

Experience HCISD

THE MAGAZINE | SPRING 2013
Vol. 1, No. 2



HARLINGEN CONSOLIDATED INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

EXPERIENCE HCISD/ THE HISTORY ISSUE

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MESSAGE FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

Steve Flores, Ph.D., shares a message with families for summer

As we close the school year, our students conclude another chapter of their academic careers and anticipate the start of what is next. For some, it will be a new grade, a new school and in the case of our graduates, a new start in college, the armed forces or a career.

This year, our district experienced great success in our elementary, middle and high school campuses. Our students have reached many milestones and earned achievements that have allowed HCISD to be one of the best school districts in Texas and the nation.

We ask that students and families stay safe and active this summer. We offer our digital library and summer reading programs for students to gain an academic edge

next school year. In this district, we know learning is a lifelong mission that extends into our homes. I encourage all of our parents to use the summer to teach and to have fun with their children.

We look forward to seeing our students return safely and ready to learn in August and to watching our graduates succeed in whatever path they choose.

Thank you for your time and commitment to public education in our most outstanding community.



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COMING 2014

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HCISD IS ANNOUNCING ITS APPLICATION FOR 21ST CENTURY LEARNING CENTERS

The Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District would like to make our community aware that we intend to apply for the 21st Century Community Learning Center Cycle 8 Grant for the 2013-2014 school year. The application and any waiver request will be available for public review after submission of the application on March 26, 2013.



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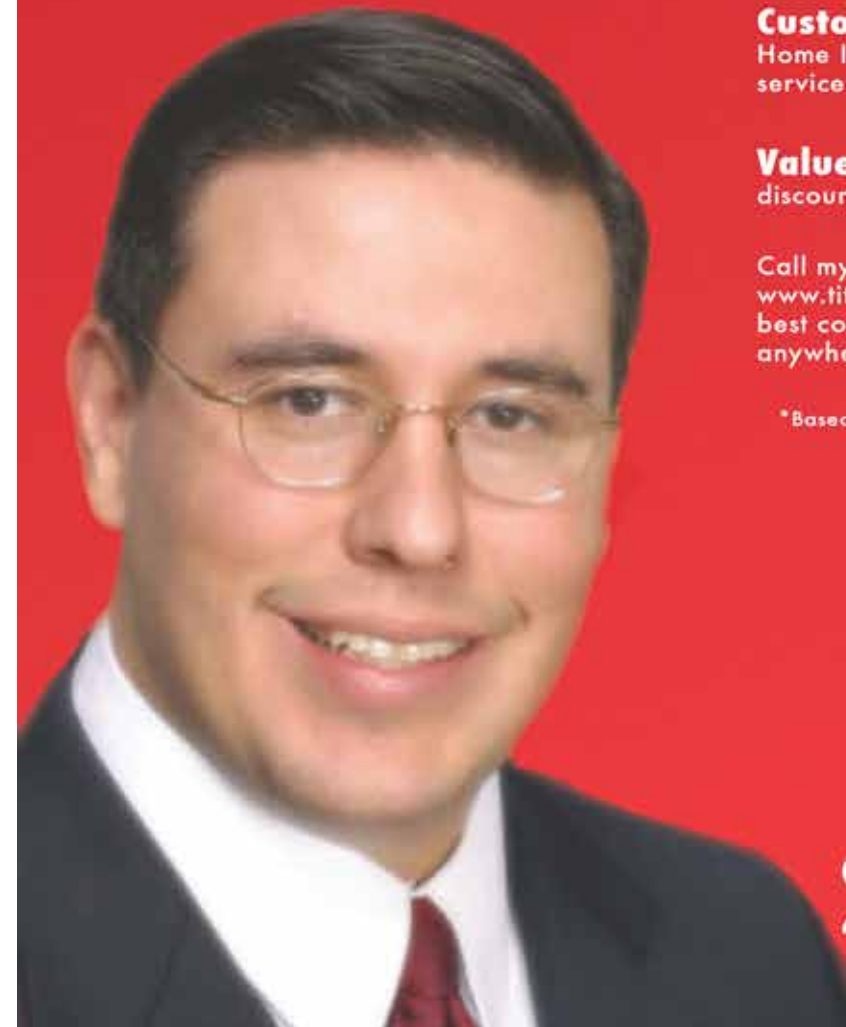
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ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT HARLINGEN HIGH SCHOOL

WRITER Sofia Lopez Gelston EMAIL sofia.lopezgelst@hcsd.org

A 2012 graduate from the U.S. Naval Academy, Diana Barrera began her journey from student to a gunnery officer on the USS Gonzalez at HCISD. Barrera graduated from Harlingen High School in 2008, and also attended Memorial Middle and Long Elementary schools. One of the 1,251 students admitted in 2008 to attend the Naval Academy, Barrera learned to balance her personal life with her academics. She graduated in 2012 as a commissioned officer in the US Navy with a Bachelors of Science degree in English and with a minor in Spanish. From her ship located near the Horn of Africa, she took some time to answer questions from Experience HCISD.

Experience HCISD: Having been to so many different places and having met extraordinary people, what does it mean to you to be able to say you're an alumna of Harlingen High School and of the Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District?

ENS Diana Barrera: I'm very proud and feel accomplished to say I come from the Rio Grande Valley and Harlingen. I am always proud to tell people where I come from, even if they don't know where it is. I always talk about the culture, the close-knit community we are and our hardworking lifestyle. I miss it all and visit every chance I get. I will never forget where I come from.

EH: How did your experience in the JROTC program at HHS impact your decision to join the military?

DB: JROTC was very structured and it taught me a lot about discipline. It was there that I learned the basic leadership principles I use to this day to lead my gunnery division of 16. I rose to a higher rank in JROTC as the years progressed until I became the command sergeant major in 2007 and the battalion commander for the brigade in 2008. That's when I realized that leading people and working to get things done came naturally to me. I wanted to be a part of the elite who served our country with honor

and moral values, and I felt that JROTC had taught me the basics in the four years I was there. That is when I decided to become an officer in the military.

EH: What memory gained from your time in Harlingen has had the greatest impact on who you are today?

DB: I think a lot about my family in Harlingen. My mom, my dad and my sister all have made a significant impact on who I am today. My dad is a landscaper and my mother cleans houses. When I was in school, I would help them out, especially with the landscaping business. From an early age, I learned how to work lawnmowers, ride tractors, use the leaf blower, etc. Every time I looked miserable, was sweaty and not wanting to be out there in the hot sun, my dad would look at us and say, "You don't want to end up doing this. You need to go to school and get an education." So obtaining a college degree and a decent job became a top priority for me.

EH: Becoming an officer must take many trials and tribulations. What knowledge have you taken away from these ventures?

