NEISD faces difficult decisions due to decreased enrollment and state funding

Any student who walks through the doors at North East ISD receives a quality education with access to myriad support services and extracurricular programs. Because of this, NEISD is a diverse School District serving a large percentage of economically disadvantaged students and a growing number of English Language Learners. Despite the different challenges, students thrive in our schools. Last year, NEISD graduates earned more than $81 million in scholarship offers. Additionally, our schools earned more than 100 distinctions under the state’s accountability system.

Unfortunately, the District is seeing a steady decline in student population for the first time in its history. This is due in large part to growing competition from charter schools. State funding is based on student enrollment, so this has a direct impact on the District’s budget. Financial forecasts are showing tough times ahead for NEISD.

As enrollment continues to drop, even more difficult decisions may have to be made. NEISD is approaching Chapter 41 recapture (i.e. the state’s “Robin Hood” program) which means the District will be required to pay millions back to the state. It is projected that NEISD will send $7 million to Austin in 2019 and $33 million in 2020.

This is something the District was anticipating. However, because student enrollment is decreasing, it will force the District into Chapter 41 much sooner than originally projected.

What is causing this?

Texas relies on local property tax collections to fund public education. Yet, only about 25 percent of North East ISD’s revenue comes from the state compared to a national average of a 45 percent split between state and local funds.

As property values rise, local property tax bills increase. If your taxes aren’t frozen, your school taxes have likely gone up around $575, or 25 percent over the past 10 years. However, rather than using those increases to supplement funds for school districts, the state decreases its share to public education. Over the past 10 years, the funds NEISD gets from the state have gone down 48 percent.

At the same time that home appraisals have risen, our student enrollment has declined. NEISD is projecting another decline of nearly 1,300 students next school year.

What happens now?

North East ISD administration and the Board of Trustees have been forced to make difficult decisions to contain costs including instilling hiring freezes, foregoing pay raises, decreasing utility costs and cutting back on purchases in general.

As always, the District will continue to advocate for a fair school funding system where the state adequately invests in our public schools. First and foremost, our responsibility is to educate, motivate and graduate our students.
Blossom Athletic Center receiving much needed upgrades

If you’ve driven by the Blossom Athletic Center (BAC) you may have noticed a lot going on at the facility that first broke ground back in the early 1960s. With so much use of the center over the decades, it has come time to reconstruct and upgrade several key areas. BAC is currently seeing eight projects that include (1) construction of a new maintenance building, (2 & 3) new Home and Visitor field houses, (4) Comalander Stadium West Stand replacement, (5) Josh Davis Natatorium improvements, (6) Bill Walker Pool replacement, (7) tennis courts resurfacing, and (8) tennis center upgrades.

The work happening around Comalander Stadium features three major projects. The east side stands were replaced between December 2016 and July 2017, while the west side stands will be replaced between December 2017 and July 2018. Construction of the new 2,500 square foot field maintenance building is taking place between the baseball facility north side visitor stands and the stadium. In addition, athletes will start the 2018-2019 football season with new field house locker rooms to go along with renovated stadium restrooms. The construction package includes two new field house locker rooms (home and visitor) at the south end of the stadium to replace the existing locker rooms located under the east/west bleachers.

The North East Aquatic Center/swimming pools projects include upgrades and improvements to the Josh Davis facility, in addition to the replacement of the Bill Walker pool. Completed in December 2017, the Josh Davis Natatorium now features a new dehumidification system, ceiling fans, lighting system, airlock/vestibule at the main entrance, renovated locker spaces, cleaned tile and a newly painted interior. The Bill Walker Pool replacement is a major project with completion set for June 2019.

Lastly, the tennis courts resurfacing and tennis center upgrades project will feature four new tennis courts, tennis court resurfacing, lighting upgrades and a new facility entrance canopy.

“Safety is always our main concern,” said Jeff Hoffman, Assistant Director of Construction Management. “In this case, we have to be aware of the scheduled events at each of the BAC venues and be sure that the construction activities account for these events and that all measures are in place to mitigate any potential risk.”

Altogether, the total bond program budget for the BAC projects is $35,275,000. These projects were approved by voters in the District’s 2015 bond proposal.

If you’ve driven by the Blossom Athletic Center (BAC) you may have noticed a lot going on at the facility that first broke ground back in the early 1960s. With so much use of the center over the decades, it has come time to reconstruct and upgrade several key areas. BAC is currently seeing eight projects that include (1) construction of a new maintenance building, (2 & 3) new Home and Visitor field houses, (4) Comalander Stadium West Stand replacement, (5) Josh Davis Natatorium improvements, (6) Bill Walker Pool replacement, (7) tennis courts resurfacing, and (8) tennis center upgrades.

