



Issue 1 | Fall 2023



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GCISD News | Issue 1 | Fall 2023

## Board Focused On Excellence

On June 6th and July 18th of this summer, the Grapevine-Colleyville ISD Board of Trustees began the process of creating a new vision for GCISD focusing on students and their learning. Because state law has certain legal duties required of trustees, much of their time has been spent on performing those non-student focused tasks. The Board is determined to gradually change the district's efforts to put the focus back on student performance.

Those same Principals must coordinate within their schools so teachers at every campus are supported in their efforts. Beginning, middle, and end of year assessments will continue as before; the difference is the continuity between individual schools and the district Administration.

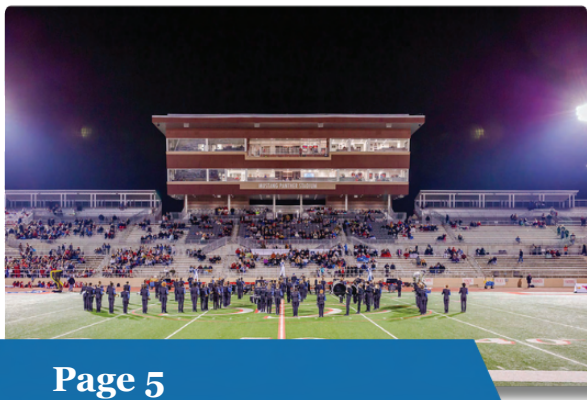
The Board and Administration are changing how they evaluate themselves too. This year, both will create "scorecards" to measure their progress towards the goals they set. In all cases, the success of students underpins every goal.

***This streamlined level of accountability has never been done in GCISD.***

Overall, the new Board of Trustees is transforming district procedures and expectations to provide accountability at every level. The shared vision of improving student learning is the new North Star of GCISD.

At those two summer meetings, trustees discussed a new strategic plan that will be carried out by actionable, measurable learning goals at every level in the district. From individual classroom plans all the way through the pipeline to the district-level Administration, all goals will target student achievement.

Pulling off this new model of governance will require that the Administration constantly communicate with school Principals.



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### Homecoming & Friday Night Lights



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### New Bond Priorities



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### GCISD Welcomes Teachers & Staff

The Grapevine Colleyville Scholar's Journal is a 501(c)4 non-profit social welfare organization doing business as "GCISD News." Our sole purpose is to provide high-quality, useful information about GCISD. We are both reader and sponsor supported. Donate here to contribute to our purpose. Your donation is not tax-deductible.





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# Letter from the Board of Directors

Allow us to introduce ourselves, share with you how our organization came into being, and tell you what we stand for. The three of us have deep ties to the Grapevine-Colleyville area and our stories and connection with it reflect the diversity and richness of this great community. Some of what we see in our schools, we like; other things, we don't. What we all agree upon is the community's need to know the full story of everything going on in our school district delivered to every household in GCISD. This newspaper is a direct response to that perceived need.

The Grapevine-Colleyville Scholar's Journal is a nonprofit organization born out of the desire to restore our schools. Inspired by a previous unaffiliated publication, we have chosen to do business as "GCISD News." We think that the best way we can support this school district is through honest communication celebrating its victories and acknowledging its shortcomings. Collaboration with the community is only possible if that community is well-informed about how its money is being spent. We all have a vested interest in seeing our schools succeed.

We are aware that our district has new leadership and seek to work alongside it to further our mutual goals. As GCISD embarks on a new beginning, we believe it is time to move forward to academic excellence for all of our community's children by focusing on increasing measurable academic outcomes. Our shared vision is to uplift this school district to create a better tomorrow for us all.

## Our Core Beliefs

- #1** Schools are the center of every community
- #2** The purpose of school systems is to educate children
- #3** Strong schools and a strong community are directly related

Our mission is nothing short of a complete revitalization of our community, centered on nurturing the heart of that community--our schools. If this mission resonates with you, then we ask for you to stand with us by supporting our nonprofit.

Sincerely,  
**Joel Loua, Robert Smullin, and Zariyan Stark**  
[gcisdnews@gmail.com](mailto:gcisdnews@gmail.com)



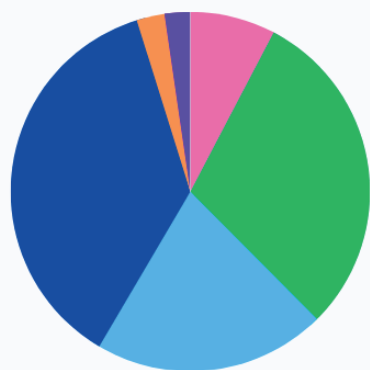
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## GCISD Quick Facts

  
**1,899** Full-Time Employees  
**49** Part-Time Employees



**13,714 Students**

5,754 Elementary  
 4,683 High School  
 3,277 Middle School  
 1,204 Virtual  
 396 Pre-K  
 361 Collegiate Academy

**11.40%**  
 Special Education

**11.27%**  
 Emergent Bilingual

**25.55%**  
 Economically Disadvantaged

Source: GCISD.net

## Salute to Champions

### GHS Cheer: National Champions

The Grapevine High School Cheerleaders enjoy winning, and this past year was no exception. After earning a UIL Spirit State Championship and an NCA National Championship the previous year, 2023 brought more trophies and honors to GHS.