DB: The first lesson I have learned so far is that not everything is going to go your way. Schedules will change, as well as your superiors. A working day that was supposed to end at 1500 could potentially end at 2000

because of things that arise throughout the day. You might be told you have to work weekends. You have to be flexible in this profession and learn how to manage time or you will not be successful. The second thing I would say I've learned is how to effectively communicate with my subordinates. Being in charge of 16 people, that's 16 different personalities I have to take into consideration. What works for some might not work for others. Not only do I want them to effectively execute what I ask them, but I also want to know and understand

DIANA BARRERA

SCHOOLS ATTENDED

Long Elementary, Memorial Middle and Harlingen High schools, graduating in 2008

FAVORITE TEACHERS

1SG Moses Mendoza, JROTC at HHS; 1SG J. Cerda, JROTC at HHS

PROFESSIONAL TITLE

Gunnery Officer on the USS Gonzalez with the U.S. Navy, serving on a seven-to-eight month deployment off the coast of Africa.

them as people. Most are married, have been in the Navy longer than I have and even have families, so I have to learn to be compassionate and understanding while at the same time accomplishing the mission at hand.

EH: Being one of the few Hispanic females to achieve an officer ranking, what advice would you give to

young women from Harlingen pursuing careers traditionally dominated by males?

DB: I would advise young aspiring women from Harlingen to work hard and pursue their dreams. There were plenty of people that told me that I wouldn't make it, but none of that stopped me from doing what I wanted to do with my life. I won't lie, I was apprehensive going to a mostly male university and work environment. It's intimidating, but you have to want it badly enough to overcome that mental obstacle. You just have to make it your ultimate goal, and you can't give up. Once you're there, you can't look back. You can't let anybody bring you down because people, especially the small percentage who don't think you belong there, will try to break you. But you have to show everyone, including yourself, that you can do it.

PHOTO

Barrera, right, poses at her graduation with 1SG Mose Mendoza of the HHS JROTC program.





ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

HARLINGEN HIGH SCHOOL SOUTH

WRITER Sofia Lopez Gelston EMAIL sofia.lopezgelst@hcsd.org

Before being crowned with the title of Miss Texas Teen USA and Miss Teen USA; moving to New York City to attend the New York Film Academy; serving as a spokeswoman traveling nationwide for many organizations including D.A.R.E., Best Buddies, Project Sunshine, Girl Talk, Reach Out and Read, and Same Sky Trade Initiative; being featured in "Seventeen Magazine"; and making guest appearances at notable events including the "Glamour" Women Of The Year awards and The People's Choice Awards, Danielle Doty began her rise to fame here at Harlingen CISD. A top 10 graduate from Harlingen High School South in 2011, Danielle attended Treasure Hills Elementary School and Coakley Middle School. After completing her duties as Miss Teen USA, she has continued her education at Texas Christian University, pursuing her dream of becoming a broadcaster for a national television network.

Experience HCISD: Being born and raised in Harlingen, what is your perspective being a native of a small town?

DD: Growing up in a small town has taught me many things. I think being such a long way away from larger cities helped me develop patience, especially when it came to traveling, which always took so long. Being very family oriented, growing up close to my grandparents and spending time with my family at our ranch or at the beach was always fun and memorable.

EH: After visiting so many different places and meeting so many extraordinary people, what has been your most interesting experience after being crowned Miss Teen USA?

DD: I absolutely loved living in New York City. I miss the Miss Universe Family and the exciting events that filled my every day, but I know I will be back one day soon! I loved all the traveling, especially with the USO to Germany, being on the "Celebrity Apprentice," working with several wonderful charitable alliances and attending the Red Carpet events. I have made long-lasting friends, met several outstanding athletes, celebrities and incredible people that have taught me so many life skills and

have helped me grow as an individual.

EH: I can imagine that while growing up in Harlingen CISD you had the opportunity to learn from dozens of great educators. Which educator from HCISD made the most lasting impact on your life?

DD: Well, I'd have to acknowledge my middle school math teacher, Mrs. Salinas; my drama teacher, Mrs. Lunsford; my high school chemistry teacher, Mr. Salgado; and my English teacher, Mrs. Wilson. I am probably leaving someone out, but those teachers have all influenced my love for

DANIELLE DOTY

SCHOOLS ATTENDED

Treasure Hills Elementary, Coakley Middle and Harlingen High School South, graduating in 2012

FAVORITE TEACHERS

Beatriz Salinas, math at CMS; Linda Lunsford, drama at CMS; Omar Salgado, chemistry at HHSS; and Mrs. Debra Wilson, English at HHSS.

AFTER HCISD

Studying broadcasting at Texas Christian University

the class and subject they taught.

EH: What advice would you give to young girls hoping to accomplish their dreams

of being successful in their academics and personal lives?

DD: My advice is to be comfortable with yourself.



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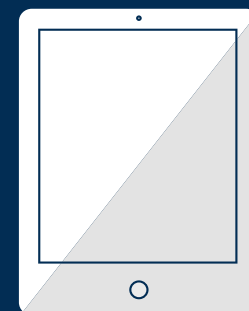
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A PARENT'S BUYING GUIDE TECHNOLOGY OF TODAY

WRITER Andrea Monasmith

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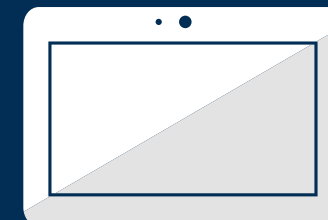
The classrooms of HCISD want to tap into mobile technology's limitless learning potential. As many secondary schools transition into a Bring Your Own Device model for student engagement, parents may find themselves shopping for learning tools. Students are not required to own their own devices, and our campuses feature Information Literacy Centers for students to borrow technology. However, if you do find yourself looking for a new mobile device, here are some tips that can help you along the way.



Apple's **iPad** tablet packs a 2048 x 1536 pixel resolution into a 7.8-inch display. This tablet has the power to record video in 1080p HD, along with face detection and video stabilization. The iPad can get up to 10 hours of battery life while multitasking. **Price – iPad 16 GB \$499.**



Amazon's **Kindle Fire** tablet and e-book reader has a 7-inch display with a 1024 x 600 pixel resolution with a 9-hour battery life. It only has 8 GB of storage, but comes with free cloud storage and the ability to view your Amazon content on other devices. **Price – Kindle Fire 16 GB \$159.**



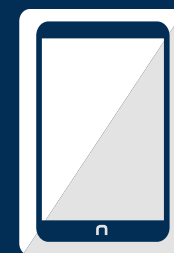
The **Samsung Galaxy Note 10.1** tablet has a 1290 x 800 pixel resolution display with a battery life of 10 hours. The 16 GB model comes with the ability to add on more space, capping out at 80 GB of space. It includes free 50 GB of free cloud storage. **Price – Samsung Galaxy Note 10.1 16 GB \$499.**



Apple's **iPhone 5** phone has a 4-inch Retina display at a 1136 x 640 pixel resolution. An 8-hour browsing time with lightning fast charging time yields for a quality user experience. The 8 megapixel camera is one of the top three most popular cameras on photosharing website Flickr. **Price – iPhone 5 16 GB \$199 with a cell service contract.**



Samsung's **Galaxy Note 2** phone surprises with a 5.5-inch HD display. It features a big screen on a small phone. Bundled with a stylus, this phone is able to take quick notes while multitasking. It comes with an easy mode, which makes for simpler functionality. **Price – Galaxy Note 2 \$299 with a cell service contract.**



Barnes & Noble's **Nook HD** tablet has a 7-inch display with a stunning 1440 x 900 pixel resolution. This tablet only comes with 8 GB of space; however, can be expanded to 16 GB via a micro SD Card. Barnes and Noble's offers over three million books, magazines, videos and apps for their tablets. **Price – Nook HD \$199.**



What's the Difference?
Android vs Apple



Android and **iOS (Apple)** are two different operating systems (OS), like Microsoft's Windows 8 and Apple's Mountain Lion. Each OS performs differently depending on their hardware and software. Popular applications (apps) are generally available on both OSes, however, iOS has slightly more options. Android is an open source OS, meaning it is available on more devices, while iOS is limited to Apple devices.