The work happening around Comalander Stadium features three major projects. The east side stands were replaced between December 2016 and July 2017, while the west side stands will be replaced between December 2017 and July 2018. Construction of the new 2,500 square foot field maintenance building is taking place between the baseball facility north side visitor stands and the stadium. In addition, athletes will start the 2018-2019 football season with new field house locker rooms to go along with renovated stadium restrooms. The construction package includes two new field house locker rooms (home and visitor) at the south end of the stadium to replace the existing locker rooms located under the east/west bleachers.

The North East Aquatic Center/swimming pools projects include upgrades and improvements to the Josh Davis facility, in addition to the replacement of the Bill Walker pool. Completed in December 2017, the Josh Davis Natatorium now features a new dehumidification system, ceiling fans, lighting system, airlock/vestibule at the main entrance, renovated locker spaces, cleaned tile and a newly painted interior. The Bill Walker Pool replacement is a major project with completion set for June 2019.

Lastly, the tennis courts resurfacing and tennis center upgrades project will feature four new tennis courts, tennis court resurfacing, lighting upgrades and a new facility entrance canopy.

“Safety is always our main concern,” said Jeff Hoffman, Assistant Director of Construction Management. “In this case, we have to be aware of the scheduled events at each of the BAC venues and be sure that the construction activities account for these events and that all measures are in place to mitigate any potential risk.”

Altogether, the total bond program budget for the BAC projects is $35,275,000. These projects were approved by voters in the District’s 2015 bond proposal.

Attention Visitors: Beginning in fall 2018, and in an effort to enhance public safety, BAC and Heroes Stadium will limit the size and style of bags allowed into events.

Prohibited Bags

- Clear tote bags no larger than 12” x 6” x 4”
- Backpacks
- Purses
- Camera bags
- Baseball bats
- Computer bags
- Skates
- Penny boards
- Umbrella handles
- Large painted interior. The Bill Walker Pool replacement is a major project with completion set for June 2019.

Lastly, the tennis courts resurfacing and tennis center upgrades project will feature four new tennis courts, tennis court resurfacing, lighting upgrades and a new facility entrance canopy.

“Safety is always our main concern,” said Jeff Hoffman, Assistant Director of Construction Management. “In this case, we have to be aware of the scheduled events at each of the BAC venues and be sure that the construction activities account for these events and that all measures are in place to mitigate any potential risk.”

Altogether, the total bond program budget for the BAC projects is $35,275,000. These projects were approved by voters in the District’s 2015 bond proposal.

Attention Visitors: Beginning in fall 2018, and in an effort to enhance public safety, BAC and Heroes Stadium will limit the size and style of bags allowed into events.

Prohibited Bags

- Clear tote bags no larger than 12” x 6” x 4”
- Backpacks
- Purses
- Camera bags
- Baseball bats
- Computer bags
- Skates
- Penny boards
- Umbrella handles
- Large painted interior. The Bill Walker Pool replacement is a major project with completion set for June 2019.

Lastly, the tennis courts resurfacing and tennis center upgrades project will feature four new tennis courts, tennis court resurfacing, lighting upgrades and a new facility entrance canopy.

“Safety is always our main concern,” said Jeff Hoffman, Assistant Director of Construction Management. “In this case, we have to be aware of the scheduled events at each of the BAC venues and be sure that the construction activities account for these events and that all measures are in place to mitigate any potential risk.”

Altogether, the total bond program budget for the BAC projects is $35,275,000. These projects were approved by voters in the District’s 2015 bond proposal.

Attention Visitors: Beginning in fall 2018, and in an effort to enhance public safety, BAC and Heroes Stadium will limit the size and style of bags allowed into events.

Prohibited Bags

- Clear tote bags no larger than 12” x 6” x 4”
- Backpacks
- Purses
- Camera bags
- Baseball bats
- Computer bags
- Skates
- Penny boards
- Umbrella handles
- Large painted interior. The Bill Walker Pool replacement is a major project with completion set for June 2019.

Lastly, the tennis courts resurfacing and tennis center upgrades project will feature four new tennis courts, tennis court resurfacing, lighting upgrades and a new facility entrance canopy.

“Safety is always our main concern,” said Jeff Hoffman, Assistant Director of Construction Management. “In this case, we have to be aware of the scheduled events at each of the BAC venues and be sure that the construction activities account for these events and that all measures are in place to mitigate any potential risk.”

