

SPRING 2016 | Vol. 4, No. 1

# *Experience* HCISD

THE MAGAZINE



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## *Experience* HCISD



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*Experience* HCISD

# A Letter To Our COMMUNITY

As HCISD continues to experience growth in enrollment and academic achievement, we are creating new avenues of opportunities for students to succeed.

Twenty-fifteen marked a defining moment for our district. Led by our visionary Board of Trustees and our strategic plan, “Transforming Learning for Global Achievement,” we called for a Tax Ratification Election to propose a new tax rate that would generate additional funds to address facility needs through replacements and upgrades without incurring debt. The Harlingen community subsequently approved the tax ratification on September 12, 2015, giving us the opportunity to forge ahead in our efforts to provide world-class campuses and facilities for our students.

To get to that moment, would not have been possible without our community’s support. We will continue to work together to invest in our students and their futures. Since the tax ratification was passed, we have purchased new musical instruments, invested in security camera upgrades for our school buses, started the process to modernize elementary classroom furniture, initiated upgrades to technology infrastructure at our comprehensive high schools, and many more projects are coming soon.

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 superintendent of this innovative district while working alongside outstanding students, teachers, administrators, staff and board members on a daily basis to remain true to our vision.

Thank you for your commitment and your support of HCISD students and schools. Together we will continue to prepare our students for global achievement.

To keep up to date with ongoing and upcoming TRE projects, visit [www.hcisid.org/tre](http://www.hcisid.org/tre).

*Dr. Art Cavazos*

Superintendent of Schools

## HCISD’S TEAM OF 8



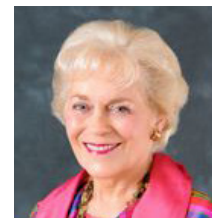
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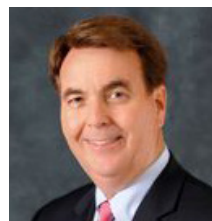
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# Paving the Way

## For Future Generations Of Health Professionals

by Adriana Dominguez



**Through a rigorous curriculum, strong community partnerships, technology-infused classrooms, and a unique hands-on approach to learning, the Harlingen School of Health Professions is paving the way for future health professionals.**

The campus has become the school of choice for some second, third, and in some cases, fourth generation medical practitioners in the area.

Ninth grade student Morgan Johnson comes from a long line of pharmacists. Her decision to attend HSHP was in large part influenced by her goal of becoming the fourth in her family to pursue a career in the field.

“Being a pharmacist is a family tradition. My father, grandfather, and great-grandfather have all been pharmacists,” said Johnson. “I chose to come to HSHP because I wanted the challenge of rigorous coursework and to get a head start in the medical field.”

With a 13th year focus, HSHP aims to prepare students for post-secondary education in one of the six schools of study in the health professions – Dental Science, Patient Care, Surgical Procedures, Pharmacology/Biomedical Technology, Medical Science, and Sports Medicine/Therapeutic Services.

During the eighth and ninth grade, students are immersed in all six fields so that they may have the knowledge to decide during their sophomore year which school of study to pursue.

Brittney Garza, whose father is a nuclear pharmacist, grew up learning about how her dad would prepare radioactive materials in the lab to be used for the diagnosis and treatment of diseases.

This sparked the ninth grader’s interest in healthcare; however, she has chosen to go a different

route in the field of medicine after hearing from a neurosurgeon at an HSHP summer camp.

“HSHP sponsored a medical camp for two days, and one of the highlights was ‘Neuro Day.’ As soon as I saw all that neurosurgeons do, I fell in love with it,” said Garza. “I’ve been exposed to many opportunities here at HSHP. I feel that by coming to school here, I have a much better chance of doing what I want in life.”

Along with summer camps, students get to hear first-hand experiences from members of the medical community during “Tutelage Thursdays” as guest speakers discuss their careers and answer questions about their field.

Each classroom is set up to promote an environment where students can communicate, collaborate, create, and develop their critical thinking skills. Eighth-grade student David Saucedo says that this arrangement prepares them for real-world scenarios as it strengthens their level of comprehension and offers different approaches to a problem.

“In our classes, we have project-based learning, so we’re learning and collaborating. The communication and the sharing of ideas make all the difference,” said Saucedo. “Before the teacher would have one idea and that’s just how it was. In this group learning, we have about five people to a group, and we can all learn from each other. One person may have one idea and another have an entirely different idea, but it still works.”

Through transformed instruction, students at HSHP have the opportunity to explore various aspects of their chosen field and are given experiences that will place them at the front of the line.



# Shop with a Cop

Harlingen Police Department and community leaders spread some Christmas cheer to 34 youngsters from the Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District

by Adriana Dominguez

**The group of fifth-grade students from 17 elementary campuses were treated to a day of Christmas shopping at the Harlingen Target store and lunch followed by a game of bowling at Bass Pro Shops.**

"Today was one of my brightest days in my first 11 months in Harlingen," said Police Chief Jeffrey Adickes. "I think that the investment we are making as a police department is going to pay off later in life for these fifth-grade students. Who knows, we

may have shopped with a future Harlingen police officer and not know it yet. It's a really great group of kids. The school district here is a great partner to the police department, and this is just a great example of that."

Officers guided students through store aisles where they had the chance to find the perfect item. A rewarding experience for all involved, the event also gave students the opportunity to get to know law enforcement officers as well as community leaders.

The event was made possible through sponsors including HPD Citizen's Police Academy, FedEx, Target, Bass Pro Shops, Harlingen Fire Department, Dairy Queen, community contributions and many more.



*"I think that the investment we are making as a police department is going to pay off later in life for these fifth-grade students,"* said Police Chief Jeffrey Adickes.



# Building A Transformed District:

Two HCISD Facilities Receive Awards  
For Architectural Design

by Adriana Dominguez

**The panorama of the Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District has changed considerably over the past few years with the construction of new facilities, some of which have recently garnered the attention of renowned architects from across the state.**

The Lower Rio Grande Valley Chapter of American Institute of Architects (LRGV-AIA) honored two of the district's new additions in their 2015 Design Awards.

Harlingen CISD Performing Arts Center, designed by Megamorphosis, was presented with the Honor Award, which is the highest offered by the chapter, and HSHP designed by Rike Ogden Figueroa Allex Architects received the Merit Award.

"On behalf of our entire design team, we want to thank the HCISD School Board and staff for this opportunity to serve our community," said John Pearcy Vice President at Megamorphosis. "The Performing Arts Center Design Committee

comprised an amazing array of talented individuals whose commitment to providing our students an unparalleled place to grow and perform has been affirmed with this prestigious award."



The Performing Arts Center, a roughly 30,000 square foot venue located at 3217 W. Wilson Rd., boasts a 900-seat auditorium designed to cater to patrons and performers alike. Building features include an elevated stage, dressing room, classrooms, practice rooms, offices, a conference room, and support area.

"The Harlingen Performing Arts Center and HSHP have played a large part in our transformational efforts," said Superintendent Art Cavazos. "We are very proud of these two outstanding facilities. Built with our learners in mind, the design of these state-of-the-art spaces supports our district's focus to create environments that maximize opportunities to enhance our students' learning experiences."

In addition to this recognition, HSHP also earned three Stars of Distinction from the Texas Association of School Administrators and Texas Association of School Boards for excellence in planning and design of the learning environment in August 2015.

HSHP is an HCISD School of Choice with a specialized focus on medical careers. Six areas of emphasis – Dental Science, Patient Care, Surgical Procedures, Pharmacology/Biomedical Technology,

Medical Science, and Sports Medicine/Therapeutic Services – are highlighted throughout the main floor.

Located at 2302 N. 21 Street, the building features an open library and a vast lecture hall. Small breakout spaces and dining area help create a collegiate feel and promote collaboration.

For over 25 years, the LRGV-AIA Awards program has recognized achievements for a broad range of architectural activity to elevate the general quality of architecture practice, establish a standard of excellence against which architects can measure performance, and inform the public of the breadth and value of architecture practice.

*"We are very proud of these two outstanding facilities. Built with our learners in mind, the design of these state-of-the-art spaces supports our district's focus to create environments that maximize opportunities to enhance our students' learning experiences,"* said Superintendent Art Cavazos.

**Harlingen School of Health Professions  
COMMONS AREA**





# Gabe Puente

*Harlingen High School | Class Of '97*

by Karen Villareal



A district tennis star in his high school days, Gabriel Puente has accomplished quite a bit since graduating from HCISD in 1997, though the path to his current success was not a straight shot by any means. “If I were able to go back 20 years and tell myself, ‘You’re going to be the CEO of a media company, a publisher of a magazine,’” says Puente, “I would’ve said, ‘Alright...That’s weird.’ I had no idea at the time what I wanted to do.”

“It’s in the nature of growing up in an economically disadvantaged home,” explains Puente, founder and publisher of rgVision Magazine. “My dad has a high school degree, and my mom only got a 5th grade level education.” As such, his parents didn’t prompt conversations about future careers or fields of study, and it’s not something teenaged Puente spent too much time thinking about. “Schools are starting to understand that,” says Puente, referring to the strides college counselors are taking to help these students.

He remembers his own college counselor, Mrs. Kithcart, as extremely helpful. “She took the time,” recalls Puente. “She laid my options out for me; she told me what I needed to do.” Though he expected college counselors to focus on the top tier students, Kithcart gave Puente the same attention that anybody else would have gotten. “I wasn’t even in the top 25%,” he explains, “but I remember going to her office and I felt how passionate she was to help me.”

Puente’s tennis instructor, Coach Hurst, also influenced him. “He had high expectations and that helped me build my character as a competitor,” says Puente. “He knew my capabilities, but never gave me any type of validation - so I demanded it. I was always trying to work hard and be the best for him.”