The team placed in the top 6 at the UIL Spirit State Championship in January and then competed at NCA Nationals the following weekend. Having won an NCA Spirit Program National Championship in 2022, the bar was set high, and the team rose to the challenge. They claimed NCA National Champion titles in BOTH the Spirit Program AND the Crowd Performance divisions. This year's performance garnered them the coveted Grand National title, which goes to the team with the highest point total out of over 400 teams in all Gameday divisions.

The 2023-2024 team continues winning with a great showing at the June NCA camp. The Varsity cheerleaders won Top Team awards in cheer, chant, and band chant categories. They will defend their titles in January at the UIL Spirit State Championship and the NCA National Championship competitions. Go Grapevine Cheer!

### CHHS Volleyball: Reigning Champions

The Colleyville Heritage High School volleyball team returns this season as the reigning 2022 UIL 5A State Champions. The program has a history of success. While the school opened just 27 years ago, the volleyball program has made playoff appearances for a total of 18 seasons. Eight of those playoff appearances advanced to the regional level. Individual players are annually recognized with all-district, all-area, and even all-state honors as well as academic all-state recognition.

The program hosts summer volleyball camp in July for students who have not yet started high school. Tryouts typically begin the first Monday of August, and the season starts the second week of August. These Panthers already have their season underway! CHHS has 2 freshmen teams, along with a Jr. Varsity and Varsity team. They typically play on Tuesdays and Fridays during the regular season.

Good luck to CHHS Volleyball and best wishes for these defending state champions to make a deep playoff run well into November for 2023!

## EXPERIENCE A *Happy* HOMECOMING



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# Homecoming Season

## GHS Homecoming

GHS homecoming is an enduring tradition in a district over a century old. Long-time residents and newcomers alike, both students and the community at large, come together every fall for several days of festivities. While the details may change over the years, the excitement generated is exhibited by the crowds that turn out to cheer on the homecoming parade participants – bands, sports teams, clubs, and honorees.

This year’s events will kick off with the parade down Main Street in Grapevine beginning at 6 pm on Wednesday, October 4. Cash prizes provided by the GHS Ex-Student Association with assistance from the City of Grapevine are awarded to the top ranked entries. The parade also includes homecoming king and queen nominees, returning home kings and queens from prior decades, and the current year’s honorees for former student and faculty Hall of Fame. Each year the Association honors one former student and one former faculty member. Former students have been recognized since 1966 and faculty since 1997. This year marks the Association’s 75th anniversary.

The pep rally for the homecoming football game begins on Friday, October 6, at GHS. The Hall of Fame honorees are presented at an induction ceremony during a coffee at 10 am held in the library. The GHS Student Council and Hospitality Services students plan and host the event. Attendees include former students and faculty representing decades of history. The GHS 2023 Homecoming Court is also presented at the coffee. Later that evening, the homecoming football game will begin at 7 pm at Mustang-Panther Stadium where the Homecoming King and Queen will be announced.

Come home again and be part of a special community!

### 2023 GCISD Varsity Football Home Games

All games are at Mustang-Panther Stadium at 7 pm.

|       |      |                   |
|-------|------|-------------------|
| 9/22  | CHHS | Trimble Tech      |
| 9/29  | GHS  | Colleyville       |
| 10/6* | GHS  | Poly Tech         |
| 10/13 | CHHS | Arlington Heights |
| 10/20 | GHS  | Wyatt             |
| 10/27 | CHHS | Poly Tech         |
| 11/2  | GHS  | Trimble Tech      |

\*GHS Homecoming

Friday, October 6th, 7 pm | Mustang-Panther Stadium



## CHHS Homecoming & Famous Football Alumni

Built in 1996, CHHS is the newest brick and mortar high school in GCISD – but that doesn’t mean it’s missing any all stars!

At the end of last June, Panther alumni Maxx Crosby hosted and brought NFL players with him to mentor some of the CHHS students. Panther pride was at an all-time high with this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to meet these incredible players!

**Micah Parsons - Cowboys**

**Dez Bryant - Cowboys**

**Von Miller - Bills**

**Maxx Crosby - Raiders**

**Denzel Perryman - Texans**

Crosby graduated from Colleyville Heritage High School just over 5 years ago and signed a four-year \$98.98 million extension contract with the Raiders in 2022. Another CHHS graduate and high-profile alumnus of the school is Christian Ponder, a former Quarterback who played for the Vikings.

Colleyville Heritage High School celebrated its 26th homecoming on September 8th, welcoming home CHHS alums who have attended the school since its opening in the fall of 1996.

Preparations for the typical Panther Hoco begin weeks in advance. Nominating and then voting on the Homecoming Court is a central part of the celebration. Wednesday evening is the homecoming parade featuring clubs, teams, and the homecoming royalty. The crowd-drawing parade navigates down Heritage Avenue with onlookers lining both sides of the street. Traditionally, the parade ends with a fireworks display for the crowd, adding to the fun for current and future Panthers!

On Friday morning, the homecoming pep rally involves the majority of the student body, with giant Texas-sized mums and garters unmistakably marking Homecoming Friday. Performances by the CHHS band, the Pantherettes, and the Cheerleaders typically entertain the pep rally spectators. Then Friday night is the finale of the week with the football team playing the homecoming game under Friday Night Lights at Mustang-Panther stadium.

Homecoming creates an opportunity for old friends to reunite, and the CHHS community enjoys a favorite fall pastime in the school’s ever-growing tradition.

Don't miss the annual "Red Rail Rivalry" game on September 29th!



