

TEXAS SPECIAL EDITION



THE STATE OF COACHING



EverRise

THSCA
TEXAS HIGH SCHOOL COACHES ASSOCIATION
& COACHES EDUCATION FOUNDATION

FAIR

EverRise in partnership with THSCA and the FAIR Foundation

Foreword

The role of a coach in a Texas public school is one of the most unique and influential in education.

Coaches don't just prepare young people for competition—they prepare them for life. They are both classroom teachers and mentors, shaping students' character, mindset, and resilience far beyond the field or court. In Texas, the athletic arena is an extension of the classroom, where lessons in teamwork, communication, time management, and discipline come to life in real time.

Coaching in Texas is not a simple task. It's complex, demanding, and deeply personal work. Our state is synonymous with athletic excellence and community pride, but behind every championship and every small-town Friday night stands a coach—often the steady voice, the consistent adult presence, and the mentor who helps a student-athlete see potential in themselves that they may not see otherwise.

Billy Graham once said, "A coach will impact more lives in one year than the average person will in a lifetime." That quote captures the heart of this report. Coaching is not just about winning games; it's about shaping lives. When done well, coaching builds young men and women who are stronger in spirit, more confident in their purpose, and better prepared to lead.

That's why this report matters. For the first time, we have the data to prove what we've always known intuitively—that **coaches are a driving force in student development**. The findings confirm that when coaches are trained, supported, and given the tools to succeed, student-athletes thrive not only in their sport but also in academics and personal growth.

But it also reveals a growing challenge. Roughly 20% of coaches in Texas are leaving the profession each year. While some departures are due to retirement, many are not. Increasing stress, expanding responsibilities, and a lack of support are leading talented educators away from coaching. Losing even one great coach means losing the positive impact they could have had on hundreds of young lives. We cannot afford that loss.

This report serves as both validation and a call to action. It validates the essential role coaches play in the educational ecosystem and challenges us to invest in them—to provide the professional development, mentorship, and respect they deserve. It proves that a highly qualified coach is critical to the success of a school and the vitality of a community.

In Texas, we've always believed that athletics is about more than wins and losses. It's about preparing students for life beyond sports. Every rep, every practice, and every challenge is an opportunity to teach perseverance, teamwork, and accountability. That's what sets our coaches apart, and that's what makes Texas special.

Now more than ever, we must recognize coaching as one of the most impactful professions in education. Our communities depend on it. Our young people depend on it. And our future depends on it. Despite the long hours, the criticism, and the challenges, I still believe coaching is the best profession in the world. **Coaches matter**—and now, we have the data to prove it.



— *Joe Martin*

Executive Director, Texas High School Coaches Association

Foreword

This project has further consolidated the anecdotal evidence pointing to the growing need for teacher/coaches. It promotes the necessity of providing access to experiences, opportunities, and relationships for coaches and potential coaches that are in or are entering the profession. Providing access to information that allows for both personal and professional growth in the profession is imperative to retaining those qualified to be transformational in the profession. The Texas A&M Coaching Academy is committed to its mission to "Prepare, Promote, and Support" those in the profession and those with an interest in entering the profession. This data provides us the foundation to structure programming for the R.O.C.K mentoring program (a collaboration with THSCA), which supports young coaches in the profession with mentoring, as well as our F.C.T.A. Program (a collaboration with THSCA Education Foundation), which provides access to teacher/coach programming for high school students. We are grateful to the many athletes and coaches across the state who have contributed to this project, which is going to influence how we prepare, promote, and support the coaching profession as we move forward.

— **Michael Thornton, Ed.D.**

Executive Director, Thornton-McFerrin Coaching Academy



Learn about the Authors and Contributors:

EverRise - A Sports & Education Research & Data Company who partners with schools and school districts across the United States. EverRise led the data collection and theoretical framework efforts in this project.

Dr. Joshua Childs- Associate Professor at The University of Texas at Austin researches education policy, with an emphasis on school attendance, student engagement, and role of extra-curricular activities. Dr. Childs, along with UT-Austin doctoral students, Brooke Fousek and Jacob Navarette, led data analysis and generated findings for the report.

Foundation for the Advancement of Interscholastic Resources (FAIR) Foundation-A 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization whose mission is to equip those who support students and student-athletes with the resources, training, and strategic support they need to make lasting impact—on and off the field.

Preface:

This report marks the second installment in a multi-part series on The State of Coaching in Texas.

Over the coming year, the series will expand to include:

- A state-specific report using PEIMS Data that explores the impact of coaching on student-athletes,
- A comprehensive research report examining national coaching trends and outcomes, and
- An in-depth exploration of the Pillars of Interscholastic Coaching

*While this report is designed to inform a broad audience interested in education-based athletics, its primary focus is on those who shape and guide the field: **athletic administrators, state-level leaders, national governing bodies, and—at its core—the coaches themselves.** Our purpose is both to equip decision-makers with actionable insight and to elevate the voices of coaches, whose work forms the foundation of interscholastic athletics.*



Introduction

Interscholastic athletics are a cultural and social phenomenon in Texas, serving as an important component within Texas education as well as a powerful economic engine, shaping communities big and small. The scale and competitive intensity of high school sports has influenced the state's identity, serving as a source of community pride, cohesion, and visibility. Beyond the field, interscholastic athletics participation is lauded for its role in developing lifelong skills within student-athletes, and coaches are an important contributor to that development.

While debates over education and athletic funding persist, the immense societal value of interscholastic athletics remains both universally celebrated and structurally undervalued. Student-athletes are at the center, as they are tasked with balancing academics with the demands of competition and representing the pride of their schools and communities.

However, it is the coach who acts as the primary architect of a student's athletic experience, and a coach's influence is expansive within a school and broader community.

