

PARENTS AS PARTNERS

Educational Development Center

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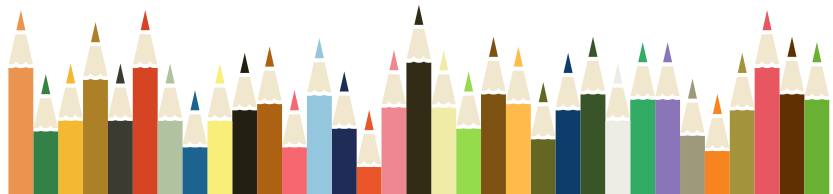
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Grant Schindler

Contributed by David Schindler

The Schindlers are a military family who have lived in Alamo Heights for 5 years, and have two young children enrolled in AHISD, Grant (1st grade at Cambridge) & Grace (4 yr Pre-K at Howard). Grant was



born prematurely at 31 weeks in 2015, and spent the first few months of life in the NICU at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, MD. While they noticed delays early on, the medical staff assumed they were the result of his early arrival. As time passed, delays increased and more abnormal neurological and physical symptoms presented themselves, spurring dozens of hospitalizations for the first 24 months of life, and ultimately culminating in a brain surgery. At 18 months Grant was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and shortly after received an underlying diagnosis of EBF3 HADDS (Hypotonia, Ataxia and Delayed Development Syndrome), a rare genetic syndrome. The timing of Grant's genetic testing was incredible, as the syndrome had just been discovered a few months prior by a pediatric neurology research team at Baylor College of Medicine and Texas Children Hospital's Neurological Research Institute in Houston. Grant was #23 in the world with the HADDS diagnosis and to date, there are still less than 250 globally.

The Schindlers shared that receiving the HADDS diagnosis led to some mixed emotions. While they were relieved to have an explanation for Grant's struggles, the fear of the unknown and the very real possibility that this could be a lifelong, arduous battle also lingered. Due to the newness of the syndrome's discovery, the lack of publications, educational materials, and community only compounded the fear. While they accepted the news, they had to adjust their expectations, goals, socialization, therapies, advocacy and everything else that comes along with a HADDS diagnosis.

So what is HADDS? HADDS is caused by a random (de novo) mutation at conception within the EBF3 gene on the 10th chromosome. The mutation leads to defects and delayed development within the cerebellum portion of the brain. As a result, those living with HADDS tend to reach milestones later, have poor muscle tone (hypotonia) and balance issues (ataxia) leading to difficulty with walking. They often have some facial dysmorphism and strabismus of the eyes, and struggle with incontinence, voiding their bladder, and with chronic constipation, leading to urinary tract & kidney infections. Many are delayed to speak or remain non-verbal, relying on AAC/communication devices to be their voice. Behaviorally, those living with HADDS also typically present with autistic tendencies, often stim, perseverate on phrases, have difficulty with social interaction, engage in repetitive behavior, lack facial expression and have a high pain threshold. As children become school aged, ADHD and challenging behaviors often emerge. Similar to autism, there's a broad spectrum of severity amongst those living with HADDS, depending on the type and location of where the mutation falls on the EBF3 gene.

Why Alamo Heights? In 2018 the Schindlers received military orders to relocate from Washington, DC to JBSA-Lackland and Ft. Sam Houston where Grant's father David practices dentistry and conducts research. Prior to moving to Texas, they evaluated special needs programs in various San Antonio-area school districts, and were quickly impressed with the talented and supportive teaching staffs, smaller learning environment, and commitment to funding quality education within AHISD. Grant began 3 yr preschool at Howard ECC in an integrated classroom setting in the summer of 2018 and is currently in 1st grade at Cambridge. The decision to move to Alamo Heights has been affirmed with every passing year. Grant is fortunate to have a committed team at Cambridge—1st grade teacher Ms. Bonewell, multiple paraprofessionals led by behavioral teacher Ms. Garner, case manager Ms. Spellmann, speech language pathologist Ms. Shelnett, and other therapists, counselors and campus administration ensuring that he reaches his full potential. In the Schindler's experience thus far, AHISD doesn't just teach character education, it embodies it by meeting every student where they are at by living honorably, acting humbly and modeling dignity for all.