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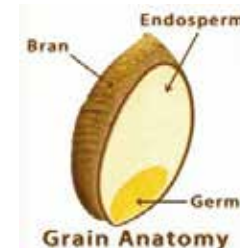
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2012-2013

Awards

The students of HCISD continued their tradition of excellence in 2013 by earning some of the most prestigious awards. Below is a snapshot of what HCISD students have achieved so far this year.



The **Harlingen High School** Armed Drill Team made campus history at the 5th Brigade U. S. Army Drill Team Championships held in San Antonio at the Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center on Feb. 9.

The team placed 10th at the competition, earning them a spot to compete for the top prize in the United States Army Junior Reserve Officer's Training Corps (JROTC) National Drill Team Championships.

The HHS Drill Team competed in the National Championship in Louisville, Ky., on April 6.



Students from **Coakley Middle School** earned its 37th consecutive district championship for UIL academics.

Coakley blew away the competition with a score of 410. The team had 26, 27 and 19 students place first, second and third, respectively. The team consists of 30 students.



The **Harlingen High School South** Speech, Drama and Debate team earned the Sweepstakes award for their outstanding overall performance in the National Forensic League Gulf Coast National Qualifier hosted at Harlingen High School South on Feb. 23.

HHSS had ten students qualified for the National Forensic League National Finals to be held in Birmingham, Alabama on June 8. In order to qualify for the National tournament, students must have placed first or second in their respective event.

Qualifiers include:

Angel Yanez (12), Matthew Almaguer (10), Jann Soto(11), Luana Chaires(12), Paige Robles(11), Erik Rodriguez(12), Dante Colmenares (12), Collin Flemmons(11), Rebecca Pockrus(10) and Chris Esparza (11).



The **Sam Houston Elementary** Chess Team proved they could compete against the best at the 2013 Super Nationals V Chess Tournament held in Nashville, Tennessee on April 7.

In the K3 division, the team of Maxx Perez, Christian Cruz, Ernesto Garcia, Gianelli Serrano, and David Rodriguez placed sixth out of 76 schools. The K3 Blitz team of Jacob Fox, Carlos de Leon, Sabian Nieto and Michael Casas were awarded fifth place.

Over 4,000 students from across the nation competed.



Jude Ikponmwonba, junior at **Early College High School**, was selected to attend the 8th High School Presidential Inaugural Conference in Washington, D.C. He was one of 1,900 high school students from around the nation selected to attend.

Students were selected based on their grade point average and recommendations. He was encouraged to submit his application as part of his participation in National Honor Society.

The conference is held once every four years in conjunction with the formal Inauguration of the President and Vice President of the United States. The inaugural gathering took place from Jan. 19 to Jan 23.



Omar Hunter and Erik Jorn of **Harlingen High School** were awarded positions on the 2012-2013 Academic All-State Football Team by the Texas High School Coaches Association (THS-CA). They received a First Team placement, which represents the highest honor a student-athlete could earn.

Student-athletes were awarded positions based on their academic performance and merit. To be considered for any of the teams, students were required to maintain a minimum of a 92 average throughout high school and be nominated by a coach.



The **Harlingen High School South** basketball team outperformed the competition to be named the 32 - 5A District Champions on Feb. 12.

The team soared over Los Fresnos with a score of 65 - 44 to win the district title. The team finished off the season with a district record of 14 -2.



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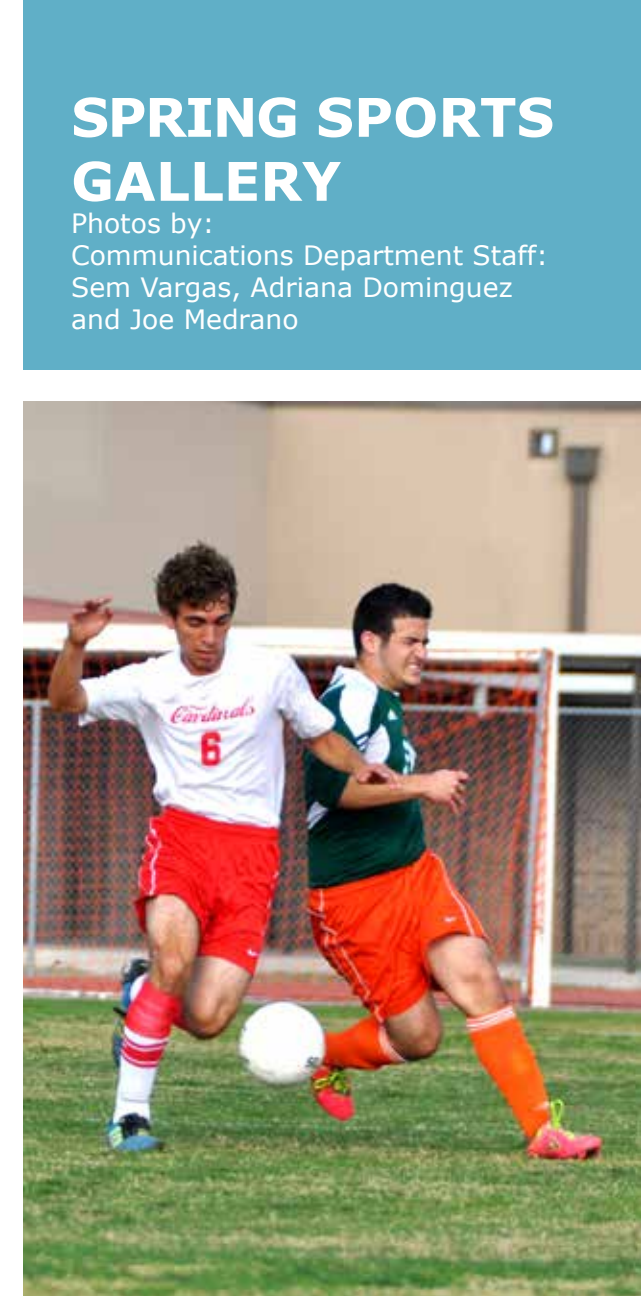
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SPRING SPORTS GALLERY

Photos by:
Communications Department Staff:
Sem Vargas, Adriana Dominguez
and Joe Medrano

MUSIC PROGRAMS PAVE ROAD TO A BRIGHTER FUTURE

“It not only benefits their grades, but they do better in sports, social situations and relationships. It really is all across the board that we see improvement.” - Jason Hooper, director of orchestral studies at Harlingen High School South

WRITER: Maritza Gallaga EMAIL: maritza.gallaga@hcisd.org

When Memorial Middle School student William Galvan picks up his viola and plays smooth melodies in his orchestra class or practices at home, he's not only learning how to create beautiful music — he's improving his cognitive abilities.

