

Parents as Partners

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Sloane Fagan and her Family

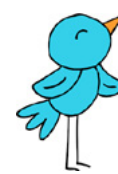
Sloane Fagan

Melinda Fagan and her husband Paul met at a dental office where Melinda was working as an RDH (Registered Dental Hygienist). Paul already owned an older home in Alamo Heights and since Melinda had heard so many positive comments about AHISD, they decided to make Alamo Heights the community in which they would raise a family.



Their first daughter, Sloane, was born four months after construction was completed on their home. Melinda's pregnancy went smoothly, without complications. She grew up in a large family surrounded by many children, and had many opportunities to observe their development. She began to notice that their daughter was not reaching her developmental milestones. They shared their concerns with their pediatrician but he wrote them off telling them that Sloane was a healthy child and would reach her developmental goals soon. Nothing changed so they decided to take her to other specialists such as an ENT (Ear, Nose and Throat) doctor to make sure her hearing was within normal range.

As a first time mother, Melinda was very observant of her daughter's play and non-play. Sloane was not emotional and showed very little range in expression. At 9 months of age, Melinda began teaching her sign language for fun. But at 13



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Save the Date!

Parents Night Out

May 8th 6:00pm
Parents Night Out
@ La Fonda Alamo
Heights

Texas Parent to Parent Conference

June 22-23rd
Embassy Suites
San Marcos, TX
<https://www.txp2p.org/>

Texas Autism Conference

August 2-3rd
San Marcos Convention Center
San Marcos, TX
<https://txautism.esc2.net/>

Sloane Fagan Continued...

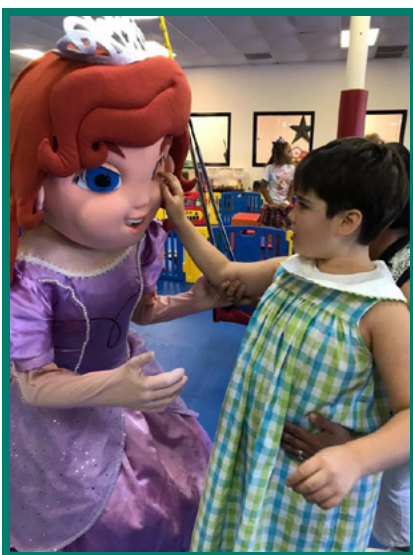
months Sloane still had no language and then she lost her ability to sign. Melinda heard about how children with autism just stopped talking one day and seemed to slip away. They were still waiting to hear Sloane speak.

The Fagans decided to enroll Sloane in swim classes with a local swim instructor who was also a nurse. Melinda figured, "What better person to teach her than a nurse who would be able to know what to do in the event of an emergency?". What she did not know was that their swim instructor, Diana Perry, had a background in developmental delays. It did not take long for Diana to help Melinda understand that there was a need for concern. Diana sent Melinda to Autism Community Network (ACN). After a long, four-hour evaluation, Dr. Chris Johnson gave Sloane a diagnosis of Pervasive Developmental Disorder, on the autism spectrum. Sloane was 18 months old. Then it was off to the races as the Fagans had six months until their next child was due to be born. They were informed that they had a high percentage chance of their second child also having autism.

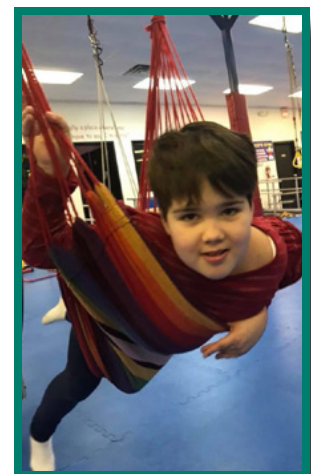
The Fagans knew that the next few years would be by far the most challenging. They attended many lectures, trainings, and interviews regarding autism. They participated in a six-week therapy program at ACN (Autism Community Network) and a boot camp about what to know when enrolling your child in a public school district, with Any Baby Can, an organization that provides direction and guidance for families of children and youth with special needs.

They were fortunate to already live in the Alamo Heights School district. There was no doubt they would continue to stay unless there were things that the school could not provide. They started at Howard ECC with pre-k and kindergarten. "What a wonderful school and staff!", Melinda exclaimed. They immersed Sloane in speech and occupational therapy, then added floor time therapy which was done at home. Next they tried Applied Behavioral Analysis therapy (ABA) with a private home therapist.

