



GROVE GAZETTE

Vol. V, Issue 6

Union Grove ISD News

Feb. 2024



**TRACTOR TECH TEAM
RETURNS TO STATE
MODEL UN TEAMS
BRING HOME HARDWARE
What ARE School Vouchers?**

On the Cover

Seniors Matthew Gipson, Rowdy Williams and Cash Coleman debug a malfunctioning tractor at the SFA invitation- al Jan. 20. The team will return to state March 3-4. PHOTO: Josh Shafer

This page: Junior high theater students block "Fathoms Below" for their upcoming musical "The Little Mermaid", which will star Layla Kirk (8) as Ariel, Mia Mullican (8) as Ursula, Konner Long (8) as Prince Eric and Ryder Martindale (8) as King Triton, with Landry Harris (8) as Scuttle, Connor Mead (8) as Sebastian and Jillian Russell (7) as Flounder. PHOTO: Bella Foster



GROVE GAZETTE

Published by:
Union Grove High School
11220 Union Grove Rd.
Gladewater, TX 75647

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PHOTO: Layla Kirk

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LETTERS FROM THE PRINCIPALS

The second semester of 2023-24 is well underway at Union Grove Elementary! It was a busy January, and February promises to be just as busy.

Here are some things coming up in February:

- February 5-9 is School Counseling Week
- Painting with the Kids is Feb. 6 and 7
- Valentine's Day Parties are Feb. 14
- Daddy Daughter Dance is on Feb. 17
- Monday, Feb. 19 is a School Holiday
- Spring Individual and Class Pictures are Feb. 21
- Ag Science Day on Feb. 23
- Students have a holiday March 1

We also have some testing days coming up. We will send you more information as that gets closer.

As always, you can contact me at 903-845-3481 or ballards@ugisd.org if you have any questions.

Sherrill Ballard
Union Grove Elementary Principal

We're off to a great start in 2024!

UIL teams are earning medals at invitational meets, and the rocketry kids presented at NASA Jan. 31. We're about to wrap up a successful basketball season, and track, baseball and softball are about to kick in.

Ag and FFA have been winning various shows, the tractor tech team advanced to state, and Chloe Brooks (10) was elected 2024-2025 Daingerfield District FFA Student Advisor.

Some upcoming events include:

- Dee Mackey Relays on March 1
- Grade 7 Language Arts and English II STAAR Field Testing on Feb. 8
- ACT Testing on Feb. 28
- FAFSA Night Feb. 13 at 5:30 p.m.
- Student Holiday on Feb. 19

A few reminders:

- If you have any questions about dress code, you can check the Student Handbook posted on the school website.
- Parents who bring food for their child's lunch need to check in at the office before meeting their child in the cafeteria.

David Chatterton
JH/HS Assistant Principal
903-845-5506 / chattertond@ugisd.org

Chatterton Wins Principal's Award

JH/HS assistant principal David Chatterton will receive Region 7's Middle School Assistant Principal of the Year award at the Josten's Night of the Star Dinner on June 11, part of the annual Texas Association of Secondary School Principals conference.

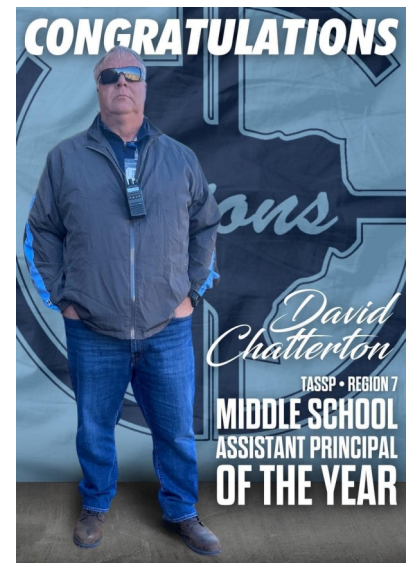
"I'm just extremely proud I'm able to represent UG in this way," Chatterton said. "It's a reflection on the quality that is UG. I may have gotten the award itself, but the Grove is the main thing."

