



Teresa Flores aims to inspire advocacy as TASB president

by Laura Cherry

For Teresa Flores, incoming board president of the Texas Association of School Boards (TASB), the drive to serve was born of a desire to give back to the community and school that raised her, without which she says she wouldn't be where she is today.

Flores has deep roots in her home district of Ingleside ISD, where she's served on the local school board for 18 years. She started first grade at Ingleside Elementary (at the time, there was no kindergarten), and graduated from Ingleside High School. Both of her children went through Ingleside ISD, and her grandson is currently a senior there. She first became interested in serving on the school board as a way of giving back.

"I've always been volunteer-oriented. When my son was in baseball I was very active in the little league organization," says Flores. She was president of the high school band boosters for five years, and

has served in various other officer roles in the community. It was in these roles that she gained exposure to and experience in leadership positions.

She joined the Ingleside ISD school board because she wanted to be a part of the decision-making process.

"At the end of the day," she says, "I wondered at the logic behind some of the work and requirements students were sent home with. Why was it done that way? I wanted to be involved in the decision making."

As she learned about local issues and processes, Flores began to see that there were many things that fell outside of the purview of the local school board.

"So much more is controlled at the state and legislative level than what you can control at the local level," says Flores. "So when the

TASB director position at Region 2 became open and there was no incumbent in the seat, I decided to take a shot.” With that, she says, a whole new world opened up.

“Most school board members will tell you they became involved because they wanted to make a difference,” Flores says. “While you can make a difference at the local level, at the state level it’s just such a bigger impact.”

The ability to advocate at the state level is what got Flores involved with TASB. “I’ve always been interested in local politics and politicians, so it seemed like a natural next step,” she says.

TASB members can make use of the policy services team, which writes new and updated laws in policy-friendly language so districts can update their policy manuals without having to hire attorneys to interpret the legalese. Another TASB benefit, one Flores jokes she doesn’t know how they did without in the past, is BoardBook.

“When I started out, you would get your board meeting prep materials in a 6-inch-tall binder,” Flores says. “Everything is electronic now. The superintendent’s secretary can build the agenda and supporting documentation in BoardBook and shoot it out electronically to everybody. We can also log in to view it. Not only do you get to see everything you need at your fingertips, on your phone, or wherever you are when you’re preparing for a meeting, but you also have an archive.”

TASB also provides training to board members and hosts workshops and professional development throughout the year.

“That networking opportunity is invaluable,” Flores says. “Whenever we have an issue, we know we don’t have to reinvent the wheel — someone’s already been through it. There are a lot of benefits to being a member of TASB. One of the parts of their mission statement is to serve school districts and schools, and that’s exactly what they do.”

The TASB presidency has a tenure of one year. Flores says she still has to pinch herself to believe that she has the opportunity to serve as board president.

“Most of the time, when someone moves into a position like this, they have time to get acclimated, to sit back and observe, to

see how things work,” she says. “But with a one-year term, you’ve got to hit the ground running.”

It wasn’t a complete baptism by fire, though. Flores was elected by the Region 2 boards in 2006 and served two years on the officer track before assuming the presidency. Prior to that, she served as first vice president, and president-elect. She has been a TASB member for 11 years.

Flores’ big goal for her tenure is to increase community and school involvement, get people voting to put legislative representatives in place who support public education, and then stay in front of them. She also wants to bring more visibility to the positive things happening in public education through news and social media. But she is especially passionate about getting people to vote and communicate with their legislators.

“There are a couple of reasons I think people don’t vote, and you can go to any election and see what a small percentage of people actually turn out,” Flores says. “I think some of it is that they lack the interest, but even more so, they don’t know who to vote for. Part of what I’m trying to get done this year is getting school board members involved (we have to start with ourselves) and spreading the message out to the community to continue to advocate so we can get people in place that value public education.”

When Flores accepted the gavel at the delegate assembly in October that started her presidency, she said a few words of acceptance and then she asked everyone to stand up.

“I said, ‘you’ve just taken the first step in standing up for public education,’ and that’s my message: Stand up for public education. It is the root of success.”

LAURA CHERRY is an education content specialist and former teacher in Austin. She has been a freelance writer and copy editor since 2010, covering food, gardening and education topics for a variety of magazines and individual clients.