They attempted to continue their routine of attending church but could not find the appropriate care for Sloane. She developed pica (eating objects that are not food) and that was difficult in itself, but with her still being non-verbal it was challenging for them to find anyone they trusted to care for her as well as her little sister. As a result of her pica, Sloane had surgery after swallowing an object that blocked her esophagus but thankfully not her airway. Melinda took that time to make sure Sloane knew what



Sloane playing at We Rock the Spectrum Gym





<The Fagans enjoying Morgan's Wonderland>



Sisters >

had happened and this seems to have worked as she has not tried that again. But the pica remains. Sloane has undergone genetic, nutritional and neurological studies. Melinda shared, “The pica is what it is. There is no rhyme or reason as to when it is at its peak. There are times when Sloane does not engage in pica activities and then seemingly out of nowhere the pica is back.” In addition to her pica related challenges, Sloane does not know how to communicate if she is in pain, so it is a part of their daily routine to check her body from head to toe. Her younger sister is exactly the opposite and has a heightened sensitivity to pain.

They watched their second child with a different pair of eyes as they now knew what to look for. They went ahead and had her evaluated. Their youngest was diagnosed on the higher functioning side of the autism spectrum. At this time Sloane was still not talking. Sloane eventually began using pop-up words along with her own language. They continued using sign language, PECS, and an iPad as an augmentative device.

“The best thing about Howard was the participation of the staff and extra help we were given to understand what needed to be done with regard to academics,” expressed Melinda. She and Paul met Mary Hillis who has remained an invaluable person in their lives. They were blessed with dedicated teachers, including Linda Duffy, when it came to understanding their daughters. They attended Parents as Partners meetings organized by Tracy Maxwell, Parent Liaison for special education, to learn about additional resources in the community and to network with other families.

Then Melinda heard of a tuition-free charter school in the area, specifically for children with autism. They submitted an application to a lottery system and applied and waited for the next enrollment. Melinda shared “I didn’t know if it was the right thing to do but with all of the staff specializing in autism and small class sizes of seven or less, I thought this was what might help our daughter.”

Their youngest daughter surpassed Sloane with language and development but showed signs of autism in a different way. Melinda often joked that they were the yin and yang of autism.

The charter school was great but only went to first grade. Melinda and Paul had concerns about enrolling Sloane at Cambridge, fearing she would be overwhelmed with a large school and a larger class in an inclusion classroom. They brought Sloane back to Howard where she had one semester with her sister. That proved to be a great idea because she established friendships that would carry over to Cambridge.

Sloane Fagan Continued...

Melinda shared, “Another wonderful thing about the Alamo Heights community is the overwhelming support and kindness from our neighbors.” Additionally, they are blessed to have family who are eager to help and attend lectures along with trainings. This support has helped their daughters become more integrated into their community.

Melinda reflected “It was quite scary to agree to put our daughters on the bus transportation that the school district offered us, but I looked at this as another opportunity to give them additional socialization, in a way that I couldn’t provide.” Riding the bus helped the girls build their independence.

If she could, the one thing Melinda would do differently is early on, she would have taken Sloane to more Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) therapy versus a lot of occupational and speech therapy. With a non-verbal child the behaviors were a higher priority, for both of their children. Without successful behaviors, in her experience, it is hard for a non-verbal child to make progress in other therapies. This is challenging because successful ABA therapy requires 3-4 days per week, for several hours each day. But Melinda feels that early intervention is the best recipe for success.

During second grade, the Fagans decided Sloane needed a more concentrated environment that included year round ABA therapy. First they placed her at Empowered Behavioral Health (EBH) but with a 16 mile commute one way, they eventually moved Sloane to Integrated Behavior Services (IBS) as they offered a much more flexible schedule and are located at IH35 and Judson, much closer to the Fagan’s home. Their hope is to get Sloane to a higher academic performance level so she can return to public school for a half day at first and then full time.

With two girls, Melinda and Paul had to pick their battles. They experienced feelings of isolation and feared the dangers of going out in public with both girls. They have slowly started to go to safe places such as Morgan’s Wonderland, where they have additional eyes and support. Another place their family enjoys is We Rock the Spectrum Kid’s Gym. The small area and the supervision from the couple that owns it are what they need to have a safe, good time.

Melinda tells parents whose children are newly diagnosed that if they need to grieve, to go ahead and grieve but not for too long. Getting an autism diagnosis is not terminal. Everyone has feelings of isolation, not just families of children with disabilities.

As their girls get older the developmental gap between them has grown bigger. Their younger daughter has surpassed her older sister academically and socially. In reference to their youngest daughter, they are asked frequently, “Is she truly autistic?” While a diagnosis is not reversed, they are pleased she is able to fool so many people.

The next phase of their lives has turned to securing their girl’s futures in case Melinda and her husband depart prematurely. “The idea of a special needs trust was presented to us early on, but we had so many other priorities we had to put that one in the back of the line,” Melinda reflected. Now that they have their trust set up, they are so relieved.