Former principal Rachel Evers nominated Chatterton, who then went through a selection process that included a questionnaire, telephone interview and review by the TASSP Principal Image Committee. The committee considered each nominated principal's contribution to school culture, academic results and collaboration, then Region 7 administrators voted.

"I'm very flattered my peers awarded me this prestigious honor," Chatterton said.

Chatterton received email notification from TASSP's executive director Celeste Dickerson on Nov. 29, and the district revealed the news on their Facebook page on Jan. 18.

"We are very excited and proud of the recognition that Coach Chat has received through the Texas Association of Secondary School Principals," superintendent Kelly Moore said. "That is a tremendous honor. It is always rewarding to see our administrators receive distinguished recognition for the job that they do. Congratulations to Coach Chat!"



Graphic: Kris Kelley

Band Prepares for UIL Contest

By Faith Woodall

Forty-seven soloists and four ensembles will represent the high school band in the annual UIL Solo and Ensemble contest on Friday, Feb. 2 at Gilmer High School. Students from 25 schools will play with hopes to earn a first division, some hardware, and trip to the state contest in May.

"Appropriate, literature-based solos were handed out to each student in December with the expectation of each performer receiving a superior performance on Feb. 2nd," director Andy Thompson said. "My expectations side with the UIL judges on holding a high standard for a 1st division performance."

The group aims to earn more than last year's total of 28 medals.

"Having all of the eyes watching me as I play the right notes and rhythms in hopes of staying in sync with the piano player is a little nerve-racking," senior Paige Parman said. "After not competing last year due to illness, I am excited to put my solo to the test to see where I land."

Last year, six solos and three ensembles went to state in May. However, quite a few members of the qualifying ensembles graduated, leaving those remaining to find new group members. Senior Jenna Scott joined the clarinet quartet.

"The pressure is on considering they go to state every year," Scott said. "The conflict in schedules has made it difficult to meet up to practice. However, my individual practice has increased, which will hopefully make the overall ensemble sound better."



Junior high band members participate in the ATSSB All-Region clinic and concert Jan. 12. PHOTO: Kinleigh Birlew



PHOTO: Josh Shafer

FFA Sees Success

Tractor Tech Trio Returns to State, Show Teams Win at Ft. Worth Rodeo

By Bre Reynolds

The tractor tech team of seniors Rowdy Williams, Cash Coleman and Matthew Gipson, coached by AG teacher Josh Shafer, advances to their third consecutive state contest after placing second at their area competition at Sam Houston State University on Jan. 26. Coleman placed fourth individually, followed by Williams in fifth and Gipson in sixth.

The boys will compete again March 3-4 at the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo, testing in three different areas: a 100-question exam, a component evaluation, and fixing a "bugged" or malfunctioning tractor.

"They have been practicing, preparing, and studying so they can make it happen," Shafer said.

Several students also competed in the Ft. Worth Stock Show Jan. 18-22.

Chloe Brooks (10) won Reserve Division Champion in the Hereford heifer exhibit, and Madison Byers (11) placed third. Junior FFA team members Cooper Swinford (4) and Rylann Venn (4) showed Brahman heifers. Venn won her class and Swinford placed 10th.

Boyd Potter (5) placed third with other registered breeds in the heifer show, followed by sisters Rachel (9) in 12th and Katherine (12) in 15th in their classes. The event marked Potter's last show at Fort Worth.

"As I walked down the tunnel to the show arena, all the feelings and emotions hit me," senior Katherine Potter said. "I was just trying to enjoy the moment. It was sad, but I am excited to now go to the pig majors and compete at the other shows."



Rylann Venn (4)
PHOTO: Andrea Shafer



Above: Junior Jaycie Mullins and sophomore Gracelyn Head practice batting. In pairs, players took turns drilling inside- outside- and center-plate hits. Right: Coach Molly Savell helps junior Marissa Wick with arm extension during the Jan. 22 practice that moved indoors due to bad weather. PHOTOS: Bailee Hosak

Softball Team Thrown Curveball

Girls to Start Season without Coach Savell

By Bailee Hosak

Softball will start off with a scrimmage against Arp Feb. 6 before their first official game against Sabine on Feb. 13.

