program.

High-Tech Farm = High-Impact Lessons

But Manor's commitment doesn't end at procurement. Inside Oak Meadows Elementary,

Manor ISD has installed hydroponic towers — giving students direct, hands-on experience growing lettuce, basil, and other greens that eventually land on their classmates' lunch trays.

The hydroponic approach — plants grown in nutrient-rich water instead of soil — allows produce to grow faster and more efficiently than traditional



methods. According to the school's principal, the project transforms the cafeteria into a living classroom: students learn where food comes from, engage in planting and harvesting, and experience — quite literally — farm to plate.

For many children, veggies can be a tough sell. But when they grow the produce themselves, they're more likely to try — and appreciate — fresh greens. As Manor's Nutrition Director Ryan Cengel noted, this isn't just a school project; it's a way to build long-term healthy eating habits.

A Model Worth Sharing: Why This Matters for School Nutrition Professionals

- **Scalable Farm-to-School Model** — What Manor ISD demonstrates is that even mid-sized districts can succeed in farm-to-school sourcing when supported by a local food hub and committed FNS leadership.
- **Student Engagement & Education** — Hydroponic farming inside schools doesn't

just feed students — it teaches them about agriculture, nutrition, sustainability, and food systems. That can foster lifelong healthy eating habits.

- **Support for Local Agriculture** — By sourcing from local farms, districts help strengthen regional food economies — benefiting farmers, communities, and students alike.
- **Innovation in School Nutrition** — Manor ISD shows how blending traditional cafeteria service with innovative growing methods and local procurement creates a more resilient, community-centered food program.

What's Next: Keeping the Momentum Going

Manor ISD's initiative is not a one-off. The district's Food & Nutrition Services department, committed to quality, wellness, and community, is building relationships with local farms for the long haul. The hydroponic farm at Oak Meadows could serve as a blueprint for other campuses across the district. For school nutrition professionals across Texas and beyond, Manor ISD offers a compelling example: investing in local food systems and student-driven agriculture can yield healthier meals, more engaged students, and a stronger sense of community.

Have Something You Can't WAIT to Tell Us About?

We love to highlight members and share your news. If you have something to say or photos you'd like to show off about an event, an accomplishment, or kudos to a team member, please reach out to Shelley Livaudais, TASN Communications Manager, at communications@tasn.net. We'll get the news out to other members by including it in an e-newsletter, social media, or other TASN publications. **Let us celebrate with you!**





SEPTEMBER 15, 2025 – MARCH 31, 2026

The 2025-2026 school year TASN Membership Drive is underway!

See details below for details on the prizes and how to win. We hope that everyone can participate, spread the mission to feed hungry kids in Texas, and win big through this year's Membership Drive!

Important note: New members filling out the membership application must include the recruiter's name and district for the recruiter to receive entries in the Membership Drive.

JOIN TASN AS A NEW INDIVIDUAL MEMBER

New individual members receive one entry in the new member category

PRIZE:

The winner of the new member category will have the choice of:
\$50 gift card
OR
an Early Bird registration voucher for the TASN 2026 Annual Conference for that individual

RECRUIT NEW INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS

Recruiters receive one entry for every one new member recruitment. For every five new member recruitments, they get an additional five entries (total of 10 entries) in the recruiter category

PRIZE:

The winner of the recruiter category will have the choice of:
\$50 gift card
OR
an Early Bird registration voucher for the TASN 2026 Annual Conference for that individual

ADD NEW POSITIONAL MEMBERS

Positional membership orders with new members will receive one entry for every one new positional member in the positional category

PRIZE:

The winning ISD of the positional category will receive an Early Bird registration voucher for the TASN 2026 Annual Conference

Please reach out to [Eric Vicharelli](#), TASN Education/Membership Manager, with any questions regarding membership or the 2025-2026 Membership Drive.

EDUCATION UPDATE

by **Kasandra Davis, MS, RD, LD**
Child Nutrition Director, Brenham ISD
TASN Education Chair

A Fresh Start to 2026: TASN Education Committee Update

I hope you enjoyed a well-deserved break, filled with good company, good food, and berry bright holiday moments as we roll into 2026! It's hard to believe we're already stepping into 2026, but with a new year comes new opportunities to learn, connect, and continue strengthening school nutrition programs across Texas.

As we look toward the months ahead, the TASN Education Committee is excited to highlight several key initiatives designed to support professional growth and elevate the important work happening in districts statewide. From leadership development to statewide collaboration, the upcoming season is packed with meaningful opportunities for members at every level.

A Busy February in Galveston: PCS, Administrative Academy & Board of Directors Meeting

We are looking forward to a vibrant and productive week in Galveston this February, where the [Partnership Collaboration Summit](#) (PCS), [Administrative Academy](#), and the Board of Directors Meeting will take place. These gatherings bring together school nutrition professionals, industry partners, and TASN leaders from across the state.