Most recently Sloane has taken to using her augmentative device to communicate and has surprised them. One incident stands out. They were in their backyard with the family who would take care of her if Melinda and Paul were no longer around. Melinda asked Sloane to show them how she uses her device. She picked it up and answered simple questions like “What is your name?”, “What is your



Fiesta Fagans

mom’s name?”, “Where do you live?” “How old are you?”. Then Melinda asked “What do you want to say?” Sloane typed “I see love.”. Thinking she made a mistake Melinda cleared the bar for her to start over and said “Sloane, what are you trying to say?” She then typed “I see love.” “Well that was it for me as well as for everyone around her,” Melinda joyfully remembered.

The Fagans do not think of Sloane as disabled, but instead view her as “differently-abled”. This gives her diagnosis a more positive light. She is not “disordered” but is “ordered differently”. Sloane is unique and she is who she is. What is typical? They no longer look at parenting the way they did when they were single. They are parents to the most amazing daughters they could ever have.



<http://www.anybabycansa.org/>

San Antonio Location
 217 Howard Street
 San Antonio, TX 78212
 (210) 227-0170
 FAX (210) 227-0812



Any Baby Can services are provided at no cost – regardless of income – to families who have a child birth through 17 years of age with a chronic illness, disability, developmental delay or health risk. The child must reside in either Bexar, Atascosa, Bandera, Blanco, Caldwell, Comal, Edwards, Frio, Gillespie, Gonzales, Guadalupe, Hays, Kendall, Kerr, Kimble, Medina, Real, Uvalde or Wilson County.

Case Managers direct families to many Any Baby Can program as well as help link families to many local and state programs. All Any Baby Can services are offered at no cost – regardless of income – to families who have a child birth through 17 years of age with a chronic illness, disability, developmental delay or health risk and who reside in Bexar County or one of the surrounding 18 counties.

Any Baby Can offers the following services:

- [Sibling Support](#)
- [Autism Services](#)
- [Educational Materials](#)
- [Wellness Services Program](#)
- [Center for Infant and Child Loss](#)
- [Prescription Assistance](#)

JUNIOR SCHOOL NEWS

Mr. Boyer and Ms. Nichol's Class

- New teaching assistant Kenneth Reyes joined the their team in January.
- Teacher Morgan Nichols passed her BCBA exam.
- Their class moved to a larger room this year, and the teachers and students have thrived in the additional space. The new classroom allows for a great deal of versatility such as individual cubbies, Smart-board lessons, Whiteboard space, tables for small group activities, a lounge area with bean bags, a couch, a bubble machine and a row of desktop Macbooks for individual technology-based lessons.
- Their classroom runs a meditation Flex class with 15 to 20 students each session, and they are using mindfulness practices as an intentional proactive strategy for dealing with stress, anxiety, impulsivity, frustration and anger.
- Their team received \$2,500 for behavioral and social skills curriculum through the Alamo Heights School Foundation "Grants to Educators".
- Their class has two class pet gerbils: Clive and Richard. Seventh grader JP Meriwether researched what type of pet would be best for their classroom environment as well as how to care for them. He was in charge of naming the gerbils and teaching other students about the importance of hand washing and handling them with care. JP is also in charge of taking the gerbils home for extended holidays and for day-to-day feeding and changing out their bedding and water. All students were required to watch a video about gerbils prior to being able to play with them.



Students raising money with the Service Club >



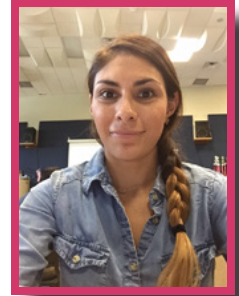
Mrs. Deutchman and Ms. Wood's Class

The Wall of Fame is used to recognize students for completing tasks above and beyond their requirement. If a student does something to get on the Wall of Fame, he or she will be recognized in an awards ceremony at the end of the day, get to post their picture on the wall, and receive a trophy or a medal.

The service club and students came together to raise money for their department by opening the concession stand during the faculty vs. student basketball game. It was a big success and all students involved received real world experiences. They will be doing this again for the faculty vs. student soccer game.

Math with Mrs. 'A', Isabel Arranaga

This school year Isabel Arranaga's resource math class, room 116, joined the engaged classroom cohort in AHISD. This is very exciting as her class is the first and only engaged classroom in a special education setting. Isabel shared, "It has definitely been a learning curve, but we are enjoying every minute." Their class furniture and technology were updated. They have dry erase board tables, a class set of chrome books, and a choice of seating for students including a bench, rolling chair, or wobbly stool for those students who need movement while they learn.



