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HARLINGEN
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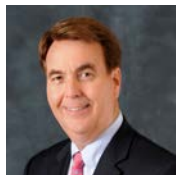


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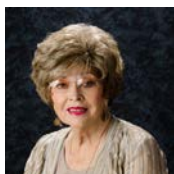




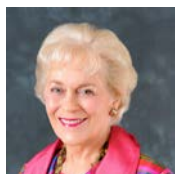
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A LETTER TO OUR COMMUNITY

We continue to move forward as a district through the collaborative work of our HCISD family and community. It's a unity that will propel us further as we embark on a continued transformation through our district's strategic plan "Transforming Learning for Global Achievement", which will shape our district for the next three to five years.

Our united mission is to offer every student educational options to fit their individualized needs and place them on the path toward global achievement in any field. I am proud to serve as the Superintendent of this growing and innovative district and work with the outstanding students, teachers, administrators, staff and Board of Trustees on a daily basis to stay true to our vision.

This innovative vision our district and Board of Trustees has led to the opening of Harlingen School of Health Professions, which will provide students with an early start on a career in medicine and the medical school process, and our Aquatics Center, a state-of-the-art wellness facility. And we continue our implementation of Digital Classrooms, Dual Language Academies, the Competitive Edge Program and Leader in Me Academy.

Keeping our vision a reality will take our collective advocating for continued transformation. To help you further share the message with our community, we have created some resources with more details on "Transforming Learning for Global Achievement." On your campus, you should find a poster listing the goals of this strategic plan and pamphlets detailing this program. We also ask that you please visit www.hcisid.org/transforminglearning for details.

We have the right people in place here to create world-class schools that improve the quality of life for all students. Thank you for your commitment to the mission and your support of HCISD students and schools.

Dr. Art Cavazos

DR. ART CAVAZOS

Superintendent of Schools



★ HCISD ★

PRE-ATHLETICS

A HEAD START FOR SPORTS AT HARLINGEN CISD

The experts agree: playing sports brings major benefits. This year, Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District is bringing those benefits to more students than ever with its new Pre-Athletics class.

Pre-Athletics is a year-long course open to sixth graders across the district. Each nine weeks, students in Pre-Athletics learn the basics of a major sport. So far this year, classes have covered football, volleyball, soccer, and basketball, with track coming up soon. By the end of the class, Pre-Athletics students will be well-versed in game rules and regulations, fluent in sports vocabulary, and able to play several positions with confidence. Best of all? The course counts towards the state-required four semesters of physical education. Sounds

like a win-win for budding HCISD athletes.

A typical Pre-Athletics class period starts with a quick warm-up. Once everyone's muscles are nice and loose, the day's "lesson plan" begins. Despite the name, Pre-Athletics lesson plans are quite unlike typical classroom instruction. Instead of lectures, pop quizzes, and group projects, students train with weights, work through drills, or compete in scrimmages. Instead of paper and pencil, students learn with soccer balls and gym equipment. For the over-750 students who signed up for Pre-Athletics this year, the daily chance to get moving has been a welcome addition to their school day. Many students have even reported feeling more focused in their academic classes since joining.

Of course, Pre-Athletics was not founded to give sixth graders a break from school day monotony. It's actually the result of a coordinated effort by the Athletics Department, District Senior Lead Team, and Superintendent's Office to meet two main goals. First, Pre-Athletics will help vertically align HCISD's middle school and high school athletics programs. At HCISD, school sports officially begin in seventh grade. Because of Pre-Athletics, many of next year's seventh graders will have a whole year of training under their belts, making them better prepared to compete and more familiar with the district's expectations of sportsmanship and scholarship. As the years go by, a "trickle up" effect will strengthen athletics all across the district.

The program's second aim is to support student wellness. HCISD firmly believes that a healthy body equals a healthy mind, and strives to offer programs that support wellness for students, staff, and community. Students who take Pre-Athletics not only get regular exercise, they also learn about the nutrition they need to keep their bodies in top form. All around the nation, people are working to become their healthiest selves. HCISD is right there with them, and is proud to add Pre-Athletics to its list of programs supporting health and wellness in Harlingen.

Pre-Athletics has something to offer every sixth grader regardless of athletic ability or knowledge of sports. As the 750+ boys and girls in this year's class will confirm, Pre-Athletics is not about winning. It's about learning the game, getting active, and having fun with classmates. All that plus two semesters of PE requirements? Sign us up!

Did you know?

Various data demonstrate that athletes have higher grade point averages, higher standardized test scores, better attendance, lower dropout rates, and a better chance of going to college.

- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services



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ZAVALA ELEMENTARY & ConnectEd

Teams Up To Transform Classrooms

by Annie Sykes

THE LAST MORNING BELL HAS RUNG, AND STUDENTS AT AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ARE SETTLING IN. THEY BEGIN BY PULLING OUT LAST NIGHT'S HOMEWORK. MATH WORKSHEET? DONE. SPELLING PRACTICE? YUP. SHORT FILM ON AN IPAD SHOWING THE MOST IMPORTANT SCENE OF A NOVEL, BUT SET IN A DIFFERENT TIME PERIOD? CHECK!

This scene does not, as one might think, describe a school set in the future. Nor does it describe a typical morning at a pricey private school. Instead, this scene reflects what life will soon be like at HCISD's own Zavala Elementary. A few months ago, Zavala Elementary was awarded a prestigious grant from Apple that will transform its classrooms and prepare its students for a successful future in this 21st century world.

Zavala Elementary is one of only 114 schools in the nation to receive a ConnectEd grant through Apple. ConnectEd grants are part of a national partnership between the Department of Education and some of the tech industry's biggest names such as Apple, Microsoft, and AT&T. The initiative's goal is to bring technology and internet connectivity to all public schools. Apple's ConnectEd grant is particularly sought after; it furnishes every student with an iPad, every teacher with an iPad and a MacBook Pro laptop, and every classroom with an Apple TV. To support all this new technology, Apple outfits winning campuses with state-of-the-art wireless infrastructures. Finally - and most importantly - Apple ensures that staff at winning schools feel both confident and excited about incorporating new devices into their classrooms. The company provides regular professional development and on-call support, empowering teachers to transform their classrooms with the vast educational potential of their technology.

In the coming months, Zavala Elementary will undergo this technological transformation, with HCISD augmenting Apple's training through its own professional growth opportunities. Refreshingly, both the district and Apple are firm on one point: It's not about the device, it's about transforming instruction. This attitude lets parents rest assured that students won't spend the day frittering on iPads, but rather using the devices to learn in ways they previously couldn't.

The addition of technological resources enhances the district's previously established Bring Your Own Device initiative, which allows students to bring their personal

tablets and smartphones to class. The initiative is practiced at all of the district's campuses.

What is the actual benefit of devices like iPads in education? The list is endless, but some major examples stand out. First, with the iPad, students can visualize complex concepts with the flick of a finger. They can learn, for instance, about the skeletal system by turning, magnifying, and manipulating an actual skeleton on their screens. When the organ systems lesson arrives, students simply flip a switch to see how lungs are protected in the ribcage, or how the heart supplies blood to the toes in real time. That sort of visual understanding, previously limited to museums or medical examination rooms, is now at students' fingertips.

And Apple technology isn't just great for students - it's a boon to teachers as well. One of the greatest challenges in education is ensuring that every student learns at his or her own level. With the new grant, teachers at Zavala Elementary can have their kiddos practice reading or math with apps that find their ability levels and adapt to their progress as they go. Furthermore, teachers can easily monitor their students' growth with dashboards that update in real time. This system lets any teacher quickly realize when a student is behind on fractions, pull her aside for some detailed coaching, and send her back on her way. The ConnectEd grant will help teachers at Zavala clear the hurdle of delivering differentiated instruction to all.

Above all, technology in the classroom makes learning exciting. With Apple programs like iBooks Author, students can make their own books - complete with interactive illustrations - and share them instantly with the whole class. They can apply their knowledge of theme and mood by using GarageBand to create a soundtrack to an important book scene. With so many possibilities, Zavala teachers and students will soon enjoy the greater engagement that comes from infusing paper-and-pencil classrooms with Apple technology.

The team at Zavala Elementary could not be more thrilled about this new chapter in their school's history (with the possible exception of Zavala's current fifth graders, who are practically offering to postpone middle school to be around for next year's technological makeover). The exact date the iPads, computers, and Apple TVs arrive is still unknown, but school officials predict that it will be sometime in the fall of next year. Whenever it is, Zavala Elementary students, teachers, and staff are all tremendously excited to be a part of this transformational learning opportunity.



Harlingen to Hawaii & Back:

DR. GINA CANO-MONREAL,

HARLINGEN HIGH SCHOOL CLASS OF '92

by Annie Sykes

Dr. Gina Cano-Monreal has lived San Antonio, St. Louis, and even Hawaii, but Harlingen has always been home. Born and raised here, Dr. Cano-Monreal moved back several years ago and is now an active and respected member of the community. She works at Texas State Technical College as the Associate Vice President of Organizational Development, managing the professional development of all TSTC staff.

>> She is also responsible for TSTC's Online Learning Office. In this role, she trains new TSTC faculty to teach online courses and supports existing faculty with distance learning. As if that wasn't enough, Dr. Cano-Monreal also teaches anatomy and physiology classes, not to mention raising two young children with her husband.