Unlike other states, Texas coaches have the distinction of having dual citizenship within a school. First, they are employed as an educator within their school and/or district, engaging with students throughout various learning environments at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. These coaches are math, social studies, English, science, special education, and music educators. Or, they may be paraprofessionals, custodial staff, administrators, or district leaders entrusted to support the day-to-day functions of a school. Second, they are tasked as athletic coaches, visible community figures who occupy an influential space in students' lives—one that is frequently underestimated but exceptionally powerful.

For millions of Texas interscholastic student-athletes, navigating the intense pressures of adolescence can be challenging. With over 68% of student-athletes reporting they take honors-level classes or above (Advanced Placement, Dual Credit, etc.), the abundant pressure of allocating time is paramount for these teenagers. It is during these times that a coach becomes a valuable resource, support, and mentor.

Texas coaches are a source of stability, serve as mediators when addressing complex issues, and represent the values of education-based athletics throughout the state.

The demands of 21st century students require coaches who understand that the athletic experience can be a powerful engine for student-athletes' cognitive, social, and emotional growth.

The competitive sports arena—from a major 6A stadium to a small indoor gymnasium—functions as a powerful, real-world laboratory for life and professional skills. Across fields and courts in Texas, lessons in resilience, accountability, teamwork, and composure are not only taught through lecture; they are experienced through the elation of victory and the shock of defeat. One role of a coach is to mediate these formative emotional experiences, ensuring that a young student-athlete's journey produces character development and life-long healthy habits. **The legacy of a Texas coach extends beyond the final whistle**, fundamentally shaping a student-athlete's self-perception, work ethic, and approach to the ups and downs of life.



Interscholastic athletics in Texas is at a critical juncture. While enjoying decades of massive success, present-day challenges related to the hiring and retention of coaches, rise of sports-specific academies, and declining enrollment in public education threaten its legacy and future. As these challenges mount, the quality and stability of Texas coaches becomes paramount, and understanding where Texas coaches are succeeding and opportunities for growth will ensure that Texas interscholastic athletics is positioned for continued excellence in the coming decades.

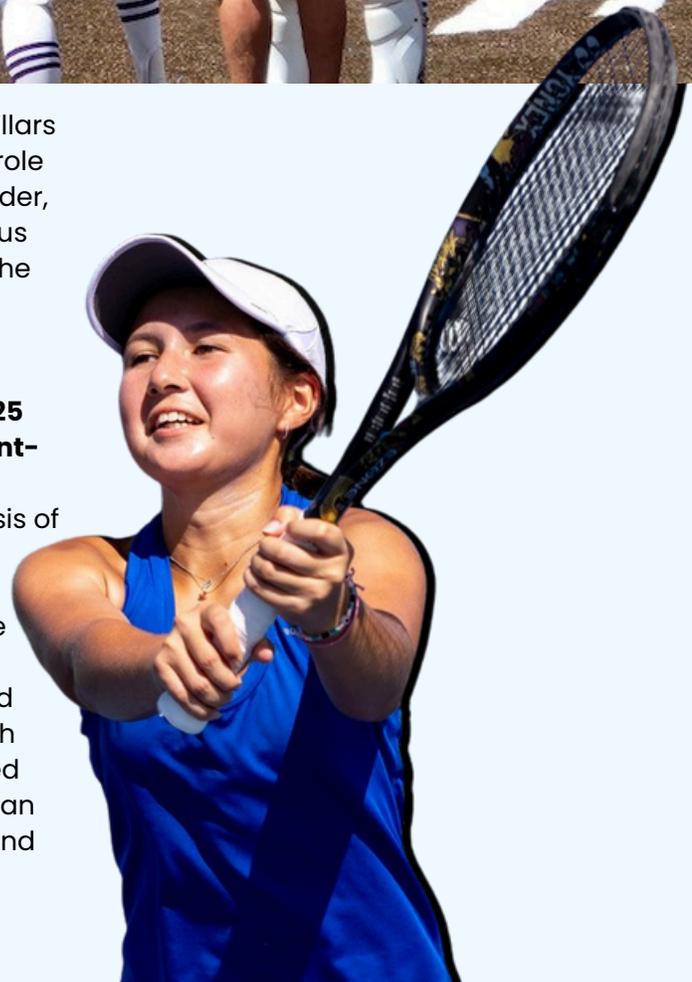


It is within this Texas context of interscholastic athletics that this comprehensive report is produced. **The purpose of this report is to move beyond anecdote and assumption, and to provide a data-driven and deeply researched examination of the men and women who are on the front lines of youth development: coaches.** To guide our analysis, EverRise has identified six fundamental pillars that serve as a framework for defining high-quality practice in the 21st century.



These research-based pillars encompass the coach's role as a teacher, mentor, leader, communicator, continuous leader, and guardian of the game's integrity.

Drawing on survey assessment data of **18,025 Texas high school student-athletes**, this report will present a detailed analysis of the current landscape of Texas interscholastic athletics. Additionally, the report identifies the key competencies associated with each pillar along with practical, evidence-based recommendations that can support Texas coaches and interscholastic athletics.



"As a Texas HS football coach, I believe that public education is the foundation of our communities in Texas and the key to shaping future generations. Education-based athletics provides a powerful platform for us as coaches to instill the value of good character, discipline, teamwork, and the value of service to our communities."