Her math students love the accessibility of Google Classroom and are Google experts when it comes to Docs, Classroom, Slides or the DocHub extension that allows for them to edit a PDF file. As a group, they are learning about other platforms that can help them learn and share, such as FlipGrid, where Isabel's students answer a question posted through video. Technology aside, the Engaged Classroom experience has allowed Isabel to feel supported while trying new things, such as incorporating more hands-on activities in resource classes.

Kris Holliday, Special Education Director for AHISD, recommended a teacher training back in February called Secondary Math Activities. "It has been AMAZING! I brought back so much useful information," Isabel shared. She quickly incorporated the new activities with her classes. Students have loved the ability to not only be learners but teachers as well. Recently eighth graders created 'One Step Equation' towers for their peers to solve as their assessment over our equations unit. Seeing them provide feedback to each other has been incredible. Kids who were self-proclaimed 'math-haters' were asking if they could do one more problem! In seventh grade, students recently finished 'Fractions Golf' where they had to roll a pair of dice to create a fraction, then compare that fraction to another in a given number sentence. After a few modeled examples, they picked up the steps quickly.

It has been an interesting and exciting journey in Rm. 116, and Isabel cannot wait to see what a second year as an engaged classroom has to offer. Check out Rm. 116 on Twitter to keep track of their classroom happenings at @hey_MrsA !



Junior School Students enjoying new math activities



Texas Special Education

The state of Texas received a monitoring visit from the federal Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) in February 2017 following information obtained from an article written in the Houston Chronicle in 2016. They visited twelve school districts. Alamo Heights was not one of the districts they visited.



As a result of the visits, OSEP determined that some ISDs had specific actions

to decrease the number of students in special education following a 2004 Performance Based Monitoring System put in place at the state level. This target was set at 8.5%. At that time, the state was telling districts that if they had more than 8.5% of the total population in special education that a district would have to write a plan to indicate how the district would lower this percentage.

The overall special education rate in Texas fell from 11.6% in 2004 to 8.6% in 2016.

As a result of these monitor visits, the Texas Education Agency has to come up with a corrective action plan which addresses the following:

Corrective Action One

Documentation that the State's system of general supervision requires that each ISD identifies, locates, and evaluates all children suspected of having a disability who need special education and related services, in accordance with section 612(a)(3) of the IDEA and its implementing regulation at 34 CFR §300.111, and makes FAPE available to all eligible children with disabilities in accordance with section 612(a)(1) of the IDEA and its implementing regulation at 34 CFR §300.101.

Corrective Action Two

A plan and timeline by which TEA will ensure that each ISD will (i) identify, locate, and evaluate children enrolled in the ISD who should have been referred for an initial evaluation under the IDEA, and (ii) require IEP Teams to consider, on an individual basis, whether additional services are needed for children previously suspected of having a disability who should have been referred for an initial evaluation and were later found eligible for special education and related services under the IDEA, taking into consideration supports and services previously provided to the child.

Corrective Action Three

A plan and timeline by which TEA will provide guidance to ISD staff in the State, including all general and special education teachers, necessary to ensure that ISDs (i) ensure that supports provided to struggling learners in the general education environment through RTI, Section 504, and the State's dyslexia program are not used to delay or deny a child's right to an initial evaluation for special education and related services under the IDEA; (ii) are provided information to share with the parents of children suspected of having a disability that describes the differences between RTI, the State dyslexia program, Section 504, and the IDEA, including how and when school staff and parents of children suspected of having a disability may request interventions and/or services under these programs; and (iii) disseminate such information to staff and the parents of children suspected of having a disability enrolled in the ISD's schools, consistent with 34 CFR §300.503(c).

Corrective Action Four

A plan and timeline by which TEA will monitor ISDs' implementation of the IDEA requirements described above when struggling learners suspected of having a disability and needing special education and related services under the IDEA are receiving services and supports through RTI, Section 504, and the State's dyslexia program.

In Alamo Heights, the percentage of students in special education has not fluctuated greatly over the past ten years. Currently 8.3% of the student population receives special education services. AHISD implemented a strong Response to Intervention (RtI) system to help support students in need of academic and behavioral support. This system includes a progress monitoring plan that focuses on the need to refer a student for special education or dyslexia services when data indicates that the student is not responding to the implemented interventions.

The state has written a draft of the corrective action plan that includes:

- Hiring additional staff at the state level to monitor school districts on a six year cycle
- Developing an outreach campaign to inform families and school districts of their rights and responsibilities
- Expanding a call center at the state level
- Creating a suite of resources to be shared with parents of students suspected of having a disability that will describe the differences between RtI, dyslexia programs, Section 504 and the IDEA that includes how and when a parent or staff member may request services under these programs
- Developing statewide staff development for all educators in inclusive practices, instructional techniques as well as identification and Child Find practices
- Creating a Special Education Escalation Team that will focus on districts with the most clear gap between students who are identified with special needs and those who should have been previously identified. This team will remain with these school districts until the point at which the critical and urgent issues have been addressed.