In regards to academics, Puente recalls that HCISD teachers were very engaging, passionate, and demanded quality work. He developed study habits, that coupled with his personal fear of failure, ensured his academic success at college. “A lot of times at HCISD I would study at night, making sure I was prepared because I just did not want to fail,” he remembers. “Two days before my first college class, I was reading the chapters of all my classes to make sure I was ahead.” He laughs that he kept up that exhausting routine for about a semester. When he found himself intrigued by consumer behavior, he went into marketing. “That’s basically what advertising agencies do: figure out the trends and why people are doing certain things,” he explains.

Puente also gained experience in a number of fields by working while enrolled, from your typical job in the service industry his sophomore year to an internship his senior year at Montemayor Y Asociados, the second largest Hispanic ad agency in the country. “That gave me a lot of experience and they offered me a job in Atlanta, but I was

scared to move away,” Puente remembers. He was also hesitant because the \$27k salary the advertising agency offered him seemed unrealistic to Puente, compared to the \$95k his fraternity brothers who had studied pharmacy (a hot market at the time) were boasting. “I didn’t know anything,” he laughs. “27 is actually pretty good,” he explains, “because it opens doors and you grow from that.”

He ended up not taking the job, working instead for a telecom company where he gained sales experience. “Not coming from money, the commission was very driving to me as a fresh-out-of-college, hungry, young professional - but it was cutthroat,” he remembers. After getting fed up with the stressful environment, Puente next went to work for a nonprofit in Colorado for a time before returning to Texas, where he found his way working for a magazine in San Antonio. He then came back to start a publication for the RGV, where his passion lies.

***“A lot of people in the world would die for the level of education HCISD is offering, and that’s something I think kids are taking for granted,”*** said Gabriel Puente.

Looking back, Puente says he was lucky to be raised in the Rio Grande Valley because of the funding that is sent to our region. “A lot of people in the world would die for the level of education HCISD is offering, and that’s something I think kids are taking for granted,” he says. “Take full advantage of what’s available,” he wants to tell high school students. “They need to understand that they can be ahead of the game and they can compete.”

He is proud of his Alma Mater for aiming to increase the number of educated leaders. “Not only locally,” he says. “Students are graduating from HCISD and applying their education wherever they go: outside of the valley, all over the state, and nation.”





# Josue Aldrete

*Early College High School | Class Of '11*

by Maritza Gallaga



**I**nnovation in education works. Just ask Josue Aldrete, who in 2007 enrolled in Harlingen CISD's Early College High School (ECHS), a decision that would propel him towards his dream of practicing medicine as a physician assistant. "At the time, ECHS was brand new, and most of us took a leap of faith towards the promise of a dual credit program. Looking back, I can say with confidence that I made the right decision," says Aldrete, who was later accepted into a physician assistant school at age 20, the youngest of his class of 75. "ECHS was a big part and a right step towards my education." Fast forward to May 2016, when he will graduate from the University of North Texas Health Science Center (UNTHSC) with a Master of Arts in Physician Assistant (PA) Studies. Once certified, Aldrete plans to practice medicine both within and outside of the Rio Grande Valley.

Aldrete's journey demonstrates that opportunity plus determination equals success. Born in Guadalajara, Mexico, Aldrete's parents immigrated to Harlingen when he was three. "My parents, who both currently work for HCISD, gave up everything to allow my siblings and I a better opportunity and education," says Aldrete. Full of high aspirations for their son, they saw enrollment at ECHS as an opportunity not to miss, and the years that followed confirmed that choosing HCISD's ECHS provided definite advantages to the academically determined Aldrete. Four years after enrolling in ECHS, he graduated from high school with an additional diploma, an associate of science degree in biology. His honors at graduation included being named valedictorian, a Distinguished Graduate, a Texas Scholar, and a Board of Regents graduate from TSTC with a 4.0 grade point average. Consequently, he earned his undergraduate degree in two years. Moving on to graduate school, he secured a highly coveted seat in the UNTHSC PA Studies program, beating out over a thousand applicants for the opportunity. "ECHS allowed me to get one step ahead towards achieving my goal of practicing medicine," Aldrete explains.

HCISD's ECHS, now in its ninth year, kicked off the district's efforts to provide students and parents with a unique learning

environment, offering students the opportunity to excel in both high school and college. HCISD Superintendent Dr. Art J. Cavazos, a staunch advocate for public schools, reminds us that education is the great equalizer. "The ECHS and TSTC partnership is a tribute to the power of community collaboration for student achievement," says Cavazos. "Together we are offering a world-class education."

***"At the time, ECHS was brand new, and most of us took a leap of faith towards the promise of a dual credit program. Looking back, I can say with confidence that I made the right decision,"***  
said Aldrete.

Aldrete praises the school and encourages students to consider ECHS as a choice. He says it's never too early to plan for the future. "Placing yourself on a good career path by working on your education will save you time and money, helping reduce some of the worries about the future." Through its supportive environment, rigorous curriculum, and collaborative agreement with TSTC, ECHS moves students one step closer to their career of choice.





# Dr. Joshua Rodríguez

*Harlingen High School South | Class Of '04*

by Michelle D. Everett

**D**r. Joshua Rodriguez, who specializes in emergency medicine, knew his purpose in life was to help his community receive high-quality, affordable healthcare. As a child growing up in Harlingen, Texas, Dr. Rodriguez saw his grandparents affected by diabetes and other ailments. Determined to make a difference, he set out, with his family's support, to become a doctor.

The core values—family, education, community—instilled within Dr. Rodriguez directed, encouraged, and supported him during the long journey from elementary through medical school. “My family has always supported every one of my endeavors. We are a close knit family,” Dr. Rodriguez said. As a young child, his mother Yvonne Rodriguez took a job as a paraprofessional in the Harlingen schools so that she could help raise her family while earning her own college degree. “I witnessed the endless hours of study and all the hard work my mom put in; she was an inspiration to our family,” Dr. Rodriguez said. Now a teacher at Wilson Elementary in Harlingen, Ms. Rodriguez models a love for learning to her students. “We lacked many of the finer things growing up, but we never lost sight of our family. We had love,” Dr. Rodriguez said.

On his first day at Harlingen High School South, the future doctor met with the principal. “I plan on being the valedictorian for my senior class,” Rodriguez said. True to his intent, Rodriguez graduated from HHS South in 2004 as the valedictorian, grateful to his counselor, Ms. Angel Paxton, and his mother for their support and guidance.

Next, Rodriguez attended Rice University, majoring in biochemistry. While he did well, Rodriguez admits that he “had a lot of catching up to do. I had to work harder than my peers.” Obviously, he overcame the challenge of the rigorous curriculum. As a result, today he encourages teachers to maintain high levels of rigor in their classrooms and encourages students to rise to the challenge so that they too are ready to compete with other minority groups and cultures outside of the valley.

Dr. Rodriguez continued his studies and training at the University of Texas Southwestern and Scott & White Hospital, eventually

deciding to practice emergency medicine.

“The emergency room affords a flexible schedule, with long hours, but I can still have time for a family and fun,” said Dr. Rodriguez. Today, Dr. Rodriguez works in the Emergency Department at Valley Baptist Medical Center, the same hospital where he previously spent summers shadowing his first mentors. “The most rewarding part of being a physician is being able to help the community I grew up in and personally care about,” Dr. Rodriguez said.

After eleven long years of studying, Dr.

***“The most rewarding part of being a physician is being able to help the community I grew up in and personally care about,”***

said Dr. Rodriguez.

Rodriguez returned home to Harlingen in July 2015 to care for his community. “He had a purpose for coming back home,” his mom said. During this time, his beloved grandmother’s health had declined, and Dr. Rodriguez was able to consult with his grandmother’s other physicians during her last days. “We brought her home to her house, with her family, and her husband of 55 years, to die peacefully and with dignity,” Dr. Rodriguez said. Helping, treating, and healing the sick fulfills Dr. Rodriguez’s mission in life, just as he knew it would as a first grader in Ms. Galindo’s class at Bowie Elementary in Harlingen.



# Learning to Talk the Talk

Speech, Drama, Debate at HCISD Driving Student Success

by Karen Villareal



**Public speaking is reported to be the number one fear people live with, but that's not the case for students who go through the speech, drama, and debate programs at HCISD. Speech, drama and debate coaches, Tasha Kneis and Leah Ince, help students find their voices and put them to use defending their beliefs and dreams in state and national level mock courts, debate tournaments, and on-stage performances.**

"To find students that actually want to do that every weekend is not as easy as some would think," says Harlingen South speech & debate coach Leah Ince. However, both schools of HCISD regularly take home trophies from competitions, and the students are passionate because they understand the benefits they are gaining, from personal growth in their communication skills to future educational and career opportunities.

Tasha Kneis, who instructs students at Harlingen High, adds that the theater program in particular also helps shy students come out of their shell in a very non-threatening environment, and additionally allows students to explore job possibilities in theater tech they might not have considered before. "Besides being on stage, we stress at HCISD all the other areas that go into a production," says Kneis. Costume design, soundboard, light work, and the backstage crew are actual, real-world professions on movies, plays, and TV shows. "A show will have only a handful of stars, but many technical workers," says Kneis, which has allowed more students to participate over the years.

Ince has seen a lot of students go through the program she actually started at Harlingen South when it became a four year high school. "We started with one state qualification that first year," she remembers.



“By my third year we had 40.” Almost 25 years later, her students are no longer just qualifying for state; she’s had around 20 state champions and many who have qualified for national titles as well.