To ensure that every individual living with HADDS and their family have access to immediate information, resources and community upon diagnosis, the Schindlers co-founded the EBF3 HADDS Foundation (HADDS.org) in 2019. Over the past four years they've helped raise over \$200,000 to support ongoing HADDS research at Baylor Texas Children's Hospital in Houston, led two HADDS international conferences for families to network & learn, provided medical & travel grants to families in need to access healthcare, and produced educational materials in eight languages for families and providers to better understand this recently identified syndrome. Their belief, similar to AHISD's mission, is that every individual living with a diagnosis such as HADDS has value and should not have to navigate life alone. Having a central source of information that includes tools for advocacy, fundraising to support continued research and HADDS families, and building a more connected HADDS community will help loved ones living with HADDS *thrive*.

Hello from Howard ECC

Valerie Kronk, Howard Kindergarten Teacher

Valerie Kronk is one of the new kindergarten teachers at Howard. This is her fourth year as a Special Education teacher, having worked at East Central before coming to Alamo Heights this past August. Valerie teaches some of the youngest students in the district but despite her short tenure at Howard, has quickly been made to feel at home. Valerie became interested in teaching, and specifically working in special education, years ago when a family member was diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder. As she learned more about autism, she became more convinced that her path should be in special education. At Howard, she uses her expertise in Specially Designed Instruction (SDI) strategies to identify and address any instructional learning gaps by examining content, methodology and delivery to address the unique needs of each student.



Valerie has fallen in love with the students she teaches; she loves working with each of them on a daily basis and couldn't imagine working at another school district. She describes her experience at Howard as "life changing" and plans on being there a *long* time which attests to the motto "There's No Place Like AHISD". Valerie believes in the importance of a strong relationship with the families of her students. She encourages parents to reach out to teachers with their concerns as well as to share their child's accomplishments. She encourages the cooperation and collaboration between school and home to ensure the best educational outcome for students.

Valerie is a native San Antonian and graduate of Texas A&M San Antonio where she majored in Special Education and Kinesiology. She and her husband Steven, have a son (Isaac) and daughter (Mila) and two cats. Valerie replenishes herself by spending free time and summers with her family. She takes care of herself physically and mentally by running; she particularly enjoys training for and running in marathons. Valerie has immediately felt welcome at Howard and within the Alamo Heights community and looks forward to opportunities to teach and meet more students and their families.

Kaci Boylan

Howard Mini-Mules Teacher



Kaci Boylan began working with young children at a day school eleven years ago while pursuing a degree in education. She remembers being interested in teaching as a child and that passion blossomed during her senior year of high school. Kaci holds a degree in Elementary Education with minors in Special Education and Reading from Incarnate Word. After earning her degree, she went to work for a literacy based non-profit organization for six years. This is her first year as a classroom teacher. She is one half of the teaching team in the Early Childhood Special Education class, also lovingly known as the mini Mules class, where she and co-teachers Betty Scott (mornings) and Hannah Hammer

(afternoons) work on the PreK 3 checklist and use the TEA guidelines for early childhood. Teachers also integrate social emotional learning, the Howard Touchstone (“at Howard, we use our thinking heads, feeling hearts, and helping hands”) as well as character education from the Purposeful People curriculum.

Kaci enjoys seeing children become comfortable in the school setting and grow in all aspects of their lives: academically, emotionally and socially. Kaci emphasizes, “Parents are the primary advocates for their child, so the more they know about the process and learn as their child grows, the better advocates they will be. My advice to parents would be to ask questions and stay in communication with your child’s school team.” Kaci is happy to talk with parents by appointment during school days during her conference period, from 1:45-2:45. She can be reached by email at kboylan@ahisd.net

While Kaci was born in San Antonio, she was raised in Tallahassee, Florida. She returned to San Antonio ten years ago to attend college at the University of the Incarnate Word and be closer to family. While at UIW, she majored in Elementary Education with minors in reading and special education. Kaci shares her home with her dog, Frankie. During summers, she spends time at the pool, visiting family, traveling and preparing for the next school year. Kaci loves to play cards and board games, watch documentaries and spend time with loved ones.



Emily Shobe recently had the opportunity to shine in a different setting thanks to Kinetic Kids's gymnastic program. Emily participated in an 8 week class that met at Aerial Gymnastics every Sunday afternoon beginning in mid January and culminating the first week of March. Emily loved every bit of her class and bonded with the volunteers and coaches who worked with her; she especially loved Alexis. The staff at Kinetic Kids guided Emily and her classmates through skills such as jumping, long trampoline, floor routines and uneven bars. For more information on how to register your child for classes such as gymnastics and other sports through Kinetic Kids, visit the [webiste here](#).