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## GCISD Bands March Into Football Season

With the start of a new school year comes football season. Each year everyone gets excited about the football games and the “Friday Night Lights.” The football teams, cheerleaders, drill team, and all of their coaches and staff work incredibly hard to make the games competitive and fun ... but the games wouldn’t be complete without the band.

GCISD has an amazing Fine Arts program – and the biggest organizations in the program are the GHS and CHHS bands. You won’t find a harder-working, more dedicated group of students than band students. In fact, while everyone was popping their fireworks and celebrating the 4th of July, the band kids were winding down their summer and getting back to work.

For both GHS and CHHS bands, percussion students reported back as early as July 17th. Full band began rehearsing twice a day on July 24th. Three times a day rehearsals began on July 31st and continued until school started. These kids know what it means to work!

It’s not all football games for the band students, though. In fact, there is such a phenomenon known as “Band-tober.” During October, bands not only perform at the weekly football games, but also in at least 1 local marching contest, have overnight travel to another marching contest (GHS travels to San Antonio and CHHS to Midland), and perform in a UIL Marching Band competition. While Band-tober is fun, November brings a huge sigh of relief to band students, directors, and parents each year!

Fall band requires so much effort that many parents of incoming band students have some tough questions: “How are we going to make this schedule work? Is it really worth all this time and effort?” And then, at the end of marching season, the answers are clear. The schedules can be tough at times, but it all works out. And yes, it is absolutely worth the effort!

Considering the large variety of events that the band students participate in, individuals may wonder how it is all funded. After all, buses for traveling to competitions, entry fees, hotels, and meals for the students and staff can’t be cheap. Luckily, band parents are as hardworking as their kids. The band booster organizations at both GHS and CHHS fundraise almost non-stop so that they can provide for the kids.

So the next time you get a call from a band student raising money for a fundraiser, or one pops in to your business to ask for a donation item for an auction, keep in mind how hard that kid is working. And when you’re at the football game, be sure to drop by concessions to grab a bite and say “hi” to the band parents running it. Most of them are former band kids too.

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## Walk of Honor

The GCISD Walk of Honor was established to recognize individuals who have dedicated years of service to making GCISD and our cities a place of excellence. In 2017, then GCISD superintendent Dr. Robin Ryan recognized that we did not have a process or program to formally honor and memorialize those who contributed to building the schools and community we now enjoy, and he initiated the process of formalizing an organization led by stakeholders to accomplish this end.

Walk of Honor's purpose is "To recognize the efforts and contributions of individuals who have brought distinction, honor, and excellence to Grapevine-Colleyville ISD."

In 2019, the newly renovated Mustang-Panther Stadium began a new chapter of its legacy, which includes housing the GCISD Walk of Honor. Permanent bronze plaques honoring these individuals are on the brick pillars flanking the main entrance of the stadium, giving everyone who walks into the seating area a glimpse into our community's history, tradition, and pride.

The Walk of Honor is a self-supporting, non-profit charitable organization led by a Board of Directors that selects individuals to be honored.



Each fall the current year's honorees are inducted into the Walk of Honor at a reception and then recognized that evening during the Pre-game ceremony of the Red Rail Rivalry football game. Previous honorees, by class, include:

**2018** W.F. Cannon, Madeleine Hemley, Riney Jordan, Russell Kidd, Larry Oliver, William D. Tate, Jim Thompson, Ted Willhoite

**2019** Billie Hurst Ebersole, Bill Powers, Roy Stewart, Mary Virginia Wall Simmons

**2020** Joseph N. (Joe) Box, Bob Burrus, Phil Parker, Ted Ware

**2021** Marion B. Brekken, Jerry H. Grantham

**2022** Travis James Matthews, William H. (Bill) Yancey, Sr.

**2023** Linda Tidmore, Tom Walker

Anyone can nominate someone. Nomination information is on the website at [GCISDWalkOfHonor.com](http://GCISDWalkOfHonor.com). In addition, Walk of Honor welcomes donations to support their effort to identify worthy recipients. Donations may be made online OR mailed to "GCISD Walk of Honor," 3051 Ira E. Woods Ave., Grapevine, TX 76051.

Our community has been built by the efforts of remarkable people, and we all stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us. The Walk of Honor seeks to tell the stories of those who have contributed to GCISD's excellence throughout its 116 year history.

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## School Safety & House Bill 3

The 88th Texas Legislature passed House Bill 3, which requires school districts to put in place several safety upgrades, including the presence of at least one armed person on every campus. School districts unable to do this may file for an exemption providing the reason for non-compliance.

The armed person can be a School Resource Officer (SRO), security guard, or a district employee through the Guardian or Marshall program (which requires training and certification for district employees to carry a firearm on campus). To assist with finances for this new law, the state is providing a \$.28 cent increase per student, which raises the per student allotment from \$9.72 to \$10, in addition to \$15,000 per campus. The state is also offering grants to reimburse districts for some of the security upgrades; GCISD was among the first to apply for one.

At the August 7th school board meeting, a number of trustees expressed their

disapproval of putting such a low price tag on Texas students.

Trustee Humphrey commented, saying "I'm fine spending money on security. We need some more money to spend, and that money needs to come from the state. I am offended at a wholly inadequate \$10 price tag on a student and I'm offended that the state continually asks us to do more with less."