HCISD competes in numerous organizations that support competitive speech, from UIL, which is well-known in Texas, to TFA, the Texas Forensic Association. “We came back from a tournament in March where we had many finalists, and we had four students receive awards,” says Ince. “We were awarded the School of Honor at the National Speech and Debate Association National Tournament held in Dallas this past year,” she adds. “We had two students make it to the top 14 in the nation, and another made it to the top 30.”

While it started out about the competition, she has come to really enjoy the success stories more than anything. She says some of the students who are drawn to the program are natural speakers; they love being in front of an audience and getting up to speak. “You can tell right away,” says Ince. However, she’s had students who were a little hesitant when she first met them. By the end of their high school years they’re placing at speech or debate tournaments. “When you get to the end of your career like I am, you do it to watch the growth of students to become great communicators who can sell themselves,” she says.

Ince has been able to not only watch this growth; as some of her former students returned to the program as professionals she can now grow alongside them. Kneis and two other instructors in the program, Julia Wise and Maegan Conely, are such students who Ince thanks for their dedication. “They got so much out of the program when they were in it, that they wanted to return and give back,” she says. Steven Cano is another individual who Ince and Kneis recognize for giving much of his time and talent back to the program he enjoyed in his high school years.

Kneis remembers competing without any of today’s technological advances; reading newspapers and lugging plastic tubs full of printed evidence that is replaced with laptops and cellphone apps today. She says that while modern technology factors into the success of HCISD’s speech, drama, and debate teams, it’s the students’ drive which brings home the trophies year after year.

However, the victories are only part of the mission of the coaches. “As a coach, my biggest goal is to make them not winners, but leaders,” says Kneis. It is a little known fact that ivy-league university applications typically ask if applicants participated in activities like debate. “Schools are really looking for this component,” explains Kneis. “It helps teach students critical thinking, problem solving, and communication skills.”

In addition to pride that comes from winning and the capacity that is built from skills learned and put into practice, the speech, drama, and debate program allows students the chance to travel all over the state and country to compete on some of these prestigious campuses which are likely interested in them as candidates. “We’ve traveled to the Harvard tournament, so we were in Boston; last year the Columbia tournament in New York; we’ve gone to national tournaments in Minnesota; and this year we will be in Lexington, Kentucky and Denver, Colorado,” she lists. “Students sometimes don’t know what they want until they have a chance to explore and see it for themselves,” says Kneis. Students who may never have seriously considered going out of state for college can suddenly see themselves at an Ivy League school.

Both coaches are thankful that the HCISD administration has been supportive of these activities. “They see the benefit of it - and allowing us the necessary travel,” explains Kneis. Ince says that without the funding and support of the administration standing by the program, these students wouldn’t have the opportunity to shine. “It has taken teamwork over the years,” explains Ince.

Introducing students to the elements of communication is very time consuming but the coaches feel it is time very well spent. Kneis feels fulfilled when speech, drama, and debate helps students get full ride scholarships to private universities. As for Ince, she says she knows the value of speech, and the importance that it carries on. “It’s a skill they’ll take with them the rest of their lives,” says Ince, and she has firsthand evidence. As technology changes, she now receives Facebook messages or texts from students she taught three to five years ago. ‘I just wanted to thank you,’ they write her, sharing that they aced an interview or gave a great presentation at their job. “They give credit to the skills, and we know we are making a difference,” says Ince.



# A Year of Excellence



## HCISD NAMED TO COLLEGE BOARD HONOR ROLL

The Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District was recently named to the College Board's 6th Annual AP District Honor Roll list.

"This is the first year HCISD is recognized in the annual Honor Roll list," said Superintendent Dr. Art Cavazos. "We are making significant gains in our AP Program and this honor attests to that. I commend our dedicated teachers and administrators for their commitment to working with our students to achieve high levels of performance."

This list recognizes institutions for increasing access to Advanced Placement course work while simultaneously maintaining or increasing the percentage of students earning scores of 3 or higher on AP Exams.

HCISD is one of 425 districts across the U.S. and Canada and only one in four from the Rio Grande Valley to be recognized this year.

Inclusion on the 6th Annual AP District Honor Roll is based on the examination of three years of AP data, from 2013 to 2015, for the following criteria.

Increased participation/access to AP by at least 4 percent in large districts, at least 6 percent in medium districts, and at least 11 percent in small districts;

Increased or maintained the percentage of exams taken by African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian/Alaska Native students, and;

Improved performance levels when comparing the percentage of students in 2015 scoring a 3 or higher to those in 2013, unless the district has already attained a performance level at which more than 70 percent of its AP students are scoring a 3 or higher.



## HCISD MIDDLE SCHOOLS SURPASS STATE AND NATION IN COLLEGE READINESS BENCHMARK

Eighth graders at the Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District exceeded their peers across the state of Texas and the nation on college readiness benchmark results recently released in the 2015-2016 Preliminary SAT (PSAT) 8 Benchmark.

The PSAT 8, one of a series of assessments administered by the College Board, measures how well 8th graders are mastering the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in college.

"Cultivating college readiness begins before high school," stated Dr. Alicia Noyola, Chief Academic Officer for HCISD. "Our goal is to prepare students, in part by monitoring their progress throughout their education, so that all students succeed after graduation."

The PSAT 8 provides students, parents, teachers, and administrators with the feedback needed to ensure that a rigorous curriculum is delivered and mastered by students. Based on student mastery in two areas, evidenced-based reading and math, results are correlated with the SAT, an assessment that predicts how well students will perform in college. Meeting benchmark standards in 8th grade demonstrates that students are on track to succeed in college.

HCISD students outperformed the state and the nation on the college readiness indicators, evidenced-based reading and math, gauged on the PSAT 8. According to the report, 52% of the HCISD students assessed are on track to succeed in college. In contrast, only 43% of Texas students and 41% of students nationwide are on track.

"As a community, we set a course with the vision of creating a system of world-class schools so that all students are provided with an excellent education, and these results affirm that HCISD is transforming learning for global achievement," said Dr. Nolan Perez, President of the HCISD Board of Trustees.

In addition to outperforming the state and nation academically, HCISD tested a larger percentage of its students. While many schools administer the PSAT 8 to a select group of students, HCISD administered the assessment to 64% of enrolled students, 16% more than the state and 26% more than the nation.

"Earning a college degree opens doors and provides opportunities," said Dr. Art Cavazos, HCISD Superintendent. "We are committed to assessing student learning to ensure that post-secondary readiness is achieved. The PSAT is one part of our comprehensive plan to build world-class schools."

How does a school district go about creating world-class schools that cultivate college readiness in the 21st century?

"Plan the work and work the plan," states Cavazos.

High-quality data drives instruction, helping students and teachers understand areas of strength and areas in need of improvement. Assessment data, such as the PSAT, is an integral part of the district's plan to ensure that students graduate ready to succeed.



## HCISD SCHOOLS RECOGNIZED IN TEXAS HONOR ROLL

The Educational Results Partnership and the Institute for Educational Productivity have recognized Early College High School, Bowie Elementary School, and Long Elementary School on their 2015 Honor Roll, a national effort to identify higher-performing schools and highlight successful practices that improve outcomes for students.

Schools receiving this award have demonstrated consistently high levels of student academic achievement, improvement in achievement levels over time and reduction in achievement gaps among student populations. For high schools, the Honor Roll recognition also includes measures of college readiness.

Schools can be awarded in one of two categories – Star Schools or Scholar Schools.

ECHS, Bowie, and Long are all recognized as Star Schools. Additionally, Bowie received the distinction of STEM School, a recognition reserved for schools scoring in the top 10 percent among Star Schools in the areas of math and science.



## HCISD RECOGNIZED FOR DISTRICT SAFETY

The Texas Association of School Boards (TASB) Risk Management Fund recognized the Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District during the regular Board of Trustees meeting on July 14.

Clem Zabalza, division director of TASB Loss Prevention and Training Services, was on hand to present HCISD with a \$3,000 Loss Prevention grant, which recognizes district members who take proactive steps in mitigating hazards and exposures in the work place. This is the eighth year the district is awarded the grant.

Also received was a \$3,000 Scholar Award, which recognizes districts that possess innovative risk management programs and have included TASB's foundation accident prevention plan. This is the third year the district has been awarded this recognition.

"For the past eight years, Harlingen CISD has been honored as a recipient of the TASB Loss Prevention Grant," said Rosalinda Vargas, Assistant Superintendent for Human Services. "HCISD has also received the distinction of being one of six Texas districts to receive

the TASB Scholar Award in recognition of our innovative risk management program under the direction of Rachel Cortez. Through these grants we are able to purchase safety equipment for our campuses and departments including stepladders, rubber mats, and protective gear.

We appreciate the support we receive from the Texas Association of School Boards in helping us improve and maintain the safety of our students and staff."

In addition to the endowment, the district will be hosting a Standard Response Protocol (SRP) Train-the-Trainer event, developed by the I Love U Guys Foundation. The event will be presented by executive director for the foundation, John-Michael Keyes, and will focus on how to train others on the SRP, how to conduct drills, and how to recruit partners such as law enforcement, fire, educators, and administrators.

"John-Michael Keyes has been presenting this training across the country," said Zabalza. "To this date, the state of New Jersey, the city schools of New York, the state of Oregon, and the TASB Risk Management Fund have adopted and partnered up with the 'I Love U Guys' Foundation to provide this training to school districts to make them safer. Thanks to HCISD's hospitality we will be bringing John-Michael Keyes on October 8 to do an all-day training for their staff and also other area districts that would like to participate."

The "I Love U Guys" Foundation was created to restore and protect the joy of youth through educational programs and positive actions in collaboration with families, schools, communities, organizations and government entities.