Alamo Heights ISD has always been responsive to student needs and has provided excellent services in dyslexia, RtI, and special education. Kris Holliday, Director of Special Education, feels confident that AHISD will continue to provide and improve their services.

Remember, this is a “draft” of a state plan. The state has asked for input from all stakeholders including parents. Following the process of analyzing the comments, a revised plan will be formulated by TEA and shared statewide. Kris will make these plans available as she receives them from the state by posting them on the AHISD special education website.



*Kris Holliday, Director
of Special Education*

Kris Holliday joined Alamo Heights ISD in 1997, and she has enjoyed every minute. She began her career teaching a variety of special education classes including a self-contained classroom, resource, and taught a homebound student. Next she moved to San Antonio to teach resource students for Judson ISD. After several years, she became the campus department chair for special education and then supervisor for special education. She attended Texas State University and received her master’s degree in Education Administration in 1988. In 1990, she became the director of special education for Judson ISD. After 20 years in Judson ISD, she moved to Alamo Heights ISD.

Kris believes in meeting children’s needs first, and enjoys the challenge of solving new ways to help students succeed in school and go on to be successful adults in the community.

CAMBRIDGE ELEMENTARY

Spring semester has been a busy time in the SST class at Cambridge. Students continued weekly basketball practice in the Sky Gym for Special Olympics thru mid-February. Practice was followed by either an outing to a local restaurant where students hone their communication skills by ordering and paying for their own lunches, or they enjoyed the fresh air with a picnic lunch at a local park.

Special Olympics practice was interrupted briefly while the San Antonio Rodeo was in full swing. Cambridge and Junior School students enjoyed a visit to the rodeo fair grounds and carnival. Students were free to don their cowboy boots and hats and get into the rodeo spirit. This is always an event the group looks forward to.

February closed out in grand ceremony as Alamo Heights was honored by members of the Special Olympics North American delegation as the first Unified Champions school in Texas. Cambridge joined the Junior School and High School SST classes, the entire Special Olympics delegation, and the Unified Club members in an “un-run” while the High School student body cheered everyone on. “It was such a moving event and proud moment for the Unified Club and Alamo Heights,” said parent Michelle Harrison.

The students once again hosted a lemonade stand during the bike rodeo on March 2nd. Both the lemonade stand and bike rodeo are beloved Cambridge traditions. While students Sebastian Robelo, Noah Canada and Addison Roland competed in bike rodeo, the rest of the class manned the lemonade stand by taking money and handing out cups of lemonade. The money raised goes to offset the cost of the field trips the class takes during STAAR testing. March also brought the continuation of Special Olympics as student athletes began track practice. The class and staff put in their time at the High School track every Friday to improve their endurance and prepare for the meet at Somerset on April 26th. Libby Rokowski, Cambridge SST teacher shared, “Everyone has worked so hard and I’m proud of their progress!”

April marked the beginning of STAAR testing and Fiesta. The class had two field trips during the reading and math STAAR testing days including a trip to the Alamo Heights Fire Department and bowling. April in San Antonio means one thing - FIESTA! The class attended Fiesta Especial on the 24th and enjoyed free rides and events. The week was packed with fun!

May STAAR field trips are still in the works but may include a trip to the San Antonio Zoo, Mission San Jose, Morgan’s Wonderland, and the San Antonio Aquarium.

Cambridge students visiting the Alamo Heights Fire Department >





Cambridge 3rd grade students Noah Canada and Addison Roland with Teaching Assistant Daisy Gonzales, Participating in Bike Rodeo



< Another Bike Rodeo participant, Sebastian Robelo



< Cambridge students Wyatt Harrison, Noah Canada, Sam Heinly, Benjamin Evans, and Addison Roland. participating in the Somerset Track Meet, with teachers Libby Rokowski and Teaching Assistant Daisy Martinez

“What would happen if the autism gene was eliminated from the gene pool?

You would have a bunch of people standing around in a cave, chatting and socializing and not getting anything done.”

~Temple Grandin, The Way I See It: A Personal Look at Autism & Asperger's

HIGH SCHOOL NEWS

UCS Special Olympics Blog

*Dominic Cavazos and
Carrie Mullins >*



High school seniors Carrie Mullins and Dominic Cavazos are the co-presidents of the club Alamo Heights High School's Unified Champion School (UCS), and they have recently started a blog as guest authors for Special Olympics. They met in kindergarten and have been friends ever since. In this club, members promote inclusion across the high school campus for students of all abilities. Both Carrie and Dominic have had unique experiences with inclusion and want to share the ways that living unified has changed their lives.