Samantha Castaneda

Woodridge Resource and In-Class Support Teacher

Samantha Castañeda has been a teacher at Woodridge for three years but has been teaching for eight including teaching assignments in kindergarten, first grade and as language enrichment specialist in other school districts. Samantha first knew she wanted to become a teacher while in high school after an experience volunteering with medically fragile children. The class was a life skills class similar to the SST class here in Alamo Heights. Students required modified instruction, along with support with personal care and other life skills. She also had the opportunity to volunteer with Special Olympics. Perhaps the biggest impact on Samantha's future came from home; Samantha's younger brother, Mikie, has autism. She saw firsthand the challenges he faced as well as the determination her parents modeled in navigating his diagnosis and the grit to overcome the roadblocks to his success. She is uniquely positioned to understand the frustrations that can bubble up from both the family and school side. Samantha's role at Woodridge is that of resource and in-class support teacher for students across first through fourth grade. Her primary focus is on reading, writing and math, though there are many cross-curricular activities that involve other content areas. As a resource teacher, she works with small groups in her class and spends her time addressing any skill deficits a student may have. Aside from her work directly teaching students, Samantha follows up closely with a group of second and third grade students as their case manager.



Samantha loves being able to work directly with students on the skills they struggle with the most. Samantha shares, "It's inspiring to see my students work so hard and to see them make growth in areas they find challenging." Samantha also encourages parents to reach out to their child's case manager ANY time there are questions or concerns. "We understand how Special Education could be difficult to wrap your head around. There are many different types of services, resources, and pieces that go together to form a student's

IEP and the last thing we want is for parents to be unsure or not understand what is available for their child. We are a team (parents and teachers), we want to work together to do what is in the best interest of our students,” she adds.

Samantha is originally from a small town outside of Lubbock but moved to El Paso with her family when she was 13 where she attended and graduated high school. She is a proud graduate of Texas Tech where she earned a bachelor's degree in multidisciplinary studies. She also earned a Master's in Special Education from UTSA. Samantha and her family have lived in San Antonio for almost 10 years. She shares her home with her husband, a deputy on the Bexar County Swat Team and their two sons, Benjamin (9) and Nicolas (7) as well as their dogs, P.diddy and Lori. With two active boys, the family stays busy attending their various extra-curricular activities but enjoys down time by spending time outdoors. To restore her energy and drive, Samantha enjoys quiet moments when she's able to read or check out local restaurants and coffee-shops. She is a self proclaimed foodie.

About working in Alamo Heights, Samantha has this to say, “I have had opportunities to teach in many districts, [and] I can honestly say AHISD has been the best! I love being part of the community as a teacher and as a parent. I am proud to say I have found my ‘forever’ home at Woodridge”

Cambridge Unified Champions Club

The newly formed Cambridge Unified Champions Club held its first event recently. The students decided on a St. Patrick's Day themed social which they held in Cinthia de los Santos' and Elroy Hendrick's classrooms on Thursday, March 30th. The students decorated cupcakes, worked together on a craft and took pictures with St. Paddy's day props. Unified Champions is a club in partnership with Special Olympics North America dedicated to promoting social inclusion by providing opportunities for people with (athletes) and without (partners) intellectual disabilities to form friendships through recreational sports and activities. The UC club at Cambridge joins the other Alamo Heights campuses to offer this inclusive club to its students. This years members are: Jackson Bartlett, Harris Meabon, Austin Crow, Alessandro Corpus, Jordynn Wright, Jesus Salas, Eros Garza, Walt Muecke, Ximena Garcia, Mateo Guillen, Grace McAlpin, Antonella Hernandez, Zoey DeGrey, Evangeline Seth, Maddie Borgman, Siddhi Patel, Grant Boyher, Blake Sykes, Emiliano Gonzalez,