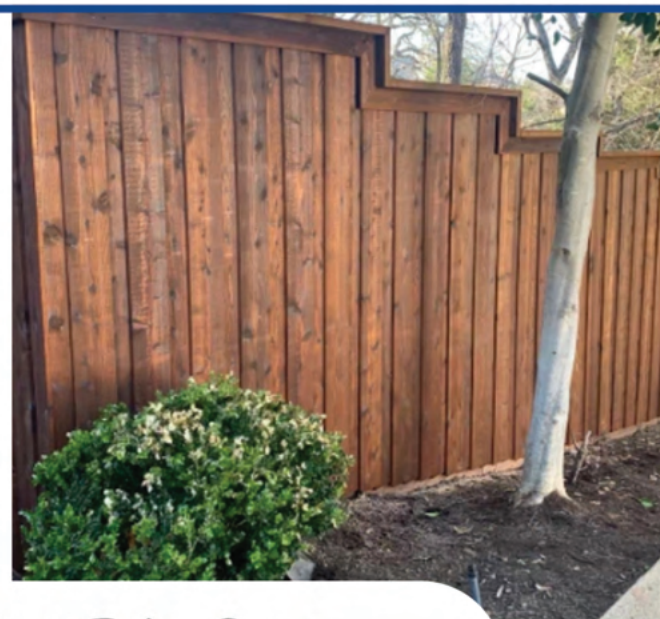
Details related to GCISD's past school resource officer expenditures were released in the August 7th Board Book Agenda online, including details of the newest interlocal agreements between GCISD and the cities housing it.

For years, both Colleyville and Grapevine have covered the full cost of SROs in their high schools, and then have split the cost of SROs in their middle schools with the District. In Colleyville, the previously budgeted cost to GCISD was \$132,661; in Grapevine, it was \$110,019.

Now, because of HB3, GCISD's leadership had to negotiate cost sharing to cover for all of the elementary schools in the district as well. The salary for 12 elementary schools equates to over \$800,000 per year, and benefits can add another 40% to the salary base cost.

Luckily, prior to HB3, the City of Colleyville stepped up to provide additional elementary school officers in all of the schools within Colleyville city limits at no cost to the district. GCISD will continue to pay their budgeted cost for the high school and middle school officers, and will then give the proportional amount of the state's reimbursement to Colleyville for this year.

For elementary schools in Grapevine (and 1 Euless school), GCISD is paying the Grapevine Police Department about \$731,996 for this year's costs alone. That includes 10 school resource officers and a new sergeant position.



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**School Safety & HB 3 (cont.)**

Fortunately, Grapevine is absorbing around 50% of the remaining expenses. After state reimbursement offered for this year only, the district will add the additional expense of \$407,155 to this year’s budget.

In Trustee Pontillo’s statement regarding the financial deal with the City of Grapevine, he states that getting “from an initial cost of \$2 million to an actual cost of around \$400,000 is amazing ... but it’s only for this year ... it’s unsustainable.”

After the financial deals with each city were explained, most of the trustees expressed their concerns about the sustainability of the current financial agreements in the future. For this year only, the state of Texas is providing GCISD with around \$400,000 in funding with no promise of support beyond that. This means that either the cities or the school district are going to have to find money to pay for future SROs.

Looking toward financial sustainability, Trustee Nakamura specifically brought up her frustrations with Robin Hood (the money the state takes away from GCISD annually, known as “recapture”), citing its debilitating nature toward running the



*Grapevine & Colleyville Police Officers with Superintendent Schnautz, Mayor Tate of Grapevine, and Mayor Lindamood of Colleyville*

school district: “When you have 66 million dollars going out the door before you even pay one bill, it makes it very difficult to get this done.”

President Braun finished up Trustee comments by informing the community that the district will be collaborating with both the cities of Colleyville and Grapevine to create two task forces, one for each city, with the purpose of gathering business-minded people who can come up with sustainable solutions for maintaining HB3 after this year.

Clearly the purpose of House Bill 3 is to keep Texas kids safe. Unfortunately, the financial implications of that bill are hitting school districts and the cities that house them rather hard. The Board of Trustees passed a balanced budget last June. Unavoidable state-mandated services puts that in jeopardy and will make reaching a balanced budget even more difficult next year.

**Students with Weapons**

Concerning safety in GCISD specifically, KUVN 23 Univision Dallas sent an open records request last July to get information about weapons within the district. The request stated, “For the school year of 2022-2023 how many weapons: specifically, guns, bb guns and knives were brought into school campuses by students? This includes elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools” (P001029-071723).

**The response to this request yielded this information:**

- Guns: 0**
- BB Guns: 1**
- Knives - All Small Pocket: 5**

This information makes clear that, within GCISD’s schools, the kids are safe from weapons. In this district, then, HB3 is about outside threats only.

# BLUE 6 INVESTIGATIONS

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# Preparations for New Bond in Progress

## Executive Summary

In preparation for considering whether a bond proposal should be presented to the Board of Trustees for approval, the district formed two committees. The first was a Long-Range Planning Committee (LRPC) that recently completed its task of evaluating and ranking the needs of the district. The second is the Bond Advisory Committee (BAC), which will make a recommendation to the Board on what should be contained in a proposed bond package. The bond package, if approved by the Board, will be considered by voters in the May 2024 election.

The LRPC committee was made up of both taxpayers (about 60%) and district employees (about 40%) (Source: GCISD TV, LRPC Meeting, February 16th, 2023). The LRPC has completed its work and the Bond Advisory Committee (BAC) started in August. This committee is made up of 51% district employees (not all of which are tax payers) and 49% non-district employees that are all taxpayers.

