

PARENTS AS PARTNERS

Educational Development Center

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SAVE
THE
DATE



TAPPestry Conference

Saturday, Feb. 16, 2019

8:00-4:30

Texas Transition
Conference

Feb. 21-22, 2019



JS Students Nathan & Isaac Garza

Nathaniel Garza finds himself quite busy these days. It hasn't always been this way for the 8th grade Junior School student; typically shy, Nathaniel has become increasingly more confident as he discovers his love and talent for painting. Now his painting has become his outlet and he has begun to excel academically and emotionally.

The road to Nathaniel's success has not always been so smooth. After a few years of misdiagnosis, Nathaniel was diagnosed with ASD, Autism Spectrum Disorder, when he





was in the 5th grade. His family learned as much about autism thru organizations like Autism Treatment Center (ATC) and DisabilitySA and have been strong supporters for both Nathaniel and Isaac, his brother who also has autism.

The Garza family recently moved into the Alamo Heights district after Nathaniel's father met a man at work who has autism. He inquired about where he'd gone to school and

the co-worker spoke with high regard about how the district helped him achieve his goals. The Garza family immediately began looking for a place to call home in the area.

Before Nathaniel found his passion for painting, he received typical services such as speech and occupational therapies. Nathaniel still has issues with maintaining eye contact and engaging in reciprocal conversation. "He tries to stay focused on the person speaking but tends to focus on his own interests," shares his mom, Valerie. Because of these difficulties, Nathaniel tends to stick close to immediate family; "big gatherings can take a toll on his energy" says his mom. Art seems to change that, however, "if it's an art event, he has no

issues keeping up with the crowd." His confidence has crossed

"We all want to connect, and sometimes the Fine Arts gives us that chance to connect without the words that so often let us down."

over to his success at school. He is now in theatre and advanced art at the Junior School. His art teacher, Casey Fallis, underscores the role art can play in a person's life, "Nathaniel's story is one that rings true for many students.

The fine arts are truly a critical component of

child development." He adds, "We all want to connect, and sometimes the fine arts give us that chance to connect without the words that so often let us down." Connecting with others is precisely what Nathaniel is doing through his art. He is using his medium to bring awareness and support to autism and the organizations that have supported him; Nathaniel is running for Fiesta Especial King. His fundraising efforts towards becoming King



have opened up opportunities to be part of multiple parades, make TV appearances and take part in a commercial for Autism Treatment Center. This year, Nathaniel marched in the 41st Annual Alamo Heights Holiday parade as part of the Fiesta Especial court.

When asked what actions the family is taking to plan for Nathaniel's future, Valerie says that they encourage Nathaniel to pay for items at the store on his own and speak to spectators at his art shows to foster more confidence and independence. Valerie concludes, "Like most special needs parents, my main expectation for him is independence. To know that he will be okay and just fine on his own. And I know he will."

Like his younger brother, Isaac is also on the Autism spectrum. As the saying goes, "if you've



Nathaniel and Isaac Garza

met one person with autism, you've met one person with autism." While Nathan is shy and prefers to stay close to family, Isaac is more social and likes to explore his surroundings. The two brothers have different strengths but they complement each other. At Nathan's art shows, Isaac engages customers with his friendliness. He helps in practical ways by bagging merchandise and counting inventory. Isaac has a strong work ethic and is disciplined at saving his money. He knows that Nathan's success is good not only for Nathan but for the family as well. The job he takes

most seriously is that of big brother. Valerie says that Isaac is quick to "come to the rescue" when Nathan becomes overwhelmed and shies from the crowd.

Valerie has been very pleased with how well both her sons have done in the transition to a new district and school. The impact that the teachers at the JS have already made on Isaac is readily apparent. "Ms. Woods has been amazing. She has seen Isaac at his lows and highs but always responds with love and concern" commends Valerie. Though Isaac has been an anxious child in the past, Valerie believes that having clear expectations has helped him thrive and that success has translated to many of his classes. "That's one reason why we love the district even more," adds Valerie. One of the areas that Isaac has excelled in is choir. "It's

something we never thought we'd see him do... perform with a group... I cried at the [combined high school and junior school] choir performance out of sheer pride and awe." Choir director, Rachel Holliday says it beautifully, "Choir is a place for Isaac to experience success, be part of a team of his peers and truly be 100% included. For Isaac and many students like him, fine arts classrooms are a place where he can excel."