Chuck Griffin

Head Football Coach & Athletic Director at Georgetown High School

The Organizations of Interscholastic Athletics in Texas

The landscape of interscholastic athletics in Texas is defined by the scale, cultural significance, and a highly structured organizational ecosystem. Far exceeding other states' scope of typical extracurricular activities, interscholastic sports in Texas are a massive, year-round operation requiring meticulous planning and professional advocacy. At the heart of Texas interscholastic athletics is the University Interscholastic League (UIL). Founded in 1910, the UIL is one of the largest inter-school governing organizations of its kind. **Governing over 70 academic, music, spirit, unified, and athletic contests for approximately two million Texas students annually, the UIL provides expansive opportunities for Texas students to foster leadership, discipline, and sportsmanship through fair and equitable competition.** While the competitive environment that anchors Texas public school communities and shapes the development of thousands of student-athletes is managed by the UIL, it is supported by a robust and overlapping network of specialized professional and sport-specific associations. These associations ensure that every facet of the athletic experience, from the integrity of the officiating to the professional development of the coach and the administrative compliance of schools, is addressed by a dedicated entity.



Sport-Specific Organizations

Texas also has a diverse representation of sport-specific organizations that support coaches within their individual sports. Some of these associations include the Cross Country Coaches Association of Texas (CCCAT), Texas Association of Basketball Coaches (TABC), Texas Association of Golf Coaches (TAGC), Texas Tennis Coaches Association (TTCA), Texas Interscholastic Swimming Coaches Association (TISCA), Texas Association of Soccer Coaches (TASCO), Texas High School Baseball Coaches Association (THSBCA), and the Texas Six Man Coaches Association. These associations provide **sport-specific professional development, showcase events for student-athletes and coaches,** and connect coaches to **national sports organizations** that facilitate **networking and job opportunities.**

Professional Organizations

Texas interscholastic athletics are supported by numerous professional and regulatory bodies that work collectively with the UIL and other organizations. Some of these organizations are:



A. The **Texas Association of Sports Officials (TASO)** operates as one of the largest professional organizations for sports officials in the country. An independent and non-profit organization, its primary role is to **recruit, train, certify, and advocate** for thousands of Texans who officiate middle and high school contests. TASO officiates a wide array of sports and is organized into **more than 160 local chapters** throughout Texas.



B. The **Texas Girls Coaches Association (TGCA)** is one of the largest coaches associations in the United States dedicated exclusively to girls' athletics. TGCA serves as an **advocate for girls' athletics and their representation in Texas.**



C. The **Texas High School Athletic Directors Association (THSADA)** is the principal advocate and professional organization for athletic administrators. THSADA works with athletic directors to address **administrative, fiscal, and logistical challenges** unique to managing one of the country's most expansive high school sports systems.



D. The **Texas High School Coaches Association (THSCA)** is the **largest coaches association in America, serving over 27,000 members.** THSCA serves as a leadership organization for Texas high school coaches, providing education, representation, and services across all sports.



The Six Pillars of Effective Coaching



Connection

Building trust-based relationships that foster meaningful connections.



Psychological Safety

Creating environments where students and athletes feel safe to take risks, voice concerns, and thrive without fear of consequences.



Structure

Establishing consistent routines, expectations, and support systems that enable students and athletes to focus on growth.



Communication

Sharing clear, constructive, and effective information to build understanding and alignment.



Challenge

Encouraging students and athletes to stretch beyond their comfort zones, unlocking new levels of performance and resilience.



Skill Development

Focusing on advancing students' and athletes' competencies, ensuring they continually improve and excel—on the field, in the classroom, and beyond.

The Six Pillars of Effective Interscholastic Coaching

Effective interscholastic coaching goes beyond simply teaching sport-specific skills. Oftentimes, the success of an interscholastic coach is measured in wins and losses, but this metric fails to capture the full impact a coach has on their student-athletes. **Successful coaching is rooted in building relationships, fostering a positive environment, and nurturing the complete student-athlete's mind, body, and spirit.** EverRise has created a structural foundation to guide this holistic approach to coaching: **The Six Pillars of Effective Interscholastic Coaching. These pillars—Connection, Psychological Safety, Structure, Communication, Challenge, and Skill Development**—are not independent elements but a deeply interdependent framework that form the basis for a positive, supportive, and growth-oriented athletic environment. Each pillar supports and strengthens the others, creating a cohesive and powerful system for fostering positive student-athlete experiences and optimal development. A coach who excels in one area while neglecting another will find their efforts undermined. When these pillars are built together, they create a supportive environment where student-athletes can thrive in their sport and beyond.

The data in subsequent Pillars were gathered by EverRise during the 2024–2025 school year and consists of over 18,000 Texas high school student-athlete assessments over the fall, winter, and spring sports seasons. Student-athletes provided answers about their perceived relationship with their coach on a 1–5 likert-scale assessment (1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neither agree nor disagree, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly agree) that were then analyzed across each of the Pillars. Additionally, when analyzing student-athlete assessment results, EverRise uses correlation coefficients and p-values to measure how closely assessment answers within the data are related. A high correlation coefficient reflects two variables that are strongly correlated, while a low correlation coefficient reflects a weaker connection. Furthermore, the lower the “p-value,” the less likely the relationship between the two variables is due to random change. Recommendations at the end of this report will connect data to actionable items for coaches, administrators, and policymakers.

Pillar 1: Connection

Coaching is about building and sustaining relationships. Whether it is with fellow coaches, student-athletes, parents and caregivers, school and district administration, and the broader community, relationships can say a lot about a coach's program and long-term success. The pillar of **Connection** serves as a foundation upon which all other coaching endeavors are built. It is the ability of a coach to establish meaningful relationships that go beyond asking a student-athlete to perform tasks. **Connection** is about building a reciprocal relationship that is solidified through trust, empathy, and mutual respect. Coaches that build strong connections take a genuine interest in each of their student-athletes, both during and outside of athletics. Data from the student-athlete assessment indicated an average mean score of 4.3 out of 5 when it comes to the coach-athlete **Connection**. 75% of student athletes agreed or strongly agreed that they have a high level of **Connection** with their coach, and this has consistently contributed to higher GPAs and attendance metrics in the research conducted by EverRise. Overall, data revealed that coaches are successfully fostering rapport and belonging, which helps in building **Connection** and is an important foundation for building positive outcomes both on the field and in the classroom.