Dr. Cano-Monreal manages her full plate with grace. She is passionate about helping others reach their professional potential, animated about the role of technology in education, and steadfast in her lifelong love of science. Her hard work and professionalism do not go unnoticed; Dr. Cano-Monreal has earned several major awards from TSTC, including the Leadership Excellence Award in 2009 and the Chancellor's Award for Excellence in 2010.

The story of Dr. Cano-Monreal's journey from Harlingen around the nation and back again is an interesting one. From an early age, she knew she wanted to work in the sciences. An affinity for science runs in the Cano family, to the extent that while she was in high school, Dr. Cano-Monreal's father actually built a science lab in the family's home garage so his children could run experiments.

Harlingen High School was the perfect environment for this budding scientist. Dr. Cano-Monreal recalls her favorite class, Ms. Powell's honors biology. Ms. Powell's passion for biology was contagious, and she never missed a chance for hands-on learning. Dr. Cano-Monreal remembers spending Saturdays in the lab with her classmates, so engaged in Ms. Powell's "experiment competitions" that she willingly spent weekends at school.

After graduation, Dr. Cano-Monreal went to St. Mary's University in San Antonio. There, she signed up for what she thought would be one semester away at Chaminade University of Honolulu in Hawaii. Whether it was the crystal blue waters or the fact that she was named a McNair Research Scholar, it became clear that there was no going back. Dr. Cano-Monreal graduated from Chaminade with a B.S. in biology. The next couple of years found her back in San Antonio where she graduated with her master's degree in biology from the University of Texas at San Antonio.

Taking a break from academia, Dr. Cano-Monreal began working at a small biotechnology company in San Antonio. It was rewarding to use her advanced knowledge of biology in the real world. Soon, however, it became clear that if Cano-Monreal wanted to advance professionally in her field, she needed a Ph.D.

WHEN ASKED WHAT ADVICE SHE'D GIVE TO THE YOUNG PEOPLE OF HARLINGEN, DR. CANO-MONREAL RECOMMENDS FINDING A BALANCE BETWEEN PURSUING YOUR PASSION AND STAYING OPEN TO CHANGE. "YOU NEVER KNOW WHAT WILL HAPPEN IN LIFE," SHE ADVISES.

So she sent in her applications and was accepted into a doctorate program at the St. Louis University School of Medicine. Six years later, Gina Cano-Monreal crossed the stage at graduation and became *Dr. Gina Cano-Monreal* with a Ph.D. in Molecular Microbiology and Immunology. She recalls this as one of the proudest moments of her life.

Unfortunately, the economy that was so promising when she entered graduate school was no longer as rosy. Funding for research positions was scarce. Strangely, this situation was something of a blessing in disguise for Dr. Cano-Monreal. For one thing, she had caught the education bug during a teaching stint at St. Louis University's School of Nursing, and this led her to consider careers outside of scientific research. Furthermore, Dr. Cano-Monreal and her husband - another Harlingen native - had long been wanting to return to the Valley. Now they had their chance. The pair drove their belongings across several states and began their life back in their hometown. Dr. Cano-Monreal was soon hired at Texas State Technical College, and the rest is history.

What's the secret to Dr. Cano-Monreal's success? According to her, it's all about passion, flexibility, and good communication. When asked what advice she'd give to the young people of Harlingen, Dr. Cano-Monreal recommends finding a balance between pursuing your passion and staying open to change. "You never know what will happen in life," she advises. "If you can't see obstacles as opportunities, you might get stuck." She also emphasizes the critical importance of being a good communicator. "At TSTC, the students who look you in the eye, speak clearly, and don't rely on text or email seem to go the farthest." Lastly, Dr. Cano-Monreal suggests taking time to give back to the community. "The more people who get involved, the brighter Harlingen's future looks," she reflects. "Plus, there's no better feeling than giving back to the community that gave so much to you." HCISD is proud to call such a brilliant, driven, and civic-minded member of the Harlingen community one of their own.



COMPOUNDING *Success!*

DR. VANESSA RAMIREZ

HARLINGEN HIGH SCHOOL SOUTH CLASS OF '02

How many saxophone-playing, marathon-running, doctorate-holding individuals work at your local pharmacy? The answer is most likely “none”, unless you get your medicine at the H-E-B pharmacy managed by Dr. Vanessa Ramirez. Dr. Ramirez is everything listed above, and a competent and compassionate pharmacist to boot. Harlingen High School South is proud to call Dr. Ramirez a former Hawk.

Dr. Ramirez is a Harlingen native. She grew up in the Harlingen CISD school system, eventually graduating

from HHSS. Dr. Ramirez knew she was interested in pharmacy from an early age. Her favorite class at HHSS was chemistry. Chemicals fascinated her - the way they could combine and recombine, each time with different effects. Pharmacy was a way for Dr. Ramirez to combine her interest in chemistry with her long-standing love of working with people. A college counselor at HHSS, knowing of Dr. Ramirez’s interests, encouraged her to apply to the University of Texas Pan American’s Cooperative Pharmacy Program.

Graduates of the UTPA CCP program earn a Doctor of Pharmacy (Pharm D) degree in just six years. The first portion of the program is spent completing basic requirements at UTPA. Then, students spend two years at UT Austin gaining a more detailed understanding of physiology, pharmacology, and other specialized courses. The final two years of the program are back at UTPA, and include rotations at local hospitals and community pharmacies. For Dr. Ramirez, the program was perfect. She could have a science-oriented career but still work with people. She could experience life away from home, but with a guaranteed return. She would spend time in the classroom, but also out in the field giving back to her community. So during her senior year at HHSS, Dr. Ramirez applied and was accepted to the CCP. Six years later, she earned her doctorate. Today, she heads up the pharmacy team at a Harlingen H-E-B, one of the most successful grocery chains in Texas.


Among the many lessons Dr. Ramirez has learned from school and work is that healthcare is a team effort, and that pharmacists play an integral part on that team. This is why patient care is such a priority at her pharmacy. She gives an example of this philosophy: If a patient is being treated by two or three specialists, she explains, his pharmacist needs to be sure each doctor prescribes medications that can be combined safely. Without the pharmacist, dangerous medical combinations might go unchecked.

For Dr. Ramirez, being a good pharmacist is also about more than just being a safety net for prescriptions. It's fundamentally about caring for others who need help. In a typical day at the pharmacy, Dr. Ramirez and her team can be seen talking with patients about their medications, helping them choose the right over-the-counter medicines for their symptoms, wading through confusing insurance protocols on behalf of their patients, and much more. If it helps a patient be their healthiest self, they do it. Patient care is what Dr. Ramirez loves most about her job.

Dr. Ramirez is quick to attribute much of her professional success to the foundation built by her time at HHSS. She took multiple AP courses there, played in the band (told you she played the saxophone!), and even took college courses from Texas State Technical College. Being so busy in high school taught Dr. Ramirez to manage her time wisely, a skill she uses today more than ever. HHSS also taught Dr. Ramirez the value of giving back to the community. Today, she "pays it forward" by donating her time and leadership to many HCISD

programs. She is on the advisory board for the new Harlingen School of Health Professions, she presented for fifth grade students at Treasure Hills Elementary's Future Medical Professions Academy, and soon, she and her husband (also a pharmacist) will present at an HCISD career fair. Dr. Ramirez feels grateful for the gifts from her time at HHSS, and does whatever she can to make sure other students receive them too.

When asked what advice she would give other HCISD students - especially aspiring pharmacists - Dr.



DR. RAMIREZ IS QUICK TO ATTRIBUTE MUCH OF HER PROFESSIONAL SUCCESS TO THE FOUNDATION BUILT BY HER TIME AT HHSS. SHE TOOK MULTIPLE AP COURSES THERE, PLAYED IN THE BAND (TOLD YOU SHE PLAYED THE SAXOPHONE!), AND EVEN TOOK COLLEGE COURSES FROM TEXAS STATE TECHNICAL COLLEGE.

Ramirez keeps it simple: stay organized, and have a life outside of work. Organization, she says, is key to stress management. Anyone who has felt the relief of turning a mental mountain of tasks into a manageable list on paper will agree. Plus, organization usually leads to better time management, meaning less working nights and more waking hours to do the things you love. Speaking of things you love, Dr. Ramirez emphasizes the importance of keeping up hobbies. She likes to run, listen to jazz music, and explore the Harlingen restaurant scene with her husband. But it doesn't matter what the hobby is as long as it can be used to decompress from work.

When it comes to life advice, we'll take any tip from this incredible Harlingen High School South alum. HHSS is grateful for the continued contribution of this former student, and proud of all she's accomplished. Go Hawks!

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT



An Early Start to Success

BOBBY PALMOS

HCISD Early College High School Class of '13

by Annie Sykes

How do you get into medical school as a sophomore in college? Ask Early College High School alum Bobby Palmos, who is on the path to doing just that. Bobby is a part of the Facilitated Acceptance to Medical Education (FAME) Program at the University of Texas at San Antonio, where he is enrolled. Through FAME, UTSA students who maintain their grades and meet other stringent requirements are guaranteed admission the University of Texas Medical School in San Antonio. FAME is an accelerated program, meaning Bobby can expect to earn his bachelor's and medical degree within seven years. The FAME program is no cakewalk, but for someone like Bobby - who knew he wanted to be a doctor since the beginning of high school - it's an ideal pathway to his career of choice.