“Reading music is just like reading one of my favorite novels,” said Galvan, sixth grade. “It puts me into another world. Reading music helped me read better and understand the novel more.”

Galvan is one of over 3,500 students active in music programs in the Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District and his improved reading skills are a common occurrence in music students. Beyond its ear pleasing value, music education has been connected to multiple areas that benefit a student's grades and tests scores.

“We give them an instrument and a venue to learn, and what ends up happening is that over time, the student will begin to feel a function within our academic system,” said Jason Hooper, director of orchestral studies at Harlingen High School South, Coakley Middle School and Vela Middle School. “In turn, students will begin to succeed in their classes and their grades go up.”

Enrolled in her first year of orchestra, Ericka Medrano, sixth grade student at Memorial, has already seen a change in her classroom performance. She specifically recalls the effect that it has had on her grades in one particular subject.

“My reading grades have gone up,” said Medrano. “In orchestra, you have to pay attention to the music. When you are reading, you have to pay attention to the words. It has helped

me pay attention to what my teacher is saying and what I'm reading.”

Its effects aren't only felt in the classroom. Music programs have been known to promote the development of a student's social skills, confidence and language processing ability.

“It not only benefits their grades, but they do better in sports, social situations and relationships,” Hooper said. “It really is all across the board that we see improvement.”

These acquired skills can come in handy during a student's transition into a new stage in their academic career. The progression from eighth to ninth grade can be the most pivotal transition in a student's education because the first year of high school tends to be an indicator of future academic performance.

“Being in orchestra has helped my transition from middle school to high school go a lot smoother,” said Eliud Cardenas, a violin player at Harlingen High School South. “It helped me develop socially and make friends from all of the different middle schools my first year. I know it has helped me be more successful in high school.”

For students interested in participating in one of HCISD's music programs, they are encouraged to contact their counselor. Hooper encourages all students considering enrollment to begin their musical journey as early as possible to ensure they have the best opportunity to gain all the benefits that are associated with participating.



Comprehensive Services



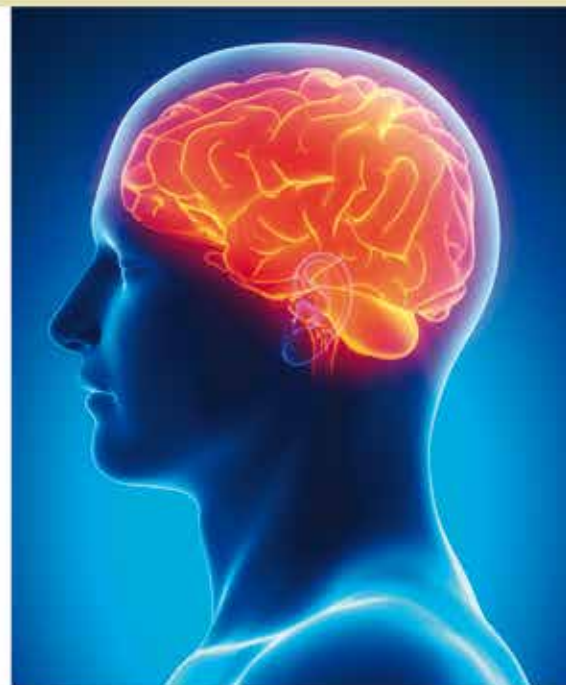
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A native of Harlingen and an HHS graduate, Dr. Saucedo received his BS Degree from Texas Tech University and attended Texas Tech School of Medicine, earning a Doctor of Medicine. Completing his residency in Pediatrics at Texas Tech, he was named Resident of the Year in 2006 - 2007 and is a member of the American Academy of Pediatrics, Texas Medical Association and the Cameron - Willacy Medical Society



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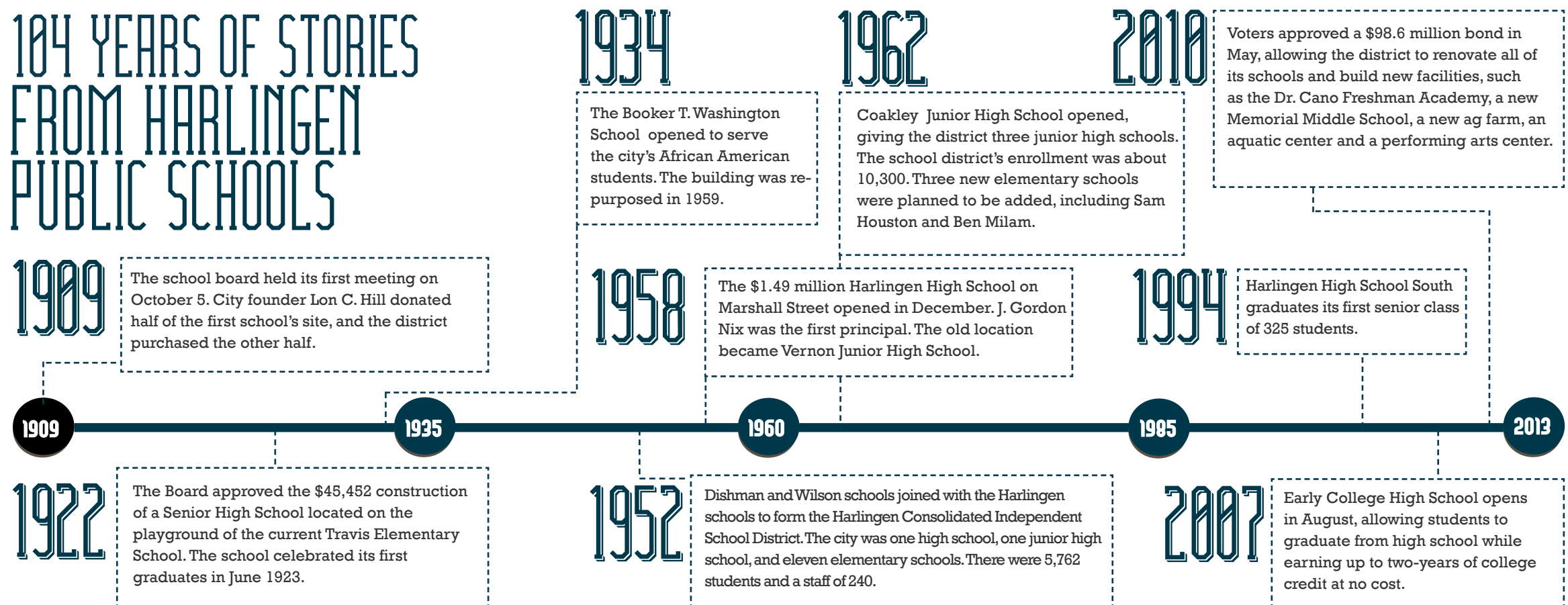
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HISTORY

104 YEARS OF STORIES FROM HARLINGEN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

A proud history that dates back to the founding of the city in 1909, the Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District has grown from a system of public education with schools in five wards to a thriving consolidated district featuring 28 schools across the communities of Harlingen, Combes and Primera. In this issue, Experience HCISD took to the history books, looking for the images and stories from Harlingen CISD's history. Writers and designers peered through hundreds of old photos, interviewed some of the district's most influential people and explored the traditions at Bowie Elementary School, Austin Elementary School, Coakley Middle School, Vernon Middle School, Harlingen High School South and Harlingen High School.