When asked to consider what goals she has for Isaac this school year, Valerie says she expects that Isaac be able to maintain his composure and continue to work on having self-control. Looking further out into his future, she is confident that he will build on the daily living skills he's learning now along with the customer service skills he's honing at his brother's art exhibits. She has no doubt that he will be running the snack food truck he dreams of owning. While outwardly, the brothers may have different interests and strengths, they share a similar drive and perseverance that will serve them well.

Cambridge Elementary

Cory Howard, Resource Teacher

Cory Howard joins the team at Cambridge Elementary as a new resource teacher where she provides reading resource help to 3rd and 4th graders as well as in-class support in math and reading to a small group of 2nd graders. Cory has always known she wanted a career where she could work with children, so teaching seemed a natural choice. While working on her degree at St. Edward's University in Austin, Cory had the opportunity to do field work in a Preschool Program for Children with Disabilities (PPCD) program in Austin ISD. It was through the education program at St. Edward's that she began to work with students with diverse needs and chose to focus on special education. She considers it one of the best decisions she's made because she gets to combine her love for reading and help her students grow their own love for reading and curiosity for learning. Cory is excited to begin her teaching career in the district from which she graduated and one she calls, "one of the best districts in the state."



Cory enjoys interacting with students from both the general education and special education population and seeing the growth and progress they make from week to week. Her advice to parents on how to successfully partner with their child's teacher pivots on open communication. "Parents should feel they can openly communicate with their child's teachers/case manager," shares Cory. She further offers that understanding the ARD process is one of the best ways to advocate for one's child and adds that any questions not answered by the Notice of Procedural Safeguards put out by TEA should be directed to you child's case manager or a member of campus administration. On a personal note, Cory loves to travel and explore new cultures. She had the opportunity to live in New Zealand for a few months earlier this year as well as explore South East Asia where she worked at an elephant sanctuary. She enjoys visiting her family's home in New Mexico where she snowboards and spends time with family and friends as often as possible. She lives in the area and has an Australian Kelpie mix named Quinn. Ms. Howard's conference is 1:15-2:00pm daily and can be reached via email at Choward@ahisd.net. She's happy to communicate by phone or email at your convenience outside of class time.

On a personal note, Cory loves to travel and explore new cultures. She had the opportunity to live in New Zealand for a few months earlier this year as well as explore South East Asia where she worked at an elephant sanctuary. She enjoys visiting her family's home in New Mexico where she snowboards and spends time with family and friends as often as possible. She lives in the area and has an Australian Kelpie mix named Quinn. Ms. Howard's conference is 1:15-2:00pm daily and can be reached via email at Choward@ahisd.net. She's happy to communicate by phone or email at your convenience outside of class time.

KENS5 EXCEL AWARD WINNER

Howard Elementary Teacher, Stephanie Hargrove was recently honored as a KENS5 ExCEL Award recipient. KENS5 and Credit Human recognize one outstanding teacher from each of the 19 local school districts for their passion and innovation. Along with the award comes a \$1000 check. Congratulations, Stephanie!



Congratulations, Annie!

Annie Blake was recognized at The ARC of San Antonio "Achievers of the Year" Award Ceremony because of her positive attitude to meet new people and try new activities! She is able to balance social activities in the community, spending time with her family, and her goals for employment, volunteerism and wellness. With support from her family she has become an active member of the community, having a myriad of activities to enrich her day!

Her activities include:

- Participating in the Alamo Heights ISD Connects Transition Program and pursuing employment through Texas Workforce Solutions.

- Volunteering with 4 year old children at Howard Early Childhood Center once a week

- Attending the SA Life Academy Day Program part-time

- Dancing in the Eva's Heroes and San Antonio School for the Performing Arts performance of The Nutcracker on December 21, 2018

- Attending dances and social events with Morgan's Wonderland, the Down syndrome Association Teen and Adult Club, the Tim Tebow Night to Shine

- Swimming with Kinetic Kids and playing softball with Challenger League, attending CAMP Camp and Camp Blessing

- Being a presenter at the Special Olympic Unified Champion School conference in May, 2018



- Exercising at the gym and walking in her neighborhood to average 16,000 steps a day!