Before he starts med school, however, Bobby has to finish college. He is currently a sophomore at UTSA, living out the standard

college student balancing act of studying, working, and enjoying the perks of higher education. On second thought, "standard" may not be an accurate descriptor: Bobby is taking 19 hours of class right now (a typical college workload is 15 or 12), three of which are major science classes. On top of his academic courses, Bobby is enrolled in a special leadership training course so he can be a student leader at UTSA orientation next year. This all means that besides becoming well-versed in medical chemistry, cell biology, immunology, nutrition and obesity, health communications, and community service learning, Bobby will be growing as a leader. Some may call that overachieving, but it's par for the course for this future physician.

Bobby attributes much of his success at UTSA to his time at Early College High School. ECHS prepared him well for college, not only in terms of credits - he graduated with an associate's degree in biology thanks to ECHS's dual enrollment options - but also culturally. At ECHS, Bobby was trusted to self-manage his class schedule and assignments. He adapted to an unusual school day schedule, learning to juggle courses at Texas State Technical College as well as at ECHS. Bobby also recalls spending free periods discussing world affairs and scientific advances with both friends and teachers. These memories are so typical of a college experience that it's hard to believe they describe high school. But they did, and that early exposure to college life gave Bobby the kind of discipline and intellectual curiosity that allows him to thrive today.

When asked about his most memorable high school moments, Bobby is quick to credit ECHS teachers. There's Mrs. Morton, his English teacher and writing mentor. Mrs. Morton believed in problem-based learning, and would present the class with complex situations requiring critical thought and exploration to solve. For someone like Bobby, accustomed to the more cut-and-dry concepts of science and math, such quandaries were both intriguing and frustrating. But they made him grow. Mrs. Morton also made it a point to help Bobby with this writing. To this day, he attributes his admission into early medical programs to the essays she helped him craft. Mrs. Morton, along with other ECHS instructors, ensured that Bobby would be prepared for college. And they didn't stop there: by teaching him to be thoughtful about complex situations and clear in his communication, they ensured he would be ready to be an excellent doctor.

Bobby is looking forward to the day he can begin his medical practice. Being a doctor has been a longtime dream of this HCISD grad, a way to turn his love of science into a career that serves others. This future keeps him motivated each day, and he encourages others to dream big as well. "The advice I'd give to young HCISD students is to not be afraid to take risks in order to follow their dreams," Bobby reflects. "Don't be afraid to be proactive, talk to people whose careers you find interesting, and maybe even explore a different part of the country for a little while." It's certainly worked for Bobby Palmos. ECHS and the whole district are proud to have played a role in his success, and look eagerly forward to what's in store for his future.

PROUD SUPPORTER OF

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Soon, we'll be launching people into space from right here in the Rio Grande Valley. With the quality education Harlingen CISD provides our children, they have the opportunity to grow, thrive and reach for the stars. Texas Regional Bank is proud to be in Harlingen where the possibilities for an exciting future are endless.



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2015 HCISD AWARDS



1 U.S. NEWS NAMES ECHS AS ONE OF AMERICA'S TOP HIGH SCHOOLS FOR 2014

U.S. News & World Report published its 2014 Best High Schools Rankings on September 9, and for the second year in a row, Early College High School had the honor of being recognized as one of the nation's best.

With a bronze classification, ECHS was named as one of the top 27 percent of high schools in the nation.

According to the U.S. News website, the rankings include data on more than 19,400 public high schools in 50 states and the District of Columbia. Schools were awarded gold, silver, or bronze medals based on state assessment performance and how prepared students are for college.

"It is a collaborative effort between ECHS and TSTC as well as our supportive community of students, staff and parents that has allowed our campus to improve each year and place us at the top of state and national rankings," said ECHS Principal Angel Paxton. "I'm proud of the distinctions, accomplishments and success

our students have earned. ECHS students are "Not just college ready but college experienced."

Opened in 2007, the campus kicked-off the district's efforts to provide students and parents with options in education. It was designed to incorporate the college and high school experience for students, freshman through senior year. The dual-enrollment focus allows ECHS students to start taking college classes at Texas State Technical College their first year of high school at no cost. Traditionally, students would have waited until 11th grade to begin dual-enrollment.

"Our mission is to provide our students and parents with educational choices, and we saw that goal begin with Early College High School," said Superintendent Dr. Art Cavazos. "Seeing ECHS flourish from its initial design to the great achievements they have come to earn is a testament to not only their staff, students and community but our great partnership with TSTC. I'm proud to have been a part of that as it has provided many of our students the opportunity to excel in both high school and college while preparing them for global achievement."

Last May, ECHS saw 31 graduates celebrate the completion of an associate's degree or their collegiate academic core in the Texas State Technical College commencement ceremony. The campus even had two students graduate with the distinction of Board Regents Scholars, which is an honor reserved for students graduating with a 4.0 Grade Point Average (GPA).

The campus has also excelled in extracurricular activities. On April 4, the ECHS team placed 19th in the nation in the High School JV Division at the National High School Chess Championship in San Diego. It's a first-time achievement for many of the students as the club was just started two years ago.

Last October, ECHS students took home first place in the BEST category (overall excellence in all categories) at the 2013 RGV Boosting Engineering, Science & Technology (BEST) Robotics Competition.

In addition to the highly coveted BEST Award, ECHS added the most spirit and sportsmanship award, first place in the Team Exhibit Category and third place in the Engineering Notebook Category to their accomplishment.

does. He is the mark of excellence, and he is the reason that we do so well at Harlingen High School with our band program."

The Harlingen High School Jazz Ensemble was the only jazz group recognized at the national level as the best jazz high school band.

"I'm the proudest band director in the world because of this recognition, and it makes it easy when you have the world's greatest students," said Rios.

Each year, groups around the nation enter the national competition by submitting performance recordings to The Foundation for Music Education, in which the top quarter are selected as National Winners and the second quarter receive Commended Honors.

"We're so proud and excited for this honor," said Director of Music Education, Dr. Sabrina Quintana. "The students and Mr. Rios have worked tirelessly to attain the superior performance level that they have achieved and of course Mr. Rios has many years of experience at Harlingen High School. It shows in the quality of everything that he does with his students."

The Mark of Excellence consists of the following categories: National Wind Band Honors, National Choral Honors, National Orchestra Honors, National Jazz Honors, and National Percussion Ensemble Honors.

The project has now received entries from thirty-five states, and this year 224 of the finest musical ensembles in the nation competed for the distinct honor. Offering a unique competitive environment, the competition allows groups to compare their performance quality to that of other outstanding ensembles from across the country.

The Jazz Adjudicator for 2014 was Steve Wiest, University of North Texas.



2 HHS JAZZ ENSEMBLE RECEIVES NATIONAL RECOGNITION WITH THE MARK OF EXCELLENCE AWARD

The Harlingen High School Jazz Ensemble, directed by Ronnie Rios, received a congratulatory visit from Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District and HHS administration on Tuesday, for their recognition as a National Winner in the 2014 Mark of Excellence/National Jazz Honors project.

Superintendent Dr. Art Cavazos entered the trophy-lined HHS band hall and greeted the ensemble commending them for their national recognition.

"This is a very stringent competition. Being recognized at the national level doesn't just happen; you don't wake up one day, compete, and get national recognition," said Dr. Cavazos. "You have to work hard, you have to dedicate yourself, and your band director has to do the same thing. I want to congratulate you and thank you for putting us on the map. I also want to thank your director, Ronnie Rios, for all of the great work that he



3 HCISD AWARDED \$100,000 GRANT FOR A TECHNOLOGY-LENDING PROGRAM

Continuing efforts to make technological resources available to all students, the Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District was recently awarded the



2015 HCISD AWARDS

Technology Lending Program (TLP) Grant, a competitive grant awarded by the Texas Education Agency.

The TLP grant provides funds to start a technology-lending program on campuses so students may access and checkout digital devices for instructional purposes. The \$100,000 of obtained funds will be utilized for the purchase of 171 iPad Airs for Harlingen High School and Harlingen High School South.

Once available at the campuses, the iPad Airs will be available to HHS and HHSS students to checkout. Through these devices students may access online curriculum, conduct research and complete classroom assignments and homework.

The district was able to obtain a total of \$100,000 with the assistance of Linda Alaniz, President of Educational Research Institute.

"The district is committed to the continuous improvement of our safety programs to ensure safe and secure environments for all our students," said Oscar Tapia, Assistant Superintendent for District Operations/School Safety. "Thanks to the hard work of our maintenance, custodial staff, and school administration we have made great strides in improving our building securities, evacuation drills and safety plans. We will continue to work hard every year to get even better."

To prepare for the audit many security enhancements were put in place such as securing the campus front entries with card readers, video cameras, and speakers to communicate with the visitors before entering a campus. District staff also replaced outdated cameras with digital cameras for better face recognition.

Campus Security Guards were given uniforms for easy recognition, and fencing was installed with panic devices to lock out unwanted visitors, while allowing an effortless exit should an emergency occur.

The audit covered emergency response operations, building safety compliance, and security.

"Our consultant reviewed emergency operations plans and emergency response flip chart processes and procedures and found them to be very complete and thorough," said Alfonso Castillo, Assistant Maintenance Director. "Mrs. Hinojosa gave our district very high ratings in our emergency planning and our emergency drills."