As Carrie looks back on her four years of high school, she is confident that the high school's inclusive programs have made her high school career unique and more enjoyable. Carrie reflects that being a Unified Champion School is not only about inclusion for students with intellectual disabilities, it is about the inclusion of all students, regardless of their diagnosis or background. In her 12 years of schooling, she has felt more accepted through her involvement with UCS. For Carrie, UCS assures that she has a place she can go at all times, friends she can be with, and parties to attend. She has witnessed the ways inclusion has changed people's lives. She has seen numerous lasting friendships forged and has noticed her friends' self-confidence flourish. By participating in the Unified Champion School club (UCS), Carrie has enjoyed the unique chance to truly feel connected to a large and wonderful population of the high school student body.

Dominic likes playing basketball, video games, swimming, listening to music, and hanging out with his friends. Before he was involved with UCS, he did not do a whole lot on the weekends. Now he does a lot of stuff with his friends, and he is excited to start each weekend. Before UCS he was not included and felt very lonely all of the time. Now he has a lot of friends, things to do, and is happy. In the past few years, inclusion at his school has grown and improved. He has more ways to hang out with his friends and classmates. In the past two years, he has gone to the prom with his closest friends, raced in a 5K with his friend Isaac and won, participated in white elephant exchanges, and gone to homecoming with a big group. Dominic shared, "These are things I haven't gotten to do before now. Inclusion makes me feel great. It makes me feel empowered, confident and like I belong. I wish everybody got to feel as included as I do, then the world would be happier."

The high school has been an inclusive campus for a long time, starting with integrating students in special education classes into general education courses, as well as implementing a strong peer tutor program. This program fostered social inclusion and friendships were immediately created. Students spent time outside of school together, during the weekends and after school. Members of the student body became happier and more unified. They stopped seeing each other for what made them different and starting seeing each other for their similarities. Over time this way of thinking has become ingrained in the Alamo Heights culture. Today, with all of the strides the high school has been making towards the goal of fostering an environment with complete and total acceptance, Carrie and Dominic are part of a campus community that they feel is an example other schools should follow.

Carrie and Dominic shared, "As the two of us finish our lives as high schoolers, we could not be more grateful for our inclusive school and our time together in the club. We would urge anyone reading this to take the inclusion we have been talking about and have been fortunate enough to experience, into

AHHS Peer Tutor Auburn Lucas

“Special education has grown to be a significant portion of who I am and what I want to do professionally in the future,” Auburn shared. Since the seventh grade at Alamo Heights Junior School, Auburn Lucas has served as a peer tutor. She signed up for an elective course specifically designed for building respect and lifelong friendships with her peers with intellectual disabilities. Her role was to assist them inside the classroom by modeling positive student behavior and helping them with their classwork. Her first year taking the peer tutor elective, she was one of three students in her grade who got to participate as seventh graders because typically, the course was only offered to eighth graders. “I instantly knew that my placement in the program was meant to be. Every day I looked forward to taking my friend to lunch, assisting him with proper lunch line behavior, then after our interesting lunch conversations we would go to the track and walk until our time together was over. It’s little experiences like those that have shaped me into who I am today,” Auburn reflected. Through her involvement in the peer tutor program, she feels like she has almost witnessed it all -- from seeing her classmates take the pledge to end the derogatory use of the “R” word, to experiencing the unconditional love, happiness and mutual respect that comes from the friendships she has built through the peer tutor program and the the Unified program at Alamo Heights High School.



Auburn Lucas

As a high school freshman enrolled in the peer tutor program, she worked with peers who were older than her. Auburn shared, “As much as they probably thought I was teaching them, they were teaching me so much more, including patience, kindness, or even cool fun facts I had never heard before. I came out of that class period always knowing something new,” she shared. Each experience from past to present fueled her infatuation for wanting to dig deeper in her knowledge of this field of study. Most importantly, being a peer tutor has taught her that a person’s disability should never define who a person is. “Because whether it is noticeable or not, everyone has disabilities and very strong abilities that are unique to our individual selves in our own way, and just because somebody inherits something completely different than you does not make you superior or smarter than them, it simply shows their individuality. The coolest part about the peer tutor program is that individuals are accepted for their differences and abilities and everything else is transparent.” Auburn feels that anybody who has a disability deserves the right to be treated and taught with the same amount of patience, enthusiasm and dedication as everyone else. “Without the peer tutor program within the Alamo Heights Independent School District and the life lessons it has embedded into my mind forever, I would not have realized the importance of inclusion and equality. This is why I am so eager to hopefully pursue a career in special education in the future,” Auburn shared.

UCS Special Olympics Blog continued...

their own schools, cities and communities. Inclusion changes lives. It makes people happy. It creates friendships. It brings us together and it makes the world happier.”