Woodridge Elementary

Emily Melngailis

Unlike many teachers, Emily Melngailis (pronounced Meln-guy-lis) didn't start off as a teacher. She worked in Austin for the marketing department at Texas Monthly Magazine when she decided she was ready for a change. Her mother was a music teacher so the thought of teaching had always been in the back of her mind. While she was back in school, she worked as a special education paraprofessional in Eanes ISD. After a semester, she knew that special education was the area she wanted to focus on. Before coming to Alamo Heights, Emily taught a self-contained class in Edgewood ISD for five years and was a resource/inclusion teacher at Walzem Elementary for four years. She joins the team at Woodridge as a resource teacher; she teaches reading and math in a pull-out setting as well as provides in class support in both subject. As a case manager, Emily is the primary contact for communication with parents about their child's IEP (Individualized Education Plan) and any educational concerns. She works diligently to ensure that parents understand the ARD process along with the role each committee member plays. Emily concedes

that the ARD process "Can be difficult to understand....there is so much information in these documents and meetings." Emily also coordinates with general education teachers to ensure the students are working towards successful achievement of their goals, and provides accommodations and modifications as needed. When asked what she enjoys most about her job, Emily says, "I love that I have the opportunity to work across multiple grade levels." Emily also enjoys being able to work with a variety of teachers and seeing the different teaching styles and strategies they employ. She is especially interested in how teachers incorporate technology into their classrooms.



When asked what advice she has for parents on how to better advocate for their children, Emily recommends reading the document titled “Guide to the ARD process” available on the TEA website: http://framework.esc18.net/Documents/ARD_Guide_ENG.pdf. Emily further encourages parents to ask a case manager to review the document with them if they have any questions. Emily encourages parents to feel comfortable asking questions during the meeting. “If something is unclear before, during or after the meeting, ask for clarification,” she suggests. Generally, a draft of the ARD is sent home for parents to review and, if necessary, seek clarification prior to the meeting. Emily underscores the importance of collaboration, “Ask me for clarification... tell me if you see something we have missed. Open up that dialogue. You see a side of your child that we don’t have an opportunity to see at home. Share that with us.” This in turn can help not only at school, but teachers may be able to support you with some of the struggles your child faces at home or transfer a skill or strength from one environment to another. She wants to remind parents, “we are on your child’s team and we want to help!” That collaborative spirit hasn’t gone unnoticed. Woodridge principal, Gerrie

Spellmann says of Emily, “She has a knack for developing relationships with students, staff and families.”

On a personal note, Emily is a native Texan. She was born in Brenham, home of Blue Bell Ice Cream and went to college at Texas State. She has lived in San Antonio since 2009. Emily and her husband, Noah, have been married for five years and have a two year old daughter, Eliana. The family has 2 rescue dogs, Watson and Marlowe. Eliana will be a Mini Mule next year. In her free time, Emily enjoys reading (she is a reading teacher!) and running to relieve stress, relax and enjoy the outdoors. She also loves to cook. The whole family enjoys taking walks, going to museums and the zoo and generally spending time together. During the summer, they love traveling to see extended family on the east coast and are considering a road trip to Montana next summer.

As she provides in class support most of the day, email is the best way to contact her. Emily’s email is emelngailis@ahisd.net.

*“You see a side of your child
that we don’t have an
opportunity to see at home.
Share that with us.”*

Alamo Heights Junior School

Charley Gilbert, SST and Peer Tutor Teacher



John (Charley) Gilbert is no stranger to the Junior School. He came to AHJS as a paraprofessional in the SST classroom last year and took the role of lead teacher alongside Darcilyn Woods this year.

Charley had many interests in college, ranging from architecture, kinesiology, fire fighting and education. Fortunately for our kids, he settled on education. Charley comes from a family of educators; his mother was his middle school science teacher. He also learned a lot from his older sister when he helped out in the PPCD (Preschool Programs for Children with Disabilities) classes she taught for many years. Charley's own experience with children began with mentoring and coaching soccer and basketball right out of high school.

Here at the Junior School, Charley teaches math, science, writing, reading and social studies. He and the team work on translating these subjects into functional skills the students will use in real life applications. Charley insists that he learns as much from the students as they do from him. He draws great satisfaction from watching each student's growth and knowing he's played a part in that. Charley's advice to parents concerning how best to support their child is, "love your kiddos and do what you think is in the best interest of your child." He also stresses having open communication with your child's teacher.

Charley and his wife Brittany have been married a year and have three large dogs. They have been foster parents to two boys, ages two and three and are awaiting twins later this month. With the little free time he has, Charley enjoys coaching club soccer, playing soccer and working out.

Charley is available for conference daily from 2:25-3:10 and is most easily reachable by email at jgilbert@ahisd.net.

Alamo Heights High School

Bella Martinez, Math and Science SST Teacher

Isabella Martinez is one of three new special education teachers at AHHS. She returns to her alma mater (class of 2014) straight from completing her degree in special education at Texas A&M University in May 2018. Bella is a native San Antonian and a product of Alamo Heights ISD, having attended Howard, Woodridge, the Junior School and High School.