Participants can expect:

- Collaborative conversations with peers and partners
- Leadership and skill-building sessions
- Innovation spotlights on systems, tools, and best practices

- Opportunities to network, share challenges, and celebrate successes

I'm looking forward to the opportunity to reconnect, recharge, and launch the year with fresh ideas and shared goals!



Administrative Academy: Building Stronger Leaders

This fall, we kicked off the first half of the [Administrative Academy](#), welcoming a committed group of participants eager to deepen their understanding of school nutrition operations. The academy focuses on everything from program regulations to financial management, staffing, customer service, and leadership strategies.

Our group will return in February for their second round of in-person sessions, where they will continue building skills that prepare them to lead successful, compliant, and student-focused programs. Graduates who complete the coursework and pass the final exam will be recognized at the [TASN 2026 Annual Conference](#), joining our Summer 2025 Managers Academy graduates in this achievement.

Continued

Scholarships to Support Continued Learning

TASN remains committed to supporting members in their professional journeys. A variety of scholarships are available for:

- ESL, GED, and college classes
- Administrative Academy
- Managers Academy
- The Partnership Collaboration Summit

These scholarships help remove barriers to continuing education and allow members to pursue meaningful advancement. Recipients will be honored at the 2026 TASN Annual Conference. We encourage all members to explore these opportunities and invest in their future. See [page 34](#) and the [TASN website](#) for more TASN scholarship details.

Honoring Excellence Across Texas

Nominations are now open for TASN's annual [awards](#), and we couldn't be more excited to celebrate the incredible work happening across Texas! Every year, these awards shine a light on the dedication, creativity, and heart that school nutrition professionals pour into their campuses and communities. In addition to our individual honors, we'll also be recognizing outstanding local chapters and districts for their achievements in Certification, Membership, Local Plan of Action, and student meal participation. As you think about the people who make a difference in your district every day, we encourage you to take a moment to nominate those who truly deserve to be recognized for their hard work and impact. For more information about TASN awards, [page 34](#) and the [TASN website](#).

We Want to Hear From You – And We're Seeking 2026 Conference Proposals!

Your insights are essential in shaping the future of TASN training and professional development. If you have session ideas, conference topic suggestions, or recommendations for new learning opportunities, please reach out—we'd love to hear your thoughts. We are also actively seeking proposals for the 2026 Annual Conference. If you're interested in teaching, sharing your expertise, or

presenting a topic that can support school nutrition professionals across Texas, we encourage you to [submit your proposals](#) by **Monday, February 16**. Our goal is to ensure every TASN member feels supported, equipped, and empowered to thrive, and your contributions play a vital role in making that happen.

RESOURCES

PARTNERSHIP COLLABORATION SUMMIT (PCS)

February 2-4, 2026

Click [here](#) for more info

TASN ADMINISTRATIVE ACADEMY

February 2-3, 2026

Click [here](#) for more info

TASN ANNUAL CONFERENCE

June 28-30, 2026 • Grapevine, TX

Click [here](#) for more info or see pages [13-18](#)

Registration opens soon!

TASN SCHOLARSHIPS & AWARDS

See the TASN website for more info on

[awards](#) and [scholarships](#) or see page [xx](#)

Application Deadline: February 16, 2026

CALL FOR PRESENTATIONS

Click [here](#) for more info or see [page 19](#)

Application Deadline: February 16, 2026

TASN SCHOLARSHIPS & AWARDS



Deadline: February 16, 2026



TASN is excited to continue awarding members for their excellence in the child nutrition field and granting scholarships for those pursuing a higher education within the nutrition scope! Nominate someone or a district for one of the scholarships or awards below!

[**Reach out to me**](#) if you have any questions!

Eric Vicharelli

TASN Membership, Education and Certification Manager

TASN SCHOLARSHIPS



General Scholarship



ESL Scholarship



GED Scholarship



College Scholarship



Administrative Academy
Scholarship



Managers Academy
Scholarship



Partnership Collaboration
Summit Scholarship

LEARN MORE & APPLY

TASN AWARDS



Rising Star Award



TASN Membership Award



Local Plan of Action Award



School Nutrition Specialist of
the Year



School Nutrition Manager of
the Year



School Nutrition Director of
the Year



Partnership in Nutrition
Nutrition Education Award



Breakfast Participation Award



Lunch Participation Award



Outstanding Achievement Award
for Continuing Education

LEARN MORE & APPLY

NEW TASN CERTIFICATIONS

November 2024 – November 2025

Congratulations to these TASN members who took the next step in their child nutrition careers by achieving TASN certification!

