

# BACK TO SCHOOL 2009

“  
Next in  
importance to  
freedom and  
justice is  
popular  
education,  
without which  
neither free-  
dom nor justice  
can be  
permanently  
maintained.”  
”  
— James A Garfield,  
July 12, 1880



## Education: The real meaning

by writer  
**J. Michael Ross**

Shepherding the kids back to school each fall marks all kinds of changes – the end of summer, cooler weather, football and, let’s be honest, a lot more peace and quiet around the casa. It wasn’t always that way, especially in rural Texas. Some of our more senior seniors can remember a time when working in the field or milking cows was the first priority and school was a luxury. Only when the family was flush enough did the kids get to go to school when their parents decided they could spare them from the demanding rhythm of farm or ranch work. That’s far cry from today’s mandatory attendance rules.

**No matter what they say, most kids like school**

The *Oxford English Dictionary* says the Greek origin of the word “school” meant leisure, philosophy or a lecture place. At first thought, it might seem a bit of a leap for kids to agree with the *leisure* part of that definition, but apparently (no matter what they may profess when protesting going to school) kids would much rather be there than not.

In their teaching-teachers-about-teaching book, *Assertive Discipline: A Take-charge Approach for Today’s Educator*, authors Lee and Marlene Canter explain that even the most disruptive or seemingly-disinterested

students prefer school to the alternative of staying home alone or with a parent. That makes sense. School is where the herd of young’uns bunches up every day, and when you’re a kid, kids are the herd you want to be with.

**The ancient Chinese school teacher**

We’ve all heard the phrase, “Confucius says...” followed by some wise teaching. It turns out that Confucius, who lived in ancient China circa 500 B.C., may have been the world’s first school teacher in the sense that we think of teachers today. In that time, all teachers were government officials and only the rich had access to them. Being born of noble parentage, but in a family whose fortunes had all but evaporated, Confucius hired himself out to a nobleman who was willing to share his education with the young man as part of his wages.

Before long, he had mastered many subjects and others found he had a knack for stating profound thoughts simply. Soon people began to seek him out to teach their children. He was willing, and therefore one of the first crude forms of public education we know of was born.

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## Fall means football fever

by writer  
**J. Michael Ross**

Texas is synonymous with football and it’s hard to imagine one without the other. There’s even a fictitious high school football team featured on the hit TV show, “Friday Night Lights.”

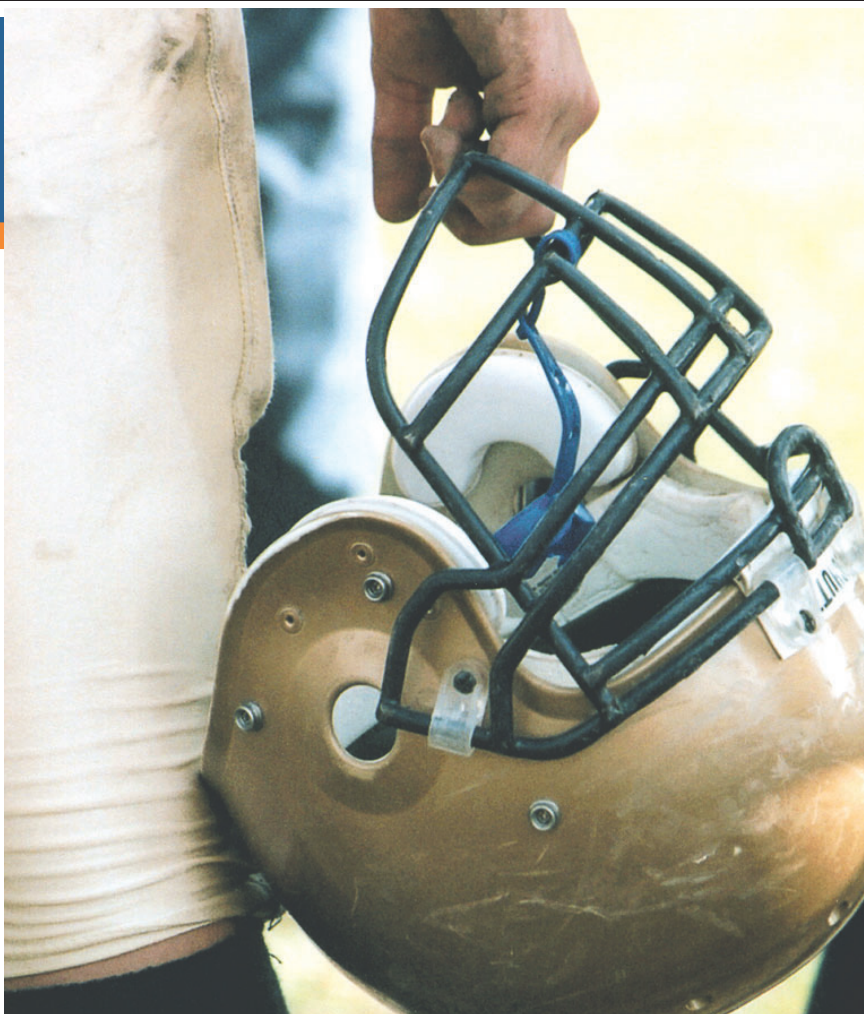
It’s difficult to count all the high school teams, but there are nearly 900 Internet links listed on the TexasFootball.com website, one of the most authoritative sites you can find on the subject of Texas high school football. And it’s a pretty good guess that there are another 50 to 100 or so additional teams without websites lurking out there in tiny, dustbowl towns, bringing the high school total to close to 1,000 teams.