PHOTOS FROM HCISD HISTORY

In the Spring of 2012, the HCISD Library Services and Communication departments began a massive digitization of photos from across the district. Hundreds of old photos are currently hosted on the HCISD photo site, accessible at photos.hcisid.org/history and the district's Facebook page, [facebook.com/hcisid](https://www.facebook.com/hcisid).

"We want to be able to create a digital history book and archive for our families and community members to be able to enjoy for generations to come," said library services coordinators Dr. Laura Sheneman.

Dr. Sheneman has asked current and former HCISD staff, students and alumni to please visit the photo galleries on Facebook and HCISD's photo site and to leave comments or tag people in photos. Please email Dr. Sheneman with any questions at laura.sheneman@hcisid.org.



BOWIE

Elementary School

WRITER Eileen Mattei EMAIL eileen@valleybusinessreport.com

Originally known as South Ward School, the grammar school built on Lincoln Street in 1928 soon acquired the nickname La Escuela de Las Viboras due to its architectural design. Brightly colored snakes and elements of Mayan, Toltec and Aztec cultures predominated in the cast concrete facade created by Harlingen artist Luis Lopez Sanchez. Snakes symbolized wisdom and knowledge: Quetzalcoatl, the feathered serpent, brought reading, writing and math to the people of Mexico. Aztecs used the "speech bubble" in their art.

The elementary school, renamed in 1935 for Texas hero James Bowie in anticipation of the Texas Centennial, is the oldest Harlingen school building still in use.

Generations of students eagerly learned times tables, cursive writing and state capitals at Bowie, just as students do now. Yet what they recalled vividly were the field trips to the Rainbo and Holsum bakeries. "They would give each of us a mini-loaf of fresh baked bread, a ruler and a Rainbo paper tent hat, as well. We always loved getting to go to that place," Phillip Sharp said.

In the days before air conditioning, students looked forward to outside recess, too, and the time to use the swings or to play tag and dodge ball.

Bowie was so overcrowded at one point students were bussed to Bonham. Several years after the school board closed elementary campuses in 1973, Bowie gained a new cafeteria and air conditioning.



Outside classrooms were enclosed in the 1980s. During a 1990s remodel, Principal Susan Salinas saw work crews uncover brick chimneys that had been hidden behind walls for years, she said. Later, long-buried sidewalks surfaced during construction preparation. Further additions brought a music room and stage to Bowie along with an extension of the original mural.

Indeed, the wisdom implied by the Escuela de las Viboras motif has been displayed in Bowie Elementary School's Exemplary ratings in 2007, 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012 (the state did not release rating scores in 2013). Above and beyond that, Bowie has been placed in the top four percent of Texas schools by the Texas Business and Education Coalition (TBEC) ratings. Based on test score improvement, Bowie has won the TBEC award five years in a row beginning in 2007 and is the only Harlingen school to achieve the honor.

Every grade level at Bowie has at least one garden. All 370 students participate in the hands-on life science program that lets them work in separate gardens planted with native plants, vegetables, hummingbird-attracting plants and salsa ingredients, as well as flowers. Additionally, a small pond allows students to observe the life cycle of tadpoles.

All students participate in college days and other fun activities set to prepare them for the long academic journey that lies ahead in middle school, high school and college. With a history of strong leadership and a beautiful campus, Bowie Elementary is sure to remain a bright spot on the South-side of Harlingen.



AUSTIN

Elementary School

WRITER Eileen Mattei EMAIL eileen@valleybusinessreport.com

Built in 1928, the North Ward School on Austin Street was notable for its archways of floral designs molded into the cast concrete. To celebrate the Texas Centennial in 1936, the school was renamed Austin Elementary, in honor of the Texas hero Stephen F. Austin.

By 1949, sidewalks had been installed on Austin Street so children could easily walk with their friends to the neighborhood school consisting of two classes per grade level. "School was all we had. There was no television until the mid-50s," recalled Gerry Fleuriot. "Parents had tremendous faith in what education could do for us as individuals and the country. Our fifth grade teacher, Mrs. Bass, was fluent in Spanish, and she greeted students in Spanish and had conversations with us in Spanish for a few minutes a day. By the time we got to junior high, many of us were prepared for learning Spanish."

In the 1950s, Miss Voight, a third grade teacher, captured her class's imagination and heart, Forrest Garling said. "She put on plays where the boys were dressed as girls, which everyone thought was a hoot. One of my friends was dressed as Little Bo Peep; others were Spanish dancing ladies. She did so many different, interesting things we didn't want to leave her class. The parents got involved and pleaded for her to stay with the students in fourth grade. So she moved on with us, and the magic continued," Garling said.

During those years, some Austin school students walked at lunch by themselves to the soda fountain at Moser Drugs a few blocks away, a luxury former students fondly remembered.

Harlingen schools (and many homes) were not air conditioned until the mid-1970s, so floor fans in each classroom moved the hot air and the gnats coming through the window screens. Former Austin student David Archer remembered that because he had been talking in class and was sent to the hall to finish his math problems. He was lucky that the school board was touring the campus right then, because, as he recalled, "A lady board member helped me with my math."

Austin still had sixth grade students when the school's enrollment topped 600 on a campus designed for 500. The first portable building was added in 1982 and other additions and renovations have kept the second oldest school in HCISD a viable and upbeat campus.

Today, according to Principal Debra Valenzuela, students look forward to any opportunity to use technology as part of the learning process. In fact, technology motivates them, even as testing becomes more rigorous. The curriculum now extends beyond academics to include formal character education, which covers appropriate behavior, honesty, reliability and trustworthiness. "These are qualities that students need to be productive citizens," she said.

Science teacher Blanca Villarreal organized a fifth grade science club called the Color Cats, a pioneering recycling group. She is the caretaker of Gargoyle, the very large and very popular iguana who is Austin's living mascot. A symbol of Harlingen's neighborhood education structure in a neighborhood filled with tall, lavish trees, Austin Elementary has remained a cornerstone for students and families.





WRITER Eileen Mattei **EMAIL** eileen@valleybusinessreport.com

After Mary E. Coakley donated 19 acres to HCISD for a school, mid-century modernism architects Bowman, Swan and Heister designed a single story building with thin-shell concrete vaults that was built in 1961. When construction costs ran \$100,000 over budget, and the city delayed paving the Sixth Street and Taft crossing, the opening of Mary E. Coakley Junior High School was postponed until September 1962.

Art Martinez, who was among the first students to spend three years at Coakley Junior High, remembers one November day when he was an eighth grade student. "On the PA, we were informed that President John Fitzgerald Kennedy had been shot in Dallas. An hour later in Mrs. Parker's history class, the most horrendous announcement came over the PA. JFK had died."

The first additions, reading rooms and a vocational shop, were completed in 1973 and air conditioning was added soon after. More classrooms, a science wing, band hall and a new gym were added in the 1990s.