Region One representative Fidela Hinojosa considers Harlingen CISD one of the Valley's Showcase Districts and feels confident that the students in Harlingen are in a safe and secure school environments.

"At HCISD the safety of our students and staff has always been and will continue to be our top priority," said Superintendent Dr. Art Cavazos. "We are proud of our staff for this recognition and will continue to perfect our practice in school safety and security."

4 HCISD ACHIEVES COMMENDABLE RESULTS IN SAFETY AUDIT

The Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District achieved high marks during their Safety and Security Audit this year.

Senate Bill 11 mandates that all Texas School Districts conduct a complete Safety and Security Audit every three years. Fidela Hinojosa from Region One Education Service Center and the district's safety and security personnel conducted the 2011-2014 audit.

5 HAWK TENNIS TEAM WINS 20TH DISTRICT CHAMPIONSHIP

The Harlingen High School South tennis team won their seventh consecutive district championship and twentieth overall in an 18-1 win against Harlingen High School on Tuesday, September 30.

The group completed their sweep of district titles by





winning both the girls and boys team championships for the seventh year as well.

"The team has come along nicely and is improving on a daily basis," said Coach Noe Stillman. "This team has the potential to be one of the best we have had!"

Team members have worked hard to play at a high level, and their efforts paid off as senior team members finished undefeated in district play.

"The team this year is a really tight-knit group and that helps us push each other to get better," said Senior Allison Kyril.

Senior Team members are as follows: Caitlyn Resendiz, Allison Kyril, Ashley Ray, Matthew Ringheanu, Chris Cavazos, Jacob Tennison, and Logan Rowan.

The Hawks are currently ranked fifteenth in the state coaches poll. The team is now training for the upcoming area tournament to take place later this month.

6 ZAVALA ELEMENTARY AWARDED APPLE AND CONNECTED GRANT

The Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District is pleased to announce that Zavala Elementary has been selected to receive an Apple grant as part of the ConnectED program. The award will enable Zavala to provide a comprehensive 1:1 technology solution for every student and teacher, including Apple hardware, software, and services.

"We are honored to have Zavala Elementary be one of 114 campuses selected nationwide as a recipient of the Apple and ConnectED grant," said Superintendent Dr. Art Cavazos "Our district recognizes the importance of providing all students and teachers with the technological resources they need to succeed, and this grant will allow us to further those efforts. Through resources like these, our district will continue to enhance the teaching and learning that takes place and keep our students on the path toward global achievement."

By providing students, teachers, and administrators with Apple technology, Zavala will be able to enrich its classroom experience and expand opportunities for its students.

"We are thankful for this opportunity to expand the technological resources available to our students and teachers at Zavala Elementary through the Apple and ConnectED grant," said Board President Greg Powers. "Increasing technological access for all of our students and teachers is something we strive to do as we continue our mission to provide our students with world-class learning environments. We look forward to seeing the positive impact this will have on the Zavala Elementary Learning Community."





2015 HCISD AWARDS



7 HS ROBOTICS TEAMS SOAR AT BEST ROBOTICS CHAMPIONSHIP

The Harlingen High School robotics team and their robot K-9 emerged victorious at the BEST (Boosting Engineering Science and Technology) Robotics Competition. The team took home first place in Robotics Performance along with the Most Robust Robot award.

They advanced to the Texas BEST Regional Robotics Championship that will take place November 14-15 in Dallas, Texas.

As the team prepares to go head to head with teams at the regional competition, they kept the same robot design. In the weeks leading up to the competition, they used what they learned from the local competition to rebuild their robot and create new components.

"I was really concerned when the wheel fell off of our robot," said team vice president Connor Smith. "We had a few mess ups, but we pulled through. Now we know what we need to tweak for the next competition."

The regional contest brought together teams from local hubs in Texas and New Mexico. The objective will remain the same. Competitors will present their solutions for the engineering challenge of transporting components and assembling wind turbines.

"I'm very proud that the team was able to perform so well," said Paul Tenison HHS engineering teacher. "We look forward to representing Harlingen in Dallas. We hope to do equally well in future rocketry and engineering competitions."

Early College High School and Harlingen High School South also competed at the Event.

ECHS won first place for the Best Team Exhibit and Interview and second place for Best Sportsmanship and Spirit. South brought home the Most Elegant Robot award and the Founders Award for Creative Design.



8 COAKLEY UIL TEAM EARNS 39TH DISTRICT CHAMPIONSHIP

Students from Coakley Middle School continued their tradition of excellence by earning the campus' 39th consecutive district University Interscholastic League (UIL) Academic Championship.

During the January meet, Coakley swept away the competition with a score of 1014. Sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students competed in UIL academic meets for middle school students with campuses from across the Rio Grande Valley competing for the top spot.

Hosted in San Benito on January 9 and 10, the tournaments consist of 19 categories including math skills, impromptu speaking, and dictionary skills.

9 SUPERIOR ACHIEVEMENT: HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS SELECTED FOR TMEA ALL STATE MUSIC ENSEMBLES

Select high school students in the Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District music programs recently received one of the highest honors a music



student can achieve – to be recognized among best student-musicians in the state of Texas.

Seventeen HCISD students earned spots on the 2015 Texas Music Educators Association All State ensembles. The Harlingen High School choir and band had four and five students awarded chairs respectively. Five students from the Harlingen High School South choir, and three students from band earned a position in their corresponding ensemble.

To qualify for All State ensembles, students went through a series of audition rounds, in which their musical skills were put to the test and as each level of auditions increased so did the difficulty and competition.

Approximately 20,000 high school students began the audition process early in the fall and only around 700 6-A musicians earned a coveted spot in their respective All State division. As a result of their All State qualification, selected students will travel to San Antonio to participate in the TMEA Convention/Clinic on February 11-14.

During the convention, students participated in three days of intense rehearsals directed by nationally recognized conductors, and they performed before thousands of attendees to bring the event to a close.

TMEA All-State Concerts were held Saturday, February 14, in the Lila Cockrell Theater, Ballroom A, and Ballroom B of the Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center in San Antonio.

The students to make it in the All State Choir for HHS were Jazmin Almendarez (12), Madison Defoor (12), Matthew Benavides (12), Alexander Alvarez (11), and Jacob Fierro (12). For HHSS, Alyssa Rodriguez (11), Jordan Funk (12), Benjamin Ruiz (12), Ricky Cantu (12), and Jose Sanchez (12) were placed on their respective ensembles.

For the All State Band students, HHS had Aaron Balboa (11), Gilberto Cardenas (12), Alejandro Leal (12), Israel Yanez (11), and Myles Rosenbaum (12). HHSS students Ryan Mowers (11), Ivan Trevino (12), and Brandon Cabrera (12) also earned spots on their respective ensembles.

10 HCISD BUSINESS SERVICES AWARDED NATIONAL RECOGNITION FOR FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

The Long, Chilton, LLP auditing firm recently presented the Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District's Board of Trustees with the 2013-2014 fiscal year financial audit. The audit contained a clean opinion in all material respects and conveyed a fair and accurate picture of the district's financial statements.

Consequently, the Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada (GFOA) awarded HCISD's business services department its highest honor for comprehensive financial reporting for the 2012-2013 fiscal year. This is the fifth consecutive year the district has been presented with this recognition.

The GFOA awarded HCISD its Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting, the group announced earlier this month. The award is the highest form of recognition in the area, and represents a substantial accomplishment by a government and its management.

"This award is an indicator of the caliber of our entire financial team," said Chief Financial Officer Julio Cavazos. "Throughout this department, we work as one unit to provide the best for our students, staff and the community we serve. With our fifth recognition, we have reached yet another success in financial consistency and transparency."

An impartial panel judges the CAFR contests on how well the entity demonstrates transparency and clarity in reporting its financial records. The GFOA is a nonprofit professional association serving approximately 18,000 government finance professionals.

In October 2014, HCISD also earned the Platinum Leadership Circle Award from the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts for meeting high financial transparency online by providing citizens with a clear, consistent picture of spending as well as sharing information through the district website.

The Comptroller's Office designates different levels of transparency awards to government entities based on a score criteria sheet ranging from Bronze, Silver, Gold and Platinum. The Platinum designee helps highlight organizations that go above and beyond providing financial transparency in local government.

Additionally, HCISD continues also to present debt information on its long-term obligations and pledges to keep the public informed on any future bond issuances.





2015 HCISD AWARDS



11 LADY CARDINAL BASKETBALL NAMED UNDEFEATED DISTRICT 32-6A CHAMPION

On Tuesday Feb. 10, the Harlingen High School Lady Cardinal Basketball team earned the District 32-6A Champion title after an undefeated regular season.

In their final game, the team faced Harlingen High School South with an outstanding performance. The game ended with a score of 72-54, and the Lady Cardinals have continued to soar over the competition while maintaining an overall record of (29-4) and a district record of (14-0).

Wilson Elementary turns 100 years old this year. To commemorate the occasion, the campus held a full-day celebration on February 2 – which coincidentally also marks the academic year's 100th day of school.

Administrators, students, and staff worked hard to collect old photographs, learn songs, produce video, and produce artwork to honor this significant milestone.

In delving into its past, campus staff and administrators recall many cherished memories of their time at Wilson. Former student and Dual Language Kinder Teacher Nereida Luevanos feels that she has come full circle at the campus.