Meet Colton Connelly



Colton joined Alamo Heights High School as a Teaching Assistant for special education in January 2018. He is excited to work with excellent teachers, including Mrs. Sutton, Mrs. Guerrero, Mrs. Gordon, and other great staff members in AHISD. He also volunteers coaching track with Coach Ricketts, and he helps coach the Unified Track Team with Mrs. Guerrero.

Colton shared that he has taught a little here and there, fifth and second grade. He worked as an assistant for PPCD (Preschool Program for Children with Disabilities) and taught English in an elementary school in Thailand. Before he decided to pursue a career in education, he served in the Peace Corps as a Community Health Empowerment Facilitator, then worked in health care here in San Antonio.

In college he ran track for Southern Arkansas University then transferred to UTSA where he earned his bachelor's degree in Kinesiology. He is from Comfort, Texas.

Colton shared, "I love working in AHISD. I'm lucky enough to live nearby and I ride my bike to work every day". Soon he will be taking the exam to become certified in special education and plans to be a special education teacher next fall, hopefully at AHHS.

TEX4S

educate. empower. employ. excel.

<https://disabilitystudies.utexas.edu/e4texas>

E4Texas provides a college experience at the University of Texas at Austin. The 2018 Employment Certification focuses on Personal Care Attendant training.

E4Texas is for people with or without disabilities, who have graduated from high school (or have a GED), and who want to be a Personal Care Attendant.

The E4Texas experience combines classroom instruction with practical career building experiences in addition to independent living and self-determination skills.

E4Texas has three goals:

1. **Educate** Texans to gain employment skills, as well as professional and independent living skills.
2. **Empower** Texans to become self-determined & independent.
3. **Employ** Texans in the area of Personal Care Attendants and related fields, and who will **Excel** in life!

Questions? Contact Mary Anne Hettenhaus, maryanne.hettenhaus@utexas.edu, [512.232.0773](tel:512.232.0773)

5K

Run, Walk, or Roll into Inclusion
We're more alike than different

Saturday April 7th, the High School's Project Unify hosted their second annual "Run, Walk, or Roll Into Inclusion 5k". The 5k was held to promote inclusion within the Alamo Heights community, and to raise funds for the unified track team. Funds raised will also go towards continuing the 5k as an annual tradition at Alamo Heights. The race was made possible with the help of the Caroline Gose foundation, Special Olympics, and numerous other donors. The 5k was a huge success and an amazing time for all that attended. People of all abilities unified around the cause and helped promote inclusion.



Ms. Vicky, HS Teaching Assistant and her son Evan



HS SST Teacher Erika Guerrero



Dominic Cavazos and 09 Academy teacher Austin Amaro



Student Volunteers with HS SST Teacher Ruby Quiroga-Sutton



Parents Michelle Harrison and Tracy Maxwell



Many students volunteered to help at the event

PARENTS AS PARTNERS

A Message From Mary Hillis



Connects Program and 09 Academy

AHISD students who are receiving transition services in an 18+ program may participate in the Connects Program or the 09 Academy. These programs utilize the facilities at the Robbins campus and

training sites in the community. Austin Amaro (Transition Coordinator), Beverly Owens, and Cicely Lott work with students in the 09 Academy. Mary Hillis (Transition Coordinator), Chris Tilt, and Mary Martinez work with students in the Connects Program.

Health Matters YMCA Program

The students in the Connects Program and the 09 Academy participated in a 13-week *Health Matters Program* sponsored by the YMCA and The ARC of San Antonio. The students enjoyed a Zumba class and fitness activities led by an instructor at the YMCA's Tri-Point location. After a great aerobic workout, students participated in a class discussion focusing on healthy eating and lifestyle choices. They used their smartphones to track their workout as part of the YMCA's involvement in the City of San Antonio Tricentennial Celebration. The students took a trip to HEB and talked about healthy food choices that can be initiated at home. They made a meal together in a community kitchen, preparing the meal themselves. Looking back on the experience, Connects Program student Annie Blake commented, "I am not sure if I lost any weight but my clothes fit better!"

The Connects Program and 09 Garden

Students, staff, and visitors to the Robbins campus enjoy the garden which is located on the Robbins campus. On April 6, 2018 the garden came to life again as the students planted vegetables, herbs, and flowers. The accessible-raised bed garden provided a perfect follow-up to the YMCA Health Matters Class and serves as a lifelong leisure activity for the students. The students definitely have "green thumbs" and everyone looks forward to a bountiful harvest this spring and summer.



Mackenzie Soto with her sister Cheyenne selling artwork at La Villita



Employability Skills and Independent Living Skills

The students utilize community training sites as well as the facilities on the Robbins campus to practice their skills. The community sites include the Animal Defense League, Christian Assistance Ministry, Children's Hunger Fund, Meals on Wheels, University of the Incarnate Word, St. Andrew's United Methodist Church, Alamo Heights United Methodist Church, and Howard Early Childhood Center.