"It's going to be a new and different season, with a new team, with a lot of new freshmen coming up," head softball coach Molly Savell said.

Those freshmen include Mayci Boland, Tinsleigh Webb, Bre Reynolds and Hailey Griffin, who have each played on club softball teams and have both infield and outfield experience.

"I'm excited to see the freshmen grow and see the achievements and improvements they make throughout the season," junior Izzy Gregg said.

Savell also expects returning girls to "step into bigger shoes" than they filled last season.

Several key upperclassmen return this year, including seniors Daytona Vaughn and Allie Calhoun who will be the primary catcher and pitcher. Juniors Jaycie Mul-

lins and Jamie Webb will cover bases, and Izzy Gregg will be Calhoun's backup pitcher.

Last season, Gregg hit 24 runs in and scored 18 herself with a batting average of .362; Mullins batted .361 with 16 RBIs, scored 27 runs, and stole six bases; Calhoun batted in 21 RBIs, scored 22 runs and stole four bases.

"I feel like it's going to be rough in the beginning, but we can get the hang of it," junior Jaycie Mullins said. "Once we get our 'mojo', we can come together."

But the girls will have to keep their 'mojo' without Savell for twelve weeks of the season while she bonds with her newborn on maternity leave. Meanwhile, coach Julie Martindale, who has been assistant coach the last two years, has the team's leadership covered.

"I'm thankful for the opportunity," Martindale said. "Working under Coach Savell for the past few years has prepared

me. We have a pretty good relationship and are on the same page all the time to where it's just picking up where she leaves off, and when she comes back, it'll be the exact same thing."

Seventh grade science teacher and boys' coach Hunter Gray, who played baseball for years, including as a UGHS student, will assist Martindale.

"Coach Gray is a good coach, so he'll be able to jump in and be just fine," Savell said. "And I trust coach Martindale is going to do a fabulous job, but I'm definitely gonna try and make my way back and come to games and some practices if I can. It's going to be super hard to miss."

Full Court Press

Varsity Lions Pick Up Key District Wins

By Bella Foster

Varsity boys basketball will finish district play in February with home games against McLeod Feb. 6 and Harleton Feb. 9 and an away game against Linden Kildare on Feb. 13.

"They are very competitive teams, and we are in a stage where we have to try hard to win every game," head coach Hunter Gray said. "We have to go out there and play like I know we can."

The varsity boys won 73-72 at home against Big Sandy on Jan. 5, the highest-scoring game of their season thus far.

"As a team, we played really well defensively and they made a lot of tough shots," junior Jace Roberts said. "We had to score on offense every chance we got because they just wouldn't miss. It was a really good game to watch and definitely an exciting game to play."

The team also defeated Harleton 58-37 and Linden-Kildare 49-17.

Senior Jaxson Daniels scored 15 points against Harleton. Senior Peyton Laake scored 12 points and made four assists, two rebounds and a steal; Roberts earned 12 points and tallied seven rebounds, two assists and a steal; and junior Morgan Mayhan pitched in four points and 10 rebounds. Sophomore Wrigley Roberts made six points, three rebounds, two steals and an assist, and junior Cason Cowan scored seven points and five rebounds.

Against Linden-Kildare, junior Jesse Fulmer led scoring with 12 points, followed by Daniels with nine and junior Andrew Jacobus with eight. Senior Rylan Roberts and Mayhan each picked up six rebounds.

"LK had to pull up some freshmen to make a team, and I'm grateful for that," Cowan said. "They gave us a chance to play a fun game."



Paced for Playoffs

Lady Lions Look Set for Second Place

By Hannah Caperton, Kinleigh Birlaw and Aubrie Coulter

The varsity Lady Lions look set to take second in district play and advance to playoffs the week of Feb. 12.