Level One

Marisol Aguilar, Channelview ISD
Ysaura Aguiluz, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD
Saima Ajaz, Garland ISD
Lilianna Alaniz, Aldine ISD
Alan Alexander, Channelview ISD
Katherine Alexander, Channelview ISD
Ashley Alexander, Sheldon ISD
Mosammat Ali, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD
Rosa Almanza, Garland ISD
Anabelia Arredondo, Klein ISD
Maria Arriazola, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD
Azucena Avalos, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD
Buendi Avila, Ector County ISD
Arooj Baber, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD
Yadira Blanco Arrozarena, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD
Maria Claudia Bolivar Prince, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD
Connie Breshears, Dripping Springs ISD
Keisha Brown, College Station ISD
Claudia Buhler, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD
Carolina Calderon, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD
Fabian Callis, Aldine ISD
Betty Camacho, Cleveland ISD
Maria Campos, Garland ISD
Nora Campos, Garland ISD
Maria Carmona, Sweeny ISD
Olivia Carreno Ortega, Ector County ISD
Yanira Castillo, Ector ISD
Carmela Cazares, Dripping Springs ISD
Arturo Chavez, College Station ISD
Nancy Chen, Dripping Springs ISD
Rosalinda Contreras, Aldine ISD
Paul Cook, Ector County ISD
Lesly Cruz De Bonilla, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD
Rosa Cumpian, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD
Sabrina Davis, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD
Amanda Deaton, Garland ISD
Naima Del Rio, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD
Liliana Delgadillo, North East ISD
Marvelys Diaz Vazquez, Ector County ISD
Lia Doak, Sweeny ISD
Maria Doan, College Station ISD
Jocelyn Donahue, Spring ISD
Tiffany Dowden, Aldine ISD
Tammie Dudley, Barbers Hill ISD

Fabiola Espino, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD
Lorena Estrada, Cleveland ISD
Martha Fantu, Garland ISD
Lorena Fernandez, Galena Park ISD
Starr Fitch, Sweeny ISD
Rebeca Flores, Ector County ISD
Amparo Flores, Cleveland ISD
Veronica Franco, Houston ISD
Johanna Galo, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD
Sandra Galvan, Ector County ISD
Graciela Gamboa, Galena Park ISD
Beatriz Garcia, Aldine ISD
Maricela Garcia, Sheldon ISD
LeQuisha Gentry, Houston ISD
Hosanna Gillin, Sweeny ISD
Mari Gonzalez, La Villa ISD
Edwin Gonzalez, Galena Park ISD
Angelica Gonzalez, Aldine ISD
Faviola Gonzalez, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD
Gabriela Gonzalez de Fernandez, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD
Maria Gonzalez Garcia, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD
Berta Guerra Pacheco, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD
Iris Guerra, North East ISD
Maria Guerrero, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD
Cenovia Guzman, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD
Patricia Hagman, Ector County ISD
April Henry, Dripping Springs ISD
Claudia Hernandez, Galena Park ISD
Estefany Hernandez, Aldine ISD
Maribel Hernandez, Garland ISD
Gladys Hernandez, Aldine ISD
Rosa Hernandez, Aldine ISD
Flor Hernandez, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD
Luis Ibarra, Aldine ISD
Anila Ibrahim, Garland ISD
Bianca Jimcoily, Klein ISD
Alma Jimenez, Sheldon ISD
Sinterra Johnson, Aldine ISD
Rene Johnson, Dripping Springs ISD
Laurie Kane, Sweeny ISD
Misty Kennedy, Garland ISD
Sunghee Kim, College Station ISD
Julie King, Little Cypress- Mauriceville ISD
Kasey King, Sweeny ISD
Dana Krop, Garland ISD

NEW TASN CERTIFICATIONS

November 2024 – November 2025

Cesar Lagrimas, Klein ISD
Rosa Llamas, Klein ISD
Paula Lopez, Sheldon ISD
Tavia Lovelace, Dripping Springs ISD
Estela Macias, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD
Maria Madrid, Ector County ISD
Mayra Mares, College Station ISD
Patricia Martinez, Pasadena ISD
Elizabeth Martinez, Aldine ISD
Julia Martinez, Garland ISD
Magali Martinez, Klein ISD
MaryAnne McCord, Dripping Springs ISD
Lakiesha McCraney, Garland ISD
Maria Medina, Garland ISD
Ogechi Melkam, Garland ISD
Ruby Mendez, Dripping Springs ISD
Madison Menzies, Garland ISD
Gillian Miller, Dripping Springs ISD
Yadira Moncada, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD
Leticia Mondragon, Galena Park ISD
Ana Morales, Aldine ISD
Virginia Moreno, Dripping Springs ISD
LaTasha Mourning, Houston ISD
Monica Navarro, Dripping Springs ISD
Crystal Nelson, College Station ISD
Syreeta Noel Mitchell, Aldine ISD
Jennifer O'Quinn, Sweeny ISD
Angelica Ortiz, White Settlement ISD
Maria Ortiz, Sheldon ISD
Mauricia Pacheco, Houston ISD
Kimberly Painter, New Caney ISD
Minerva Palacios, Ector County ISD
Marla Pantoja, Garland ISD
Brigida Pena, Galena Park ISD
Olga Perez, Aldine ISD
Maria Perez, Belton ISD
Eufemia Perez, Garland ISD
Laura Perez, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD
Brenda Perez, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD
Yesenia Portillo, Houston ISD
Connie Pown, Garland ISD
Rosa Quintero Mota, Galena Park ISD
Gabriela Reyes, Galena Park ISD
Miriam Richardson, North East ISD
Michelle Ringo, Sheldon ISD
Vanessa Rios, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD
Terri Robins, Houston ISD
Iliana Rodriguez, Klein ISD
Arcelia Rodriguez, Cleveland ISD ISD