Bill Pietro, who was Coakley's principal from 1976 to 1995, said the combination of a top-notch staff, a positive attitude and clear discipline created a consistently high-achieving campus that found itself in the national spotlight. "We got the kids to believe that they could succeed. We emphasized their strengths and challenged them." After a hard fought game, an athlete apologized to the principal for the loss. "I said 'Coakley never loses a game. Time just runs out.' I didn't pay attention to wins and losses, only that they were



always trying."

Mr. Pietro could be heard daily on the PA system congratulating students for their accomplishments, both in and out of school. Coakley at one time educated 1,200 students in buildings designed for 800, earning various academic excellence awards along the way. "It's not the building that matters," Pietro said. "It's the staff. That's where it starts and ends. You do what has to be done."

Gail Thomasson taught language arts and reading to at-risk students. She believed it was essential for those students to be integrated into the school at all levels and to take leadership roles.



Coakley Proud was the name of the students' club, which took on community projects that involved relevant learning. They wrote local histories, put on a Red Ribbon Fair, researched a nearby wildlife area and raised funds to put in a rose garden at the school. The White House called Coakley one morning to say that President George H.W. Bush had named Coakley Proud the 744th Point of Light in recognition of their efforts to better the community.

When sixth graders came to the campus in 1997, the name changed to Coakley Middle School. The school continues a tradition of excellence, celebrating its 50th anniversary in December 2012 and its 37th consecutive academic UIL district championship in January 2013. With outstanding teachers and programs with proven success in benefiting students, it's no wonder that Coakley has remained true to its motto for over five decades – Simply the Best.





WRITER Eileen Mattei
EMAIL eileen@valleybusinessreport.com

Vernon Middle School started life in 1929 as “the showplace of the Valley” – Harlingen’s senior high school. The ornate entrance was strikingly similar to the White House’s East Wing, thanks to architect Roscoe Dewitt who designed both. Inside the school, modern elements included an auditorium with a motion picture projection booth, sliding blackboards, boys’ and girls’ showers, a soundproof music room and skylights on the second floor.

In 1958, the 13th Street school became Vernon Junior High, named for Julia Vernon who founded Harlingen’s chapter of Future Teachers of America, while teaching English at all levels: elementary, junior high and senior high.

Over the next 40 years, Vernon evolved into a ninth grade campus, an eighth grade campus, then a seventh and eighth grade campus before becoming Vernon Middle School for sixth, seventh and eighth grade students in 1997. Through the years, Vernon and the adjacent Gay/Memorial junior high shared the Barn, the spacious boys’ gym built in 1939 and renowned for its wooden floors, benches, handrails and basketball backboards. Flooding from Hurricane Beulah in 1967 warped the gym floor, but it was soon restored. Nevertheless, legend has it that the Vernon Mustangs knew where the dead spots were on that wooden floor and would maneuver their opponents to them and steal the ball away.

In 1973 when Vernon was a ninth grade campus, the sounds of basketball games and rock and roll bands filled the Barn. At the annual talent show, Ida Gomez played her guitar and sang



Roberta Flack’s “Killing Me Softly” to win second prize in a year dazzled by disco sounds. “Those were the good days, so much fun. My English teacher, Mrs. Salinas, made a big difference in my life. She gave me confidence by encouraging me to keep singing and loaning me a tape recorder. Because of her, I sing at weddings.”

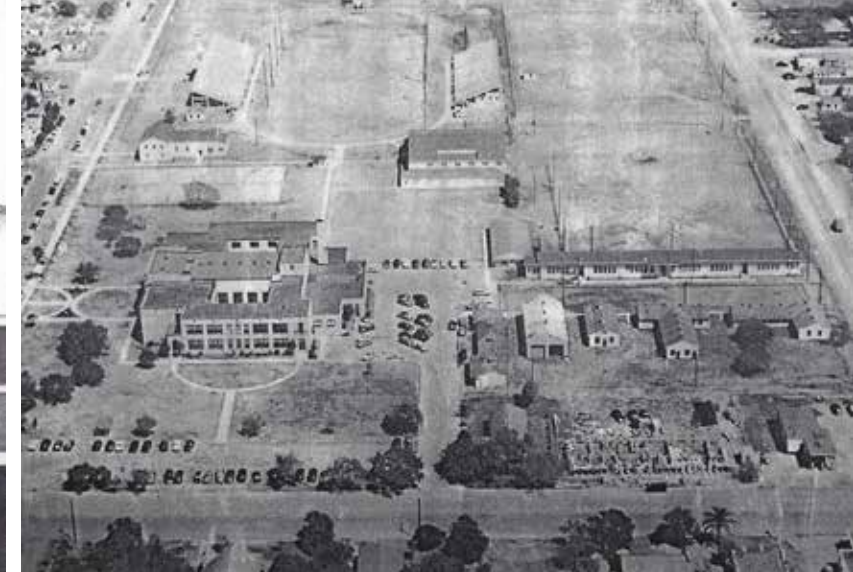
Vernon held the ninth grade prom in the girls’ gym, with Principal Glen Cleckler on hand to take pictures of the dressed-up,



high-school-bound students. Until 1985, when Vernon became a closed campus, students dashed across the street to buy bear claws and other pastries at the Mayflower Bakery.

After being an integral part of Vernon culture for 59 years, the district replaced the Barn for \$1.36 million in 1998. The Band Hall received upgrades in 2012 as part of the district’s 2010 bond initiative; however, the program’s history still holds strong through the pictures of the school’s bands from years gone by being displayed across the hallways.

The first additions to Vernon – a vocational shop, classrooms and reading rooms – were completed in 1973, and modifications and additions continued through the years. In 2013, a



major restoration project was completed that returned Vernon’s façade and parts of the interior to the original glory. Second floor skylights reappeared and now throw light on trophy cases that contain championship cups from the high school years (basketball – 1920; baseball - 1927) and junior high years (tennis – 1966). The wide stairways still reverberate with students rushing upstairs to the science lab and its black soapstone tables. The girls’ gym floor survives in the main office, and the old gym scoreboard is tucked above the office’s dropped ceiling. A contemporary cafeteria complete with bistro tables and Mustang murals give this classic campus a bright, new feel. Only a corridor away is a recent bit of history, which parents recognize, if the students don’t – the wooden pay-phone booth, site of many first kisses and several Superman appearances.

Like a treasure tucked away in the central courtyard, two avocado trees stand strong, a metaphor for a campus strong with tradition and proud to have served thousands of students and families for 84 years.

SOUTH

Harlingen High School South



Initially planned for ninth grade students, Alamo School, designed by architects Lubunski Associates, opened at 1701 Dixieland Road in 1987 with Glen

Cleckler as principal. "The building was a work in progress," the long time educator recalled.

The next year Alamo became a ninth and tenth grade campus. Soon after, Harlingen residents began debating where the dividing line should be drawn to split students between two high schools. Additions and renovations in 1988 and 1990 set the stage for the first students to attend Harlingen High School South.

In 1993, the first Bird Bowl was played, with the Hawks meeting the Cardinals on the field. The pioneer class of 325 students graduated from the new high school in 1994.