As of Jan. 26, the girls have only lost to Hawkins in two very close games, 45-42 on Jan. 23 and 54-50 back in December.

In the Jan. 23 game, senior Ava Wightman led scoring with 15 points; junior Jamie Webb scored 13, freshman Danica Vestal four, junior Keira Taylor three, senior Allie Calhoun three, senior Jenna Scott two, and junior Sarah Prince two.

The girls defeated Harleton 62-44 in the Jan. 18 makeup game, Linden Kildare 47-26 on Jan. 19, and Ore City 44-13 on Jan. 26.

In the Harleton game, which marked the girls' 10th straight 20+ win, Ava Wightman scored 17 points for the Lady Lions, followed by Sarah Prince with 14 and Keira Taylor with 11. Against Linden Kildare, Scott scored 14 points, Wightman scored 10, and Webb nine.

Wightman was selected Longview News Journal Player of the Week for Jan. 15-19 after averaging 15.5 points, seven rebounds and 5.5 steals and shooting 56% from the field.

"This season has been amazing," Wightman said, "I love my team and I am super proud of how far everyone has come in this short season."

Opposite page: (Clockwise from top left) Keira Taylor (11) catches a rebound and passes to Ava Wightman (12) during the varsity girls' senior night game against Ore City. Taylor scored six points in the girls' 44-13 win. PHOTO: Jaxon Ledbetter / Junior Jace Roberts shoots over his Ore City defender, avoiding a charge in the Jan. 26 game against the Rebels. Roberts was the top scorer with 15 points and 11 rebounds and finished the game with a double-double. PHOTO: Jaxon Ledbetter / Senior Allie Calhoun receives an assist from Ava Wightman. Calhoun faked a pass then drained a corner three. PHOTO: Connor Stanford / Senior Peyton Laake receives a pass from sophomore Wrigley Roberts and scores an open layup. Laake scored eight points, two rebounds, two assists, and two steals against Ore City. PHOTO: Jaxon Ledbetter

Gamechangers

From Top: Jamarr Martin (12) avoids his Linden-Kildare defender for an easy shot. Martin scored five points in the Jan. 19 49-17 win. PHOTO: Connor Stanford

Freshman Christian Bowling steals the ball from an Ore City Rebel. PHOTO: Jaxon Ledbetter

Junior Jamie Webb drives to the bucket to score a layup. Webb ended the game with 12 points, the Lady Lions' leading scorer against Ore City. PHOTO: Jaxon Ledbetter



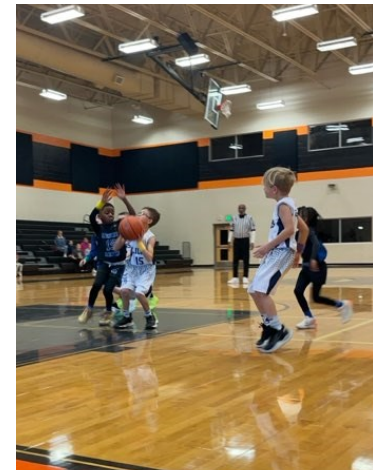
Brayden Harrison (8) looks for an open teammate in the Jan. 11 game, when all four junior high teams played McLeod at home. PHOTO: Anissa Barton



Right: Gracelyn Jones grabs a rebound during the seventh grade girls' game against McLeod on Jan. 11. "We played really good," Jones said. "It was a tough game. The other team had some pretty good players, some good shooters. We beat them by working as a team." The seventh-grade girls only lost one game this season, earning the title of district champions. PHOTO: Natalie Spruell



Above: Seventh-graders Malachi Martin and Gage Stinson block out to rebound a McLeod free throw. "They were quick and good at shooting," Martin said. "They were way faster than us, but they also don't play football." Stinson said the team played their "best on defense" and he's "very happy" with how his teammates pulled through. PHOTO: Natalie Spruell



Little Dribblers play at Gladewater Junior High Jan. 20. The team won 30-19. PHOTOS: Layla Kirk



PHOTO: Anissa Barton

Catch Us If You Can

JH Athletes Look Ahead to Track

By Charlotte Wright, Alley Hale and Hannah Haggard

With basketball season coming to an end, junior high athletes are beginning to look ahead to track season, which begins with a practice meet at Sabine on Feb. 20.