“As a kid, I loved coming here,” says Luevanos. “I knew when I started teaching that I wanted to come back to Wilson because I really enjoyed my time here. I was so thrilled to find out that a lot of the teachers who taught me were still here and I’d have the opportunity to work with them. Then when I found out that I was going to be able to bring my daughter here, I was even more ecstatic.”

Among her favorite student memories at Wilson are the school programs that she participated in and the field days that were held to reward students for their hard work throughout the years.

Proud of her campus, she says, “Once an Aztec, always and Aztec.”

Wilson’s historical roots date back to early the 1900s, when Pierre and Marie Wilson of Hennepin County, Minnesota, purchased several thousand acres of land extending from present day Combes to near Gutierrez Middle School and to Tamm Lane to Highway 107. The Wilsons subdivided the land and put it on the market to attract interested parties. The tract of land was christened Wilson Tract upon Pierre Wilson’s passing.

In 1915, the campus was built under the name Wilson Tract School and consisted of a wood frame building with two large rooms. From 1926 to 1928, the school underwent some additions and grew into a two-story brick building called Wilson Independent School, which employed roughly 11 teachers. The former wood frame building was designated as the school’s cafeteria. The school was torn down in 1972, and to make room for a new building in 1974. The cornerstones of both the 1915 building and the 1926 addition were saved and are currently on display at Wilson Elementary.



12 WILSON ELEMENTARY CELEBRATES 100 YEARS

One of the Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District’s oldest campuses is hitting the century mark.

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FUTURE

HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

At Treasure Hills Elementary

By Annie Sykes

Move over, Doogie Howser, M.D.! Fifth graders at Treasure Hills Elementary are jumping into health care early, too.

This year, the Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District, along with Treasure Hills, launched its Future Health Professions Academy. The Academy is an extracurricular program that gives youngsters a head start on a future in medicine. Participating students get an insider's view on of health care professions, from surgery to nursing to research and more. And because few people are dead-set on their career at age ten, the program also helps students develop skills that are useful in any line of work such as, project management, public speaking and teamwork. Thus, while the main goal of the Future Health Professions Academy is to focus students on a future in health care, the program provides important college and career readiness training as well.

+ NO ORDINARY ACADEMY

There are fifteen students in the founding class of the Future Health Professions Academy. Two Saturdays a month, they spend their day with some of Harlingen's top health care professionals. The first Saturday is usually a learning day; students listen attentively as the visiting presenter shares what they do for a living. So far, the kids have spent time with a neurologist, two pharmacists, and the head of the surgical unit at the Regional Academic Health Center. Later this year, they'll hear from a veterinarian and a nurse. All presentations are highly interactive. The students are encouraged to ask questions, and they don't hesitate to do so - seeing five to ten little hands in the air at any given moment has become the norm.

On the second FHPA Saturday, the "guest professionals" facilitate a hands-on experience for the students. Whether it's touring Valley Baptist Hospital or performing a mock surgery, students will be able to see what it's actually like to work in health care. Second Saturdays are thrilling for the students. Not only do they love doing "cool doctor stuff" (as one student put it), they're proud that they're considered responsible enough for these kind of tasks. But the best part of either Saturday is the bond created between the students and their mentors. The fact that busy health care professionals are willing to spend their Saturdays with Treasure Hills students is a testament to a growing bond between HCISD and the Harlingen medical community.

The final component of the Future Health Professions Academy experience is project work. During a portion of each Saturday, FHPA students work together on projects that range from answering a research question to building a model medical device. They present their work to the group, field questions, and discuss how to improve on the next one. With each passing Saturday in the Academy, this group of fifth graders from Treasure Hills grows more capable, confident, and connected.

+ THE RIGHT PLACE AT THE RIGHT TIME

"The Future Health Professions Academy is the result of a perfect storm of ideas and change at a pivotal time," says Roland Ingram, principal of Treasure Hills Elementary. The scene was set last year. Superintendent Dr. Art Cavazos had just rolled out HCISD's plans to increase college and career readiness plus community involvement. The Harlingen School of Health Professions was opening soon, and "health care careers" was a buzzword. Enter Mr. Ingram, who left a long stint as a high school educator to become principal of Treasure Hills. "I hadn't been entirely re-wired to elementary," says Mr. Ingram, "so I was still thinking in terms of students being focused on college and career." Add to this mix the fact that Treasure Hills is across the street from a hospital, and you've got a nearly perfect foundation for a community-centric health care development program.

It was right around this time that Dr. Felix Rivera of the Harlingen Area Educational Foundation approached HCISD and Mr. Ingram with the idea for the Academy. Mr. Ingram, Dr. Rivera, several other HCISD officials, and members of the community spent the summer carefully planning. The school year started with fifth-grade students applying for the Academy. By mid-autumn, the Future Health Professions Academy had opened. The rest is history.

+ TO A HEALTHY FUTURE

By the end of the year, the fifteen founding members of the Treasure Hill Elementary Future Health Professions Academy will have glimpsed almost every health care career Harlingen has to offer. The two-Saturday system will have shown them firsthand how medical professions blend academic learning with specific skill sets. Next year, they'll enter middle school with a more focused sense of future, a healthy network of connections, and an array of important skills. These kids may not be scrubbing in to the O.R. as early as Doogie Howser, but they are certainly on their way to a bright future in health care.



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HARLINGEN SCHOOL OF HEALTH PROFESSIONS

*Putting Harlingen students at the
front of the line for future health-
care professions*



By Annie Sykes

This August, Harlingen CISD welcomed a new addition to the family: Harlingen School of Health Professions. The school - which often goes by its nickname, HSHP - is a place for 8th through 12th grade students who are interested in a future in healthcare. With state-of-the-art facilities, small student:teacher ratios, and a rigorous, well-rounded curriculum, HSHP gives Harlingen students the experience, character, and academic background they need to succeed in the medical field of their choice.

Harlingen School of Health Professions opened this fall with founding 8th and 9th grade classes. Staff and students alike hit the ground running, and after only a few months of operation, the school is thriving. This early success was no surprise. For one thing, the school's staff, led by Principal Tina Garza, is a veritable dream team of educators. Furthermore, the Harlingen community has outdone itself supporting the school. Members of the medical community from across the Valley have donated their time to HSHP, serving on advisory boards, presenting to students, even sometimes helping out in the carpool line.

But the real stars of HSHP's stellar first year are the students. They've risen to the challenge of jumping into a brand new school with classes that challenge them and teachers who hold high expectations of them. If the past months are any indication, the future of HSHP -

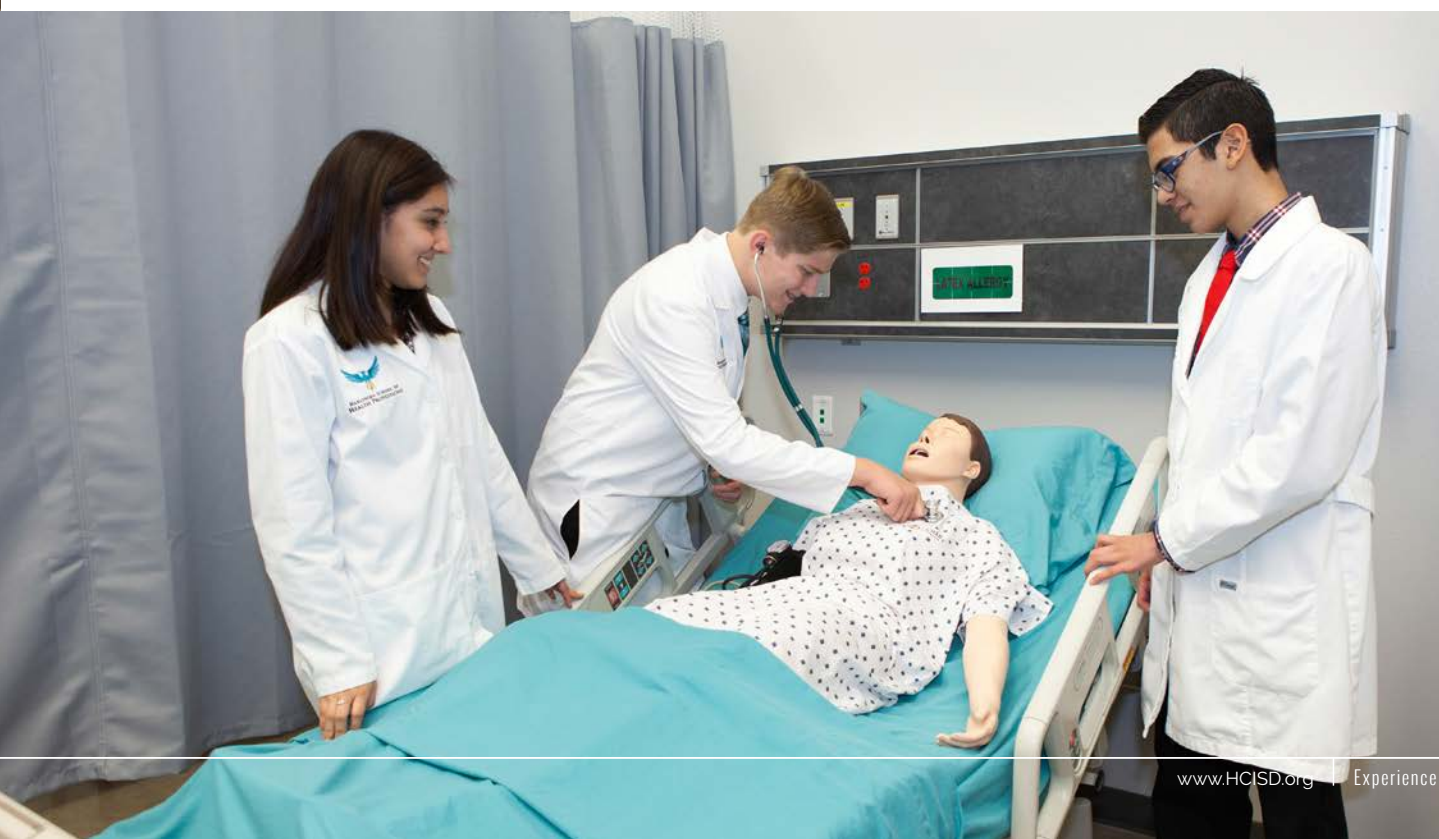
and the future of healthcare in the Rio Grande Valley and beyond - is looking bright.