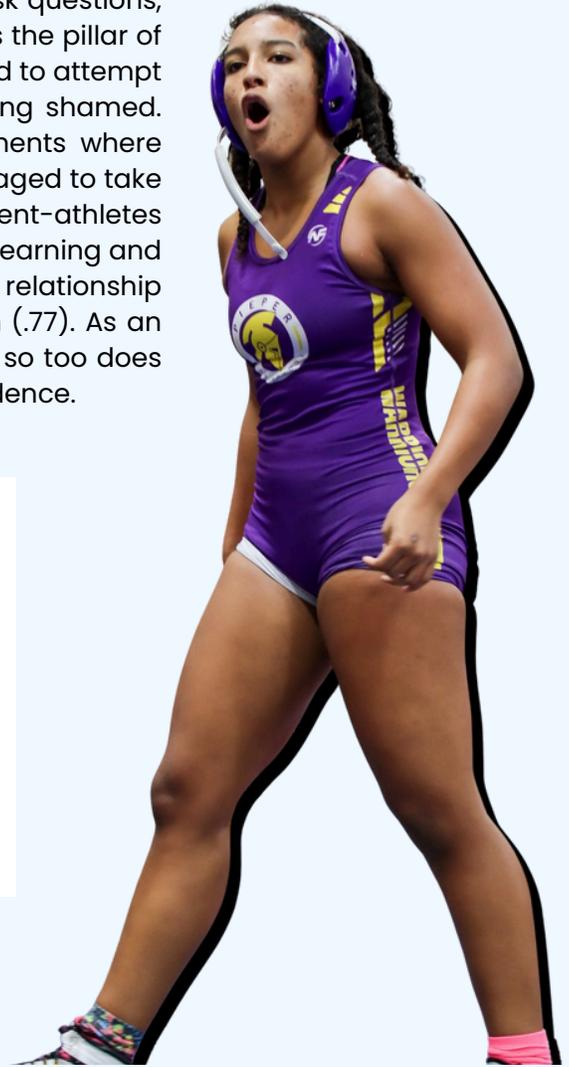
Connection is about building a **reciprocal relationship** that is solidified through **trust, empathy, and mutual respect.**



Pillar 2: Psychological Safety

80% of Texas student-athletes agreed or strongly agreed that their coach creates an environment where it is safe to make mistakes, ask questions, or voice concerns to their coach. This environment represents the pillar of **Psychological Safety**, where student-athletes feel empowered to attempt new or difficult moves, make decisions, and fail without being shamed. Overall, Texas coaches are successful in creating environments where students feel free from the fear of judgement and are encouraged to take risks. Across all indicators of psychological safety, 82% of student-athletes feel comfortable being vulnerable, a crucial element for both learning and personal growth. Assessment data revealed a significant relationship between the pillars of **Psychological Safety** and **Connection** (.77). As an athlete's belief that their coach cares about them increases, so too does their belief that their coach is successfully building their confidence.

Across all indicators of **psychological safety**, **82%** of student-athletes **feel comfortable being vulnerable**, a crucial element for both learning and personal growth.



Pillar 3: Structure

Structure provides the framework for the consistency and support that student-athletes need to be successful. It is within **Structure** that clear expectations, predictable routines, and well-defined boundaries are created. Assessment data revealed that student-athletes perceived a strong sense of **Structure** and organization within their programs. **82% of Texas student-athletes believed that their coaches were creating a Structure that could lead to individual and team success.** The average mean score of 4.2 for how coaches structure practices and their organizational skills shows that Texas coaches have created athletic programs that student-athletes are benefiting from. Texas coaches are effectively communicating expectations and providing a consistent environment, which allows student-athletes to focus on skill development and performance without the distraction of uncertainty which can lead to stress and anxiety. While it may seem rigid, **Structure** creates a sense of security and stability for student-athletes. It eliminates ambiguity and reduces the cognitive load of having to guess what's expected of them. When student-athletes know the rules and can rely on the coach's consistent application of them, they are free to focus their energy on skill development and performance. Furthermore, when coaches are highly rated in **Structure** and **Connection**, their student-athletes apply lessons learned on the team to relevant areas beyond the sport, such as in the classroom.

Pillar 4: Communication

Coaching is all about communicating. Whether it is with various community or school groups, players on the team, or fellow coaches, **Communication** is important for understanding, alignment, and connection.

Communication focuses on creating dynamic and invested dialogue. Effective **Communication** involves not only speaking with clarity and precision but also listening with empathy and an open mind. A coach must be able to speak their vision, provide clear and constructive feedback, and explain the 'why' behind their decisions. On average, student-athletes rated the clarity of instruction and quality of communication from their coaches as 84% positive.

Additionally, 86% of Texas student-athletes gave their coaches a rating of 4 or 5 when it came to their overall communication.

This shows that most Texas student-athletes understand what's expected of them and find the communication they receive helpful.



Pillar 5: Challenge

It is a coach's responsibility to create opportunities for their student-athletes to overcome adversity and expand their capabilities. **Challenge**, and creating environments for it to flourish, can lead to growth and resilience for student-athletes. **Challenge** provides opportunities for student-athletes to overcome adversity and expand their capabilities, and EverRise's research has shown a direct correlation between **Challenge** scores and increases in attendance for student-athletes. **Coaches that set ambitious but attainable goals, introduce new and difficult skills, and put their student-athletes in competitive situations that push their limits also tended to rate more favorably.** The key to effective **Challenge** is to pair it with ample support: a coach should provide resources, guidance, and the encouragement necessary for a student-athlete to meet challenges head-on.