Altogether, the total bond program budget for the BAC projects is $35,275,000. These projects were approved by voters in the District’s 2015 bond proposal.
The Big Give raises thousands for NEISD students

On March 22, the North East Educational Foundation (NEEF) joined more than 600 non-profits throughout south central Texas for a 24-hour period of giving, known as the Big Give.

This year, NEEF invited campuses across the District to create fundraising pages and promote them to their communities. The incentive was that 75 percent of all funds would go directly back to the campus, while 25 percent would be used for Districtwide grants. To top off the challenge, the school that raised the most received an additional $1,500.

Hats off to the top five fundraisers: DATA at Ed White Middle School; as well as Stone Oak, Huebner, Encino Park and Walzem elementary schools. Campuses got into the innovative spirit by fundraising an Escape Room, Chromebook cart, new Social Emotional Learning Space, STEAM projects, outdoor classrooms and many more wonderful projects. Congratulations to DATA for clinching the top spot with a grand total of $5,500 raised for their Escape Room project. They will receive the $1,500 prize.

“We are grateful and excited beyond words to all of the friends of DATA for trusting our vision of innovation in education enough to help us make this part of it a reality,” said Ryan Wayment, DATA teacher.

At midnight, NEEF reached $31,843—making this year’s Big Give the most successful in North East ISD history. Thanks to the community’s generosity, NEISD teachers and students will have the opportunity to learn new ideas in creative and innovative environments.

NEEF breaks record at 27th annual gala

The 2018 North East Educational Foundation’s Annual Starlight Gala, held on Feb. 23, was the most successful on record with more than 650 in attendance and raising close to $200,000. The night was full of milestones, as this gala marks the first to be held at the Witte Museum Mays Center. The night could not have been so successful without the generous support of our sponsors.

Thank you to the following sponsors!

Diamond
Energy Testing & Balance
Garza/Bomberger & Associates
Pfluger Architects
Terracon Consultants, Inc.

Starlight Gala Contributing Sponsor
Omni Hotels and Resorts

Gold
3Sixty Integrated
Bartlett Cocke General Contractors
Guido Brothers Construction
Joeris General Contractors
Marksmen General Contractors
Satterfield & Pontikes Construction
Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates

The NEEF Starlight Gala featured student performances, auctions, dinner, and celebration of public schools with community leaders, educators and administrators, including San Antonio Mayor Ron Nirenberg.
North East Achievements

**Roosevelt student wins best in show in VIA art contest**

VIA Metropolitan Transit’s annual Youth Art Contest kicked off March 5. All students in the Greater San Antonio Region were eligible to participate. This year’s theme was “Driving the Future,” asking young artists to imagine tomorrow’s transit options.

Angelina Gallegos, a senior at Roosevelt High School, and her teacher Kendra Slaughter were honored at the VIA Awards Luncheon on May 16, as the Best of Show winner. Along with receiving a $250 award, the artwork will be showcased on a VIA bus.

![Roosevelt student Angelina Gallegos won Best in Show in this year’s VIA Metropolitan Transit Youth Art Contest with this submission.](image)

**Colonial Hills earns funds for fitness**

Colonial Hills Elementary School’s application for the 2018 Funds for Fitness program was selected as a finalist by a review panel from the Texas Lottery, Gene and Jerry Jones Family Foundation and Dallas Cowboys organization.

As a finalist, their “Touchdown for Fitness at Colonial Hills” project will receive a $2,500 grant to help continue the growth of the health and wellness programs at Colonial Hills. Only one elementary school in Texas was selected for the $2,500 grant.

“Learning is at its strongest when the body is healthy and strong. We don’t only want our students to perform well, but to live long and healthy lives,” said Coach Terri Pitts.

**NEISD wins Best of the Bunch award**

Texas Agriculture Commissioner Sid Miller recognized North East ISD with a Best of the Bunch Award for its achievement in the Texas Department of Agriculture’s (TDA) 2017 Local Products Challenge.

Each October, the Local Products Challenge encourages school nutrition teams to incorporate more Texas products into meals and teach children about healthy lifestyles and Texas agriculture. NEISD earned the award by meeting the highest standards of the challenge.

“Schools in the Local Products Challenge demonstrate a real commitment to combining nutrition education with support for their local economies and Texas’ bountiful agriculture industry,” said Miller.

“When a school meal includes products like citrus, lean beef, or low-fat milk from Texas, it provides a lesson in healthy eating that lasts a lifetime and an economic boost that benefits the entire community.”

