



## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Friends announces 2016 Texas Public Schools Friend of the Year, Ambassador of the Year and Founder's Distinguished Service Award**

(AUSTIN, TX) Friends of Texas Public Schools (Friends) is set to honor three with Friend of the Year, Ambassador of the Year and Founders Distinguished Service Award to: Texans Advocating for Meaningful Student Assessment (TAMSA), Pam & Representative Gary VanDeaver, and Texas' 20 Education Service Centers at the Friends 12<sup>th</sup> annual gala on December 7<sup>th</sup> at Baylor University's Baylor Club at McLane Stadium in Waco.

#### **FRIEND OF THE YEAR: Texans Advocating for Meaningful Student Assessment**

The Friend of the Year Award was established by Friends to honor those rare individuals and organizations who step up as champions for those who learn and work in our schools. Honorees clearly see beyond the sensational headlines and often negative politics and understand that the success of Texas public education is everyone's business.

"The Board of Directors at Friends of Texas Public Schools is pleased to honor TAMSA as our 2016 Friend of the Year," said John Costilla, president, Friends of Texas Public Schools and Director of Strategic Partnerships with myON. "TAMSA has made a substantial and positive impact for educators, students and families. They've led selflessly and courageously to persuade the state to do what's right for kids. On behalf of Friends, thank you TAMSA members for all you have done and continue to do every day to improve the Texas public school experience for our students."

TAMSA started in 2011 as a statewide, grassroots organization of concerned parents that supports a more reasoned approach to student testing. The TAMSA mission is to improve public education in Texas through the use of meaningful and effective student assessments that allow for more productive classroom instruction and more efficient use of public funds. TAMSA is a nonpartisan organization; working in a cooperative manner with school districts, legislators, and other key policy makers to develop meaningful student assessment for Texas students.

"TAMSA is deeply honored to receive this award," said TAMSA President Dr. Theresa Trevino. "We cherish it as an emblem that we are part of a wonderful community that strives to improve our children's educational experience. When we started our advocacy five years ago, we could not imagine the great partners that we would meet along the way. We have made a difference in how policymakers now look at student assessments. Yet, each [legislative] session presents a new set of challenges. If we are to continue to make student assessments more meaningful and less harmful, then we need to continue to work together.

"We need to ensure that policymakers are informed about the impact and the consequences of their decisions when it comes to measuring our students' achievements," Trevino continued. "We are adamant that one test on one day should not define a child's opportunity to graduate or be promoted. We know that students, parents, teachers and administrators understand the concept that a student is more than one test on one day. Now, we all need to work together to make sure our policymakers understand this and implement positive



changes in support of all Texas children."

TAMSA proposes that the state decrease the number of tests to no more than required under federal law, eliminate "high stakes" performance requirements and ensure the length and composition of the tests are age-appropriate. TAMSA also encourages the state to use diagnostic, norm reference tests, such as the SAT or ACT, which are already used by colleges to gauge student learning, rather than expensive state-specific high stakes tests.

### **Ambassador of the Year: Pam & Gary VanDeaver**

The Ambassador of the Year Award was established by Friends to highlight the efforts of an educator stepping up as a champion for the public schools of Texas, in hopes that he or she will inspire other educators to take bold action in defense of their good name.

"Gary and Pamela VanDeaver have exhibited the courage and bold action we intended to recognize when we created this award," said Scott Milder, Friends co-founder. "Both career educators, Gary and Pamela recognized the Legislature was not taking care of its public school business and made the courageous decision to step out of their public education roles and into the Legislature where they could affect desperately needed change on behalf of all 5.3 million Texas public school students. The VanDeaver's are to be commended for selflessly putting themselves out there against the unscrupulous opposition of the anti-public education establishment."

Gary VanDeaver, Ed.D., was elected as State Representative for Texas House District 1 in 2014, which serves Bowie, Franklin, Lamar, and Red River Counties in northeast Texas.

"The state of Texas is blessed with tens of thousands of public school educators who provide love and care on a daily basis to the millions of students in our public schools," said Representative VanDeaver. "These educators often sacrifice their own personal wellness, finances, and time with family to ensure that their students have the best possible educational opportunities. I have been extremely honored to serve alongside these dedicated professionals and now I am truly blessed to have the opportunity to continue to serve in the Texas legislature. At a time when our public schools are under constant attack, I am so thankful for Friends of Texas Public Schools and their continued commitment to telling the awesome stories of courage, commitment, and accomplishment in our public schools."

Representative VanDeaver is a member of the Public Education and the Appropriations committees. Prior to his election to the Texas House, VanDeaver was a 33-year rural educator, serving most recently as Superintendent of New Boston ISD in Bowie County. He began his career as a high school vocational agriculture teacher. Inspired by a deep-seated belief in serving others and investing in the rising generation, VanDeaver eventually completed a Doctorate of Educational Administration and became a leading voice for providing the best possible education for Northeast Texas schoolchildren.

Pamela VanDeaver is a native of Avery, Texas and is a graduate of Avery High School. She holds a bachelor's degree from Texas A&M-Texarkana. In a career that spans 30 years, Mrs. VanDeaver has served in three school districts, including Avery ISD, Clarksville ISD, and Maud ISD. She has served each district as Business Manager/CFO, where she said it has been her responsibility to keep her school district fiscally healthy in order to provide the resources necessary to equip teachers and other instructional staff who directly serve students. Mrs. VanDeaver is a member of TASBO, where she has served as the secretary of the local association chapter and worked through their mentoring program to help other Texas school business officials.



The VanDeavers have been married 31 years and have two grown daughters, a son-in-law, and best of all, a beautiful seven-month-old granddaughter, Susanna.

**Founders Distinguished Service Award: Texas' 20 Education Service Centers**

The *Founder's Distinguished Service Award* was created to honor organizations whose support and service has been instrumental to the success of Texas public schools. The 20 education service centers across the state have quietly served our public schools for the last 50 years, providing vital services that have enabled school districts to educate students effectively and efficiently.

“As a past superintendent in a rural setting, I can testify to the importance of service centers to the operational success of our school districts in Texas,” said Blake Cooper, Executive Director, Friends. “With the wide variety of services provided by ESC's, school districts can operate in a very efficient manner while providing the best learning opportunities for our students.”

The mission of the System of Education Service Centers is to improve student achievement in Texas by developing high quality services that enable schools to operate more efficiently and economically, and to support educators as they prepare the future workforce of Texas. Examples of these services include: access to curriculum and at-risk/dropout prevention programs; teacher appraisal and certification; training, consulting and professional development services; cooperative purchasing agreements for food, energy, and fuel purchasing; and technical support.

Dr. Jerry Maze, Executive Director of Region 12 Education Service Center, said he is proud of this honor, but the real honor is the privilege of serving Texas students. "On behalf of my colleagues in the Education Service Centers of Texas, we are proud to be recognized with this honor from Friends of Texas Public Schools, another group of great champions for children.”

*Friends of Texas Public Schools is a 501c(3) nonprofit, grassroots organization dedicated to restoring public confidence in our schools by promoting their many strengths and achievements. We believe the people of Texas have a right to know that, in spite of the many challenges they face, our public schools are achieving more today than ever in their history, and that the incessant, negative and oftentimes disrespectful conversation about public education is counterproductive to progress. To learn more visit [www.FOTPS.org](http://www.FOTPS.org).*