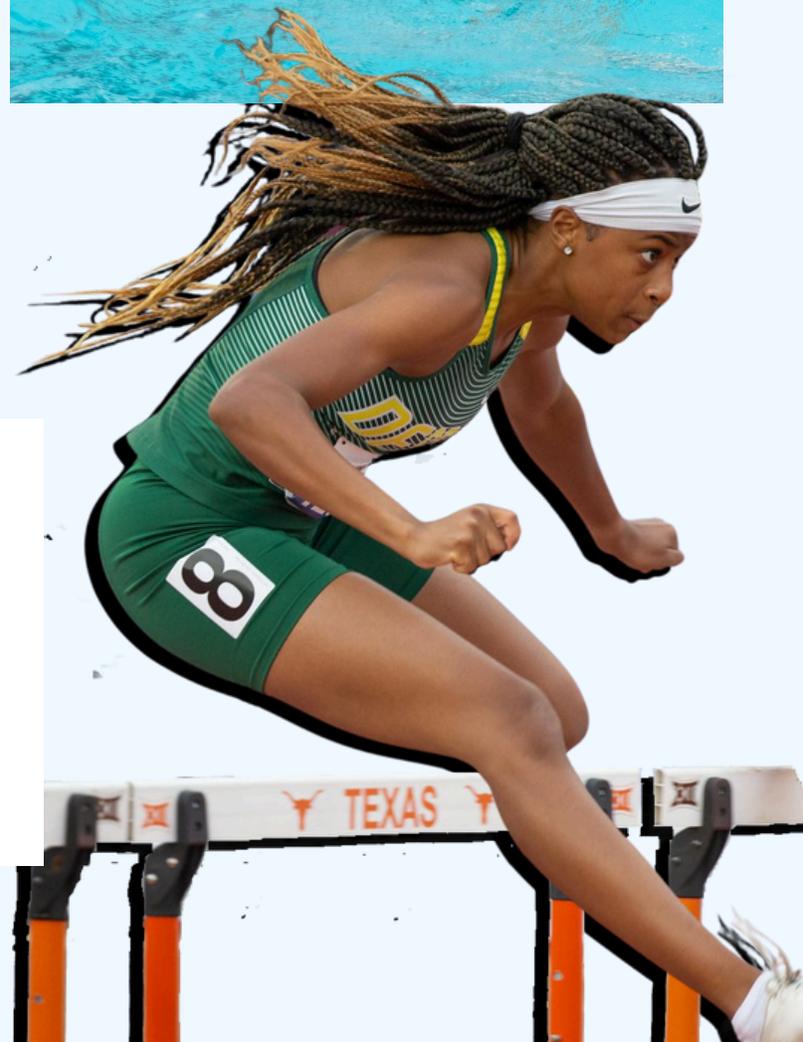
Overall, student-athletes felt they were appropriately challenged by their coach, pushed to improve, and encouraged to overcome obstacles. With an average **Challenge** score of 82% positive, coaches across Texas are successfully balancing the need to push student-athletes outside their comfort zones while also providing support to create psychologically safe environments.



Pillar 6: Skill Development

While all the other pillars are essential for creating a supportive environment for student-athletes, and are important components that lead to effective coaching, **Skill Development** remains the core objective of any athletic program. Teaching, refining, mastering, and then cycling back through that process continuously is an important function of coaching. One could argue that **Skill Development** is the most tangible and visible aspect of coaching. **Skill Development** happens when practice, in-game strategy, and self-assessment come together and manifests during competition. A coach with a strong foundation in this pillar possesses a deep knowledge of their sport and the ability to break down complex skills into manageable, teachable components. They also have the expertise to provide timely, specific, and actionable feedback that helps student-athletes understand how to improve. The assessment data indicated that student-athletes perceive significant improvement in their sport-specific skills, tactical understanding, and overall athletic competence under their coach's guidance. The mean rating for these statements was 4.2 out of 5, with 85% of student-athletes scoring a 4 or 5.

Skill Development is not only a standalone pillar; it represents a **type of outcome** that is **optimized** when a coach is **successful** at the **other five pillars**.



Texas Specific Highlights



This report highlights two unique features of Texas interscholastic athletics: high school football and athletic period(s). Texas high school football represents passion, invokes memories and deep feelings, and an overall love of Texas. **You cannot say football without also saying Texas.** In Texas, high school football is a way of life, a rite of passage, and a representation of the greatness that exists within the state. It is through Texas high school football that legends like Patrick Mahomes, Adrian Peterson, Kyler Murray, Vince Young, Baker Mayfield, Jaxon Smith-Njigba, Matthew Stafford, Earl Campbell, and so many others were made. These athletic legends, along with others that compete in other high school sports throughout the state that benefitted from an assigned athletic period. It is **during these athletic periods that student-athletes' skills are harnessed and coaches connect and communicate with their players** about academics, life, mental health, and social relationships. In the brief sections that follow we discuss data related to football student-athletes and the athletic period. These sections highlight what makes Texas interscholastic athletics special, and why coaches play an important role in making Texas a national leader for developing and supporting coaches and student-athletes.

Coaching and Friday Night Lights

Texas high school football is a one-of-a-kind experience that has a special place within the Texas psyche. The pageantry of 'Friday Night Lights' is its own spectacle, where an entire community comes together to support the local football team. The band, drill team, cheerleading squad, school administrators, teachers, student body, parents, community volunteers, alumni, businesses, and food vendors are just a few of the actors that play an important role in support of game night.