The SRP course is scheduled for October 8 at HCISD's Central Administration Building located at 407 N. 77 Sunshine Strip from 8:30A.M. – 3:30P.M. Registration will be made available to TASB members at [www.tasb.org](http://www.tasb.org). Spaces are limited.

This year, the TASB Risk Management Fund awarded grants totaling \$700,000 to 180 public school districts and education entities. Since 1998, the Fund's Loss Prevention Grant Program has distributed 2,823 total grants of more than \$7.41 million to Fund members in the workers' compensation and property and auto programs.





## HCISD EARNS TOP HONORS IN VALLEY MORNING STAR

The Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District earned the top honors in seven categories of the Reader's Choice Awards earning the best school awards for Best Elementary School, Best Middle School, and Best High School. Bowie Elementary, Coakley Middle School, and Harlingen High School all received awards based on votes by readers of the Valley Morning Star. HCISD also received individual awards presented to Susan Salinas for Best Principal (Bowie Elementary), Nora Ortega for Best Paraprofessional (Bowie Elementary), Norma Gonzalez for Best Teacher (Coakley Middle School) and Christina Luna for Best Counselor (Stuart Place Elementary).



## ECHS EARNS NATIONAL RANKING

Newsweek recently ranked Early College High School as one of the top high schools in the nation in its "Beating the Odds 2015" list.

ECHS came in at number 84 in the annual list, which recognizes 500 public high schools across the United States for their outstanding efforts in preparing their students for college while also overcoming the obstacles posed by students at an economic disadvantage.

"Early College High School provides our students with a rigorous high school and post-secondary curriculum while preparing them for leadership roles in our community," said Principal Dr. Pamela Flores. "This achievement is a result of the faculty's commitment to education, the students' dedication to their studies, and the parents' unyielding support."

ECHS received high marks for all three categories, including college readiness, graduation rate, and college bound – 87.3 percent, 100 percent, and 96.7 percent respectively.

This is the third year that ECHS is recognized at the national level. Last year, the campus earned a bronze classification in the U.S. News & World Report's Best High Schools national rankings.

"Early College High School has provided many of our students the opportunity to excel in both high school and college while preparing them for global achievement," said Superintendent Dr. Art Cavazos. "I firmly believe that education is the great equalizer in this great country, and the outstanding achievements ECHS has come to earn is a testament to what our students can accomplish when they have the support of their community. I want to commend their staff, students and our great partnership with Texas State Technical College for this recognition."

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.



## BOWIE ELEMENTARY RECOGNIZED AS HIGH-PERFORMING, HIGH-PROGRESS REWARD SCHOOL

Bowie Elementary was honored by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) earlier this summer in a report identifying more than 400 Title I Reward Schools across the state. Bowie made both lists as a High-Performing and High-Progress school.

According to a TEA press release, the identification of high-performing and/or high-progress Title I schools is based on statewide reading and mathematics assessments under the State Accountability System in the 2013-2014 school year and graduation rates.

"It is a real honor to be recognized by TEA for this achievement," said Susan Salinas, principal at Bowie. "We create a culture of high achievement, and our teachers continue to perpetuate that expectation themselves. They truly believe that all children can succeed. When kids know that you believe in them, they start to believe in themselves."

A high-performance reward school is identified as a Title I school with distinctions based on reading and math performance. Also, at the high school level, a reward school is a Title I school with the highest graduation rates.

A high-progress school is identified as a Title I school in the top 25 percent in annual improvement and/or a school in the top 25 percent of those demonstrating ability to close performance gaps based on system safeguards.

For 2014-2015, TEA has identified 192 Texas campuses as high-performing and 218 Texas campuses as high-progress.

"Bowie Elementary continues to be a pillar of unbound success for HCISD," said Superintendent Dr. Art Cavazos. "We thank Susan Salinas and her staff for making this achievement possible. Their passion for education is a testament to the highly effective educators who go above and beyond for the benefit of our students."

Title I schools are defined as campuses with a student population of at least 40 percent low-income.



## ZAVALA ELEMENTARY RECEIVES APPLE DEVICES

Students attending Zavala Elementary now have technology at their fingertips thanks to the Apple ConnectED grant.

On April 1, 2016, in a school-wide assembly, the school, accompanied by Apple representatives and district administrators, celebrated the delivery of brand new iPads for every student.

"This has been a long-awaited day for students and teachers at Zavala Elementary," says Superintendent Dr. Art Cavazos. "True champions for our district, they will be the model for digital learning in our district. We thank them for their outstanding commitment to this project and are grateful for our

partnership with Apple that allows us to enhance the learning experience for our students."

In anticipation of the devices, Beatrice Cruz, a fifth-grade teacher, has introduced her students to a few apps and the basic skills needed to perform certain tasks on the iPad.

She says the new technology will be a game-changer in the way students learn.

"We've been looking forward to today," says Cruz. "We had the teacher deployment in December, and that was exciting. Now we are celebrating the student deployment. I'm excited that the students get to engage in technology and see how technology is such a big part of our world. It is a big step for our campus and HCISD."

"I'm excited because now we will have more technology and we will learn more about how to use it for our education," says Cassandra Salazar, a fifth-grade student.

Teachers and administrators received brand new MacBook Air laptops and iPad Minis

along with onsite professional development.

To help every teacher integrate the new technology into their lessons, Apple has provided them with a series of workshops and will continue to provide ongoing support to help them reach their educational goals.

Zavala is one of eight schools in the state of Texas and one out of 114 schools in the nation to receive the grant. The school's receipt of the award was announced in October 2015.

In June 2013, President Obama announced the ConnectED initiative, designed to enrich K-12 education for every student in America. ConnectED empowers teachers with the best technology and the training to make the most of it and empowers students through individualized learning and rich, digital content.

Apple joined the ConnectED initiative by committing \$100 million in iPads, MacBooks, and other products, along with content and professional development tools to enrich learning in disadvantaged U.S. Schools.



## LONG ELEMENTARY TEACHER AWARDED \$2,000 GRANT FOR INNOVATIVE TEACHINGS

Voya Financial, Inc., a leading provider of retirement plans for educators, presented Camille Cavazos, a teacher at Long Elementary School, with a \$2,000 grant on September 28. The award is part of the company's 2015 Unsung Heroes awards competition.

Albert Villareal, Voya Financial Adviser, was on hand to present the check.

"Each year, the Voya Unsung Heroes award helps educators turn great ideas into reality," said Villareal. "We like to show our appreciation for the special teachers like Camille, who go above and beyond the call of duty to make learning exciting for students."

Across the United States, K-12 educators submit applications for the grant by describing projects they have initiated or would like to pursue. Each project is judged on its innovative method, creativity and ability to influence students positively.

Cavazos' innovative teaching idea, "Yikes!! We have to move!!" is focused on the study of biomes and adaptations, in which each student

will create a life-size walk-through biome museum. The students must build a biome that presents the greatest chance for survival, after being forced to move from their fictional communities due to contaminated soil. Additionally, they will be tasked with researching the various types of biomes and their inhabitants and creating a life-size walk-through museum for families, faculty, and students to visit.

"I'm so excited and honored to receive this award. With the grant I will have the students create a museum exhibit on biomes," said Camille Cavazos. "It's a project based learning project so the students will be working collaboratively. I would also love to digitalize these biomes as well – by having students create QR codes for visitors to scan to learn more as they walk through."

Selected from a group of nearly 1,000 applicants, Cavazos is one of only 100 winners across the country that will receive this award to help fund and bring her program to life. She will now compete with other finalists for one of the top three prizes – an additional \$5,000, \$10,000 or \$25,000 from Voya Financial.

"It is because of innovative educators like Camille Cavazos that our district can expand learning experiences for students allowing them opportunities for maximum achievement," said Superintendent Dr. Art Cavazos. "We are very proud of her accomplishment in the Unsung Heroes awards competition and are appreciative of her continued commitment to education."

Since 1996, the Voya Unsung Heroes program has awarded more than \$4.5 million to help the nation's educators turn creative teaching ideas into reality.

To learn more about this year's winning projects, as well as those from previous years, visit the Unsung Heroes website at [unsungheroes.com](http://unsungheroes.com). Applications for the 2016 Voya Unsung Heroes awards are currently being accepted through the website until April 30, 2016.





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## TRAVIS ELEMENTARY TEACHER AWARDED \$5,000 GRANT

Travis Elementary recently received a \$5,000 Lowe's Toolbox for Education grant to fund a campus reading garden.

The Literacy Vegetable Garden project will provide students an area where they can enjoy the outdoors while they read books. Students will benefit from the garden in more ways than one. Along with having a beautiful place to read, they will also learn about gardening and nutrition.

"Our students, school, and community will greatly benefit from this grant," said Beulah Rangel. "We wish to thank our friends at Lowe's for generously supporting this important project"

The Lowes Charitable and Educational Foundation grants about \$5 million to about 1,000 public schools in the United States each year through the Lowe's Toolbox for Education program. Grants range from \$2,000 and \$10,000. The award money is to be used for improvements and renovations that help strengthen the school and the community.

All K-12 public schools in the United States are eligible for the Toolbox for Education program. More information is available at [www.ToolboxforEducation.com](http://www.ToolboxforEducation.com).



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## TEACHER RECOGNIZED WITH TEACHER LEGEND AWARD

As part of its annual Teacher of the Year Banquet, the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley recognized Dorraine Araiza, a teacher at the Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District, with its highest honor on Thursday, November 18.

Araiza was presented with the Teacher Legend Award for her work in education. She was nominated by her former student, Dr. Javier Cavazos Vela, who is now a professor at UTRGV.

"I am so honored to receive the UTRGV Teacher Legend Award," said Araiza. "Teachers many times wonder if they have made a difference in the lives of their students; I'm blessed to know that I have. I am so proud of Dr. Cavazos Vela and all his accomplishments. I'm grateful that I had the opportunity to hear how memorable my sixth-grade classroom was almost 20 years ago."