Bella's love for working with people with physical and intellectual disabilities began during high school when she went on several mission trips to Guatemala. She became a peer tutor under former HS Peer Tutor teacher, Kari Butts. Her work with her peers in special education inspired her to study special education in college. As the math and science SST (student support team) teacher, Bella teaches an alternative geometry curriculum and serves as case manager for students in both SST and general education.

When asked what she enjoys most about her job, Bella says, "I love the small daily victories. Whether progress is made toward goals, academics, or behavior, it is a privilege to work with and see growth in a student." Her advice to parents on how to advocate for their children is to stay informed and continue to learn about the laws and various opportunities available to them. She also encourages parents to think long term about what they want for their child(ren) and come ready to share and brainstorm with the ARD team about those long term goals. Bella wants parents of her students to know that she is so

excited to work with their children. She adds, "This is my dream job and I truly love what I do!"



Bella Martinez, Texas A&M class of 2018

Bella worked at Laity Lodge Family and Youth camps every summer during college and loves spending her free time visiting national parks. She also unwinds by spending time with her dogs, reading and going to concerts.

The best way to correspond with Bella is by email at imartinez@ahisd.net.

Three cheers for...

Morgan Nichols



Morgan Nichols was recognized at the December school board meeting for the Spotlight on Excellence Award. Morgan is the ACE teacher at the high school. She has been at the Junior School but was asked to fill in at the high school this year when the ACE teacher at high school was promoted to an assistant principal position in Boerne ISD. Morgan has been a true leader. She came in and assessed the situation, she brought others on campus on board with procedures to follow with the students, and set up a communication system that has truly made a positive impact for the kids and the campus. She exemplifies the Profile of a Learner by Communicating and collaborating and working flexibly as a leader and contributor. Thanks for taking a risk and stepping up to lead the high school!

Unified Champions Club coming to JS

The Alamo Heights Junior School has joined the Special Olympics Texas family. We are working together to build an environment of acceptance and inclusion for students of all abilities. Our goal is to engage students as partners in Special Olympics Unified Sports, a program that integrates students with and without disabilities where all teammates have the opportunity to participate in year-round events. All students will partake in meaningful and valued roles on teams, building friendship and socialization throughout. We will begin to meet as a campus starting January 2019 during Flex to plan recreational and sporting events. Ms. Naomi Salcedo will be the sponsor. Look for more information in Monday Mail after the holiday break or email her at nsalcedo@ahisd.net.

Out and About



Supporting Mya at the 2018 Buddy Walk:

Gia Barrera, Ms. Woods, Mya Gonzales and
Wyatt Harrison

Before and After... Cambridge
Elementary Lost and Found

Andrew Cianelli & Addison
Roland hard at work.



Special Olympics News



JS visit to AH Fire station

Shown from left to right:

Mrs. Edwards, Briana Hicks, Ms. Lorenza, Grace Crocker, Ms. Karrie, Houston Russell, Ms. Woods, Mya Gonzales

Brandan Gomez, Adam Lopez, Nathan Garza, Isaac Garza, Ian Kozlovsky, Natalie Guglielmo, Daisy Flores, Mya Gonzales, Briana Hicks, Ms Karrie, Houston Russell, Grace Crocker, George Carrion, Ms. Julie, Sebastian Robelo



Special Olympics basketball practice

Keith Goodyear (l) and Julia Spalten being helped by Ms. Diane & Ms. Daisy (above)

This fall, the students were busy practicing for the Area 20 Special Olympic Competition. The students practiced bowling at Astro Bowling Center each Friday. The competition was held on November 1 and 2, 2018 at Bandera Bowling Center. All of our students bowled well and represented Alamo Heights ISD favorably!

The students will be jumping right into basketball skills practice. Basketball skills competition will be held in February 2019.



JS Bowling Competition Participants

Alexandria Gard, Sophia Zuniga, ,Daisy Flores, Ms. Michelle , Mya Gonzales, Nathaniel Garza, Mr. Pete, Leo Bowen, Isaac Garza,Ms. Julie, Gia Barrera, Wyatt Harrison, Mr. Gilbert, Olivia Thompson, Sebastian Robelo and Mrs. Davis

HS Bowling Competition

Shown left to right: SST teacher Isabella Martinez, Aidan Escamilla, Conrad Tullis, Asst. teacher, Hanah Shields, Jacob Crowder, Abby Stevens, Alex Molina and Julie Escamilla





FEBRUARY 16, 2019



CONNECTING

THE DOTS

ESC-20 TAPPESTRY CONFERENCE

FAMILY · SCHOOL · COMMUNITY



REGISTER NOW!
esc20.net/tapestry



TAPPEstry is an annual conference that brings together Parents/Caregivers, Teachers, Administrators, and other Professionals that have or work with children with special needs.