The challenge also serves up economic benefits for the entire community—each dollar that NEISD spent on local foods during October generated up to $2.16 for local economies.

**Three NEISD magnet programs earn $20,000 grants**

Three North East ISD middle school magnet programs each will receive $20,000 from the Verizon Foundation and Project Lead The Way (PLTW) to strengthen computer science-related curriculum. The curriculum will help students transition into high school level computer science pathways, according to the directors of the magnet programs.

The magnet programs at Ed White, Krueger and Nimitz middle schools will use the grant award for teacher training, as well as equipment designated by PLTW as essential to the implementation of two courses, App Creators and Computer Science for Innovators and Makers.

“We help prepare our students for college or a career anytime that we put practical technology in their hands,” said Fernando Ruiz, Director of the Design and Technology Academy at Ed White. “With this technology, we can guide our students through high-level lessons that allow them to discover real-world solutions to real-world problems.”

![Students at the DATA (pictured here), STEM and KSAT magnet programs will benefit from $20,000 grants that will strengthen computer science curriculum.](image)
Reagan band selected to perform at 2019 Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade

The Reagan High School marching band was selected to perform in the 2019 Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade®, representing the state of Texas. They received the news at a surprise presentation on May 2. This will mark the first parade appearance by the band.

Each year, the Macy’s Parade Band Committee looks for bands that have the stage presence, musical and marching abilities to captivate more than 3.5 million live spectators and more than 50 million viewers. Reagan was selected from more than 100 applicants as one of nine selected bands to march in the 93rd edition of the parade.

Reagan will spend the next 18 months planning for its parade appearance with practices and fundraising events.

Wilshire and Woodstone receive literacy grants

The Frankie Casseb Youth Literacy Foundation Club awarded a $5,000 grant to the Wilshire and Woodstone elementary school libraries. The students are looking forward to seeing new books placed on their library shelves thanks to this gift. Mr. and Mrs. Casseb have a long standing tradition of supporting North East ISD elementary school libraries. The Casseb family presented the donations to each of the schools on Feb. 23. The Casseb’s love promoting and supporting students’ love for reading.

Johnson athletes receive college scholarships from their booster organization

The Jaguar Pride Association (JPA) awarded scholarships to several outstanding Johnson High School athletic students for showing extraordinary determination, commitment and involvement with campus and community.

The recipients included varsity baseball player Sam Kaman who plans to attend Texas A&M University to study journalism; varsity soccer player Rebecca Franks who will study neuroscience at the University of Virginia; varsity tennis and track student Avery Huffman who will attend the University of Texas to study corporate communications; varsity football player Alex Rodriguez who will study engineering at Rice University; and varsity football player Chase Williams who will study biomedical sciences at Texas A&M University.

Stephanie Nemec, Jaguar Pride Association President, said all of these students were highly recommended by both coaches and teachers as leaders and exceptional young men and women.

The mission of the JPA is to support the development of all athletic programs at Johnson. The JPA works to support athletes in every sport by providing funds for equipment, travel and events. They also award scholarships to outstanding graduating athletes every year with the intent to assist students pursuing further education.

NEISD ranks among Forbes Best Employers of the Year

North East ISD was included in Forbes Magazine 2018 America’s Best Employers List. As the second largest School District in San Antonio, NEISD’s Tradition of Excellence is in the national spotlight.

Work-life balance, professional development resources and the opportunity to make a difference through the education of children are just some of the things employees like about working at NEISD.

“North East ISD’s mission to bring a Tradition of Excellence to all students is based on a foundation of support and collaboration, which is key to assuring that faculty and staff feel great about coming into work,” said Dr. Brian G. Gottardy, Superintendent of Schools. “We employ some of the most innovative and brightest educators and we are proud of the work our staff does every day to ensure student success.”

NEISD is among some top-notch organizations. Influential and well-known companies, such as Coca-Cola, IKEA and Amazon.com made the list, but NEISD managed to get an even higher ranking at 171 out of the 500 recognized.
WWII veteran continues to serve

George Lockhart, 94, has been a faithful volunteer at Regency Place Elementary School for the past 17 years. He began volunteering in classrooms to help students with math. For the past 10 years, he has been greeting students, shelving, and helping students check out books in the school library.

“I love being here,” said Lockhart. “This campus is the closest to home, and I had a need to help.”

Lockhart has lived a long life of service. He is a retired Air Force veteran who flew as a flight navigator in World War II. During his time in Europe, his crew participated in a mission called, “Operation Chowhound,” dropping food packages into Holland helping to feed the hungry who were under German occupation. His stories about this time in his life are astounding. After WWII, he became a meteorologist until his retirement.