Araiza is now in her 28th year of teaching and teaches first through fifth grade gifted and talented students at Wilson and Sam Houston Elementary. She says that her continued source of inspiration is her students.

"My students are so excited and passionate about learning, and their enthusiasm is contagious," said Araiza.

The event, hosted by UTRGV's College of Education and P-16 Integration, recognized educators from 31 school districts in the Region One Education Service Center area who were selected as their school's "Teacher of the Year."



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## ELKS LODGE AWARDS TEACHER FOR PROGRAM

The Harlingen Elks Lodge 1889 recently awarded Felix Rodriguez, a teacher at Lee Means Elementary, \$500 to benefit his math tutoring program.

Last fall Rodriguez volunteered his personal time to tutor one of his students, and after a couple of study sessions, he decided that most of his students could use a jump-start in division. Consequently, he invited the rest of the class to a Saturday of Math Learning Camp.

Rodriguez and several volunteers requested to use the Elks Lodge building for four hours to host a tutoring session for the students. On the day of the camp, Rodriguez engaged students with educational technology.

"The kids had a wonderful time using his personal smart board and response clickers," said parent and Elks Lodge member Tammy Schmidt-Swope. "His hands-on approach to math was fantastic. Mr. Rodriguez exemplifies the kind of teacher we want in our school district."

Students celebrated a job well done at the end of the session by enjoying lunch and throwing water balloons.

In December, the class met again, but this time, they invited students from Austin Elementary, Bonham Elementary, and Stuart Place Elementary to join them and work on fractions.

After witnessing the success of the workshops and Rodriguez's enthusiasm to dedicating time and money to the success of his students, Esteemed Leading Knight Lee Wallace offered to help.

"Little did I know that the Lee was going to present me a \$500 check to continue helping these kids with math," said Rodriguez. "Needless to say, I was overjoyed and shocked because no has ever really done that for me. The donation allowed me to buy some great materials, prizes, snacks, food, and drinks for the kids. It will also allow me to hold more workshops for the kids in the near future. Thank you, Lee Wallace and the Elks Lodge for your help."

Progress was evident as parents and Elk Lodge members saw an increase in the 4th-grade students' math vocabulary and learning during the second sessions.

More math tutoring sessions are in the works for this year.



## STUDENT ADVANCES TO NATIONAL PTA REFLECTIONS

Student imaginations soared in dance choreography, film production, literature, musical composition, photography, and visual arts as they created artwork for the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) Reflections Contest.

Out of the 30 students in Texas who will be advancing to the national competition, only one student is from the Rio Grande Valley, and he is part of the Harlingen City Council PTA.

Argelio Alonso, a fourth-grade Special Artist participant from Ben Milam Elementary, let his imagination fly far above the competition and will be taking his entry, "I am the Teacher", to compete at the national level.

Alonso was eager to participate when his teacher let the class know about the competition.

"He wanted to do a video about himself. He said he wanted everybody to see him teach," says Life Skills Teacher, Stephanie Aguilar. "He wants to go to college so he can become a teacher to teach kids math and words of the week."

Alonso picked the students who would assist with his video. He assigned everyone a role. One of his classmates helped record, others acted as the students, and Alonso took the role of instructor.

"He put them in order, and he would say 'stop, stop, stop', and 'start again' when the kids were not listening to him. It took a few takes, but everyone did a fantastic job," says Aguilar.

Every school year, the PTA Reflections program gives students across the United States the opportunity to submit artwork that is recognized at the local, regional, and national levels. At every level of the competition, entries are judged based on interpretation of the theme and creativity.

The 2015-2016 theme was "Let your Imagination Fly". More than 1,000 entries were submitted to the Texas PTA, and more than 400 students received awards for their creativity, but only 30 students will be advancing to the national level.

Students who received an Honorable Mention, Award of Merit, Award of Excellence or an Overall Award of Excellence were invited to attend the Student Recognition and Awards Ceremony in League City, Texas on April 30.

Results for the national level competition are expected in June.

### Below are the PTA state-level results for HCISD students:

#### Overall Award of Excellence:

*Argelio Alonso, Special Artist Film Production*  
*I am the Teacher*  
*Ben Milam Elementary*

#### Award of Excellence:

*Jacob Fraga, High School Photography*  
*Bookmark Your Dream*  
*Harlingen High School South*

#### Award of Merit:

*Nathan Mowers, Intermediate Photography*  
*On The Wings of Imagining*  
*Treasure Hills Elementary*

*David Ramos, Intermediate Literature*  
*Sofia Trevino, Primary Visual Arts*  
*Library Books*  
*Bonham Elementary*

*Sofia Trevino, Primary Photography*  
*Let's Read*  
*Bonham Elementary*

#### Honorable Mention:

*Allyson Benavides, High School Literature*  
*Secrets of the Rainforest*  
*Harlingen High School South*

*Victoria Gonzalez, Middle Junior Photography*  
*A Beautiful Flight*  
*Memorial Middle School*

*Daniella Hernandez, Special Artist Photography*  
*Jeremiah*  
*Ben Milam Elementary*

*Isabella Martinez, High School Film Production*  
*What's Left of Me*  
*Harlingen High School South*



## HHSS FBLA CONFERENCE ADVANCEMENT

This past weekend members of the Harlingen High School South FBLA (Future Business Leaders of America) Chapter competed at the State Leadership Conference in Houston. South students competed against 1,600 other students from across the state. Twelve members placed at the State Leadership Conference and qualified for National Leadership Conference, which will be held in Atlanta, Georgia this summer.

Contributing to the team's success were:

4th Place – Erika Hernandez (Intro to Business Communications)

5th Place – Socorro Salazar and Victoria Salazar (Business Ethics)

5th Place – Natalie Bothwell and Ruby Tamayo (Management Information Systems)

4th Place – Mia Aguirre, Miriam Perez, and Cassandra Rubio (Management Information Systems)

3rd Place – Rebekah Anderson, Kayla Broughton, Heather Lucente, and Rudolfo Montero (Parliamentary Procedures)

At the National Leadership Conference FBLA members have the competitive edge, as the best and brightest of FBLA from across the country convene to compete in leadership events, share their successes, and learn new ideas about shaping their career future through workshops and exhibits. This four-day conference is considered the pinnacle of the FBLA experience.





## HHS TEAM EARNS SPOT AT BPA CONFERENCE

Members of the Harlingen High School BPA (Business Professionals of America) competed in the State Leadership Conference this past weekend and advanced in their individual events in areas of Accounting, Word Processing, and Desktop Publishing. Also, for the very first time under the direction of business teacher Evangelina Vela, the Administrative Support Team placed 1st among the rest of the high schools in the state of Texas.

BPA students will compete at the National Leadership Conference scheduled for the first week in May in Boston, Massachusetts.

The Administrative Support Team consists of: Victoria Galvan, Senior (Administrative Systems/Procedures); Macario Hernandez, Junior (Fundamentals of Accounting); Oziel Landaverde, Sophomore (Fundamentals of Desktop Publishing); Ana Lagunes, Senior (Intermediate Word Processing); and Rosa Moncada, Senior (Fundamentals of Word Processing).



## TOP 6 TEAMS RECOGNIZED FOR UIL DISTRICT MEET

The top six teams in the two divisions of the UIL District Meet held at Memorial Middle School on February 6 were recognized at the regular board meeting Tuesday evening. Over 500 students and all 17 elementary campuses competed at that event.

In the Small Campus Division, Jefferson Elementary took 1st place along with the Sweepstakes Award. Crockett Elementary and Wilson Elementary took 2nd and 3rd place respectively.

In the Large Campus Division, Long Elementary was awarded 1st place, Treasure Hills Elementary took 2nd place, and Bonham Elementary took 3rd place.



## HHS SOUTH SWEEPS COMPETITION AT UIL DISTRICT ACADEMIC MEET

The Harlingen High School South UIL team brought home the 32-6A UIL Academic District Championship after competing at San Benito High School. The team won with over 500 points – a new record for South.

Winning points for South include the following::

Calculator : Ryan Mowers – 1st and 2nd place team

Current Issues :  
Miguel Dominguez – 4th  
Justin Serna – 3rd  
Jaime Ramirez – 1st and they also took 1st place team

Computer Applications :  
Miguel Dominguez – 4th  
Brenden Martinez – 3rd

Computer Science :  
Brenden Martinez – 4th  
Amanda Alvarez – 2nd and they took 2nd place team

Editorial Writing :  
Jacob Fraga – 6th  
Ashley Pannell – 3rd

Headline Writing :  
Jacob Fraga – 6th

Informative Speaking :  
Abby De Leon – 5th  
Matthew Canon – 3rd  
Chris Smith – 2nd

Lincoln Douglas Debate :  
Abby De Leon – 3rd  
Miriam Perez – 2nd  
Lizzy Everett – 1st

Literary Criticism :  
Ashley Esquivel – 6th  
Micaela Keyes – 5th  
and they won 2nd place team

Mathematics :  
Michael Cantu – 5th  
Carlos Torres 3rd  
Ryan Mowers 1st  
and they won 1st place team

Number Sense :  
Carlos Torres – 5th  
Chen Yen-Ting 2nd  
Ryan Mowers 1st  
and they won 1st place team

Persuasive Speaking :  
John Duncan- 6th  
Lizzie Everett – 3rd  
Miriam Perez – 1st

Poetry Interpretation :  
Sawyer Warrenburg – 3rd  
Savannah Smith – 2nd  
Jessica Durant – 1st

Prose Interpretation :  
John Duncan – 4th  
James Gracia – 3rd  
Matthew Canon – 1st

Ready Writing :  
McKayla Davis – 5th  
Erika Hernandez – 1st

Science :  
Chen Yen-Ting 5th  
Ryan Mowers 1st place as well as 1st place in Chemistry and Physics and they won 1st place team

Social Studies :  
Miguel Dominguez 3rd  
Jaime Ramirez 2nd  
Justin Serna 1st  
and they also took 1st place team



## ULA HELPS LAUNCH ELEMENTARY ROBOTICS

The United Launch Alliance presented the Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District with a check in the amount of \$4,000 to help fund Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) programs at the elementary level.