"I am very excited for the upcoming track season," girls' coach Rhonda Baker said. "Our eighth grade group are experienced in their events, and hopefully will make great strides in their skill as they move throughout the season. The seventh grade group has shown themselves to be competitive, and we are excited to see what they contribute."

Last year, the girls placed second and the boys placed fifth at the district meet.

Eighth-grader Landry Harris, who won first place in the 800 and the mile at last

year's district meet, expects an improved mile time after working hard to win every cross country meet, and Natalie Spruell, who won first in discus, hopes to gain more than just distance.

"I'm looking forward to this season, not only to grow in my sport but to grow closer to my team," Spruell said.

The boys' 4x1 team of Konner Long, Ryder Martindale, Daniel Fernandez and Easton Head also won first.

"This season I think we're gonna do really good," Long said. "I think we'll get first in district if it's anything like last year."



Natalie Delaney (7)
PHOTO: Natalie Spruell

Early Morning Workouts Yield Uplifting Start

Powerlifting Team Opens Season with Big Weights

The girls powerlifting team competed in Union Hill on Jan. 25. Savanna Clark (11) won first place in her class with a total of 650 pounds, Mayci Boland (9) placed second with 595 pounds and Daytona Vaughn (12) placed third with 610 pounds.

The boys team lifted in their home weight room Jan. 29 against four other teams. Gary Dacus (12) placed third with a total of 705 pounds, Kohl Sirmans (10) placed fourth with 715 pounds, and Carter Cooper (10) placed third with 780 pounds, followed by teammates Jacopo Bonino (11) in fourth with 735 and Jacob Hart (11) in sixth with 685. Ryan Hicker-son (10) placed second with 855 pounds, Calab Day (10) won his class with 880 pounds, Tommy Branscom (11) won his class with 1050 pounds and Dalton Hawkins (10) placed second by lifting 980 pounds.

The girls will compete next Feb. 5 at home, and the boys team will compete Feb. 12 at Union Hill.



Savanna Clark (11) raises the bar with a heavy bench press during the Jan. 26 meet at Union Hill. PHOTO: Daytona Vaughn



PHOTO: Tina Burns

Second Quarter Elementary Honor Roll

ALLA'S

Third Grade: Parker Adkinson, Ryker Canaguier, Karah Crump, Braxlee Dinkins, Leah Guthrie, Allie Halcumb, Jacob McDougal, Olivia McGilvary, Leslie Ramos, Aerilyn Reeves
Fourth Grade: Ember Burnett, Caitlin Daugherty, Aristyn Jones, Avery Johnston, Skye Love, Sophia Norris, Raylen Ravellette, Braxton Rich, Charles Shelton, Owen Smith, Charlze Spruell, Kenslee Steen
Fifth grade: Kaydence Deller, Blakely Prince

Sixth Grade: Adalyn Hampton, Hailey Lee, Cooper Littlejohn, River Martindale, Alexander Moncada Sanchez, Brooklynn Scott, Kinley Smith, Nicholas Spears

A & B's

Third Grade: Weston Acton, Gunner Allen, Elena Archer, Gabriella Bowling, Brooks Brantley, Lylah Delaney, Amelia Dougherty, Dillon Ferrell, Maycee Gipson, Melany Hulsebus, Jake Kessler, James Lemming, Eric Mullins, Juliana Navarro, Elliott Orr, Ariel Owens, Madison Ryan, Garrett Saye, Reagan Steele, Riley Velin, Harrison Wright
Fourth grade: Ruby Bass, Kohen Birlew, Skylar Coddington, Gunner Coppedge, Cameryn Davis, Karsyn Ferrell, Devin Ferrill, Eli Fleming, Indy Gregg, Aliyah Hammett, Jim Hogue, Gauge Hulsebus, Ashlyn Jones, Hadleigh Lake, Macie Langley, Halle Martin, Emmett Orr, Eliza Oxford, Ava Phillips, Lucas Puentes, Cambree Randolph, Courtney Smith, Omar Soto, Leah Stegall, Maddox Strong, Cooper Swinford, Rylann Venn,

