Jay Lester is currently serving as Adjunct Professor at Hardin-Simmons University and McMurry University in Abilene, Texas. A product of the Abilene public schools, he retired from the Abilene ISD as Executive Director of Fine Arts in December 2023. He also serves as the UIL Music Region 6 Executive Secretary and as a VIP for the Conn-Selmer Company. Previously, he held the Director of Bands position at HSU from 2023-2026 and the Director of Fine Arts position in Victoria ISD from 2008-2012 and was the conductor/founder of the Crossroads Community Band. Mr. Lester taught band & orchestra in Odessa, Abilene, and Allen. The Allen band received the coveted Sudler Shield for marching bands by the John Philip Sousa Foundation in 2004 and marched in the internationally televised 2006 Tournament of Roses Parade in Pasadena, California. Later that year, Jay co-conducted the Allen Full Orchestra at the Midwest Clinic in Chicago, Illinois. Hardin-Simmons University named him as one of their Distinguished Alumni in 2020 and he was also named to Who's Who in America in 2022. Since joining the HSU faculty, the Cowboy Band has appeared before 1.2 million people with an additional 350 million on television. In recent years the Cowboy Band has marched in the London New Year's Day Parade, the Battle of Flowers Parade in San Antonio, the UIL State Marching Contest as a university exhibition band, at the Dallas Holiday Parade, at the Fort Worth Stock Show Parade (1st place in 2026), as well as many other local events, state conventions, and parades. In May 2026, the Cowboy Band represented Texas at the National Memorial Day Parade in Washington, D.C., as part of America 250 celebrations.

He earned both the Bachelor and Master of Music degrees from Hardin-Simmons University where he studied trumpet with John Daniel, Scott Mather and Dr. Leighanne Hunsaker. Other trumpet teachers included Bobby Brown, Dave Scott, Paul Hankins, and Stacy Blair. While at HSU, he studied conducting from Scott Mather, Dr. Loyd Hawthorne, and Don Hanna. Upon graduation, he was awarded the Spear's Gold Medal as the outstanding band graduate in 1994. Jay completed the MEd in Educational Administration from the University of North Texas in 2007. His post graduate studies have included coursework in music from the VanderCook College of Music, the University of Miami, and Hardin-Simmons University. In addition, he has participated in workshops at the Conn Selmer Institute, Texas Tech, West Texas A&M, UNT, Angelo State University, and the Ohio State University. Mr. Lester has presented at many conferences including the Texas Music Educators Association, Texas Bandmasters Association, Texas Orchestra Directors Association, Texas Music Administrators Conference, and the Midwest Clinic for Band & Orchestra. In addition, he has worked as a clinician or presenter in over 20 school districts and at several universities. Jay stays active as a music adjudicator as a member of the Texas Music Adjudicators Association where he judges concert band, marching band, and orchestra. Jay has judged the TMEA Honor Band and Orchestra contests at the Area and State level.

In 2016, he helped charter the Lone Star State affiliate chapter of the International Trumpet Guild (ITG) which serves West Texas trumpet enthusiasts. This group has performed at least 1-2 recitals a year in various cities around West Texas as well as at TMEA and ITG. Jay has performed on trumpet with the Abilene Philharmonic Orchestra, the West Texas Symphony, the Allen Philharmonic, the San Angelo Symphony, the Big Spring Symphony, the Lone Star Brass Quintet, the Key City Brass Quintet, the Corpus Christi Wind Symphony, the Texana Community Band, the Abilene Community Band, and the Crossroads Community Band. He currently performs on trumpet and bass guitar with the Celebration Orchestra at First Baptist Church in Abilene, in orchestra pits for local musicals, and for the Big Spring and San Angelo Symphonies. In addition, he has performed on trumpet at TODA, TCDA, TBA, TMEA, and ITG on multiple occasions as part of bands, orchestras, choirs, and recitals.

Jay is a long-time board member of both the Paramount Theater and the Abilene Teachers Federal Credit Union. From 2018-2021, he served on the UIL State Music Technical Advisory Committee and in 2019-2020, he served as President of the Texas Fine Arts Administrators.