High school football in Texas acts as a proxy for many towns' identity, and their legacy is captured through the number of wins, playoff appearances, and championships. The following section shifts the analytical spotlight from the scoreboard to the locker room, conducting an in-depth examination of Texas high school football coaches.



Overall, **Texas high school football student-athletes either agreed or strongly agreed that their coach helps them learn from mistakes (93%)** and learn the right techniques affiliated with their sport from their coaches (92%), compared to 87% and 86% from non-football student-athletes. Furthermore, 89% Texas high school football student-athletes agreed or strongly agreed that their coach admits mistakes when they are wrong, compared to only 83% of non-football student-athletes.

Texas high school football coaches create strong structures in their programs, as 84% of student-athletes agreed or strongly agreed that their coach creates an environment that has clear expectations and well-defined boundaries. Overall, assessment data highlights that Texas high school football coaches are supporting their student-athletes, creating connections within their teams and communities that are enhancing overall school culture and experiences.

The Importance of the Athletic Period

A value of Texas high school athletics and essential to the student-athlete experience is the athletic period. Clayton Kershaw, Cat Osterman, Nneka Ogwumike, Cade Cunningham, and Sha'Carri Richardson are just a few of the thousands of former and current Texas student-athletes that have benefited from an athletic period. In many instances, the athletic period functions as a daily, credit-bearing, in-school block of time dedicated to the physical training and practice of sports. The athletic period is a daily institutional commitment by many Texas public schools for the development of their student-athletes, serving as the critical juncture where academic life and competitive sports intersect.

The educational function of this period extends well beyond physical fitness.

In many ways, the athletic period serves as a de facto academic support system, as evidenced by 91.31% of student-athletes noting that their coach checks on their academic progress.



By allowing practice time to be started and/or completed during the school day, the pressure on a student's after school hours is significantly reduced, allowing them more time to focus on academics and use after-school programs such as tutoring or access mental health services. For example, **88% of Texas student-athletes either agreed or strongly agreed that the athletic period helps them become better at their sport.** The athletic period not only provides a sense of **Connection**, but also **Structure** for student-athletes as they navigate their school days. Additionally, 82% of student-athletes reported that they have used what they have learned in the athletic period in other parts of their lives, showing how Texas public high schools, and more specifically athletic departments, are leveraging athletic periods to support student-athletes inside and outside of the classroom.

Finally, 88% of Texas student-athletes believe that their athletic period is the best use of their time during the day. These student-athletes recognize the value that an athletic period has not only on their specific sport, but also as it relates to their academic and personal lives.

The athletic period is, therefore, a central variable in the comprehensive study of Texas high school athletics. It is a crucial mechanism through which the state allocates time, personnel, and institutional resources to the athletic enterprise. Any analysis of the system's current state—be it on coach retention, student academic performance, or equity in extracurricular participation—must account for the time, credit, and administrative structure provided by this daily class.

"EverRise's data provides real numbers to the stories I tell about being a coach; that success isn't measured only on the field, but more importantly off of it. The future of coaching is bright, which in turn makes the future of student-athletes that have great coaches bright as well."

Chad Morris

College & High School Football Coach

Recommendations for Texas Coaches

Quick Takeaways

1. **Targeted** professional development
2. **Consistent feedback** cycles from student-athletes
3. Using **technology beyond transactional** methods
4. Show **vulnerability** and **growth mindset**

The findings discussed in this report highlight the importance of understanding how coaches evolve and sustain their practices to meet the developmental needs of student-athletes. The recommendations below are data-informed strategies designed to be immediately actionable in order to foster a culture of "**always getting better.**" Coaches are role models to student-athletes, and student-athletes view their coaches as figures of authority and examples of how to conduct themselves professionally.

The daily athletic period represents an existing, consistent block of time that Texas coaches can continue to use for **non-sport related development.** It is recommended that this time be formally structured to incorporate a dedicated focus on life skills and personal growth. With over 65% of Texas student-athletes reporting they are involved in another extra-curricular activity outside of their sport, time management and planning are core pieces of the development experience that can be taught in athletic period.

Texas coaches should continue to evolve their communication from reactive problem-solving to a **proactive feedback loop.** This creates a consistent, bi-directional system for both receiving and giving feedback. This system requires defined mechanisms, frequencies, and channels to ensure continuity and prevent feedback from being sporadic or solely performance-based. Receiving student-athlete feedback should be continuous, and be seen as low-stakes opportunities for student-athletes to check-in, provide opportunities for small-group listening sessions, and dedicated one-on-one time. The act of asking for and acknowledging feedback, even if changes are not immediately feasible, validates the student-athlete experience and increases their sense of ownership within the program.



Technology must be strategically leveraged not just for logistics, but as a tool to build **Connection** and create **Psychological Safety**. The current use of technology is often transactional; the recommendation is to shift this use to be relational. This does not mean increasing screen time, but rather implementing tools that facilitate asynchronous connection, ease coaching burdens, and provide other channels for support.

For **Connection**, this might involve utilizing a centralized platform for celebrating non-sport achievements, sharing positive and encouraging content, and acting as a social bridge even for geographically dispersed teams during the off-season.



To enhance **Psychological Safety**, technology can provide critical, low-barrier access to resources and reporting. This includes implementing an anonymous tip or communication line for reporting concerns, providing confidential access to mental health resources and appointment scheduling, or creating a digital library of developmental materials.

Finally, Texas coaches influence the culture of their school and community. Texas coaches should **actively model vulnerability and growth mindset** in their daily interactions. A culture of perfectionism stifles learning and breeds fear;

a culture of growth and openness encourages risk-taking and resilience. Modeling vulnerability means that leaders occasionally share their own appropriate professional struggles, acknowledge their own mistakes, and clearly articulate the process they used to overcome a challenge. This action humanizes the leadership and sends a powerful message that imperfection is a normal part of the process, not a failure, and allows mistakes to be a part of the learning process.



