

Board Recognition

August 25, 2026

Cheek Middle School Named 2025–2027 National PTA School of Excellence

Cheek Middle School has been recognized as a 2025–2027 National PTA School of Excellence. The National PTA's program celebrates strong family-school partnerships that enhance the educational experience and environment for every child.

The journey to this honor began with a simple observation: the campus's greatest opportunity for growth centered on connection. Guided by family feedback, the PTA and school leadership developed an action plan aligned with two National PTA focus areas—*Speak Up for Every Child* and *Address Inequitable Outcomes and Access*—with the goal of meeting families where they were and creating more opportunities for them to feel connected to the school.

That work led to the launch of the Family Talent Directory in April 2026, which invited families to share their professional expertise, bilingual abilities, and other talents so the campus could turn to its own Charger community first when seeking volunteers, guest speakers, or classroom support. The results were immediate: the share of families who felt the school asked about their talents rose from 38 percent to 80 percent, and the share of families who did not know whether they had been asked dropped from 25 percent to zero. The PTA will continue the Talent Directory during the 2026–2027 school year to build on that momentum.

This recognition underscores Cheek Middle School's success in building meaningful connections among families, staff, and the community—an achievement that reflects Denton ISD's commitment to supporting every student's success.

The Cheek 25–26 Executive Board consisted of the following:

- Andre'a Varnado – *President*
- Stephanie Scott – *Vice President*
- Lori Farrar-Kakashvili
- Jennifer Byers
- Eileen Gambill
- Chaia Sanazaro
- Monica Shaw
- Nadia Beauford
- Tawi Ferrell-Webb
- Mandi Futrell
- Shannon Edgar
- Jade McClure
- Dr. Beth Kelly

Catherine Bell Elementary Named 2025–2027 National PTA School of Excellence

Catherine Bell Elementary has been recognized as a 2025–2027 National PTA School of Excellence, a distinction that celebrates schools and PTAs working together to build strong family-school partnerships that support student success. The National PTA's program honors partnerships that enhance the educational experience and environment for every child.

The recognition resulted from a shared commitment between Bell's PTA and campus leadership to strengthen relationships with families and create meaningful opportunities for engagement. Guided by feedback from families and the school community, the PTA developed an action plan focused on two National PTA priority areas—*Collaborate with the Community* and *Welcoming All Families*.

To strengthen communication, the PTA partnered with campus leadership to expand outreach, ensuring school updates, events, volunteer opportunities, and important information were shared consistently across multiple platforms. To create a welcoming environment, the campus hosted a free Spring Family Dance celebrating its ten-year anniversary, bringing together students, families, staff, and local businesses for an evening of celebration and connection. Community partners hosted booths featuring food, music, crafts, and family-friendly activities, and more than 200 attendees participated in what was widely celebrated as one of the school's most successful and inclusive family engagement events.

These efforts expanded participation, strengthened community partnerships, and set a model for inclusive engagement. Moving forward, the PTA plans to create even more opportunities for families to participate while deepening partnerships with staff, local businesses, and community organizations. This recognition underscores Bell Elementary's commitment to family engagement and aligns with one of Denton ISD's Core Compass Points: Reciprocal Family and Community Partnerships—key to the district's mission of ensuring every student is supported and empowered to succeed.

The Catherine Bell 25–26 Board consisted of the following:

- Stephanie Thomas – *President*
- Sarah Moore – *VP of Fundraising*
- Azure Wade – *VP of Programs*
- Amanda Thomas – *Treasurer*
- Elizabeth Durham – *Secretary/Communications*
- Sandi Evans-Guin – *Council Delegate*
- Maleena Cobos
- Melanie Stanford
- Marcus Thomas

Denton ISD Singers Selected for 2026 Texas Choral Directors Association Honor Choirs

Three Denton ISD students earned selection to the 2026 Texas Choral Directors Association (TCDA) honor choirs, performing at the association's annual convention in San Antonio in July. TCDA is a statewide organization of choral music educators whose mission is to promote the art and artistry of choral singing and to support the pursuit of excellence within the choral music profession.

Selection is highly competitive. Students prepare and submit recorded auditions that are evaluated by a panel of choral directors from across Texas, and those chosen represent some of the finest young singers in the state. Once selected, students rehearse together under a guest clinician before performing for an audience of choral directors, families, and music educators from across Texas.

The 2026 TCDA honor choir members from Denton ISD are:

- **Allison Taylor**, Hawk Elementary (Now at Crownover Middle School) – *Elementary Honor Choir*
- **Alex Owens**, Hawk Elementary (Now at Crownover Middle School) – *Elementary Honor Choir*
- **Mia Smart**, Crownover Middle School – *Middle School/Junior High All-State Choir*

These student musicians were prepared and guided by dedicated choral directors **Christine Stratton (Hawk Elementary)** and **Charlie Lotspeich (Crownover Middle School)**. Their achievement reflects Denton ISD's commitment to fostering excellence in the arts at every grade level.

Denton ISD Musicians Named Outstanding Performers at the 2026 UIL Texas State Solo & Ensemble Contest

Three Denton ISD high school musicians earned the Outstanding Performer Award at the 2026 University Interscholastic League (UIL) Texas State Solo and Ensemble Contest (TSSEC), the highest individual honor available to a Texas student musician.

To reach the state contest, students must first earn a Division I—or superior—rating on a Class 1 solo, performed from memory, at their UIL region solo and ensemble contest. Of the approximately 100,000 student musicians who compete at the region level each year, roughly 25,000 advance to TSSEC. From that field, judges designate only a small percentage of soloists—historically about two to three percent—as Outstanding Performers, an award that represents the attainment of superior musicianship in the exacting competition of the state contest. Recipients earn a Division I gold medal along with the state-champion medal presented across all UIL events.

Denton ISD's 2026 Outstanding Performers (State UIL Gold Medalists) are:

- **Mark Eads**, Guyer High School Orchestra – String Bass Solo | Teacher: Michelle Hanlon
- **Nicholas Schiller**, Braswell High School Band – Bass Trombone Solo | Teachers: Matt Sawyer, Aaron Snipes, Taylor Sitzman
- **Wesley Duesenberg**, Braswell High School Band – Percussion Solo | Teachers: Matt Sawyer, Aaron Snipes, Taylor Sitzman

The dedication these students demonstrated in preparing memorized, advanced repertoire—and the guidance of their directors throughout the year—reflects the depth of Denton ISD's fine arts programs and the district's commitment to helping every student pursue excellence.