With robotics now being a UIL-sanctioned activity HCISD's objective is to bring robotics to scale by introducing the program to early adopters at the lower grade levels.

The ULA is supporting this mission in hopes to inspire the next generation of engineers and rocket scientists.



## UNITED LAUNCH ALLIANCE GRANTS AWARD FOR STEM

On October 27, Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District's high school engineering clubs gathered for a special recognition in their honor.

The United Launch Alliance presented the Harlingen High School, Harlingen High School South, and Early College High School engineering clubs with three separate checks totaling \$5,000.

With this donation, the ULA hopes to inspire the next generation of engineers and rocket scientists.

"Engaging our schools and communities is very important to us," said Ralph Luaces, Manufacturing Engineering Manager at ULA. "We do this is because we want more and more students to become interested in science, technology, and maybe grow up to be rocket scientists. It is a great opportunity for ULA to support the STEM programs. Perhaps one of these students can take my place when I retire and take over where I am leaving off."

HCISD robotics teams will use the funds to purchase materials for use in competitions like the U.S. Navy SeaPerch Challenge and RGV Boosting Engineering, Science & Technology (BEST) Robotics Competition.

"It's great that ULA gives us these grants because it means we don't have to fundraise, and we can spend all of our time working on the robot for competition," said Connor Smith senior at HHS. "We have a lot that we need to fund. We need to buy entry into competitions and supplies."

Superintendent Dr. Art Cavazos was on hand to congratulate the teams on their performance at competition earlier this month. *Cont'd on pg 27.*

He also took the opportunity to address the teams and their sponsors about the important work that they are doing by participating in and promoting STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) activities in their schools.

"This is a moment that has transformed into a movement," said Dr. Cavazos. "You all have been doing this at the high schools for some time now, and you have been doing a good job of promoting it. It's been growing bigger and bigger. You've brought about an agreement at this school district – we are going to embrace this concept."

Dr. Cavazos stated that there is a high probability that robotics will become a UIL sanctioned activity within the next year, and HCISD's objective is to bring robotics to scale by introducing the program to early adopters at the lower grade levels.

All five middle schools and 10 elementary schools have already adopted the robotics program.

Earlier this month, HHS took 1st place in the nautical obstacle course and advanced to the final interview stage while HHSS tied for 1st place overall in the presentation category at the SeaPerch Challenge. Both teams will join forces and represent HCISD as one team at nationals in May 2016.

HHS also earned 3rd place in Robotic Performance and the 3rd place BEST Award at the RGV BEST (Boosting Engineering, Science, and Technology) Robotics Competition. They also advanced to the Texas BEST Regional Robotics Competition in Dallas Texas on November 13-14.



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## HHS ADVANCES IN ROBOTICS COMPETITION

After six long weeks of preparation, the Harlingen High School Engineering & Tech Club saw their hard work pay off at the Fifth Annual RGV BEST (Boosting Engineering, Science and Technology) Robotics Competition held October 17.

The HHS team walked away with 3rd place in Robotic Performance and the 3rd place BEST Award. They have advanced to the Texas BEST Regional Robotics Competition in Dallas Texas on November 13-14.

The event hosted by Texas State Technical College is designed to inspire high school and middle school teams to pursue careers in science and engineering. This year's game, "Pay Dirt," is the first BEST game designed by former BEST Robotics students, and it asked competitors to design and build robots with the capability to burrow through small areas to repair a mine.

Students were also required to present about their robots and show exhibits of their team and the development stages of their devices.





## CHESS TEAMS ADVANCE

Three Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District chess teams have competed in the National Chess Championships.

Houston Elementary, Wilson Elementary, and Coakley Middle School qualified by placing third, fourth, and fifth in their respective categories at the 2016 Texas Scholastic Chess Championship held in Brownsville on March 5-6.

The 2016 National Junior High (K-9) Championship was held on April 15-17 in Indianapolis, Indiana, and the 2016 National Elementary (K-6) Championship was held May 6-8 in Nashville, Tennessee.

### K-8 Division | 5th Coakley Middle School

Carlos De Leon    Lauren Tovas  
Jacob Fox        Marcos Gonzalez



## CHOIR MEMBERS ALL-STATE CHOIR ENSEMBLES

High school choir members were recently awarded chairs in 2016 TMEA All-State Choir ensembles as a result of successful auditions.

The following students were selected from the HHS Choir: Justin Reyes, 3rd Chair Bass 2, Mixed Choir; Alexander Alvarez, 1st Chair Tenor 2, Men's Choir; Caitlin Gonzales, 2nd Chair Soprano 1, Women's Choir; Crystal Flores, 3rd Chair Soprano 1, Women's Choir; Beatriz Palacios, 3rd Chair Alto 2, Women's Choir; and Victoria Monroy, 5th Chair Alto 2, Women's Choir.

The following students were selected from the HHSS Choir: Alyssa Rodriguez, 2nd Chair Soprano 2, Mixed Choir and Julia Bender, 7th Chair Alto 1, Women's Choir.

The All-State audition process for high school choir students leads ultimately to qualification in one of four All-State Choirs that perform at the annual TMEA Clinic/Convention: Women's Choir, Men's Choir, Mixed Choir and a Small-School Mixed Choir.



## MUSICIANS NAMED TO ALL-STATE JAZZ ENSEMBLES

Three Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District students now belong to a prestigious group of Texas musicians.

Performing at the highest level, Israel Yanez and Josue Ayala from Harlingen High School and Ryan Mowers from Harlingen High School South, earned positions in the TMEA (Texas Music Educators Association) All-State Jazz Ensembles. Less than 2.5 percent of all music students in the state ever reach this level of achievement.

Only the highest-ranking musicians judged at the TMEA Area competitions qualify to perform in the TMEA All-State music groups.

Drum instrumentalist, Yanez (Jazz Ensemble 1) and Ayala (Jazz Ensemble 2), earned 2nd chairs in their respective ensembles. Mowers, earned 6th chair and will be performing lead trumpet in Jazz Ensemble 2.

The students competed against high school musicians from all across the state in a 'blind' recorded audition. The students rehearsed and performed with the 2015 TMEA All-State Jazz Bands at the annual TMEA Convention in San Antonio on February 10-13, 2016.







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## BAND MEMBERS SELECTED FOR ALL-STATE

Members of Harlingen High School's Big Red Cardinal Band and Harlingen High School South's Mighty Hawk Band have advanced to the highest level of performance for a high school band member – the Texas Music Educators Association All-State Band.

The following students were selected from the HHS band: Aaron Balboa – Alto Clarinet, 1st Chair; Noe Muñoz – Bassoon, 3rd Chair; Josue Ayala – Jazz Bari-Sax, 2nd Chair; Israel Yanez – Jazz Drums, 2nd Chair (two years all-state); and Joe Gonzalez – Euphonium (alternate).

The following students were selected from the HHSS band: Cole Alex – Alto Sax, 2nd Chair; Milton Rodriguez – French Horn, 2nd Chair; Ryan Mowers – Jazz Trumpet, 6th Chair (two years all-state); and Miguel Teran – French Horn (alternate).

These students performed with the Texas All-State Band in San Antonio, on Saturday, February 13, 2016 at the Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center as part of the 2016 Texas Music Educators Association Clinic/Convention.

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.

High school students selected to perform in the All-State concerts have competed through several levels of auditions beginning in the fall of 2015 to qualify at the state level. Over 1,600 students are selected through a process that begins with over 64,000 students from around the state vying for this honor to perform in one of 15 ensembles.



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## INTERNATIONAL HHS JAZZ ENSEMBLE PERFORMANCE

The Harlingen High School Jazz Ensemble has presented the Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District and the state of Texas at the 69th International Midwest Band and Orchestra Clinic in Chicago on December 16-19, 2015.

HHS was invited to perform in April after going through a highly selective audition process. The group is one of only three high school jazz ensembles to be invited to perform from around the world.

"I am honored for the opportunity to attend this prestigious event and to be able to work with the greatest students in the world.

Their hard work ethic is why they will achieve greatness in their lives," said Ronnie Rios.



# COLLEGE SHOWCASE

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## Harlingen High School



### **Kennedy Daniel** SALUTATORIAN

I plan to attend Brigham Young University and major in International Studies. I was accepted into the Honors College, and I'll have the opportunity to take advanced courses. I plan to pursue a career in humanitarian affairs. I want to help less fortunate people in other countries and advocate for their causes.



### **Israel Gonzalez** VALEDICTORIAN

I plan to attend either the University of Texas or Texas A&M University. I am majoring in Petroleum Engineering as well as fulfill prerequisites for medical school. I would like to thank God, my parents for always being there for me, and Vicente Rodea, a physical therapist at the VA he's helped me along the way in my high school career.



### **Esteban Vela** CLASS PRESIDENT

I plan to attend the University of Texas at Austin and major in Business. I plan on going into healthcare administration like my father. I like that he helps people every single day, and I'm very proud of him for that. I hope to do the same in the future. I received a varsity basketball scholarship. I would like to thank my parents for everything they have done for me and school administrators for being a big role model for me.