But it doesn’t stop there by a long shot. Texas also boasts 31 NCAA football teams that break down like this:

- Division 1-A, 10 teams: UTEP, Texas Tech, Texas, TCU, SMU, North Texas, Texas A&M, Baylor, Rice and Houston
- Division 1-AA, five teams: Stephen F. Austin, Texas State-San Marcos, Sam Houston State, Prairie View A&M and Texas Southern
- Division II, seven teams: West Texas A&M, Midwestern State, Texas A&M-Commerce, Abilene Christian, Tarleton State, Angelo State and Texas A&M-Kingsville
- Division III, nine teams: Austin, East Texas Baptist, Hardin-Simmons, Howard Payne, Mary Hardin-Baylor, McMurry, Sul Ross State, Texas Lutheran and Trinity

And that’s just high school and college level football, not counting programs for the junior high

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## All because of football

*Hang on to that olive, kid!*

by writer  
**J. Michael Ross**

- Because of the resemblance, the Chinese often call the American game of football “olive ball.”
- The first known American football player to turn pro was John Brallier, who was paid \$10 to play for the Latrobe YMCA in 1895. (Fortunately, there’s been some salary inflation since then.)
- The first televised NFL game featured the Brooklyn Dodgers against the Philadelphia Eagles and was shown by NBC only in New York, where there were approximately 1,000 TVs, total. The year? 1939. (Think rabbit ears and aluminum foil.)
- Instruction given by Florida State football coach, Bill Peterson: “You guys line up alphabetically by height.”
- Torrin Polk, University of Houston receiver, said about his coach, John Jenkins: “He treats us like men. He lets us wear earrings.”
- Quote by Joe Theismann, former Redskins football great: “Nobody in football should be called a genius. A genius is a guy like Norman Einstein.” (Albert’s younger brother, also a genius, who came up with the equation: E=MC2.5?)
- Finally, this is hilarious! To watch the dirtiest trick play in football (or olive ball) history, go to [www.youtube.com/watch?v=cSnew1PIYqk&NR=1](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cSnew1PIYqk&NR=1).

## Back-to-school sales tax holiday

This year’s sales tax holiday for back-to-school shopping is August 21 to 23. While not required to participate in the holiday, most retailers don’t collect sales tax on most clothing and shoes during the three-day, tax-free weekend.

Blouses, skirts, shirts, t-shirts, pants, jeans and slacks are exempt from sales tax on the tax-free shopping weekend. Not exempt are more specialized and less necessary items of clothing such as sports apparel. In footwear, everyday shoes, running shoes, dress shoes and sandals are exempt. Items such as cleated shoes and fishing boots are not. Backpacks are also tax exempt for elementary and secondary school students.

Sales tax rates vary by county, but potential savings are between \$6.25 and \$8.25 on every \$100 spent. To see a more extensive list of exempt and non-exempt items, go to the State of Texas website at [www.window.state.tx.us/taxinfo/taxpubs/tx98\\_490/tx98\\_490\\_list.html](http://www.window.state.tx.us/taxinfo/taxpubs/tx98_490/tx98_490_list.html).

## Texas launches two college savings websites

### The Texas Tuition Promise Fund

Last year, in September, Texas State Comptroller Susan Combs introduced the new Texas Tuition Promise Fund, a state-sponsored prepaid tuition plan. The plan allows families to lock in current undergraduate tuition and fees at public colleges and universities in Texas, protecting against future tuition increases.

According to the College Board’s “Trends in College Pricing 2008,” college costs have risen steeply over the past decade. Costs at public institutions have increased an average of 6.9 percent a year while private colleges have seen an increase of 5.8 percent a year.

With the prepaid plan, families can buy tuition units representing a fixed portion of resident tuition and fees. When the student enters college, the tuition units cover all or part of tuition expenses at all public colleges and universities in the state, including two-year colleges. All private colleges in Texas and some out-of-state institutions will also accept the tuition units to pay a portion of the costs.

At the time of enrollment, the student must either be a Texas resident or the purchaser must be a parent who resides in Texas. Go to [www.texas tuition promise fund.com](http://www.texas tuition promise fund.com) for more details.

**Every Chance, Every Texan**

The Texas State Comptroller’s office has also launched a website where you can compare The Texas Tuition Promise Fund prepaid plan to two Texas *savings* plans:

1. The Texas College Savings Plan, a tax advantaged savings plan based on the provisions of Section 529 of the IRS code, and
2. The LoneStar 529 Savings Plan, a tax-advantaged savings plan for those who prefer the guidance of an investment professional.

To find out more, go to [www.everychanceeverytexas.org/savings](http://www.everychanceeverytexas.org/savings).