Anneily Roman Arocha, Spring ISD
Odalia Romero, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD
Maria Rubalcava, Garland ISD
Norma Rubio Reyes, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD
Karina Ruiz, Channelview ISD
Laura Salazar De Tovar, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD
Jennifer Salazar Perez, Channelview ISD
Maria Salgado, Garland ISD
Mariana Sanchez, Spring ISD
Catalina Sanchez, Galena Park ISD
Yahaira Santana Pabon, Klein ISD
Beatriz Santos, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD
Emelia Serrato Solache, Aldine ISD
Valerie Smith, Aldine ISD
Angela Smith, Aldine ISD
Laura Todd-Guyton, Aldine ISD
Angela Touchstone, Dripping Springs ISD
Alicia Trevino, Sweeny ISD
Albertina Umobit, Garland ISD
Virginia Valdes de Guajardo, North East ISD
Ana Valle De Alzaga, Spring ISD
Leticia Vazquez, Aldine ISD
Maria Vazquez, Klein ISD
Brenda Velasquez, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD
Jennifer Wise, Barbers Hill ISD
Yirina Zamora, Sweeny ISD
Laura Zamora, Channelview ISD

Level Two

Adam Acevedo, North East ISD
Margarita Acosta, Galena Park ISD
Concepcion Alfaro, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD
Maria Alvarado, Galena Park ISD
Genesis Alvarenga, Spring ISD
Maricarmen Alvarez, Galena Park ISD
Alba Benitez, Channelview ISD
Alveza Benson, Tomball ISD
Nancy Caballero, Channelview ISD
Michelle Chapa, Aldine ISD
Emma Coca, Galena Park ISD
Nadene Davis, Aldine ISD
Adanely De Leon, Cleveland ISD
Brenda Deremee, Garland ISD
Marcela Dominguez, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD
Briana Duncan, Galena Park ISD
Maria E. Rosas, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD
Julia Espinoza, Houston ISD
Rualnys Fernandez Sanjurjo, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD

NEW TASN CERTIFICATIONS

November 2024 – November 2025

Genera Flanagan, Houston ISD
Mirna Flores, Galena Park ISD
Maria Garcia, Cleveland ISD ISD
Norma Garcia, Galena Park ISD
Shaylon Green, Houston ISD
Melissa Horrach, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD
Elvia Jimenez, Houston ISD
Ericka Johnson-Konare, Garland ISD
Maria Laguna, Houston ISD
Nassima Laroussi, Klein ISD
Kimberly Lounder, Fort Bend ISD
Diana Mata, Garland ISD
Joyce Moore Robertson, Houston ISD
Pamala Padilla, Cleveland ISD
Leonor Perales, Houston ISD
Moravia Pinero, Klein ISD
Majela Prieto Betancourt, Garland ISD
Rebeca Puente, Galena Park ISD
Samuel Ramirez, Ector County ISD
Ruby Reese, Galena Park ISD
Beatrice Rodriguez, Garland ISD
Velia Rodriguez, Houston ISD
Arlene Saldana, Houston ISD
Gebriela Saldivar, Channelview ISD
Maria Salome, Galena Park ISD
Kelli Shannon, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD
Tonja Taylor Robertson, Houston ISD
Clarisse Thibodeaux, Klein ISD
Masami Todd, North East ISD
Michele Twiggs, Houston ISD
Gerrisha Upchurch, Galena Park ISD
Silvia Valencia, New Caney ISD
Maria Velasco Barraza, Klein ISD
Maria Villanueva, Houston ISD
Maria Villarreal, Galena Park ISD
Sharee Webb, Houston ISD
Maria Zamora, Channelview ISD
Sonia Zamora-Moreno, Spring ISD

Level Three

Mary Acosta, Brazosport ISD
Perdita Baptiste, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD
Francisca Castaneda, Garland ISD
Athena Crawford, Houston ISD
Ana Cuevas, Houston ISD
Maria Del Carmen Garcia, Galena Park ISD
Shandolyn Feggins, Houston ISD
Irma Flores, Houston ISD
Ana Gonzalez Quenedit, North East ISD