“His being here allows us to keep the library open all day, every day,” said Dawn Fontana, Regency Place librarian. “He is a great role model for our students who adore him. They even express concern on days he isn’t here.”

Jake Cherry is newest Wall of Heroes inductee

Former North East ISD student and current retired businessman Jake Cherry is the newest inductee to the NEISD Wall of Heroes.

Cherry graduated in 1957 from what was then North East High School – later renamed MacArthur High School. He was a star football player who after graduation served in the military and then went on to become a successful businessman and community leader.

He currently leads the San Antonio Rescue Mission, a faith-based, nonprofit organization that provides year-round assistance to homeless men. Since 1975, San Antonio Rescue Mission has served more than 360,000 men.

The NEISD Wall of Heroes honors noteworthy individuals connected to the District with the hope of inspiring others.

NEISD graduate hasn’t forgotten his roots

Attorney Jacob Alford is a product of public schools and believes in the diversity they offer young people through social interactions and extracurricular activities. He also believes that teachers are the heart of every campus, and he and his law firm have dedicated time and funds to give back to them.

Alford graduated from Madison High School and then went on to complete college and law school. If you ask him, his career path began back in high school as a member of the Madison debate program.

“Freshman speech at Madison is what led me to be a lawyer,” said Alford. “After I realized I was pretty good at it, speech pretty much carried me through high school, college and law school and ultimately to the type of law we practice now.”

After he graduated from high school, Alford continued debating at UTSA and UT Law where he was in charge of his mock trial team and ultimately where he met his friend and now law firm partner Willard Clark.

“I have a connection to NEISD and public schools,” said Alford. “I was lucky to have such impactful teachers who really cared throughout my years at NEISD and that’s why we donate to elementary schools systemically.”

His firm has sponsored the Daddy Daughter Dance at Walzem Elementary School. They have also donated lunches for both PTA and teachers. If you walk into the teacher lounge, you’ll see snacks and drinks just for school staff that they provide.

As a partner at Alford & Clark, PLLC, he is proud to be part of a company that believes in the importance of public education.
Many of us take for granted the fresh fruits and vegetables that we have access to on a daily basis. Sadly, for many families struggling financially, fresh produce is not always an option. Without these important components of a healthy diet, a child’s health can suffer, as well as their ability to do well in school. In an effort to address the problem, a new partnership has been formed between North East ISD Family Support Services and the San Antonio Food Bank, so that fresh produce can be sent home with families who need it the most.

Family Support Services, managed by Director Tyler Shoesmith, serves homeless students and school-age parents and has benefited from the generosity of the community for many years when it came to nonperishable food drives. Back-to-school fundraisers and holiday donation drives keep the program’s pantry stocked. Without funding sources or sufficient refrigerated storage, fruits and vegetables were not an option until now.

Department staff can now make regular pick ups at the Food Bank for produce that they have in stock. Depending on the day, they can walk away with a truckload of fresh fruit, vegetables and more!

Once an order is placed online by a campus through a special ordering system, the food is packaged and picked up by Family Specialists who deliver it to waiting families.

Sandra Fernandez is the Family Specialist at Nimitz Middle School. Thinking about the needs her students have outside of school often brings tears to her eyes.

“Just recently, I had a student tell me the only meal she has every day is her school lunch,” said Fernandez. “That makes me think about what happens on the weekend when she can’t eat at school.”

Unfortunately, this is not uncommon. But partnerships like this are taking the burden off parents who often have to make the difficult choice of paying utilities or rent over food.

This program has been in development for almost two years, and is due in great part to the efforts of staff member Stephanie Jamerson. Currently being piloted in the Lee High School cluster of schools, the goal is to expand the program Districtwide over time.

“I’m so grateful for this program,” said Fernandez. “Fresh produce is not easy to come by. It is a huge blessing to our families, and it’s going to make a huge difference in their lives.”
Volunteer Spotlight
Liana Benavides

“I volunteer as a way to personally give back and also to set an example for my daughters so they can see the value and importance in helping others.”

Liana Benavides is first Vice President for the Hill Middle School PTSA. She is also the current Training Chair for the North East Council of PTAs. Prior to this, she was the President of the Bulverde Creek Elementary School PTA.

She has volunteered with NEISD for the past eight years, since her oldest daughter entered kindergarten.

Liana and her husband Ricardo have two daughters currently attending Hill. Danae is in the seventh grade and Natalie is in the sixth grade.