GCISD currently has over \$398.6 million in outstanding bonds that must be paid off. These existing bonds will not be paid off for decades. Any new bond approval will add to that obligation.

## Long-Range Planning Committee Details

The LRPC began meeting this past February to rank district needs. There were over 2,500 submitted line items. The first couple of meetings featured several informational presentations.

First, GCISD Chief Operations Officer, Paula Barbaroux, gave an overview of needs. Then the GCISD Interim Chief Financial Officer spoke on school finances and the need for bonds.

To many on the LRPC, it was quickly apparent that Robin Hood (aka “recapture”) took so much money from the district that the only way to cover larger capital expenses was through funds from bond elections. This point is the foundation of the idea that GCISD needs new bonds every five years or so.

Demographer Brent Alexander then made his presentation to inform everyone of GCISD’s declining enrollment. He pointed to Covid, GCISD’s aging population, and the prohibitive nature of the area’s higher median housing costs as the prime contributors. This declining enrollment trend is not expected to change in the near future.

The work of the Long Range Planning Committee has now completed. The most important takeaway from the LRPC rankings was their recommendation to completely rebuild Dove Elementary and Colleyville Middle Schools (in spite of declining enrollment). Combined, rebuilding these schools would be asking taxpayers to hand over \$155 million dollars.

A second takeaway is that the LRPC committee was repeatedly told to make their ranking decisions “blind,” meaning that they should not consider the costs of their recommendations. They were assured that the Bond Advisory Committee would handle this detail.

## Bond Advisory Committee

This August, the Bond Advisory Committee (BAC) picked up where the LRPC left off. This second committee was given the ranked priorities of the first to determine what should be presented to the Board of Trustees for the bond.

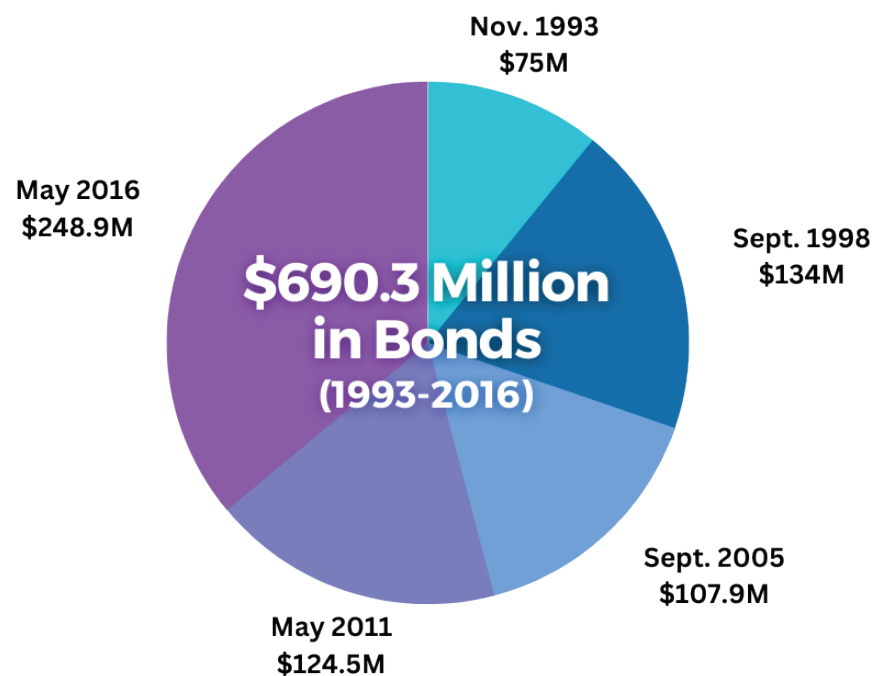
During the August 17th meeting of the BAC, one of the first votes of the participants concerned what percentage of votes was needed to reach a consensus. A secondary point was brought up that not all of the participants were GCISD taxpayers, so the percentage vote would be skewed. The issue is that individuals who wouldn’t help pay for the bond would be able to choose what was on it. Concerned participants were told this issue would be addressed at successive meetings.

When the BAC does give its recommendations, it will create two separate bond packages: 1) basic needs and 2) sustain and advance. It is unknown which package would include rebuilding Dove Elementary and Colleyville Middle Schools, if any.

## Conclusion

As the district collaborates with community members to assess GCISD’s needs, it’s incredibly important that it be transparent about both its data collection methods and its committee membership to avoid the appearance of bias. Without this transparency, the district risks losing taxpayer trust, causing voters to look unfavorably upon their recommendations.

## GCISD Bonds 1993-1996



Source: [gcisdbond2016.com/previous-bond-work](http://gcisdbond2016.com/previous-bond-work)



## Remaining Debt Service

**\$398.6 Million Owed**



**Bond Series**  
Source: GCISD

## Robin Hood

Recapture (aka “Robin Hood”) is a legal and financial mechanism that allows the State of Texas to take GCISD’s local maintenance and operations (M&O) property tax dollars and redistribute them to other districts throughout the state using a specific formula. The idea is to equalize funding for each school district; districts with more money fund districts with less money, and the state chooses who gives and who receives.