Recommendations

For Athletic Directors and School Administrations

Athletic directors and school administrators play a pivotal role in shaping the culture of interscholastic athletics. To truly serve student-athletes, administrators should consider integrating the six pillars into every facet of the professional development process for teachers and coaches. This will require a strategic shift in how resources are allocated and success is measured. Additionally, administrators should find ways to streamline coaching and non-coaching responsibilities for their coaches to lessen stress and improve overall quality of health for their coaches.

Athletic directors and school administrators should prioritize training, continuous learning, and support that directly target areas of growth identified by student-athletes for their coaches. Rather than a one-size-fits-all approach, professional development budgets should be directed toward specialized workshops and programs. For example, if student-athletes' feedback indicates low satisfaction with coach-athlete communication, allocating targeted resources towards communication workshops, conflict resolution training, and seminars on active listening could be beneficial. Data-informed resource allocation ensures that investments are impactful and address the most pressing needs.

Quick Takeaways

1. **Allocate** professional development based on needs
2. **Partner** with universities to grow future coaches
3. **Implement** the Six Pillars during coach interviews
4. **Protect** athletic period



To ensure a sustainable pipeline of high-quality, education-minded coaches, school districts must proactively engage with and invest in college students pursuing degrees in physical education, sports management, and related fields. This investment is an essential long-term strategy for talent acquisition. Programs such as Texas A&M University's Future Coaches of Texas Association (FCTA), a program that introduces young adults to the fundamentals of coaching, is a great opportunity for athletic directors and administrators to expand their talent pool. School districts could look to formalize partnerships with university education and kinesiology departments to establish official teacher-coach internships at the middle and high school levels. Through these partnerships, future coaches would have mentor coaches who would provide opportunities for learning about coaching methodologies, team management, student-athlete development, and balancing the demands of being a teacher-coach.

The quality of an athletic program is intrinsically linked to the caliber and commitment of its coaching staff. The hiring process should evaluate wins and losses, and focus on educational leadership, mentorship capacity, and alignment with the school's mission. Athletic directors and school administrators should implement behavioral interviewing techniques using scenario-based questions that assess a candidate's philosophy on handling conflict, promoting psychological safety, dealing with mental health issues, and fostering inclusive team environments. Questions could probe specific past actions, such as, "Describe a time you prioritized a student-athlete's well-being over a critical game outcome," or "How do you manage a parent who is overly critical of a player?" This provides tangible evidence of a candidate's commitment to developmental coaching.

Administrators should support the athletic period as a time for dedicated focus on life skills, personal needs, and academic growth. The most critical

philosophical change required is the recognition that the athletic period constitutes a formal class where the learning can and does translate into mathematics, English, or science. It is a laboratory for applied learning in areas like kinesiology, psychology, leadership, and health. Elevating the athletic period to class status means that it must be protected from intrusions, cancellations, and trivialization that currently diminish its value. Use the structure of the athletic class to conduct mandatory, bi-weekly academic check-ins. This ensures that coaches are immediately aware of academic struggles and can provide initial academic encouragement or mandatory study hall assignments before students fall behind. The athletic period becomes the first line of defense against academic failure as well as the primary delivery mechanism for proactive mental health instruction. The protected time allows for guest speakers (e.g., sports psychologists or counselors) to conduct sessions on stress management, resilience, and identifying warning signs of distress.



Recommendations For Policymakers and Governing Bodies

The influence of interscholastic coaching extends beyond the boundaries of individual schools and communities. Recognizing this significant impact, policymakers and governing bodies bear a critical responsibility to establish a framework that actively develops coaching that is both highly effective and centered on the student-athlete. The findings of this report clearly necessitate a fundamental shift—a true paradigm shift—in how coaching is regulated and supported. We must move away from a model that focuses narrowly on basic certification requirements and adherence to rules toward a more expansive approach that fully embraces the **holistic well-being of the student-athlete**. This updated philosophy acknowledges that a **coach's influence affects every dimension of a young person's growth**.

To achieve this change, policymakers must mandate and create accessible avenues for additional professional development hours that are required for coaching certifications or their renewals. This targeted training should focus on vital, specialized topics such as sports psychology, advanced motivational techniques, and the intentional building of positive team culture. Providing this enhanced education will help reinforce the essential understanding that a coach's primary role is not solely focused on



Quick Takeaways

1. **Establish a framework for coaching excellence**
2. **Add certification requirements focused on character development and well-being**
3. **Protect the athletic period**
4. **Promote the Texas Way**





achieving victory, but on fostering the sustained growth, character development, and overall well-being of every student-athlete. This commitment to a holistic, consistent standard of care and development must be applied equitably across all schools and all regions within the state.

Additionally, policymakers should **actively promote and protect the value of the dedicated athletic period**. This structured time must be maintained as a core component of the school day, serving as a platform for both physical training and the critical personal development that athletics provide. Furthermore, to ensure program stability and high-quality instruction, a dedicated initiative is necessary to invest in research focused on coach wellness and long-term retention. This research should be designed to yield genuine, data-driven solutions for managing workload, supporting mental health, and reducing the high turnover rate among talented, dedicated coaches.

A powerful unifying element for all these recommendations is the active, deliberate leveraging of **The Texas Way**, which is fundamentally about **ensuring good sportsmanship among all stakeholders**—spectators, participants, coaches, and officials—during competitive games. This foundational principle should be woven into every facet of the new coaching paradigm. By officially institutionalizing The Texas Way as the state-wide standard for ethical conduct and character, policymakers can ensure that the core values of respect, self-control, and a spirit of competition guide all decisions, training, and evaluations within the interscholastic athletic environment.