## Harlingen High School South



### **Ryan Mowers** VALEDICTORIAN

I plan to attend the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley and major in Mathematics and Music Performance. I want to pursue a career as a studio musician, and I also plan to get my certification as a band director and a math teacher. I received a scholarship from UTRGV.



### **Ryan Benavides** SALUTATORIAN

I plan to attend the University of Texas at Austin and major in Mechanical Engineering as well as fulfill prerequisites for medical school. Dedication is very important when pursuing academics and anything in life. When you really want something don't count the cost just go for it. If you want it that badly, you'll get it.



### **Mia Aguirre** CLASS PRESIDENT

I plan to attend the University of Notre Dame this fall and major in Law. Ever since I was little, I wanted to become a lawyer. I've always wanted to help people, and I feel that this a good opportunity to do so. I've received a few scholarships from Notre Dame.



## Early College High School



### **Dylan McNutt** VALEDICTORIAN

I plan to attend the University of Texas at Dallas and major in Biomedical Engineering. I hope to become involved in research opportunities and get an internship. After receiving my bachelor's degree, I'm looking to get matriculated into a medical school. My goal is to get an undergraduate degree in Biomedical Engineering and then pursue an MD degree. I received the Academic Excellence Scholarship.



### **Danielle Del Bosque** SALUTATORIAN

I plan to attend the University of Texas at Austin and major in Public Relations and Advertising. I'm looking into a career in the communications field because that is what I'm passionate about. I've always felt that I've articulated things well in writing, I speak well and communicate well, so that's something that I've been encouraged to pursue. I received the Terry Scholarship.



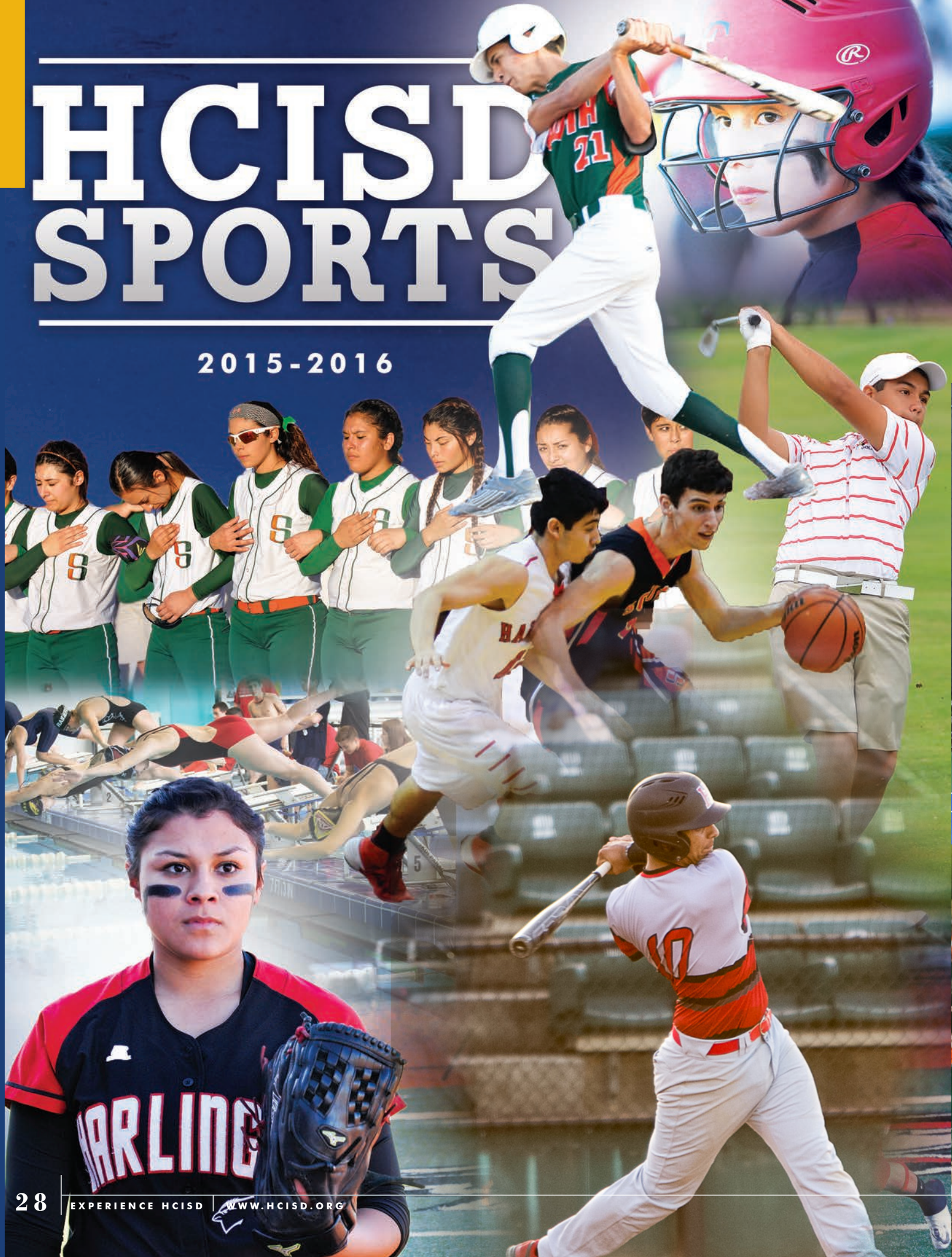
### **Michael Foster** CLASS PRESIDENT

I plan to attend St. Edwards University and double major in History and Economics. I want to pursue a career in politics. During my sophomore year, my father's insurance plan was cancelled after he was diagnosed with cancer - around the same time the patient protection and affordable care act went into effect. That experience affected what I wanted to do with my life. I received three scholarships one of which is the Dean's Excellence Scholarship.



# HCISD SPORTS

2015-2016



















# High Schools Now Well-Connected & Up To Speed

by Eileen Mattei

**Miles of new cabling and hundreds of access points were required to upgrade the fiber optic backbones and wireless access at Harlingen High School and Harlingen High School South.**

Internet speeds of five to ten megabytes are now available in every classroom, according to Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District Director of Technology James Pearcy. Previously, four classrooms – about 120 students -- shared a smaller access point, which had led to limited Internet access and dropped connections as students researched, studied and collaborated on assignments. An access point is like a pie, so with fewer sharing an access point, the connections are more satisfying: more reliable and stronger.

The project to improve bandwidth infrastructure at both campuses was funded through Tax Ratification at a cost of \$620,000, making it among the larger applications in 2016 of ratification funds. Completed in March, the full, high speed rollout has brought rapid Internet connections and less congestion which translates into less wasted time for students and teachers.

"The main goal is to provide educational transformation in teaching and learning through access to technology and resources," said Percy, referring to HCISD's strategic plan. "This is a continuous improvement process of giving easier access at higher speeds. It offers more and more resources to teachers and students." He believes HCISD high schools now rank in the top 10% of Valley high schools in connectivity infrastructure.

Six years ago, HCISD didn't allow students to use personal devices, but now the policy is 'bring your own device,' and approximately 80 percent of the students do, taking advantage of the schools' internet connectivity on their tablets, laptops and cell phones. Content checkers block access to unapproved sites and social media apps.

John Diaz, who teaches World History to sophomores in Room 2204 at Harlingen High School South, posts current events videos, quizzes and homework assignments online for students. Diaz's students do online research and study-- using the room's 10 iPads and their own devices--most days. For example, his students had to create a newspaper published during the Age of Exploration. "They research and write about past events

as if they just happened, such as 'Columbus returned to Spain last night with discoveries.' The project without iPads might have taken two weeks."

Instead, the students logged on, worked collaboratively, completed the assignment within a week and came away with an understanding of the Columbian Exchange.

"It's amazing how I can take a topic, upload it and they scroll through it. In a handout or on the board, they would have found the same thing boring. You show them things on YouTube and they think it's way more cool than you telling them about it," Diaz said. "Interactive keeps them active, and they absorb things that way. It's more stimulating, more entertaining."

The access point, which looks like a ceiling smoke alarm, opens more opportunities for project-based learning, a HCISD initiative. Working together, students gain knowledge of the material. Diaz said the textbook is fully available online, complete with review questions. "There's more stuff I could give them but not everyone has access at home."

With the increased bandwidth, Diaz's students can watch an assigned video at the same time or do research. "Everything moves much quicker, which means they can get their work done quicker, with less dead time waiting on the internet. Students notice when it's working well," Diaz said. "Everything's going great."

Before the new connection, Edwin Everett's AP/DE English III and IV classes struggled with online access. "Our internet is unpredictable," he said then. "If there were an Achilles heel in regard to how we are teaching at

South, it has to involve limited bandwidth." That definitely complicated teaching because his students have to read their assignments, research and do their writing online.

"The idea is to ease them into college, get them used to that kind of environment, where everything is pretty much online," said Everett, who also teaches at TSTC. "We use Google Docs' various applications. When they can work on a shared document simultaneously, that really helps." The Internet upgrade has enabled his classes to function better.

Everett employs blended learning, taking the best elements of face to-face and online teaching. "Good Wi-Fi access changes everything. Textbooks are limited by a lack of interactivity. Having students working online requires higher order thinking, and they get immediate feedback."

"I need to have them be able to get online all the time," he added. "Some apps can't be accessed at all when the connection is crowded. I have had to look at what takes the least amount of bandwidth. Inadequate bandwidth didn't allow the use of online quizzing with any confidence." Everett noted the system certainly provides quicker, surer online access, and he expects it will continue improving.

"We continue to address facility needs throughout our district," said Superintendent Dr. Art Cavazos. "Together we are investing in our students and their futures by providing them world-class campuses and facilities. We thank our entire community as this project would not have been possible without their support in the passing of the Tax Ratification."