< student Elliot Nash cooking

Area Special Olympic Competition - Basketball Skills

On March 1, 2018 the Special Olympic athletes participated in the Area 20 Special Olympic competition which was held at Cornerstone Christian School. Athletes from Woodridge, Alamo Heights Junior School and Alamo Heights High School competed in the areas of ball dribbling, target shot, and shooting baskets. Starting in January, they trained for the competition by practicing basketball skills in the gym on Friday mornings. The area basketball competitions are always fun to attend because the students get to meet athletes from different schools and participate in a friendly competition. All of the students did exceptionally well and exemplified good sportsmanship throughout the day!



Unified Tennis

This spring marked the beginning of the Unified Tennis Recreational Team for AHHS. Creating the team was the idea of AHHS senior and varsity tennis player Emma Reeves. Emma enlisted support from fellow tennis teammate Kendall Hunt, and other athletes and friends. Several athletes from the Special Olympics team at AHHS met weekly with their peers from the Varsity Tennis Team to learn tennis skills. The student athletes were the coaches during practices, while special education teachers Mrs. Kari Butts and Mrs. Mary Hillis provided support when necessary. Everyone learned about the sport of tennis, and had a lot of fun making new friends!



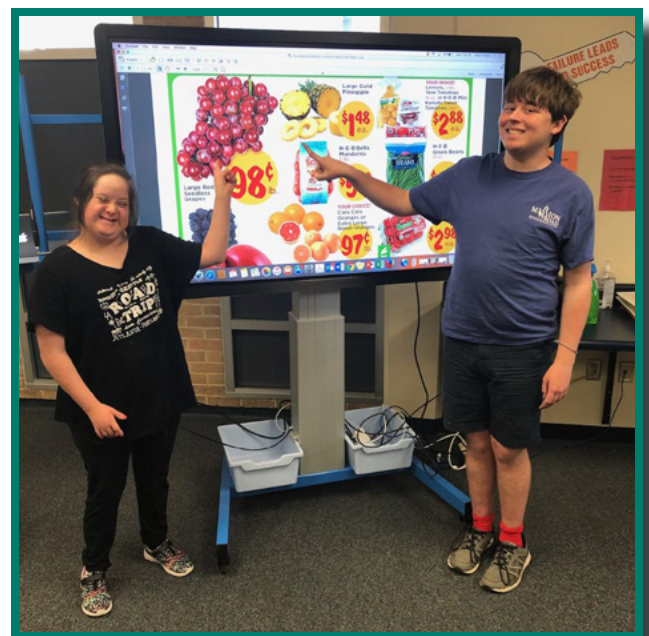
Student Emma Reeves and Special Olympian Alex Molina



< Special Olympians Erica Welchel (far left - #2) and Ali Alvarez (center - #1)



< Student Annie Blake at Howard ECC



Students Celeste Talamantez and Elliot Nash using the classroom Smartboard

Parent Liaison

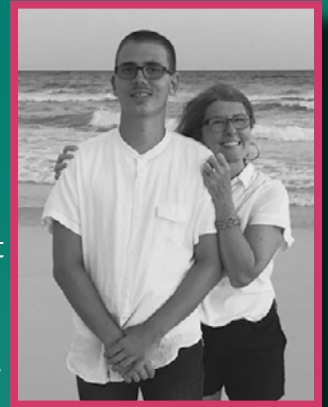
Tracy Maxwell, Parent Liaison, provides additional support to parents and children in the AHISD special education program.

Tracy assists parents and staff with communication, advocacy, support and resources. She brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to her position. She is a parent of a student who received special education services beginning with PPCD at Howard and who graduated from AHHS in 2016. She was very involved in his educational experience and she is passionate about helping other parents along their journey.

Tracy works with parents to form support networks and address concerns that pertain to special education students and their families. She organizes and facilitates the parent support groups and the Parents as Partners (PAP) meetings. PAPs are meetings with a guest speaker on a topic related to special education such as Medicaid waivers or recreational therapies, with childcare and pizza for children so that families can easily attend.

She continues to create opportunities for parents to gather, get to know each other, and share. She welcomes your ideas, questions, and concerns. Tracy maintains a resource library of books and videos that are housed at EDC, located at 705 Trafalgar, 78216.

She invites you to become active participants in your child's educational experience. Reach out to her if you need help with something or if you need someone to listen. She is a parent first and understands your experience with raising a child or children with special challenges.



Tracy Maxwell with her son Zachary

Junior School Teachers Celebrating National Autism Awareness Day