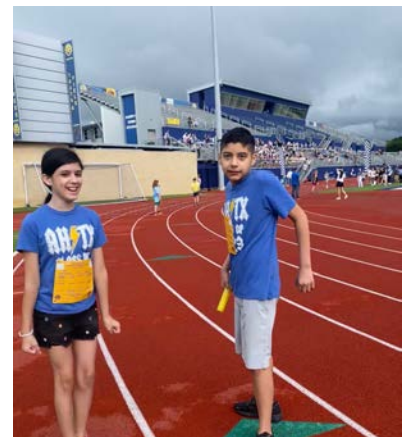
Susana Salas, Annette Nacerado, Raul Mendoza, Nicole Alvarado, Emily Thompson, Dylan Robitscheck, Matthew Marshall, Talley Wilson, Gwenyth Whiteside, Elizabeth Pfeifer, Emily Shobe, Saydie Shelnutt, Emily Son, Benjamin Reyes and Jake Case. The club is sponsored by Cinthia de los Santos, Elroy Hendricks, Avery Spellmann, Morgan Drake and Lauren Boyher. The Unified activities and events would not be possible without the help of the AWESOME teaching assistants: Alyssa Arroyo, Beverly Bernal, Juanita Dominguez, Melanie Maes, Nikki McKenzie, Paula Neil, and Veronica McKinley.

Future events this semester include the Fiesta Shoe Box Floats and campus parade along with an end of year celebration.



Woodridge Update

Students and staff have been busy learning all semester, and having a lot of fun in the process. Members of the SST class participated in the annual Bike Rodeo and 5th grade students participated in the 5th grade track meet with their gen ed classmates. The class celebrated National Grilled Cheese day on April 12th when they focused on sequencing and following multi-step directions that culminated in a delicious, gooey sandwich. Beginning in January, as part of an ongoing lesson in entrepreneurship and money sense, students (aka the Snack Squad) took turns manning the snack cart which carries an assortment of items such as sodas, popcorn, fruit snacks, chips and Chex Mix. The class then celebrated their success on a Target run with the profits they made running the snack cart. The whole campus added a hand to the Autism acceptance mural in the main hallway directly in front of the entrance.



Spring Semester at the Junior School

Members of the SST classrooms at the Junior School have been participating in community outings while deepening their understanding of many of the subjects they've been learning about in class. As an extension of a social studies unit on Native American tribes, the class visited the Witte Museum in February where they saw how the people of the Pecos lived. While at the Witte, they were also able to visit the HEB Body Adventure exhibition which dovetailed with their unit on the systems of the body. The SST class rounded out the month during a community based outing to the San Antonio Stock Show and Rodeo. While on the grounds, the students enjoyed interacting with animals in the petting area and visiting the rodeo exhibitions.



The students practiced the functional money skills they learn in class (making purchases, calculating a tip and ensuring they receive correct change) as well as appropriately interacting within the community (greetings, using good manners, and respecting social expectations and rules).

Early March saw the return of Fans in the Stands, a now annual event that gives the SST students an opportunity to showcase some of the skills they've been working on during Special Olympics practices every week. SST members from all campuses were invited to attend while

Junior School students and community members were in the stands to cheer them on. The Mighty Junior School band was also on hand to boost spirit as the athletes walked into the gyms. To cap off the exciting month, the class adopted a guinea pig which the students named Mr. Pickles. The students assist in his care and feeding and have discovered that he likes storytime and popcorn, but not pickles! The last



community outing of the month was an opportunity to practice ordering, paying and receiving correct change at Biff Buzzby's burgers. Paraprofessional Matt Long took on the Red Baron challenge- eating a 3 pound burger and fries in under 30 minutes- and was victorious. The students printed out pictures and created a timeline of events as a social studies assignment.

In April, the class again had several opportunities to extend their learning outside of the classroom when they visited the Alamo and the San Antonio Zoo. The trip to the Alamo included a river boat tour of downtown San Antonio as an extension of a unit on Texas history. The trip to the zoo was an extension of a science unit and offered the students the chance to see some of the animals they'd been discussing in class. Both outings provided the students the opportunity to combine academic learning with functional skills as they interacted with community members, made purchases, received change, and ordered, paid for and calculated a tip for a meal. Both outings were pre-planned to coincide with STAAR testing that occurred on the Junior School campus which would otherwise limit what students were able to do as their friends and peer tutors were taking standardized tests.