Sherma Jackson, Houston ISD
Brenda Lafayette, Houston ISD
Emigdia Lara, Klein ISD
Fabiola Luna-Reyna, Klein ISD
Flora Mata, Houston ISD
Mariela Medina, Garland ISD
Celina Medina, Houston ISD
Rosa Mendiola, Klein ISD
Kandace Mitchell, Houston ISD
Yasmin Mota, Cleveland ISD
Ana Paredones, Galena Park ISD
Sandra Ramirez, Spring Branch ISD
Alejandra Ramos, Houston ISD
Maria Reyes, Houston ISD
Enilda Rivera, Houston ISD
Deniece Roberson, Houston ISD
MARily Rosales, Houston ISD
Damaris Salmeron, Houston ISD
Maria Scarbrough, Tomball ISD
Cheryl Scott, Houston ISD
Ieshia Stevens, Houston ISD
Martha Veltran, Galena Park ISD
Odessa Wilson, Houston ISD

Level Four

Maria Alvarado, Houston ISD
Bertha Alvarez, Houston ISD
Ariledy Alvarez, Garland ISD
Kathleen Andrade, New Caney ISD
Paula Brady, Garland ISD
Marisela Camarillo Orta, Houston ISD
Maria Campos, Beeville ISD
Ingrid Carcamo, Houston ISD
Maria Castro, Houston ISD
Keila Chacin de Plaza, Klein ISD
Victoria Cisneros, Beeville ISD
Ana Delgado Ramirez, Houston ISD
Eugenia Diver, Spring Branch ISD
Mona El Hafi, Houston ISD
Stephanie Fierova, Beeville ISD
Maria Flores, Barbers Hill ISD
Lena Garcia, Lamar Consolidated ISD
Gloria Garza, Houston ISD
Norma Garza, Houston ISD
Earnest Gomez, Beeville ISD
Jesse Gonzales, Beeville ISD
Leah Kent, Cleveland ISD
Maria Macias, Houston ISD
Michelle Marin, Beeville ISD

NEW TASN CERTIFICATIONS

November 2024 – November 2025

Cynthia Millan, Cleveland ISD ISD
Sandra Moreno, Galena Park ISD
Cecilia Moreno, Tomball ISD
Roselyn Parks, Houston ISD
Lohany Perdomo, Klein ISD
Gillian Pleasant, Lamar Cons ISD
Ma Guadalupe Quiroz, Houston ISD
Norma Riojas, Eagle Mtn.-Saginaw ISD
Graciela Rodriguez, Houston ISD
Desiree Rodriguez, Beeville ISD
Gloria Romero, Spring ISD
Maria Rostro De Galvan, Cleveland ISD ISD
Sandra Salinas, Beeville ISD
Carolina Sanchez, Houston ISD
Maria Santuario De Rojas, Channelview ISD
Tanquelyn Sumler, Houston ISD
Elizabeth Tamez, Houston ISD
Brianna Vasquez, New Caney ISD
Elisa Villarreal, Houston ISD
Shelly Watson, Cleveland ISD
Aroniesha Williams, Houston ISD
Rita Zarate, Houston ISD

Level Five

Sandra Mejia, Houston ISD
Maria Amaya, Houston ISD
Rosa Amaya, Houston ISD
Carlos Araujo, New Caney ISD
Anselmo Barrera, Houston ISD
Leslie Barrientes, North East ISD
Sandra Canales, Houston ISD
Erica Carcamo, Houston ISD
Lucia Cardenas, Houston ISD
Viridiana Carrasco Sanchez, Houston ISD
Fernando Ciprian, Tomball ISD
Alicia Clelland, Midland ISD
Claudia Davila, Houston ISD
Melissa Dolder, North East ISD
Laura Eggemeyer, El Paso ISD
Nancy Garcia, Houston ISD
Glenda Guzman, Houston ISD
Rosario Hernandez, Houston ISD
Laura Hernandez, Donna ISD
Dustin Hutcheson, Sheldon ISD
Maria Jaime, Houston ISD
Precious Jiles, Houston ISD
Sharon Jones, Willis ISD