Robin Hood recapture is a real problem for GCISD and many other school districts in Texas. Over 90% of the money a school district has to spend on maintenance and operations is determined by the state formula. Unfortunately, the legislature has not kept the school funding formulas up to date with the rapidly rising property values in Texas, and especially in the NE Tarrant metroplex.

As a result, the state is actually taking in more overall M&O dollars from school districts than it distributes to districts through the state funding formulas. This has contributed to creating a \$32 billion dollar surplus in the state coffers.

**GCISD has paid the state of Texas \$855 million dollars in recapture since it began.**

GCISD would benefit greatly from keeping its M&O tax revenue to support its local students. Currently 39% of GCISD’s M&O tax revenue gets recaptured by the state – over \$66 million this coming year. This is all in spite of the fact that over 25% of the district’s population is economically disadvantaged and that student enrollment is declining (mostly due to the natural aging of the population).

As long as Robin Hood exists, or until the state legislature does its job and revises the state funding formula per student, GCISD will struggle to balance its budget and will consistently need to ask taxpayers for bond money for capital facility maintenance/expenditures. At the same time, since 87% of GCISD’s M&O revenue is spent on salaries, it is critical that the district operates at appropriate and efficient staffing levels.

Regardless of Robin Hood, the Board of Trustees passed a balanced budget again last June.

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# What is the GPA Game?

## Not all games are played on a field.

Student performance is measured by grades, and those grades roll into a student's Grade Point Average (their GPA, for short). The higher the grade in a class students earn, the more GPA points they get ... usually.

**This is where the "GPA Game" comes in.** Students playing the GPA game know that getting an "A" in some classes will help their GPA more than in others. These high leverage classes are called "Advanced Placement" ("AP"). AP classes are more rigorous than "advanced" classes or "at-level" classes, so their grades are weighted higher in the GPA game.

GCISD's breakdown for weighting GPA gives preferential treatment for any class labeled "AP." The district offers more than 20 AP classes, so students have a variety of options for playing the game, depending on their desired outcome.

Note that Pre-AP classes are considered "Advanced" for weighting purposes. Also note that "GT" status does not influence the game. Those classes are just another section within the AP or Advanced weighting categories.

### Selected GPA Scales

| Course Grade | AP or GT-AP | Advanced or GT-Adv. | At-Level Courses |
|--------------|-------------|---------------------|------------------|
| 97-100       | 6.0         | 5.0                 | 4.0              |
| 94-96        | 5.8         | 4.8                 | 3.8              |
| 90-93        | 5.6         | 4.6                 | 3.6              |
| 87-89        | 5.4         | 4.4                 | 3.4              |
| 84-86        | 5.2         | 4.2                 | 3.2              |
| 80-83        | 5.0         | 4.0                 | 3.0              |
| 77-79        | 4.8         | 3.8                 | 2.8              |
| 74-76        | 4.6         | 3.6                 | 2.6              |
| 71-73        | 4.4         | 3.4                 | 2.4              |
| 70           | 4.2         | 3.2                 | 2.2              |

**The lowest "C" in an AP course is weighted higher than the highest "A" in an At-Level course.**

\*AP is a registered trademark of the College Board.

**Here are three scenarios for highly academically competitive students who are playing or may wish to play the GPA game.**

### #1 How to get into the top 10% of a graduating class

For students interested in graduating in the top 10% of their class, they will need to be aware of how the GPA system works by 10th grade at the latest. The minimum GPA for the top 10% usually sits around 5.2 – meaning that for students who wish to reach this benchmark, they will need to take at least a few AP classes. Even with the inclusion of these AP classes, students must watch what other courses they take because earning a high "A" in any at-level class will drop their GPA (because at-level classes max out at a 4.0 weight).

### #2 How to be in the Top 20 of a graduating class

If students want to rank in the top 20, they will need to start gaming the system by 8th grade. Because the first four high school math classes (Algebra 1, Geometry, Algebra 2, and PreCalculus) are only offered in Pre-AP or lower form, students who want to rank will need to skip several math classes so that they are in the AP Calculus courses as soon as possible. This also applies to the sciences. Students who have to take Pre-AP Biology and Pre-AP Chemistry in high school will be at a severe disadvantage in terms of ranking, as they are missing out on valuable AP science classes that are weighted higher. To get an idea of how "skipping" classes works, check out GCISD's Acceleration testing schedule available for 2023-24 on their website.

### #3 How to be Valedictorian

To be Valedictorian (the top student in a class), start planning in early-to-mid middle school. Once in high school, take every AP course available and get a 97% or higher in that course.

Ideally, start Calculus AB by freshman year, as well as the AP sciences. GPA will always be pulled down by required Pre-AP English courses, so competing students will spend the rest of their high school career attempting to make up for the 5's weighted into their GPA by those early courses. Plan schedules well to avoid running out of AP classes by taking appropriate prerequisites. This means that, early on in high school, they need to take APs that lead to more APs later. These students should be taking 7-8 AP classes starting as early as possible.

This particular scenario is so competitive that it is unlikely that any adult who was Valedictorian when graduating from high school 20 years ago would even have had enough AP classes available to take to be a Valedictorian today.

In all three scenarios, students playing the game are likely to take some classes in which they have no interest, just for the ranking opportunities. It is also common for them to overload their schedules and burn out by the first semester each year. They tend to sacrifice hobbies, health, and relationships just to get those last fractions of a point, which can make or break their class rank.

### Final Thoughts

Not every student plays the GPA game. In fact, most of them probably don't know that anyone is playing the game at all. These students will still go to college if they want to.