JS Unified Update



This year, the Special Olympics Unified Champions Club started out their school year with a Movie Night at the Junior School football field. Families enjoyed time together as students from all AH campuses joined in on the fun. Thank you to Mr. Gilbert and Mrs. Stone for planning this

event. Unified also attended the Special Olympics Dance-a-thon hosted by AHHS. It was a great time for dancing and meeting new friends.

The AHJS Unified Champions Club had a toy drive during the holiday season for our community. The students presented Ms. Lucas the toys donated for the Holiday Angels Program. The UC Club also coordinated a



holiday Toy Wrapping Event at the San Antonio Firefighter's Academy over the holiday break; a huge thank you to all the volunteers, parents, students and friends of all who attended. We wrapped over 100 toys for children in our community.

ahjsunified
Alamo Heights Junior School



AHJS Mulch Mania 2023 - Thank you to our AH families who came out to "Mulch Mania" to help beautify our school.

We honored World Down Syndrome Day by educating students about Down Syndrome and wearing blue and gold on 3/21.

**Unified is joining forces again with NJHS for the Annual Tye-Dye event for Autism Awareness. This is a time to come together as a school to support Autism Awareness.



Frank Lara

Alamo Heights High School Coach and Biology Co-Teacher



Frank Lara joined AH this school year as both an assistant football and baseball coach as well as a biology co-teacher. This is Coach Lara's 6th year in education; he has previously taught at Clark High where he co-taught World History and coached football and track for 3 years and at Floresville High where he taught biology and coached football and baseball for 2 years. He first became interested in special education when he took an adapted physical education class as part of his kinesiology course requirements. As he began to prepare for his certification exams, Coach Lara decided on special ed certification as he felt that it would be an area he

would get the most gratification from. We're grateful for that decision.

Of his time in the classroom, Coach Lara loves interacting with the different personalities of his students. He works on fostering relationships with them and being part of the team that equips them to achieve goals they didn't previously thought were impossible. Coach Lara underscores the need for students and their families to educate themselves on the many services that schools provide; whether they have a 504 and can benefit from accommodations or an IEP and can benefit from either accommodations and/or modifications to the curriculum. Coach Lara is available by appointment during 1st period on Blue days; the best way to reach him is via email: flara@ahisd.net.

When not in the classroom or the football field or baseball diamond, Coach Lara spends his time with his family. He is husband to Vanessa, whom he met in high school in Elsa, Texas and dad to Madison (4) and Logan (2). The Laras have made San Antonio their home for the last 10 years.

As one might expect, Frank played football, baseball, basketball and track in high school and is a self-described sports junkie. He loves to watch, play and coach all sports. Because being a coach often takes him away from home, Frank is very protective of his free time and spends it with his young family. He wants parents to know that he has "fallen in love with the AHISD community. The only regret I have had this year is that we didn't get here sooner"!

Micaela Reid

Science In-Class Support Teacher

Another new face to AHHS (and the science department) is Micaela Reid Wright. Ms. Reid Wright became interested in teaching after serving first as a behavior support specialist at New Life Treatment Center. The teacher she supported, Ms. Sullivan, encouraged her to make education her career and Micaela became certified to teach science for 5-12th grade. She pursued a special education certification because many of the students she was already working with as a behavior specialist qualified for special ed services. Micaela wanted to be equipped to help her students.



Micaela serves as an in-class support teacher. This means that she is in the general education classroom to provide guidance to students who may need extra instruction, clarification or to have the material presented in a slightly different way. In fact, Micaela loves this aspect of her job- she understands that teachers have different styles of teaching just as students have different styles of learning. She is able to take the same content the general ed teacher is covering and present it in a different way that may click better with each student. In this way, she also helps the gen ed teacher ensure that all the students' needs are met. While the general education teacher plans the lesson and content, the ICS teacher, sometimes also known as co-teacher, adds another layer of clarification or adaptation to ensure the success of the student receiving support. Micaela enjoys seeing her students become increasingly more confident and successful. Micaela also performs the role of case manager. Case management involves regular monitoring of services and following up with students as needed. The services are designed to identify any academic and non-academic barriers to success and otherwise promote a student's health, educational outcomes, and overall well being. This often entails monitoring academic performance and school attendance, raising a student's standards for personal success, providing guidance about post-secondary education or training options. Case managers may also serve to teach conflict-resolution skills, to reduce maladaptive behaviors, to encourage academic engagement and to address family issues or concerns. It is this role