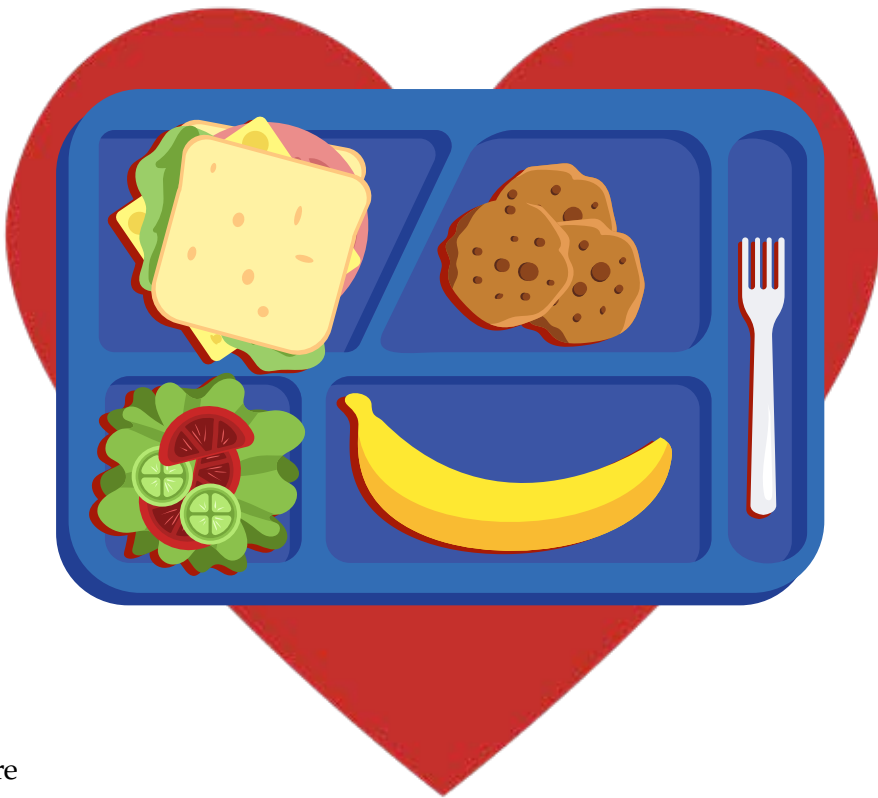
Kwanzaa King, Channelview ISD
Jennie LaCour, Rhodes ISD
Christina Lam, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD
Carla Marra Giannella, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD
Jorge Martinez, Alvin ISD
Hosana Medbery, Texas City ISD
Jasmine Middleton, Houston ISD
Mario Monjaras, Beeville ISD
Maria Navarro, Houston ISD
Michael Northey, Willis ISD
Edna Palacios, El Paso ISD
Monica Palmer, Houston ISD
Olivia Pedroza, Houston ISD
Zaira Ramirez, Houston ISD
Blanca Ramirez Palacios, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD
Silvia Reyes, Houston ISD
Jocelyn Rocha, Houston ISD
Benjamin Rojo Settle, San Angelo ISD
Maria Romo, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD
Roxana Iraheta, Houston ISD
Yensy Sanchez Carrillo, Klein ISD
Amy Santagate, Copperas Cove ISD
Thomas Sneed, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD
Candace Strickland, White Settlement ISD
Patricia Torres Jimenez, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD
Daniela Vivas Alvarez, Barbers Hill ISD
Sandy Washington, Houston ISD
Chiquia White, Houston ISD
Adam Whitten, White Settlement ISD
Roquilea Wilson, Houston ISD

INTERESTED IN TASN CERTIFICATION?

Click [here](#) to learn more!

Contact [Eric Vicharelli](#) with
any questions regarding TASN
certification.

Lunch Trays, Life Lessons, and a Lot of Heart



By Josh Miller
Aspire Bakeries
TASN Industry Committee Member



Some people measure their careers in promotions or milestones. I measure mine in smiles, high-fives, and cafeteria memories.

I'll never forget one lunchroom visit when a student marched up to me, tray in hand, and declared, "This is the best

day ever." He wasn't talking about a holiday or a big event, just lunch. That moment stopped me in my tracks. It reminded me that what we do in child nutrition is about so much more than food, it's about giving kids joy, confidence, and the fuel they need to take on the rest of their day.

Why I Love What I Do

Every school I visit tells a story. There's the cafeteria manager who greets every student like family. The team that pulls off theme days complete with decorations and music. The kids who can't wait to show off their lunch to a friend. Those are the snapshots that drive me. They're proof that meals matter and so do the people behind them.

A Few Things You Might Not Know About Me

- I'm a dad of three, which means I have built-in taste testers at home (and some very honest food critics).
- My favorite part of any day is connecting with

people, because this industry is really one big family.

- Outside of work, you'll usually find me at the pool with my kids' swim team or chasing down a good Texas barbecue spot.

A Story I Carry with Me

At a district event not too long ago, I watched a group of kids come through the line wearing sunglasses and Hawaiian shirts for a cafeteria "Winter Beach Bash." The room buzzed with excitement. When the music started playing, everyone from the students to the the staff were smiling ear to ear. I realized then that child nutrition has this amazing ability to create moments, the kind kids remember long after the bell rings.

Looking Ahead

Serving on the TASN Industry Committee gives me the chance to keep learning, listening, and contributing to this community I love so much. I'm here for the stories, the connections, and the chance to play a small part in something much bigger than myself: helping kids thrive.

At the end of the day, it's simple. School meals change lives and I'm grateful mine is one of the lives that's been changed along the way.