“Just as coaches rely on data to guide their decisions in competition, we must also use **evidence to shape how we support and advance the coaching profession**. The undeniable **impact of a coach must be protected through intentional investment**—mentorship, targeted training, and advocacy that go beyond awards or sport-specific development to sustain a profession that transforms young lives and strengthens communities across Texas.”

Libby Pacheco

COO, Texas High School Coaches Education Foundation

Recommendations

For Texas Sport-Specific and Professional Organizations

Quick Takeaways

1. **Focus** coach development on the **Six Pillars**
2. **Promote** the **life-skills** aspects of athletics
3. Be a **champion** for the **Texas Way**

Texas is unique with an engaged network of sport-specific and professional organizations that support coaches, work to improve the quality of play within Texas interscholastic athletics, and partner with the University Interscholastic League. A key recommendation is to provide professional development opportunities that are not only sport-specific, but also focus on improving the quality of coaching based on the **Six Pillars of Effective Interscholastic Coaching**. In a state like Texas, coaching involves much more than understanding X's and O's. Texas coaches are also full-time educators and translate their unique skills as athletic coaches into classroom and school environments that benefit all students. Coaches should learn how the six pillars could impact their overall teaching, coaching, and student-athletes' well-being.

A second recommendation would be to build partnerships among organizations to support the value of interscholastic athletics in Texas. The public education interscholastic model in Texas sets the standard when it comes to engaging communities and schools to work collaboratively to provide opportunities for students. In public schools across Texas, interscholastic athletics are **co-curricular, and not just an extracurricular amenity**. Interscholastic athletics has a profound and intentional instructional value as an applied educational laboratory, fully integrated with the academic mission of the school in its objectives, delivery, and outcomes. The athletic environment requires students to master concepts directly translatable to academic and professional success, such as **time management, sustained effort, goal setting, and disciplined practice**. These skills are not incidental outcomes; they are systematically taught, reinforced, and assessed daily by coaches who function as specialized educational instructors. Sport-specific organizations should highlight how interscholastic athletics are co-curricular activities that support and extend the core curriculum, operate under the same administrative supervision as academic departments, and often involve faculty members in instructional roles.



Texas sport-specific and professional development should continue to promote the Texas Way, and find ways to get more schools, districts, and communities to get involved. Ultimately, the Texas Way positions high school athletics as a vital classroom for the game of life. It seeks to reverse negative trends in sportsmanship by replacing reactive measures with proactive character instruction. By unifying coaches, athletes, officials, and fans under the banner of Respect for Others, Control of Self, and Spirit of Competition, the Texas Way elevates the purpose of high school sports, ensuring they serve as a powerful force for teaching integrity, resilience, and community strength across the state of Texas.

Conclusion

The Value of Interscholastic Coaches in Texas

This comprehensive analysis of Texas interscholastic athletics, guided by student-athlete perception across the Six Pillars of Effective Interscholastic Coaching, moves beyond anecdote and substantiates the profound value of the coach. The data presented throughout this report is conclusive: **Texas coaches are not merely athletic instructors; they are successful leaders, mentors, and structural anchors of the student-athlete developmental experience.** Texas coaches represent a professional cohort that consistently meets the fundamental demands of high-quality, education-based athletics. The significance of these findings is magnified by the unique context of the coach's role in Texas. Operating as dual citizens—both certified educators and visible athletic leaders—Texas coaches occupy an unparalleled position of influence. The high-stakes environment of Texas sports, exemplified by the cultural phenomenon of football, demands a stable, skilled, and effective adult presence.

Central to sustaining this high quality of coaching is the athletic period. This daily, credit-bearing block represents a deliberate institutional commitment by Texas public schools to the holistic development of the student-athlete. The data confirms the period's efficacy: 88% of student-athletes believe it helps them improve in their sport, and crucially, 82% report applying lessons learned in the athletic period to other parts of their lives.

For the coach, the athletic period is invaluable. It transforms fragmented after-school practice into scheduled, protected mentorship time.

The athletic period is the primary mechanism through which the high ratings in Connection and Structure are consistently delivered, and any policy shift that undermines its function would directly threaten the established quality of the student-athlete experience.

The athletic period is not a luxury; it is a vital structural asset that must be protected and leveraged to reinforce the educational mission of athletics.





The data confirms that Texas high school coaches are successfully fulfilling their mandate as educators, mentors, and program leaders. Their ability to foster high levels of Connection and Psychological Safety while maintaining excellent Structure and Communication validates the state's investment in education-based interscholastic athletics.

The value of the Texas coach is not measured by the number of championships, but by the consistently high positive impact reported by the thousands of student-athletes they serve. Future policy decisions, administrative practices, and professional development must be rooted in the evidence presented by the Six Pillars, prioritizing the protection of the athletic period and the systemic support of the coach's dual, essential role. By recognizing the coach as the primary architect of this highly successful developmental environment, Texas can ensure its interscholastic athletic system remains a powerful force for student and community benefit for generations to come. **The goal is clear: celebrate the Texas interscholastic sports experience, invest in its flourishing by embedding the athletic period into student-athletes' schedules, and sustain and develop the leaders who manage the critical work happening every day in the locker room and on the field.**

**Authors:**

Dr. Joshua Childs, Brooke Fousek, and Jacob Navarrete-The University of Texas at Austin

Dr. Kyle Craighead, Ashley Olson, Mikaela Richter, Mary Jones-EverRise

Contributors:

THSCA, Dr. Mike Thornton, Thornton-McFerrin Coaching Academy, THSCEF, Dr. Zachary Taylor, Randy Eckker, Chuck Schmidt, Blaire Prukop, Kirk Reynolds, Stephen Mackey

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^[1] A statistically significant correlation is represented by a p-value less than .05