COST

Parents: \$30 individual; \$40 per couple includes lunch and materials

Professionals: \$30 per individual includes lunch and materials

Date: Saturday, February 16, 2019
Time: 8:30 a.m.—4:30 p.m.
Location: Education Service Center, Region 20
1314 Hines Avenue; San Antonio, TX 78208

Breakout session topics range from early childhood to planning for life after high school and cover a variety of disabilities and ages. Over 60 exhibitors will be on site.

More information can be found at: www.esc20.net/tapestry
If you have questions, please call (210) 370-5430.



KEYNOTE SPEAKER:
Jonathan Mooney
<https://www.jonathanmooney.com/>

Kimberly Baumgardner, M.Ed.
Consultant, Family Engagement
Education Service Center, Region 20
Kimberly.Baumgardner@esc20.net



Please note: Children ages 0-17 are not allowed at the TAPPEstry Conference. Childcare will be provided offsite with Respite Care of San Antonio. You must register your child by Monday, February 11, 2019. Go to www.esc20.net/tapestry for childcare registration or call (210) 737-1212.

AUTISM AWARENESS NIGHT



WITH THE



7PM

SUNDAY, MARCH 10

5:00PM - 6:00PM: RESERVED SPACE IN H-E-B FAN ZONE, TO WATCH WARM UPS

5:00PM - 5:30PM: ALL INDIVIDUALS WHO ARRIVE EARLY WILL ENTER THROUGH THE EAST MAIN ENTERANCE!

EACH TICKET PURCHASED OFF THE THIS LINK WILL RECEIVE AUTISM AWARENESS THEMED SUNGLASSES.

FAMLIES ARE ASKED AND ENCOURAGED TO BRING NOISE CANCELLING HEADPHONES TO THE GAME.
THERE WILL ALSO BE A SENSORY INCLUSION ROOM FOR ANY INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES WHO MAY NEED IT DURING THE GAME.

\$30/TICKET

BRING YOUR TEAM!

FOR ANY QUESTIONS PLEASE CONTACT
MIREN ZUBILLAGA VIA EMAIL OR PHONE:
MZUBILLAGA@ATTCENTER.COM (210) 444-5325



Autism Community Network's



Night Out with the



**FIRST
PITCH @
7:05PM**



**PURCHASE
TICKETS ONLINE**

SATURDAY, APRIL 27 2019

Nelson W. Wolff Municipal Stadium

5757 U.S. HWY 90 W, San Antonio, TX 78227

www.acn-sa.org

(210) 435-1000

@AUTISMSATX



New Parent Liaison

Michelle Harrison

Michelle Harrison is excited to step into her role as the new Parent Liaison for special education. Her objective is to support parents whose children receive special education in Alamo Heights ISD.



Michelle's goal is to help parents feel connected and informed, assist with communication between parents and staff and share pertinent resources and information for our special population. She is a parent to 6th grader Wyatt, who has autism. She has been closely involved with his education and outside therapies. Having been in a different school district before coming to Alamo Heights five years ago, she appreciates the high level of care and competency that the special education department offers. Michelle hopes to highlight and celebrate the varied abilities that students possess and bring attention to the beautiful diversity they bring to the community.

Michelle will continue to organize monthly support groups and Parents as Partners meetings (PAP) that Tracy Maxwell, former Parent Liaison, established. PAP meetings feature a guest speaker that covers topics of interest related to special education. Complementary child care is always available to remove obstacles to attendance. Michelle welcomes your feedback and suggestions on future PAP topics.

Michelle serves on the planning committee for the TAPPestry Conference, an annual conference sponsored by Region 20 for parents, teachers, caregivers and professionals who care for individuals with special needs in the greater San Antonio area. She is also a member of the Connections Networking group whose purpose is to share information about the resources they provide to families with children with special needs. Michelle serves on the planning committee for Autism Community Network's signature fundraising event, Le Brunch De Chapeaux. She continues to surround herself with people who are champions of people with different abilities as she learns more about the legal rights of children and the educational system's obligations.

Please contact Michelle Harrison at mharrison@ahisd.net with questions, comments and suggestions. She encourages you to be an advocate for your child and looks forward to assisting you in your effort.