FIVE LOVE LANGUAGES OF DESIGN

by Lance Brooks
Foodservice Design Professionals
TASN Industry Committee Member

How do we truly define a “good design” in new construction or renovation projects? The easy answer is simple: the design meets the owner’s intent, is on budget, and is delivered on schedule. Honestly, it is deeper than what we think, and the [Five Love Languages](#) concept is a good example how to identify and execute a good design.



WORDS OF AFFIRMATION

Words of affirmation are rare to receive in the design industry, and it is often that we make comments about not taking things personally and the need to have thick skin. But design is only a small portion of what is included in a project. The areas that typically go unnoticed are the engineering, documentation review, specification writing, bidding, shop drawing review, installation, and project commissioning. These are honestly the hardest and most challenging due to the amount of communication, coordination and support from our industry partners. The process can be a negative experience for those who are not familiar with our industry. Again we lean on the ideas of thick skin, mistakes are going to be made, and that those mistakes can be learning opportunities. Our job is to be the owner’s advocates and their voice throughout the project. The design, all behind the scenes work and commission is done to meet the owner’s request and expectations.

We do not expect to hear any words of affirmation upon the completion of a project. It is our job to provide the project per the owner’s direction and support the owner through commissioning as well as the years following. We see the words of affirmation in the staff during the operation of the kitchen. If we do our job correctly, then staff morale, work productivity and workflow is

optimized. Words of affirmation also flow from the staff to the students.



QUALITY TIME

Having quality time in a kitchen is extremely important; work smarter and not harder, as we all say. This analogy goes a long way in the design process. Older facilities are often undersized, dated equipment and not sufficiently sized to accommodate the student population. Operators truly need more words of affirmation for operating in the smaller facilities with the ability to meet the needs of the students.

To increase quality time, the facility should be sized to accommodate the full student population capacity. If the population is not going to open at capacity, this is a great talking point to have in your pocket if budget becomes a factor.

Designs should focus on providing spaces with correct cross relationships to minimize walking, bottlenecks and cross traffic. Each function in the kitchen has a dedicated area to minimize comingling of operations.

Clear line of sights helps communication between employees within the kitchen, security from the manager’s office to the receiving door, locker room, kitchen proper and storage areas.

The standardization of design and specifications optimizes training efficiency, ensures consistency across operations and menus, and improves maintenance management.



RECEIVING GIFTS

This is not about physically receiving gifts but about the emotional feeling of the experience. I cannot express how much I personally enjoy the design process and collaborating with the

Continued on next page

owner on projects. For the owner and staff, it's the receipt of the facility that was designed specifically for their operation.

How the operator engages with the student is the gift. Lunch should be a positive interactive experience for everyone. Most kitchen staff know all the students that have lunch, the staff cares for the students as much as their own. This care and thoughtfulness carries far more than we can ever imagine.



ACTS OF SERVICE

The concept of acts of service in design means developing the most efficient layout to optimize the operational workflow. We are the owner's advocate and their voice when they are not in the room. It is our responsibility to educate the owner on trends, lessons learned, new technology and visit other facilities. And it is our responsibility to meet the owner's needs for the design and equipment specifications.

We are a relationship-driven operation. Our work doesn't end when the building is commissioned. We continue supporting the owner long after occupancy by troubleshooting equipment, coordinating with manufacturers, and addressing issues that may arise years later.



PHYSICAL TOUCH

Physical touch in our case is more about experiencing the space and student interaction. Spaces should create a positive emotional experience from the design process and material finishes. Students should be engaged for the short time that they are within our realm. It is our job to enhance their senses of, sight, smell, and touch.

Serving lines are typically 20 to 25 feet in which we get to capture students for 10 to 15 minutes. This short time is critical to allowing the student to break away from school, interact with the staff and have a positive experience receiving their lunch.

WHAT IT ALL REALLY MEANS

If we do our jobs correctly, every small detail supports the operation, the staff, and, most importantly, the students.

A truly good design incorporates all five love languages:

- **AFFIRMATION** through improved morale and performance
- **QUALITY TIME** through thoughtful workflow and sizing
- **GIFTS** through spaces that feel intentional and personalized
- **ACTS OF SERVICE** by supporting owners long after the project is complete
- **PHYSICAL TOUCH** by creating an environment that students enjoy

It is an honor to create facilities that staff are proud to work in every day. Through efficient layouts, proper equipment, flexible menus, and engaging serving spaces, we give operators the tools to positively impact students.

Ultimately, it's about the student – and hopefully a few fist bumps along the way!



TASN 2026 ANNUAL CONFERENCE & TRADESHOW IGNITE THE LIGHT

June 28-30, 2026
Gaylord Texan Resort • Grapevine

Join us in Grapevine next June where we'll *Ignite The Light* together at the Annual Conference and the nation's second-largest school food show.