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TASSP President Carrie Jackson encourages principals to be “all over the building”

by Laura Cherry

Carrie Jackson, incoming president of the Texas Association of Secondary School Principals (TASSP), comes from a long line of educators. She knew she would follow in her family's footsteps and teach, but her ambition didn't stop there.

“I had an interest in teaching, but also in sports. By eighth grade, I knew I was going to be the world's best basketball coach and I was going to teach. I had it all figured out,” she laughs.

She did become a teacher, and in her second year, her family relocated to Houston from the Dallas/Fort Worth area. There, she took a job at an alternative school in Alief ISD called Alief Learning Center, teaching English to sixth-, seventh- and eighth-graders who came from a variety of backgrounds and some difficult situations. At Alief Learning Center, she worked under two principals, both of whom had a lasting impact on her.

“I had two principals during that time,” Jackson says. “Each of them had different styles, but they were both styles I really liked. Both of them had a deep love for the kids who came to them with sometimes tremendous disadvantages, and they both knew how to find teachers who had that same kind of love for kids. By the time I moved back to the DFW area, I knew I wanted to be a principal.”

Jackson moved back to Dallas/Fort Worth and became a teacher at Crockett Middle School in Irving ISD, where she taught for three years and was assistant principal for two years. She then moved to Nimitz High School where she spent three years as assistant principal. In her third year at Nimitz, her daughter Rylee was born, and she decided it was time to find a job closer to home and to pursue her first principalship. She found it in Keller ISD, where she has served as principal for the last 12 years, first at Indian Springs Middle School, and then at Timberview Middle School, which she opened and has been running for the last eight years.

She's been a TASSP member for 17 years, and has served on multiple committees, including the Legislative Committee and the Texas Study Committee, as well as the NASSP Committee on Student Contests and Activities.

“I've always enjoyed being around our association work and around the other members and the staff,” Jackson says. “It's a genuinely student-centered and principal- and assistant principal-loving group. The TASSP motto is ‘Above all, students first.’ That's always resonated with me as a person who loves to work with kids. It's been a big deal for me to be able to support and work with an association that puts kids first.”

Over the years, Jackson attended a number of summer workshops hosted by TASSP and was moved by many eloquent, passionate speeches by TASSP presidents. She knew that she wanted to do what they did, but figured it was further down the road for her. She became an officer just to get more involved.

When the position of assistant state coordinator opened up, she decided to throw her hat in the ring, and got the position. It isn't necessarily a position that leads to the presidency, but it was through this position that she says she got to know many great leaders in the organization. From there, she moved on to be the state coordinator, and as she was finishing up her tenure, the next person in line for the presidency was called away to serve in his district as a deputy superintendent, leaving a hole in the position. "I was almost through with my tenure, so it just seemed like the right time to step up," she says. "It all just fell into place."

Jackson says her theme for her tenure as president is, "The future is now."

"Often, as leaders, we think in terms of

'someday,' but we don't step up to implement change," Jackson says. "I visited each of the 20 TASSP regions in the fall along with Archie McAfee (TASSP's executive director), and we shared my list of five things school leaders can do now to make schools awesome for their kids. We'll do it again in the spring with five more things. I want to give schools some things they can take home tomorrow to make their schools better."

Some of those items included making school magical for kids with fun surprises, being a model of servant leadership, and being present. "Be all over the building!" Jackson says, and it's something she knows well — she gave up having her own office at her school.

Between teachers, staff and 1,250 kids in fifth through eighth grade at Timberview, space has become limited. "I decided to just not have an office," Jackson says. "I have a chair in my secretary's office and I'm out and about. I encourage other principals to do the same. Just be out and be present. Be that source of support for teachers and kids and everybody in the building."

Being a principal is a tough job, and Jackson admits it's hard to recruit principals who love the job and want to stay. "It may be that many get overwhelmed and decide it's not for them," she says. "Criticism comes from all directions, and they don't get a lot of positive reinforcement. Their job is to give, give, give. For me, being TASSP president is a blessing and an opportunity to give back to those principals. I get to travel all over and help people who are breaking their backs to help students be successful. I've always felt that when you leave a TASSP meeting, you leave feeling like you're doing something important and that you're valued. I've always appreciated that as a TASSP member, so for me to be able to go out and provide that reinforcement and affirmation that other principals and assistant principals don't get on a daily basis is very cool."

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