that makes a teacher like Micaiela uniquely positioned to collaborate with families. Her advice to parents is to encourage their students to learn to advocate for themselves and talk to their teachers and to communicate often with teachers themselves specifically when it comes to preparing for their child's ARD meeting. Having a good understanding of what goals your child has mastered and planning in collaboration with his case manager increases the likelihood of a well developed IEP and the ultimate success of the student. Micaiela reminds parents that they're on the same team and ultimately, teachers want the same thing for their students as parents do, to see students perform to their fullest potential. She is happy to meet with parents by appointment during her conference period on Blue days during 3rd period (1:00-2:25) or on Gold days during 8th period (2:25-4:00); you can schedule a time to talk or meet in person by emailing her at mreid@ahisd.net.

Micaiela is a graduate of Virginia Commonwealth University where she received a dual degree in Chemistry and Psychology. She and her family moved to Texas in July 2019. She shares her home with her husband, infant son and two step-daughters as well as the canine members of her family, Beau and Bertie. The girls will attend AHJS next year and Micaiela looks forward to the day that her son will be a mini-Mule at Howard. During the summer, the Wrights enjoy family-time, swimming and spending time outdoors. Micaiela's hobbies include crocheting, sewing and making music. She attends to her physical health by going to the gym.

Bardo Brambila

Geometry Co-Teacher and Cross Country and Softball Coach



Bardo Brambila has worked in public education for 23 years, but this is his first year teaching both at Alamo Heights and within the Special Education setting. Bardo co-teaches geometry and algebraic reasoning with Ms. DeWolfe. When not in the classroom, he also coaches cross country and softball. While at the Air Force Prep Academy, his master

sergeant introduced the idea of coaching. Knowing that, in Texas, coaches must be certified teachers, Bardo decided to pursue a career in education. For most of his career, Coach Brambila taught social studies in various schools in El Paso, Castroville and San Antonio where he also coached football and track, five years in El Paso and ten in San Antonio. While working in both SAISD and South San ISD, he supervised middle and high school intervention programs. It was there that he frequently worked with students who had 504 or IEP education plans. After receiving positive feedback from students, parents and fellow teachers about his work with this population, Coach Brambila was motivated to pursue a special education certification. He enjoys hearing how material he's taught his students has impacted them in the real world. Coach Brambila also serves as a caseload manager whereby he monitors the progress of his students and ensures that they're receiving the accommodations they need in order to be successful in class. He encourages his students to ask questions whenever they're unclear about the material he's covering. Asking questions is the same advice he gives parents in order to be advocates for their student. He is available to schedule phone or in-person conferences during 2nd period Blue days. Parents can also reach him during the day by emailing him at bbrambila@ahisd.net.

Bardo is a native of El Paso and after attending the Air Force Prep Academy, graduated from UT El Paso where he majored in criminal justice and sociology. He has called San Antonio home for 15 years and shares it with his wife, Victoria and two Boston terriers, Jester and Viceroy. When not teaching or coaching, Bardo enjoys working out, visiting new cities and spending time outdoors. He and his wife enjoy visiting zoos and parks, both amusement and state and national parks. They also enjoy participating in Fiesta events, especially, Oyster Bake which his sister, a St. Mary's alum, introduced him to. His greatest hobby is bowling. While he's always been an advocate of physical fitness and is rather disciplined in his eating and exercise regimen, Bardo confesses his weakness is chocolate. Bardo jokes that most weekends he can be found working around the house that really doesn't need fixing, painting or replacing or walking the aisles of Best Buy/Lowe's/Home Depot buying something he doesn't really need. Please help me in welcoming Bardo to Alamo Heights!

Have a suggestion for a future spotlight? Email mbarrison@ahisd.net with your idea.

Living Unified at AHHS

The spring has seen a flurry of social and planning events. Unified stakeholders held an old fashioned game day on March 6th with plenty of board and card games, music and fun. The club also met later in the month to discuss and plan their spring fundraising event, an adult painting party led by co-secretary and resident AHHS artist, Nathaniel Garza. The event was a huge success. Proceeds from the fundraiser were used to cover the cost of the club's end of year celebration, a Fiesta themed party held on May 4th.

Junior and Senior Unified members attended a pre-party and the 80's themed prom together and had a wonderful time.