***"The main goal is to provide educational transformation in teaching and learning through access to technology and resources," said Percy, referring to HCISD's strategic plan.***



# Aquatic Center SEAL Program

by Adriana Dominguez

**An excited group of second grade students from Long Elementary arrived at the Aquatics Center for their very first lesson in the fundamentals of swimming and water safety.**



This lesson is part of the Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District's Safely Educating Aquatic Learners (SEAL) Program, which will give over 1,000 second grade students across the district the opportunity to learn vital aquatics skills.

During the session instructors oriented students in small groups, and showed them how to float and hold their breath under water.

"We didn't have these opportunities. For our children to learn to become familiar with the water and not be nervous is a great experience," said Torres. "I'm 38 years old and I'm so afraid to go swimming. This is going to break the ice for them and take their fears away. My daughter looks a little nervous out there, but she loves the water. She's having fun."

Facilitated through the opening of the HCISD's Aquatic Center, a cutting-edge athletic and wellness facility, the building will host the program for all 17 of the district's elementary campuses.

"HCISD's state-of-the-art Aquatic Center wellness facility allows us to enrich student learning with an introduction to the fundamentals of swimming for 2nd grade students while enhancing the current swimming programs at grades 6-12," said Superintendent Dr. Art Cavazos. "Much time and preparation has gone into the development of the SEAL Swim program, and as such, it is

a worthwhile venture to promote the three A's, Academics, Fine Arts and Athletics. We are excited to see the positive impact this initial year will have on our students as they develop a potentially life-saving skill."

The program will take place during students' physical education periods and will offer each second grade class a designated period during the year to participate. Classes will be taught by one certified aquatic professional for every eight students and will be monitored by American Red Cross First Aid Certified Lifeguards at all times to ensure the highest level of safety.

"With the opening of the aquatic center we hope that our programs will enhance the lives of our students, staff and community through health and wellness opportunities," said Sandra Flinn Aquatics Center Coordinator. "We feel that our SEAL program will have a large impact on the safety and wellbeing of our children."

In addition to the water safety program, the facility is home to the district's secondary campus swim programs and serve as a competition facility. Located on the east side of Harlingen's J. Lewis Boggus Stadium, S. 13th and E. Jackson, it includes a 10-lane 25-yard competition pool, a separate fitness pool and a diving well. Spectators are also welcome as the facility has over 400 seats.

To learn more about the SEAL program, visit [www.hcisid.org/aquatics](http://www.hcisid.org/aquatics)

***"We feel that our SEAL program will have a large impact on the safety and wellbeing of our children,"***

said Sandra Flinn  
Aquatics Center  
Coordinator.



# High Schools Unveil New College & Career Rooms

by Ashley Berrones

**Harlingen High School and Harlingen High School South expanded and updated their College and Career Rooms in December 2015.**

The new rooms are meant to provide students and parents with a friendly, one-stop location to obtain information and resources about postsecondary education.

Each campus has its own College and Career Room, which is equipped with computers and tablets, plenty and comfortable space to accommodate more students, and an advisor ready to assist with any questions or concerns about college or a career.

"The College and Career Room is a room where students come in and apply for colleges, apply to test for the SAT or ACT, apply for financial aid, and research colleges," says Belen Valdez, Harlingen High School College and Career Advisor. "We help students every day as they come in."

Both campuses have been putting their facilities to good use since the unveiling of the new rooms. Although the College and Career rooms seem to benefit the upperclassmen the most, the advisors welcome all grade levels to stop by.

"We help students find and chose a major as well as provide underclassmen with opportunities on how to prepare for college acceptance," says Crystal Castaneda, Harlingen High School South College and Career Advisor.

The overall goal is to have one hundred percent of seniors get accepted to college. The advisors encourage this by keeping track of students who apply and are accepted to college and then posting up results on their walls.

"We are in great shape in promoting this college culture and really reminding students that its about having a true plan on what they are going to do after they graduate" says Dr. Art Cavazos, HCISD Superintendent.

***"The College and Career Room is a room where students come in and apply for colleges, apply to test for the SAT or ACT, apply for financial aid, and research colleges,"***  
said Belen Valdez, Harlingen High School College and Career Advisor.





# HCISD Makes Security Camera Upgrades to School Buses

by Adriana Dominguez

**The Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District is enhancing its security and safety operations for students by installing high definition cameras on 54 of its school buses. The project was funded by the Tax Ratification, which was approved by the Harlingen community in September 2015. HCISD has invested a total of \$102,708 in equipment and installation.**

“At HCISD we are committed to providing a safe learning environment, and it begins every day when our students step onto our school buses. The new cameras will allow us to provide a safer ride for passengers and drivers alike,” said Superintendent Dr. Art Cavazos. “The approval of the Tax Ratification is allowing us to strategically plan for HCISD’s future financial needs, and we are beginning to see the impact in our schools and facilities. This would not have been possible without our community’s support.”

The upgrade is a proactive measure that has improved bus safety for approximately 6,000 students who ride the bus every day giving the district accurate, reliable, and high-resolution data.

Each bus has four cameras on board with audio and video capabilities.

With multiple views of the road, front exit, back of the bus and front of the bus, the system captures approximately six hours of video per day to a mobile digital video recorder.

“The new school bus camera systems capture video and audio of what is happening on the bus,” said Oscar Tapia, Assistant Superintendent for District Operation/ School Safety. “Visual recordings in the bus help identify concerns such as bullying, vandalism, student discipline, and bus driver safety. This will allow the district to collect the evidence needed to help resolve any problems quickly and accurately.”

All camera systems include an alert button, which bus drivers may use to mark specific footage for school officials to review.

The platform also allows for a potential expansion of safety features as budgets allow creating an all-in-one solution for the district’s transportation management system.

The equipment has replaced outdated VCR/ VHS recording technologies that have been in buses for over 20 years.

Additionally as part of the TRE, the district will purchase new security camera systems for all of its 17 elementary campuses. This project will cost approximately \$650,000 and is expected to begin in spring 2016.

***“Visual recordings in the bus help identify concerns such as bullying, vandalism, student discipline, and bus driver safety. This will allow the district to collect the evidence needed to help resolve any problems quickly and accurately,”***

said Oscar Tapia, Assistant Superintendent for District Operation/ School Safety.





# Transforming Learning Spaces:

HCISD modernizes elementary classrooms

by Adriana Dominguez

**Students at elementary campuses across the Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District could soon be entering transformed learning spaces.**

On January 9, lead teachers from the district's 17 elementary schools and a design committee comprised of teachers, staff, and administrators attended an expo that showcased the modern classroom. There they were tasked with reviewing new furniture and technology for the district's elementary classrooms.

The aim of the event was to allow teachers, administrators, and staff to try out the furniture, and its features and afterward provide feedback based on a list of criteria.

Superintendent Dr. Art Cavazos spoke to the group about the impact their decision will have on elementary students throughout the district.

"We want our students to have a great learning environment that inspires them to produce their very best," said Dr. Art Cavazos. "Our design committee has been charged with choosing the best learning platform for our students – a space that is modernized and conducive to Critical Thinking, Collaboration, Creativity, and Communication, also known as the 4 C's. We thank the committee for being the voice of our students, and we thank our Harlingen community for their support. This project wouldn't be possible without them and the passing of the Tax Ratification."

With the 4 C's in mind, committee members zeroed in on modular furniture that could be easily reconfigured for various group sizes and activities.

"I'm looking for furniture that allows for some creativity; perhaps something students could write on," said Roland Ingram, Principal at Treasure Hills Elementary, signaling to a desk with a whiteboard surface. "That's the kind of space we are talking about. Right now we improvise some of the things you see here. We are affixing whiteboard material to the tops of existing desks, and we are arranging desks in ways they are not meant to be arranged. So there is definitely a need and a desire to collaborate."

Realizing the need to bring classrooms into the 21st century, Board President Dr. Nolan Perez is increasingly focused on how classroom setups can enhance collaboration.

"We have to create active learning platforms and change the pedagogy to facilitate collaboration," said Dr. Perez. "Every facet, every industry, and every job nowadays requires collaboration. Modernizing what is in the learning space is conducive to those 4 C's. I think this is only going to further inspire our students to open up their minds and to take learning to much deeper levels."

A recommendation was made in February, and then the project will then go out for bids.

The rollout will begin at the start of the 2016-2017 school year with fourth and fifth grade at all elementary campuses.

The district has allocated \$400,000 in funds from the approved tax ratification for the purchase of furniture and expects to spend \$400,000 each year each year until all elementary grade levels are fully furnished.

***"We want our students to have a great learning environment that inspires them to produce their very best," said Dr. Art Cavazos.***





# HCISD Bands Thank Harlingen

by Adriana Dominguez



On November 6, two of the largest and most successful programs in the Rio Grande Valley came together to thank the Harlingen community for supporting students with the passing of the tax ratification.



Harlingen High School South's Head Band Director Shane Shinsato spoke for both high school bands as he expressed the impact that will be made in students' lives because of Harlingen's investment in education.

"On behalf of the Big Red Cardinal Band and the Mighty Hawk Band, I'd like to thank our entire Harlingen community for supporting our students and approving the Tax Ratification," said Shinsato. "By approving these additional funds for our students, we have been able to improve our student's Fine Arts experience by replacing many of the instruments being played tonight."

The bands took the opportunity to showcase newly purchased instruments with a special performance at halftime.

A total of \$305,000 in musical instruments have been ordered as a result of the tax ratification.

*"On behalf of the Big Red Cardinal Band and the Mighty Hawk Band, I'd like to thank our entire Harlingen community for supporting our students and approving the Tax Ratification,"*  
said Shinsato.



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