Getting a Head Start on Healthcare Success

This year's 8th and 9th graders will be the first to experience high school at Harlingen School of Health Professions. The school will add a new 8th grade class each year until fully grown. But because HSHP is a school of choice, class sizes will remain small. The school's fully-grown size is projected to be between 550 and 600 students so that it can maintain the collaborative and close environment this year's students have enjoyed.

Small class sizes are one ingredient in HSHP's recipe for success in healthcare careers. The rest can be seen in the school's unique operating model. Under this model, students choose from one of six Schools of Study: Dental Science, Patient Care, Surgical Procedures, Pharmacology/Biomedical Technology, Medical Science, and Sports Medicine/Therapeutic Services. Students are steeped in the discipline when they enter their School of Study. Not only do they learn about their chosen career in class, they visit with professionals in their field, learn to operate relevant equipment, and in their senior year, complete a community internship. The kind of preparation students get in their Schools of Study is unparalleled. The advantage they'll have in college and in the workforce is too.

An eighth grader who has settled on a career is a rare thing indeed, and HSHP understands this. That's why



students don't choose their School of Study until sophomore year. The years leading up to the choice are spent building a solid academic foundation with pre-AP and AP coursework. 8th and 9th grade students also spend time getting to know each of the six fields, as well as other important considerations for the future like the basics of running a business or the admission criteria for their college of choice. The HSHP model ensures that students in each grade receive age-appropriate professional guidance and excellent academic instruction. Whether a student wants to be a doctor, a nurse, a researcher, or a physical therapist, he or she can rest assured that HSHP will help get them there.

A Collegiate Atmosphere

Although starting their curriculum in August, HSHP students officially moved into their state-of-the-art campus in December. When the time finally came to move into the building, Principal Tina Garza and her staff had students cover their eyes and led them to the front entrance. On the count of three, the students opened their eyes and let out a collective shriek of excitement. The feeling was unanimous: this new campus had been worth the wait.

HSHP looks like a miniature university. Walls of chrome, glass, and brick surround open-concept classrooms. Vaulted ceilings and generous windows lend an airy, sunlit feel to the whole building. The facility is decidedly modern, but somehow retains the feel of an established collegiate institution. At the center of it all is the "commons." This multipurpose space is filled with couches, stools, desks, tables, and more, so that students can find a comfortable spot for whatever activity is at hand. Classrooms stocked with state-of-the-art equipment surround this common area. Some of these, known as specialty rooms, were built to offer students hands-on experience with career-specific instruments. The Surgical Procedures room contains a surgery table. The Sports Medicine/Therapeutic Services room boasts a whirlpool. Each School's specialty room lets HSHP students apply what they've learned in class to a simulated career environment. This is purposeful. Jobs in healthcare require more than just book smarts, they require skill. HSHP aims to prepare students for excellence in both.

Harlingen School of Health Profession's state-of-the-art campus is just one of a number of ways the school prepares students for college and career success. Its special curriculum is another. HSHP's academic program is built around a 13th year focus. This means that



But the real stars of HSHP's stellar first year are the students. They've risen to the challenge of jumping into a brand new school, one with classes that challenge them and teachers who hold high expectations of them.

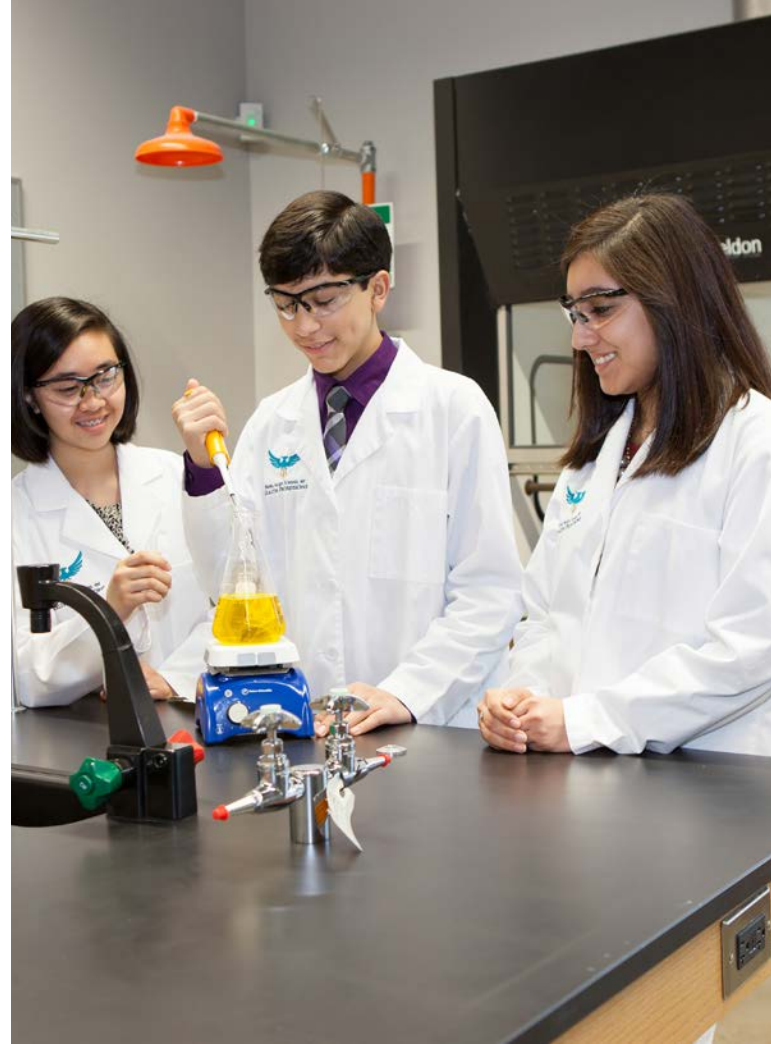
all learning is geared toward preparing students for life after high school. The classes at HSHP are all taught at an AP or pre-AP level to match the rigor of college courses. Teachers and administration have high expectations for students to match those of future professors and managers. And most if not all classes have a project component. Projects are a way to take mastery further, like this year's build-a-pharmacy project in math class. Students were tasked with building a model pharmacy and pitching their design to a local pharmacy owner. Not only did they get to apply geometry and algebra to a real life project, they practiced one of the toughest skills in business - the pitch. The model buildings were a success, and some may even be used for the guest pharmacist's expansion.

Rounding out the amazing facility and matchless academic program is HSHP's focus on character development. Healthcare is fundamentally about helping others. The HSHP team knows this, so they prioritize students' growth as people just as much as their

academic performances. One way the school does this is with Phoenix Time. Phoenix Time is a daily 50-minute period dedicated to students' personal development. Each Phoenix Time of the week has a different theme. On Mentorship Mondays, students can get extra help with tricky concepts. Team Building Tuesdays build groupwork skills. On Wisdom Wednesdays, students pursue their passions and hone public speaking ability by presenting on anything under the sun that interests them. Tutelage Thursdays are a big deal. Students wear their business attire and listen attentively as community guest speakers discuss their careers. The week wraps with Focus Friday, where students and teachers have a candid discussion of the lessons they've learned that week.

HSHP: A Recipe for Success

A uniquely effective model. A campus that rivals many colleges and universities. A curriculum that sends students to college feeling prepared to succeed. A school culture built to ensure students aren't just learning, but also growing. A supportive school district and an engaged community. A promising future in healthcare. This is the recipe for an unforgettable high school experience. This is the future and legacy of Harlingen School of Health Professions.





LEADING TRANSFORMATION in Texas

HCISD, Board of Trustees and educators recognized in the 2015 H-E-B Excellence in Education Awards program
By Maritza Gallaga

The Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District and its Board of Trustees' tradition of providing students with world-class schools and leadership has gained attention at the state level this school year.

The district and its Board of Trustees were recognized as an Outstanding District and School Board as part of the 2015 H-E-B Excellence in Education Awards Program.

The district was named one of eight finalists in the Large School District (5A and 6A) category, while its trustees were

one of five chosen across the state in their respective category. A prestigious selection, the H-E-B Excellence in Education Awards celebrates public school professionals and districts whose initiatives and leadership inspire a love of learning in students of all backgrounds and abilities.