HS Happenings

Students at AHHS have had a packed spring semester. The class has had the opportunity for various Community Based Instruction (CBI) outings beginning with a trip to the post office as an extension of a letter writing assignment in English.

The students had the opportunity to learn about screen printing as a potential future job when they visited Viva Heights, a local, family-owned apparel company designing and printing items in and for the Alamo Heights community. Each student was able to participate in the process of making their own Unified t-shirt. The class also ventured out of the '09 bubble and to the San Antonio Stock Show and Rodeo grounds where they interacted with the animals in the petting area and visited various exhibition booths as well as practiced functional money skills.



In March, the students kicked off Spring break by attending Fans in the Stands, the second annual exhibition started by Charley Gilbert at the Junior School. The students went through various skills based stations where they were able to show off the sports skills they've been learning through Unified PE and Special Olympics practice. Students were cheered on by both junior school students and community members. Later in March, the students again participated in some skills-based recreation on the campus of the University of the Incarnate Word's Amazing Race for Hope. The event was a Unified event with UIW college students and Special Olympic Athletes from across San

Antonio participating in completing stations/activities across the UIW campus. The college students were grouped with SO athletes and other individuals with disabilities to complete the race. Teams were given clues to solve in order to advance to the next station which could be an activity or a community service station. After the race, participants enjoyed pizza and social time. The event was a huge success.



Swimming practice began in early April; students continue to work on skills at their own pace and ability. Students also gave back to the community by packing bags of shelf stable snacks for students across San Antonio at a Snack Pak 4 Kids packing event. This was the second time the class participated and they worked like pros packing roughly 1500 bags in about an hour. During STAAR testing in late



April, the students took advantage of the modified schedule to attend Fiesta Especial. The students worked together to decorate a miniature float embracing the theme of “Fiesta Diversity” and proudly displayed it in the parade line up. The class

has several fun events planned for May including the end of year Special Olympics event at Morgan’s Wonderland on the 12th and various community enrichment outings during finals week to include the Magik Theatre on the 19th.



'09 Academy

Alamo Heights '09 Academy has been busy this spring! We started our garden after spring break planting flowers, vegetables, and herbs. All of the plants are flourishing with all the rain we have been getting! We were even able to eat some of the zucchini the last week of school.

We have been working at our philanthropies every week to help others in the community. One of our favorites is the San Antonio Food Bank where we assemble boxes of fresh vegetables for people in need. This is good

practice for our packing and counting skills- this week each box received

2 potatoes, 1 cabbage, 10 carrots and 3 onions. Meals on Wheels is another favorite of ours. We deliver meals to Seniors that have difficulty cooking for themselves. They are so appreciative when we knock on their doors to deliver a meal and a handmade decoration. We recently made fiesta door decorations to go along with the meals.

On campus we continue to work on life skills such as: using the washer and dryer, folding

laundry, using the dishwasher, washing dishes and wiping down tables. We also perform exercises or take a walk around the '09 campus daily. It has been a busy, fun year!



Connects Program

The CONNECTS program vocational trainees have had a busy year learning employability, mobility, independent living, and recreational skills in community settings in preparation for adult living. The vocational trainees participate in non-paid work-based learning in community businesses. The following local businesses have opened their doors for student job training opportunities. We are very grateful for our partnerships with HEB-Lincoln Heights and Oak Park, Alamo Heights United Methodist Church, University of the Incarnate Word, Walgreens (Broadway), Juniper Assisted Living, AHISD Howard Early Childhood Center, Las Palapas Restaurant (Austin Hwy), The DoSeum, San Antonio Zoo, Green Door Thrift Shop, and YMCA (N St Mary's St). Students in the Connects Program are taught to make their own VIAtrans Paratransit Service arrangements to access employment and community sites. Our students participate in the Youth Development, Healthy Living, and Social Responsibility Program at the YMCA (N St Mary's St location) twice a week. We appreciate the partnerships in our community as they have played an integral part in our student's lifelong learning and skill development. Volunteerism is a fundamental component of the program as it gives our students a sense of achievement, purpose, builds social skills, and creates a culture of giving.

We are proud that two of our vocational trainees are now employed at businesses where they previously received job training skills and volunteered. We are also very proud of our vocational trainee who has independently volunteered at Howard Early Childhood Center. Way to go! We are proud of you!