According to Public School Review, GCISD's graduation rate has stayed consistently high (about 96%) for the last 5 years, so no matter how students choose to spend their time during high school, the odds that they are going to receive a diploma are extremely good. Students don't have to play any of the "games" to reach their career goals. There are many paths to success; they can choose the path that's right for them.



## Landmark Pay Increase for GCISD Employees



*GCISD new hires at orientation (Source: GCISD social media)*

The Board of Trustees at GCISD unanimously voted to implement a significant pay increase for all salaried employees. Effective at the beginning of the 2023-24 school year, everyone received a long-awaited salary boost of 4% of midpoint, marking the highest increase in more than a decade. Starting salary for teachers was also increased to \$59,250 annually – a bump of \$2,250 dollars from the previous year. Hourly employees received a significant increase as well.

A primary goal of annual salary increases is to provide employees with appropriate and proportional cost of living compensation. Skipping annual increases creates financial hardship for employees.

Additionally, the longer the time frame between increases, the more employers have to raise salaries later to catch up to the market. GCISD has been working hard to make up for its gaps in employee pay for years and can now finally provide a more competitive compensation package.

Chief Human Resources Officer, Gema Padgett, recounts her experiences with pay increases, saying “I’m entering my 11th year in GCISD and I’m very excited. This is the largest mid-point pay increase that ... we’ve recommended.” She continues later, saying “This 4% midpoint for the teachers is really a significant increase” (GCISD School Board Meeting – May 22, 2023).

Given phenomenal nation-wide inflation, this year’s decision of an unprecedented 4% raise to midpoint brings much-needed relief and recognition to hardworking educators and healthcare professionals in particular.

The Board’s approval of the district recommendation, which took place at the May 22, 2023 board meeting, acknowledges the especially vital contributions of teachers, librarians, and nurses in shaping the lives of students and maintaining the well-being of the district. They have all tirelessly dedicated themselves to their respective professions for years, particularly through the global pandemic.

The implementation of these salary boosts not only acknowledges the hard work and dedication of all GCISD employees, but also aims to reduce turnover rates and attract new talent.

***By offering competitive compensation, GCISD can improve the quality of education for all students in the district.***



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# Welcoming New Hires & Celebrating A Great Year to Come

This summer, GCISD conducted 10 new hire orientations. This energetic group of individuals has been abundantly welcomed to the GCISD family with Welcome Week, luncheons, and of course, staff convocation!

On August 9th, GCISD held “Convocation” for all of its staff at Chicken N Pickle. This is the first year that convocation was not at a school district location.

Traditionally, employees would meet at one of the high schools, and then switch schools each year. During Covid, everyone met outside at the Stadium for distancing purposes.

This year, both indoor and outdoor facilities were available and the event focused on just letting everyone have a great time!

Due to the high volume of GCISD employees and limited parking, they took shuttles from district locations to the site. Once they arrived, breakfast burritos, coffee, and water were available for everyone to enjoy.

A short program was streamed from 8:45-9:15 am on the numerous television screens throughout the building. Program speakers included various elected officials, Administrative leadership, and the presenting sponsor of the event.

The rest of the time, everyone mingled and played games!

Employee spirits were high and Convocation offered a few hours of fun with a great, fresh twist to kicking off the school year!

*Thank you to all Convocation sponsors: Methodist Southlake Medical Center, Universal Benefits Consortium, Randolph-Brooks FCU, Meow Wolf, Huckabee, the City of Colleyville, Baylor Medical, Jason Ridley Agency, Leasor Crass, and E-Source Miller.*







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## GCISD Alumni Return to Teach

A number of GCISD's new teachers this year are former students. Having grown up in this community, they understand how special it is. Establishing a pipeline of future teachers is a big part of keeping GCISD's positive environment and hometown feel thriving.

Check out what these proud GCISD Alumni had to say about coming home to the GCISD family!

*"I chose to come back to GCISD because it's a great place."*

*"I have really good memories here."*

*"When we had the opportunity to come back home, I couldn't pass it up."*

*"I really enjoy the environment and the family feeling of being a part of GCISD."*

*"It just felt like a very warm and welcoming place to be."*

*It was a great place to go to school so I figured it would be a great place to work as well."*

*"The community ... is something very special and not anything that you can find really anywhere else."*

*"Just so welcoming, so homey."*

*"I just feel this is a great district to work in."*

*"I wanted to come back to GCISD because it feels like home."*

**No better place to return than home!**

Source: GCISD TV, YouTube

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# FEATURED SIDE-BY-SIDE: State Legislation & GCISD Policy



The 88th Texas legislature passed several bills in its regular session that parallel policies passed by GCISD’s Board of Trustees in August of 2022. These bills and policies all address “cultural issues” related to protecting children’s bodies and minds.

## Texas Legislature

## GCISD Policies

SB14

### SENATE BILL 14

***Related to prohibitions on certain gender-related medical procedures on children***

State law prohibits gender-related medical procedures on children.

### MISC. INSTRUCTIONAL POLICIES

EMB  
(LOCAL)

***Teaching About Controversial Issues***

GCISD policy prohibits promoting gender ideology in K-12.

HB900

### HOUSE BILL 900

***“READER” Act: “Restricting Explicit and Adult-Designated Educational Resources”***

State law holds book vendors accountable for selling obscene materials to K-12 schools.

### INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCES

EFB  
(LOCAL)

***Library Materials***

GCISD policy removes obscene materials and requires parental consent for controversial materials.

SB15

### SENATE BILL 15

***“Save Women’s Sports Act”***

State law has female college athletes competing against biological females only.

### STUDENT ACTIVITIES

FM  
(LOCAL)

***K-12 sports participation is based on sex at birth***

GCISD policy has female K-12 athletes competing against biological females only.



# Helping Special Needs Children

**Featured Author, Jeffrey Marler, PhD, CCC-SLP**

## Preface

I was grateful for the invitation to share some of my experiences and reflections about how to mentor children with language-learning challenges. I am a parent of children with learning differences and was a clinical researcher for more than twenty years, with funding from the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD). I focused my studies to explore some of the factors contributing to language-learning challenges in children who otherwise seem academically competent. As a licensed speech-language pathologist (SLP), I was able to work directly with these children in clinical and home settings.

I also strove to develop effective ways to mentor their parents so that they could be their children's most effective advocates and teachers. My goal was to help parents learn their children's innate strengths.

It is my hope that the material in this article will support parents who are new to the public school admission, review, and dismissal (ARD) and individualized education program (IEP) systems. I'd also like to encourage those who have been around the block a few times.

## Identification of Need for Services

To receive specialized services in the public school system, a child must qualify under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This process is most often initiated by a teacher who has concerns that a student is not progressing as would be expected, thus triggering the state-mandated "Child Find" process. Parental authorization is then sought, at which time a team of specialists seek to "identify, locate, and evaluate" whether the student qualifies for accommodations (ARD) or for special education (IEP).

Possible areas of evaluation are reviewed for each child and may include educational psychology, speech-language pathology, occupational therapy, reading, academic learning, and English as a second language (ESL). The team of professionals then determine which areas to include in the testing process (i.e., diagnostics).

## The School's Evaluation Team

It is the school's legal responsibility to determine whether "at-risk" students' challenges are significant enough to benefit from classroom modifications (ARD) or if they qualify as having a learning disability under the ADA/IDEA.

### **The language of the law states:**

*"Does not achieve adequately for the student's age or meet state approved*

This article is about empowering parents before they sign their first ARD or IEP documents.

*grade-level standards in oral expression, listening comprehension, written expression, basic reading skills, reading fluency skills, reading comprehension, mathematics calculation, or mathematics problem solving when provided appropriate instruction."*

(TEA: Specific Learning Disability)

Before parents meet with the team, they will have been given a report of the test findings and a set of actionable goals for the student in each of the "disability" areas identified. Then they'll attend the meeting itself to discuss results. Unfortunately, by the time these goals and results are presented to the parents, they are usually overwhelmed by all the new jargon and are worried about how their child will learn in the long run. It can be hard for parents to focus on the goals presented by the committee – yet this is the most important part of the meeting!

This meeting basically constitutes the "contract" between the parent and public school; how and where the student's educational needs will be accommodated and modified; and what expectations will be included or removed. The important take-home message for parents with children who have been formally identified as needing accommodations (ARD) or qualifying for special education (IEP) is that if you:

- (1) do not understand how the treatment goals address your child's learning challenges and
- (2) if the IEP goals do not include information that teaches you how to work on these goals at home with your child,

then you are under no legal obligation to sign the document until your concerns are adequately addressed!

## What is an IEP?

An Individualized Education Program, or IEP, is the written document that is completed by an Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) committee for every public-school child ages 3-21 receiving special education services in Texas. The IEP is the centerpiece of the federal legislation best known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

The IDEA ensures "that all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living."  
(Texas Education Agency)



### Special-Needs Access, Challenges and Considerations

It is important for parents to realize that even if learning differences are identified during testing, they may not be sufficient reason to qualify their child for public access to services through public schools. The differences must be documented to clearly result in poorer performance in an academic setting than if services were not provided.

Here are three examples of children with a documented disability in which the child would not necessarily qualify for services:

- #1** A child with speech challenges with producing “r” (“wabbit” for “rabbit,” or “cah” for “car,” or “bwue” for “blue”); this may not result in a poorer academic performance
- #2** A child with a documented disability of sensory integration disorder with accompanying lowered muscle strength of the hands – impacting handwriting; because the child can hold a crayon or pencil with appropriate manual dexterity, he/she wouldn’t qualify under the academic impairment criterion
- #3** A child with auditory-memory deficits struggles to successfully follow instructions and learn the “language” of the classroom, but can still get by

Parents of these children want what is best for them, and they know that their children are struggling. Unfortunately, there are limited public funding options available. In this case, parents who can afford to pursue outside options absolutely should.

### Final Thoughts and Encouragement

Do not despair if the entire process of supporting your children in tackling disability challenges seems like too much. Often, people in the professions supporting these children entered the field because they want to make a difference for children. This is especially true for those who land in public education.

They want to help you in any way that they can – just remember that the law and financial realities of public education limit their resources too. GCISD’s Special Education Services Department has extensive services available for your children.

As parents work with GCISD’s education professionals, I would encourage them to be bold and confident in their ability to learn what they need to support their children with challenges, who they love dearly!

Your children are the greatest investment you will ever make. You have everything you need to help them become all they can be. Don’t worry if you feel a bit like the Cowardly Lion.

Remember, act courageously and you will find your courage. And so will your child.

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Dr. Marler with service dog, Kazou.



Kazou dresses as the Cowardly Lion to help a young boy find his courage!



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