"We are honored to be recognized in the HEB Excellence Awards as it represents our progress and achievements as a school district," said Board of Trustee President Greg Powers. "We look forward to continuing our collective work to enhance the teaching and learning that takes place in our classrooms and propel our students further on the path toward global achievement."

The recognition follows a series of transformative initiatives and strategies that have changed the landscape of the district and foundation of public education in the region and state. These developments include continuing their efforts toward providing the HCISD community with Schools of Choices through the development and opening of the Dr. Abraham P. Cano Freshman Academy in 2013 and Harlingen School of Health Professions in 2014. Programs of Choice are also a focus for the district as they continue to offer students the option to participate in initiatives including Digital Classrooms, Dual Language Academics, Leader in Me Academy and the Safety Educating Aquatics Learners (SEAL) Program, which gives all HCISD second grade students the opportunity to learn the foundation of water safety in the district's Aquatics Center.

Also recognized in the program was Sam Houston Elementary teacher Vanessa Rincones. She was announced as a finalist in the Rising Star- Elementary Teacher category on March 25. Named statewide semi-finalists in the program were Rodriguez Elementary teacher Monica Alvarado and Treasure Hills Elementary teacher Jeanne Jimenez.

A first grade Dual Language teacher, Rincones was named one of five finalists from across the state. To announce her selection,



"We are honored to be recognized in the HEB Excellence Awards as it represents our progress and achievements as a school district," said Board of Trustee President Greg Powers.

representatives from H-E-B visited the campus to witness her interaction with students first-hand and present both her and the campus with a check for \$1,000.

"Vanessa Rincones is an outstanding educator, and we are proud to celebrate her selection as a finalist in the elementary teacher category of the H-E-B Excellence Awards," said Superintendent Dr. Art Cavazos. "Her recognition speaks to her passion of creating an engaging classroom environment that encourages academic achievement and addresses the individual needs of each student."

Along with their finalist recognition, they

are also considered a nominee in the statewide award in their respective category.

This honor is designed to recognize districts and school boards that have demonstrated real leadership in the community that it serves. H-E-B will award a designated total to each of the winners in their respective categories, who will go on to compete for even greater cash prizes at the statewide level.

The winning large district will receive an award of \$100,000 and one or more school boards may receive up to a total of \$25,000. For educators, all finalists will be invited to compete against other educators for the chance to win greater cash prizes ranging from \$5,000 to \$25,000. A panel of judges will select winners through district visits and meetings with administrators, faculty, parents, and community members. Their focus will be to give prominence to the best practices in the state.

With more than \$800,000 in cash prizes awarded annually to deserving teachers, principals, school districts and early childhood facilities and school boards, the H-E-B Excellence in Education Awards is the largest monetary recognition program for educators in Texas and one of the largest in the nation.

H-E-B launched the Excellence in Education Awards program in cooperation with the Texas Association of School Administrators in 2002 as a positive way to support public education in Texas.

★ WINNING LARGE DISTRICT

Will receive an award of
\$100,000

★ 1 OR MORE SCHOOL BOARDS

Will Receive up to a total of
\$25,000

★ Educators

Will have a chance to win greater cash prizes ranging from
\$5,000 to \$25,000



Leaping into Literacy

HCISD's Early Literacy Initiative

by Annie Sykes

“At first,” Angelina was very shy about reading with me. When she would read, it took her so long to string the words together that she couldn’t understand the story. But I knew she could do it. Our motto became ‘Practice Makes Perfect,’ and I would remind Angelina to practice reading after each of our sessions. One day, she came to our meeting with a look of excitement and asked if I would listen to her read. She opened up her book and read beautifully. I was amazed. ‘Angelina, how did you get so good at reading?’, I asked her. She looked up at me with a big, toothless grin and said ‘I practiced!’”

This scene comes from HCISD’s Call to Action program. Through Call to Action, HCISD administrators read to second graders like Angelina at least twice a month. The mentors focus on vocabulary and encourage their mentees to trade out iPhone games for books whenever possible. Call to Action is part of a whole slate of early

literacy initiatives, all of which drive toward the district goal of ensuring that second graders are reading on-level by the end of the year. That way they have every advantage possible when it comes time to take their first STAAR test in third grade. But more importantly, these initiatives help build a strong foundation for a skill they'll use their entire lives: reading.

The early literacy initiatives span grades pre-k through second grade. Each grade level has a literacy-themed program or event tailored to its specific age group. For second graders, it's Call to Action. This year, the littlest students got to enjoy an "HCISD Pre-K Family Literacy Night," where story characters like Elmo, Mother Goose, the Cat in the Hat, and even Frozen's Olaf greeted them at the door. The night focused on songs and rhymes, both of which build children's phonological awareness - their ability to hear and manipulate sounds in words. Bilingual educator, author, and musician José-Luis Orozco led the festivities, showing parents how to teach the building blocks of literacy through singing and rhyming. Adults and children alike left the event eager to make rhyming songs a part of their routine. HCISD Kindergarten is joining in on the fun too. In April, Kindergarten will have a literacy-themed celebration of their own during the Week of the Young Child™. This nationwide festival of young learners is the perfect time to fire up a love of reading.

Finally, HCISD first graders are having a boom year in early literacy. They recently participated in festivities for the National Education Association's Read Across America Day. The day happened to fall at the same time as Texas Public Schools week, so first graders celebrated reading with a little Texas flair. They went on a virtual field trip to NASA, learned about Texas history, politics, and environment, and capped off the day with a visit to the brand-new HCISD Aquatic Center. Over 1,400 first graders participated in this joyful celebration of education and literacy. But the real treat for



first grade readers is coming in May. Over the summer, all rising second graders will receive a backpack filled with ten books, a journal, and a couple of pencils. This "reading kit" will keep students' summers full of stories and their brains full of learning. At the end of the summer, students can enter a postcard contest by sending a postcard to the HCISD office listing their favorite book and why they liked it. Winners will get an awesome literacy-related prize for their efforts.

Focusing on early literacy can be likened to pouring the foundation on a new home. The entire place is stronger for having a rock-solid foundation just as children are better prepared for lifelong success by starting the reading process early. This philosophy drives HCISD and its early literacy programming. Is it working? Just ask Juan, a native Spanish speaker who shared with his mentor a very advanced (and hilarious) insight into the English language:

"Juan was a great student who was learning to read in English. One day while reading a Frog and Toad book, he came across the word 'trunks' and looked a little confused. When I asked him what was wrong,

he said, 'I know that a trunk is part of a tree. An elephant has a trunk. The car has a trunk, and a trunk can be a place to store things in, like a pirate's chest. But this says Toad is wearing trunks.' Juan looked at me and said, 'You need more English words because you use the same ones over and over and it gets hard to understand which one you mean!'"

Juan, Angelina, and the rest of HCISD's youngest student group are growing leaps and bounds in literacy. With the help of families, early literacy initiatives, and students' hard work, they'll continue to grow as their foundation for reading gets stronger and stronger.





A VISIT TO THE WHITE HOUSE

By Adriana Dominguez

Superintendent Dr. Art Cavazos, was selected by the U.S. Department of Education as one of 100 top school leaders from across America to participate in the first-ever National Connected Superintendents Summit Wednesday, Nov. 19 at the White House.

Dr. Cavazos was among exemplary local school chiefs who were recognized for their leadership in helping transition their districts to digital learning. This unique conference brought together officials from throughout America to share with one another and the Education Department promising approaches to using technology in classes.

“Continuing our mission to transform the teaching and learning that takes place in our classrooms, our district recognizes the importance of providing all of our students and teachers with easily and readily accessible digital resources,” said Superintendent Dr. Art Cavazos. “I’m honored to be included in this historic discussion as it brings a focus on how we can work together to further transform education on behalf of our students and their pursuit of global achievement.”

The White House summit will be followed by a series of 12-15 regional summits that will focus on the digital progress both made and possible by local school districts. The events will also include the unveiling of digital tools that facilitate incorporation of technology into short-term and long-range education planning.

“It’s an honor for our school district to have Dr. Cavazos represent our community and region during these important discussions focused on transforming the education and resources our students have access to,” said Board President Greg Powers. “We hope with this collaboration, we can further our efforts to create a district culture where technology is brought in to enhance the curriculum that takes place and provide our students with the means for global success.”

To help spotlight the value of technology in schools, the Education Department is sponsoring a Future Ready Initiative aimed at showcasing outstanding school leadership and strategies.

In June 2013, President Obama announced the ConnectED Initiative, starting with a goal of connecting 99 percent of students to next-generation connectivity within five years. Model schools and districts across the country are using technology to create personalized learning environments.



FUTURE READY SUPERINTENDENTS DEMONSTRATE EFFECTIVE USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN SOME OF THE FOLLOWING WAYS:

- ✦ Fostering and leading a culture of collaboration and digital citizenship
- ✦ Transitioning schools and families to high-speed connectivity
- ✦ Empowering educators with professional learning opportunities
- ✦ Accelerating progress toward universal access to quality devices
- ✦ Providing access to quality digital content
- ✦ Creating access, equity, and excellence – particularly in rural, remote, and low-income districts
- ✦ Offering digital tools to students and families to help them prepare for success in college
- ✦ Sharing best practices and mentoring other districts in the transition to digital learning





breakfast IN THE classroom

By Elizabeth Cowan Phillips



STUDENTS AT WILSON ELEMENTARY MAKE IT A POINT TO BE AT SCHOOL EARLY EACH MORNING. THEY'RE IN THEIR SEATS AND LEARNING EVEN BEFORE THE FIRST BELL RINGS THANKS TO THE BREAKFAST IN THE CLASSROOM PROGRAM. "OUR STUDENTS COME IN EARLIER TO EAT THEIR BREAKFAST WHICH WE SERVE FROM 7:45-8:00 A.M. DURING OUR ANNOUNCEMENTS, THE CHILDREN ENJOY EATING TOGETHER WITH THEIR CLASSMATES, AND THE TEACHERS TAKE THE OPPORTUNITY TO TEACH THEM MANNERS, RESPONSIBILITY, NUTRITION AND CITIZENSHIP REGARDING CLEANUP," SAID WILSON ELEMENTARY PRINCIPAL, KRISTI DAVID.