"In our junior year at Harlingen High School, we realized they were going to make a new school," said Jennifer Johnson Wilson who graduated in 1994. "Breaking away from tradition was exciting. There was no negativity about being in the new school. We had amazing teachers. English teacher Judy Smith wrote the fight song and alma mater, and we got to vote on those and the class motto. The teachers and assistant principal, Bob Jackson,

WRITER Eileen Mattei EMAIL eileen@valleybusinessreport.com

did a lot to boost school spirit and make it fun for us. Every Friday before football games, the drum corps would march up and down the halls. Teachers would let us out of class, and we would all fall in behind them. We were proud of being the first ones. Our graduation celebration was a joint event with the two campuses."

The school slowly garnered recognition for its academic, athletic and musical achievements.

Martha Stenseng taught marketing and entrepreneur classes, as well as the senior classes coop program for 17 years. Many of her students wrote a business plan while learning about economics, financials and signage. "They found it a real eye-opening experience. It gave them time to think about being in business. I know a number of them graduated with business degrees and have gone into management programs."

In addition to rigorous academic work, students followed their individual interests through clubs, organizations and athletics that ranged from Debate, Decathlon and Digital Graphics to Skills USA, Southern Stars and Student Council. For nearly a decade, the Harlingen High School South Speech Drama and Debate team has become a state and national competitor with several students qualifying for tournaments at Ivy League uni-



A step above



versities and at the state UIL competition, as well as the National Forensics League competition.

With a motto of "A Step Above," Harlingen High School South has created a positive environment for high quality education that prepares students for their future: college-ready and career-ready. Success is evident in the high percentage of students who are accepted into colleges and universities.



WRITER Eileen Mattei EMAIL eileen@valleybusinessreport.com

In 1914, the first four students graduated from high school in Harlingen after attending classes at Central Ward school on Jackson and Sixth. The high school, which went only to eleventh grade, had enough boys enrolled that year to field a 14-man football team. In 1920, the youngest daughter of city founder Lon Hill graduated with nine others. The first Hispanic student Luz Ramirez graduated in 1921. By 1925, a new twin-towered high school had 140 students and a graduating class of 34. That building was destroyed by the 1933 hurricane.

Dedicated in 1930 as a senior high, the Harlingen High School on 13th Street at Harrison was hailed as the Showplace of the Valley. From its spotlighted façade (which resembled the East Wing of the White House and was designed by the same architect) to the modern auditorium, square classrooms, teachers' lounge, domestic science rooms, and sliding blackboards, the high school was a visual and functional sensation. Cardinal Field was built adjacent to the high school in 1934, and the stadium was completed in 1947, a year the football team triumphed as district champions.

Olga Lozano graduated with the Class of 1942, the year Texas first required 12 years of schooling for a diploma. "We would eat our lunches sitting along the canal in front of the high school, or we would walk home for lunch," she recalled. "We had a lot of fun talking and walking to and from school with our friends." Few students had cars, and World War II brought rationing of gasoline. Olga Lozano sang with the Glee Club, played on the girls' basketball and volleyball teams, worked on the yearbook, and attended dances in the gym. Mr. Clyde Fincher and Mrs. Connal-

ly were among her teachers. (Lozano's mother, Margarita Villarreal, had taught on the Saldana Ranch before the Harlingen School District was formed.)

Harlingen High School was integrated in 1957 with the closing of Washington School. Lonnie Davis, Class of 1962, was the first black student to graduate from Harlingen High, as well as the first to play on the football team. On December 19, 1958 students said goodbye to the hallowed halls and began 1959 at the new \$1.485 million high school on East Marshall. Built on an open plan, the new school had the feel of a small college campus with freedom implicit in the absence of confining hallways. Forrest Garling recalled the first years at the new campus, particularly the Mardi Gras dances and junior and senior proms held in the gym,



true sock hops. "We had to go in socks on the new floor. Even for formals we had to be shoeless."

A 12-classroom wing had been added by the time the 251 students in the Class of 1962 received their diplomas. Enrollment shrank with

the closing of the air base that year, but 20 years later, two portable buildings were placed on campus to handle increasing enrollment.

In 1978 Carl Owens began his 25 years as basketball coach, guiding the Cards to 11 district titles and 19 playoff appearances.

"Some students do only one thing well," said Verna Young, who was principal from 1984 to 2000. "If playing sports was what they did well, it kept them in school and working at their classes." Students in the fine arts programs worked hard: the jazz band was invited to New York to work with Wynton Marsalis; the Harlingen High School Band marched in the Tournament of Roses Parade on New Year's Day 1987.

Student antics included Sonny Gonzales imitating the bell ringing to get his classes dismissed early. "Sometimes there was nothing else you could do but laugh and then get them back on track," Young said. As principal, she eased students-- and their parents-- through the angst of opening a second high school, and at one point presided over an 11th and 12th grade campus. "That was like a dream come true. The students were more mature and ready to graduate." From the 1994-95 school year until 2012-13 Harlingen High School has remained a ninth to twelfth grade campus with an emphasis on relentless pursuit of student success in an atmosphere of caring and excellence. Seventy percent of graduates go to a two-year or four-year college.



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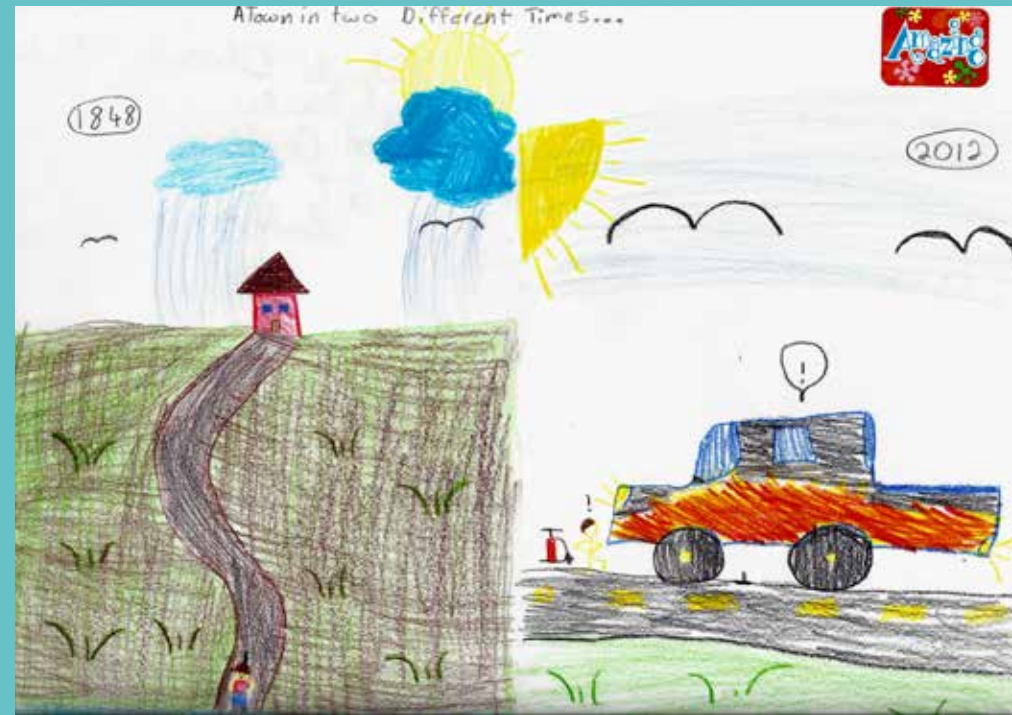
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HISTORY LESSONS

For the history issue of Experience HCISD, our editorial team asked teachers to submit student history projects from the school year. Some tremendous examples of student work were submitted, and the editorial team made some tough decisions in selecting the artwork. The team would like to thank all of the students and teachers submitting work for this issue. HCISD has some amazing talent in our classrooms.