2026 BOOTH RATES

10 x 10 BOOTH	MEMBER RATE	NON-MEMBER RATE
IN-LINE BOOTH	\$1,750.00	\$2,200.00
CORNER BOOTH	\$1,850.00	\$2,300.00

BOOTH INCLUDES:

- Five conference badges per 10x10 booth
- Post-conference attendee contact file
- Conference app listing and product description
- Company ID sign
- Two chairs
- Six-foot skirted table
- Eight-foot back drape
- Three-foot side drape
- Wastebasket
- Two Industry Night tickets per 10x10 booth (more available for purchase)

EXHIBIT REGISTRATION NOW OPEN!

SECURE YOUR BOOTH NOW

NEW YEAR HOLDS UNLIMITED POTENTIAL FOR LEARNING, GROWING



HAPPY New Year!

Thank you for making 2025 another successful year for school nutrition in Texas. I applaud your hard work that kept Texas leading the way in school nutrition as we welcomed

new leaders to the **U.S. Department of Agriculture** (USDA). Texas schools tied for No. 1 in Healthy Meals Incentives awards nationwide and spent \$22 million on local Texas agricultural products. The new year promises to bring even more excitement as you enhance your programs through new technology, learning opportunities, and the Farm Fresh Initiative.

GROWING FARM FRESH

Texans took note of the many **Farm Fresh Challenge** successes in 2025 as you shared your efforts online. The farmers' market displays looked awesome, and I know students enjoyed the demonstrations featuring dairy cows, chickens, bees, and more. There were 179 school districts pledging to participate in the Farm Fresh Challenge which translates to more than 2.6 million students having the opportunity to experience Texas agriculture firsthand.

To help increase the number of producers looking to sell local food to schools, the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA), in collaboration with **Texas A&M AgriLife Extension**, recently launched FRESH TRAYS training for farmers and ranchers. The one-day workshops include four training modules covering key topics such as *Selling to School*

Continued on next page

By Lena Wilson

*Assistant Commissioner for Food and Nutrition
Texas Department of Agriculture*



Markets and Choosing the Right Product for School Markets. Thirty workshops are scheduled statewide to ensure Texas farmers and ranchers across Texas have access to the training.

The **FRESH TRAYS grant** will also provide training to support your efforts in purchasing local food directly from producers. TDA Food and Nutrition is developing a training curriculum for school nutrition leaders that aligns with the FRESH TRAYS training for producers. This training launches soon and will walk you through selecting the right procurement method, developing solicitations, connecting with producers, and more. A USDA Team Nutrition grant has made it possible for TDA to offer 10 five-day Farm Fresh Culinary workshops at the Culinary Institute of America in San Antonio. Although registration has closed, the training mission includes attendees sharing the skills and knowledge they gain with their school nutrition teams after the workshop concludes. The grant includes funding for developing a comprehensive library of shareable online resources for all school nutrition teams. Both will help schools develop new techniques for making school meals healthy and appealing, while meeting the requirements set forth in the USDA's Final Rule, Child Nutrition: 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

Meeting at MegaCon 2026

I am excited to announce that **MegaCon 2026** will be held April 6-8, in Waco. This long-running

conference provides comprehensive training for Texas school nutrition professionals. Over three days you can meet and mingle with TDA, Texas agricultural producers, and your school nutrition peers. We are inviting Texas agricultural producers to attend and collaborate on local food purchasing from farms and ranches.

A favorite feature of every MegaCon is getting a chance to hear directly from Agriculture Commissioner **Sid Miller**. You can personally meet him at MegaCon 2026. MegaCon is a great experience for school nutrition professionals, and I look forward to welcoming you to the new location at the Waco Convention Center. You will get more information in your newsletters and inbox, and you can visit SquareMeals.org/Megacon anytime.

TURNING THE Page TO TANS

Transitioning from TX-UNPS to the **Texas Automated Nutrition System** (TANS) will be a hot topic at MegaCon and throughout the year. TDA's Food and Nutrition Training team and Education Service Centers (ESCs) will host various training "sneak peeks" and other sessions to help school districts prepare for the TANS transition. The National School Lunch Program and the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program applications will go live in TANS on April 13.

From now through March, the training team will introduce you to the general aspects of TANS in micro-learning sessions during monthly TANS Talk



sessions, school calls, and ESC calls. Starting in April, school districts will have multiple resources for learning how to submit their NSLP applications, including online self-paced videos, ESC-led live and virtual training sessions, and ESC office hours. SquareMeals.org/TANS has the latest guidance and training plans available 24/7.

You could say 2026 will be a breakthrough year or turning point for school nutrition in Texas,

but every new year brings changes and progress for the amazing work you do. This year holds unlimited potential for you to grow in your career and push school nutrition to a new level. The combination of training, technology, and teamwork coming together in 2026 promises to make Texas the undisputed leader in school nutrition. Thank you for all you do and I look forward to working with you as we ensure all Texas children can be homegrown and healthy.



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One Tray at a Time



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and the 🔥 is barely igniting!*

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TASN 2026

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