Gnome Surfing

Meriel and Forrest Bowman and their two boys spend a few weeks in Rhode Island every summer visiting family. Just before their trip in 2021, Meriel's dad saw an article in his local news paper about a sensory surf shop and thought of Townsend. The Bowmans looked it up and signed him up for a lesson.

Unfavorable weather (rainy, 60 degrees) almost made them cancel the session but they decided to attend anyway. It was a serendipitous decision. Townsend absolutely loved his time in the ocean with the surf instructors. Meriel described the lesson as magical. Townsend participated in surf therapy the next two days and had equal success and joy each day. When the Bowmans planned their visit for summer 2022, they again booked surf therapy lessons with Gnome Surf. After a year of seeing the impact that surf therapy has on individuals with disabilities, she felt compelled to join the board and started working on bringing a surfing event to south Texas. That dream was realized earlier this month when Gnome Surf conducted a therapeutic surf event at Port Aransas on May 6th. Meriel mentioned the event to Traci Thomas, OT for Alamo Heights, and Traci quickly offered to help as a volunteer. The free event was attended by members of the greater Corpus Christi area as well as several Alamo Heights families who couldn't have more positive things to say about Gnome surfing and their staff. Traci Thomas was thrilled to be part of the event, "To see the face of the athletes and parents was so heartwarming. There were so many big smiles, lots of high fives and happy tears as the athletes and their surfer instructors caught a wave and rode into shore. This will definitely be an annual event for me and I'd highly recommend that parents get involved and sign their athlete up for next year's Gnome Surfing event."

The Linder and Rabke families were just two of the Alamo Heights families who traveled to Port Aransas to participate in the event; as is the case for many of our kids, sometimes events like these are overwhelming. Moms I spoke to all agreed that the attention and thought put into every detail of the day was evident. Instructors and volunteers modeled, supported, encouraged and cheered for each participant no matter how far they were willing to wade into the water. Heather Linder pointed out that Gnome Surf staff offered the sort of acceptance that our kids desperately want. She felt a sense of hope after experiencing the patience, kindness, and respect the organization showed the athletes and their families. "I loved witnessing the faces of the all athletes – hesitation turning into confidence, and then to pure joy" shared Heather. Angela Rabke's entire family participated in the day's events. She and husband, Trey volunteered for water safety while her older children ran the art

table for athletes and Storey crushed the waves with Gnome instructors. Angela reflected, "It was magic. All kids deserve this. To risk and be safe and to float and to fly." The day had such an impact on the Rabke family that Angela and Trey agreed to chair the 2024 event. I can't wait to have my family participate next summer.



Parent Liaison

Michelle Harrison



I was recently talking to a friend and congratulated her on her son's amazing accomplishments. He wrapped up his senior year with tremendous accolades in almost every aspect of his life, with great success both academically and athletically. I could see the pride in my friend's eyes, and I was so happy for her.

I had the same feeling in learning about many of the "personal bests" of our students in special education this school year. Senior Nathaniel Garza is a self-taught artist who recently earned a perfect score at the state Visual Arts Scholastic Event, or VASE, for his painting "Willow City Spring." His work was one of 31,000 pieces entered into the statewide competition. Nathaniel's passion for painting, along with the encouragement of art teacher Casey Fallis, first at AHJS and then at AHHS, have shaped him into the confident young artist he is today.

I love learning about the success Connects students Jake Ramirez and Joel Lisowski are having in the post-secondary program they're attending. The extra time and encouragement that the Connects staff offers show our students that they are capable of so much and that their instructors believe in them!

Finally, I could almost feel the joy that Traci Thomas, Meriel Bowman, Heather Linder and Angela Rabke described in seeing children overcome hesitation and fear as they tried new, intimidating things. What once seemed impossible became possible for them.

These are all reminders that success comes in different forms and at different stages for each of us. Each step towards doing something new takes courage and commitment. They are also reminders of why we've all chosen Alamo Heights for our children's education. Our district values inclusion and diversity and aims to shape young people to be the best versions of themselves, whether that's an appointment to the Air Force

Academy, receiving prestigious art accolades, having increased independence, or riding the waves as they crash into the surf.

From our trustees and administration to the office staff and bus drivers, and especially the teachers, paraprofessionals and coaches who pour into our kids, there really is #NoPlaceLikeAHISD.

Grace & Peace,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Michelle M. Harrison". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored, slightly textured background.