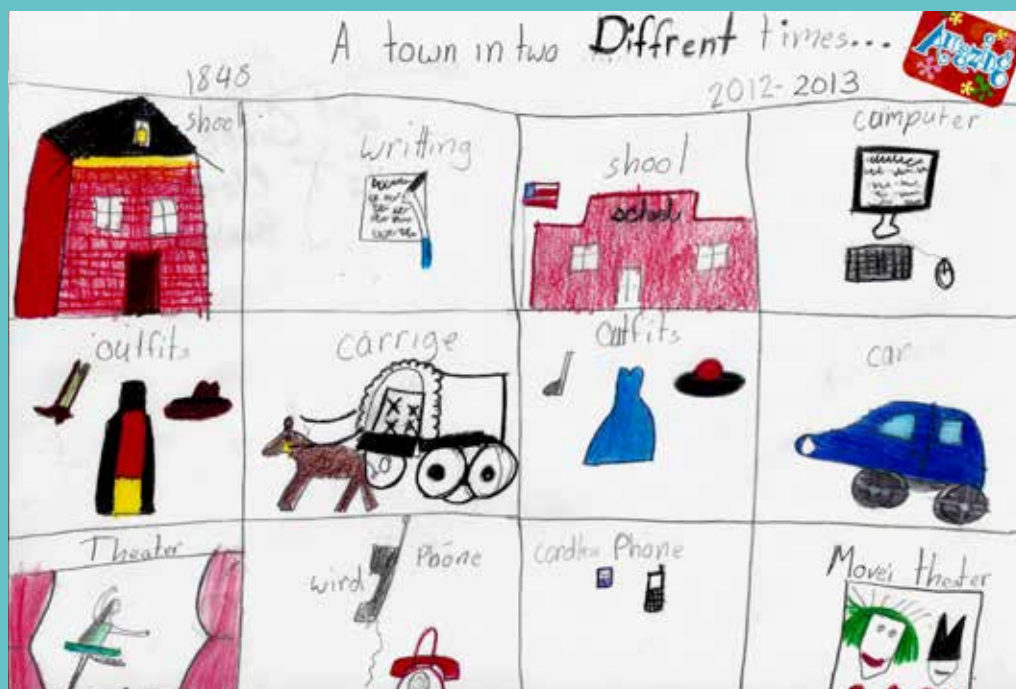
KRISTA LOPEZ / 3rd Grade / Bonham GT Class



MIKAYLA ALEXIS RUBALCABA / 3rd Grade / Bonham GT Class



TRAVIS BOWERY / "U.S. Capitol" / Kindergarten / Ben Milam



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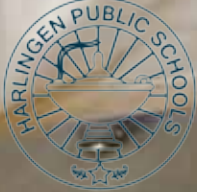
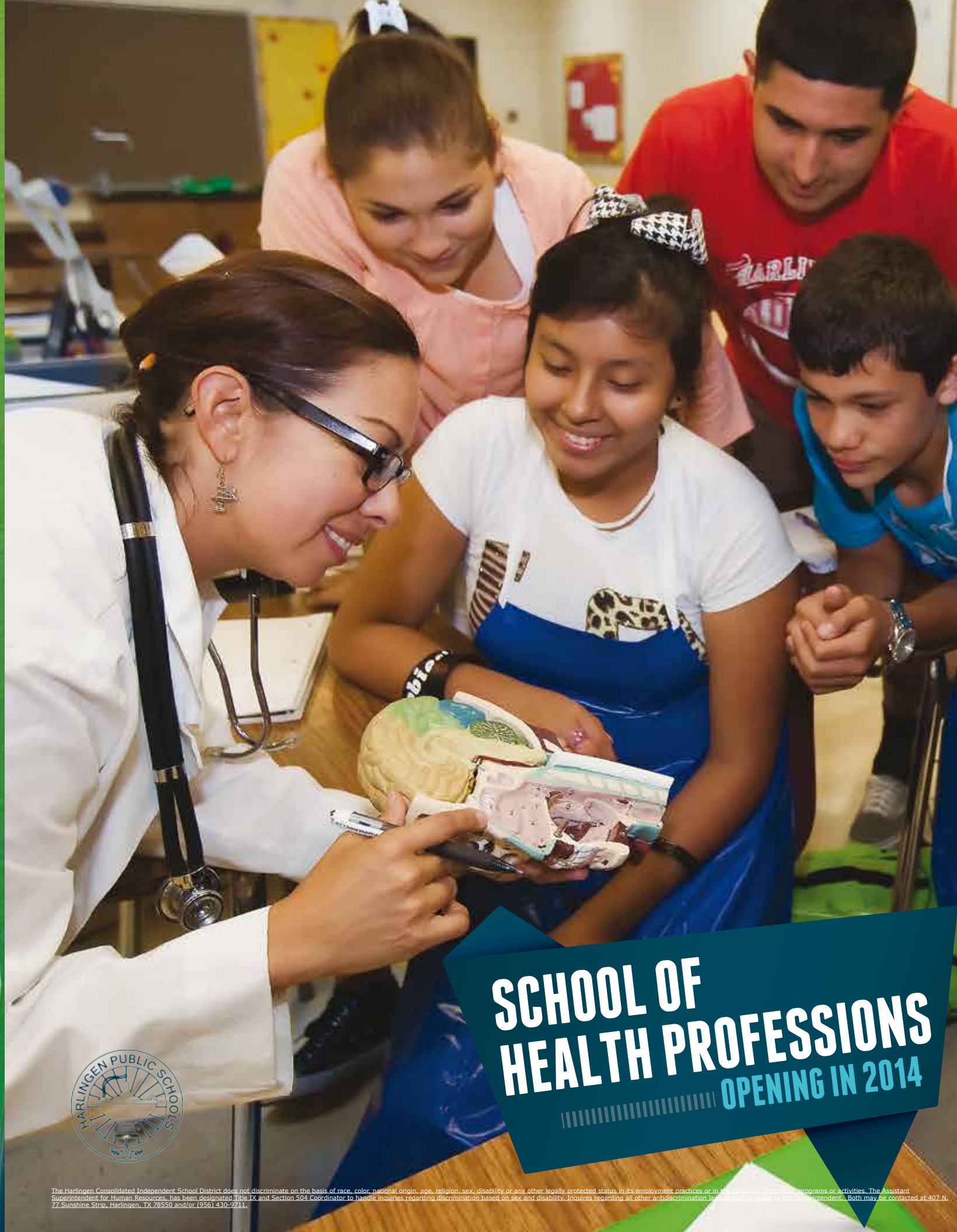
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A photograph of two young girls with brown hair, smiling and hugging each other outdoors. The girl on the left is wearing a pink hoodie with a star pattern, and the girl on the right is wearing a red shirt. They are standing in front of a blurred background of trees and other people.

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Call (956)430-9500 or visit www.hcisd.org/experience for more information.

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