Wilson Elementary participates in Breakfast in the Classroom, a Harlingen CISD program aimed at providing a healthy and free breakfast to each and every student right where they will most benefit, in their classroom. The Breakfast in the Classroom program has been implemented in varying forms at Crockett Elementary, Dishman Elementary, Houston Elementary, Jefferson Elementary, Lee Means Elementary, Milam Elementary, Treasure Hills Elementary, Wilson Elementary, Zavala Elementary, Harlingen School of Health Professions, Harlingen High School South, and Harlingen High School. Jefferson Elementary is the newest school to join the program, beginning their Breakfast in the Classroom service in September 2014. Prior to program implementation, breakfast participation was approximately



50% of enrollment, but now that breakfast in the classroom has been made available to all students, almost 85% of the 303 students enrolled eat a healthy and free breakfast each morning. Breakfast participation increases at Breakfast in the Classroom schools as meals become more accessible to students who are running late, don't congregate in the dining room before school, or just aren't hungry at home. Serving breakfast outside of the cafeteria line does not impact the selection or nutrition of meals as classrooms are delivered a selection of student's favorite items including hot entrees such as sausage biscuits or kolaches, fresh fruit, 100% fruit juice and a choice of milk types.

"Few resources are as important as a nutritious breakfast. It has been shown that providing access to nutritious food increases students' concentration, and reduces students' absences and discipline problems. We have an obligation to ensure that every Texas child has the resources they need to reach their full potential," said Senator Eddie Lucio, Jr. (D-Brownsville)

The benefits of implementing a Breakfast in the Classroom program are wide spread. Many schools began the program as a way to ensure that each child on campus had the opportunity to participate in the Universal Free Breakfast Program offered at Harlingen CISD, soon realizing the program had additional benefits that enhanced student performance and engagement.

In a 2013 report by the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC), Breakfast in the Classroom principals from around the nation reported many positive outcomes from the program such as:

✓ FEWER REPORTS OF STUDENT HUNGER

61 percent

✓ FEWER TARDY STUDENTS

40 percent

✓ IMPROVED STUDENT ATTENTIVENESS

37 percent

✓ IMPROVED STANDARDIZED TEST SCORES

13 percent

Initiating a Breakfast in the Classroom program requires schools to rethink how they start each school day. It's not uncommon to encounter challenges in the initial stages of the program, but many concerns such as classroom mess, instructional delays, and counting and claiming of meals can be addressed up front by implementing best practices and adequately training staff.

"The biggest concern was the mess in the classroom but I must say that by teaching our students citizenship and how to clean up after themselves, it eliminates the concern. The cafeteria staff has everything ready and the pickup of the bags and trash is quick and much easier than the mess that would need to be cleaned in the cafeteria," said David.

Treasure Hills Elementary, the district's largest elementary with over 825 students, has implemented breakfast in the classroom as a creative solution to reduce morning congestion and crowding in the dining room. Rather than reporting to the dining room for breakfast, all Pre Kinder and Kindergarten students go directly to their classrooms where breakfast awaits them. Though this decision was made to improve the safety and security of the students, its greatest impact has been on the health and well-being of the student.

"Each child that participates (in Breakfast in the Classroom) benefits in different ways. For some, it is the fact that they would otherwise not eat, for others it is the additional instructional time. A few really benefit from the more intimate social setting it provides, making more timid students more likely to socialize," said Ronald Ingram, Treasure Hills Elementary Principal

These benefits have prompted Treasure Hills to consider expanding the breakfast in the classroom to all 51 classrooms next year, a move that will make breakfast more accessible to hungry kids. "When it comes down to it, students are 60% more likely to eat breakfast when it is offered in the classroom setting," says Judy Baker R.D., Director of Child Nutrition. Baker goes on to explain "the menu can be similar to what is served in a traditional breakfast line, but by bringing the meal to the student, they are more inclined to start their day off with the most important meal." Harlingen CISD continues to focus on supporting the health and educational potential of its children through proper nutrition and freedom from hunger through programs such as Breakfast in the Classroom.



GUTIERREZ MIDDLE SCHOOL LAUNCHES ROBOTICS CLUB

BY ANNIE SYKES



obots are no longer a thing of the future. Just ask members of the Gutierrez Middle School Robotics Club - they can build a robot that kicks a soccer ball in a matter of hours.

This school year marks the launch of HCISD's first robotics club. The inaugural team of Robojags (as they're fondly known) consists of a small group of sixth through eighth grade Gutierrez Middle School students. New members can join at any time, and no one is required to have previous experience. Visitors to a standard robotics meeting will see club members building robots that can complete a range of tasks. During practice, the Robojags usually divide into two groups to build their machines: programmers and engineers. The programmers write code that allows the robot to push, pull, kick, spin, and perform other maneuvers. The engineers build attachments to the robot so it can perform the code's instructions, like picking up a block or pushing another robot down to win a Sumo wrestling competition (this actually happened!). While most Robojags prefer one role to another, they are almost all proficient at both.

The team also competes at robotics competitions regularly, and bring home an impressive number of trophies despite their beginner status. At their very first competition, a robotics tournament sponsored by University of Texas Pan American's Hispanic Engineering, Science, and Technology initiative (HESTEC), the team placed 16th out of 60 teams. A few weeks ago, they took first place in a robotics competition held at GMS by the First Lego League. And soon, they're headed to San Antonio to see if they can win a regional tournament that would send them on to a world championship. Not bad for a group of middle schoolers with less than a year of experience in robotics.

There are many perks to being a Robojag, from having a spot on the team's impressive website (<http://gutierrezmsrobotics.weebly.com/>) to being the proud owner of several Robojags t-shirts. But more importantly, members of the Robotics Club get to experience computer science and engineering in a fun, hands-on way. As a district, HCISD aims to graduate students who are college and career ready. What better way to introduce students to STEM careers than having them build their own robots with their friends?

The Robotics Club is sponsored and coached by two of GMS's own staff, Ms. Veronica Baca and Mr. Edmundo Lopez. Ms. Baca spearheaded the program, ap-

proaching her principal for support and reaching out to Mr. Lopez to co-sponsor. "He's a former engineer, and I am not even that good at Legos," she quips. Ms. Baca, Mr. Lopez, and GMS Principal Mr. Mike Reyes are thrilled by the possibilities the Robotics Club presents. Mr. Reyes sees the club as a starting point for a future robotics program that will start in elementary school and extend through senior year. Ms. Baca and Mr. Lopez have begun inviting community members who work in STEM careers to present to the club. And all three - plus the district leadership - are thrilled to find a way to make college and career readiness engaging for their middle school students.

The Robotics Club at Gutierrez Middle School has achieved so much in their first year, but they're not stopping there. This summer, club sponsors and other staff will be offering a summer Robotics Camp at GMS. The camp is sponsored by the city of Harlingen, who shares HCISD's excitement about this STEM-centered activity. Campers will learn the basics of building robots from coding a left turn to creating a robot foot. If they're lucky, students may even learn to build and operate "The Claw" - a complex grabbing attachment that the Robojags recently perfected. The Robojags hope that this summer's camp will build interest in their club and robotics in general.

From coding to The Claw to summer camp, the Robotics Club at Gutierrez Middle School has ushered in a new era of extracurriculars. The Robojags are likely more excited about their upcoming tournament than about the fact that they're getting unparalleled STEM experience and enjoy doing it. Still, even the students know that Robotics Club is more than just a great way to spend some time with your friends. That's the beauty of Robotics. Whether you're a future engineer, a programming enthusiast, or simply curious about how robots work, joining the team is guaranteed to be a fun and educational experience.

Whether you're a future engineer, a programming enthusiast, or simply curious about how robots work, joining the team is guaranteed to be a fun and educational experience.



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Your child may be able to attend world-class schools at Harlingen CISD if:

- You work or own property within the boundaries of HCISD
- Your child has attended private or charter school within the HCISD boundaries for at least one year OR
- Your child is interested in attending one of HCISD's Schools of Choice
(*Harlingen School of Health Professions, Early College High School and KEYS Academy*)

HCISD offers all students

Diverse Academic Programs:

Full day Pre-Kindergarten (eligible Pre-K)
Dual Language Academies (Pre-K – 3rd)
SEAL Swim Program (2nd)
Chess Teams (Pre-K – 12th)
Digital Classrooms (Pre-K – 12th)
Leader in Me Academy (Pre-K – 5th)
UIL Academic Teams (4th - 12th)
Robotics Teams (6th – 12th)
Award-winning Athletic, Music &
Arts Programs (6th - 12th)

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