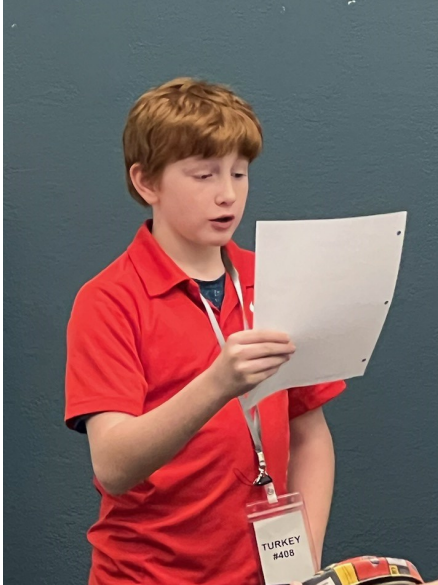
Alexander Warren, Conner Westmoreland
Fifth grade: Ian Adams, Ethan Archer, Olivia Barbee, Landon Caperton, Olivia Diaz, Noah Dippold, Trenton Easley, Brody Gumm, Trinity Haydel, Harley Herrin, Hunter Hogue, Lily Holland, Amber Lee, Embrie Long, Gabriel Lormand, James Madding, Khloe Payne, Skye Perez, Ryleigh Phillips, Lucie Pirtle, Boyd Potter, Gavin Pritchett, Brooklynn Scott, Paul Shreves, Xavier Tennison, Iker Uribe, Kris Villamendez, Steffan Wallace, Reagan Walts, Adyn West, Joseph Wilson
Sixth Grade: Zander Breakey, Coleton Burnett, Wyatt Clift, Phaedra Cole, Aubree Cooper, Jackson Coulter, Gunner Davis, Matthew Delaney, Lucious Dotten, Kayson Forster, Hannah Hill, Kenadie Holder, Leilani Hubbard, Jake Hutto, Maycee Lewis, Bentley Long, Graysen Mullins, Iliana O'Neal, Isabella O'Neal, Ruston Roberts, Claire Rogers, Grayson Selph, Sara Spears, Garrett Travis, Landon Wadle, Emmett Wright, Isaiah Yaktiyol

Seventh-grader Jacob Rodgers presents his resolution on terrorism in Turkey at the Jan. 18 Model United Nations event at Region 7 in Kilgore. Rodgers' resolution placed second in his committee but fell one vote short of passing during the General Assembly. Rodgers was also chosen to be president of the Security Council based on a video interview and leadership conference. PHOTO: Bree Cox

Present & Participating

GT Students Medal at Model UN

By Bree Cox



GT students participated in the Region 7 Education Center's Model United Nations event on Jan. 18-19, where they debated real life situations as representatives of Somalia and Turkey, and will return and hold leadership positions Jan. 30 and 31.

The Jan. 18-19 committee meetings marked the seventh-graders' first experience with Model UN.

"I was very confused to begin with, but then after a while I started to understand how things worked," seventh-grader Brady Pritchett said.

In committee meetings, delegates debate whether a resolution should pass or fail. If a topic passes, it advances to the general assembly. Seventh-grader Susanna Sturkie placed second in her committee's meetings, and her resolution on Somali piracy was passed by the Gen-

eral Assembly. Jacob Rodgers also placed second in his committee.

"I didn't expect that I would get an award," Rodgers said. "I was annoyed because I was one vote away from my resolution passing."

Participating in Model UN teaches students about problems faced by countries around the world, including environmental, health, crime, industrial, cultural and funding issues.

"It was a good learning experience for all of us," seventh-grader Kale Reeves said.

Participating also provides students experience for life beyond junior high.

"Model UN is very informative and teaches you real life skills like leadership and public speaking," eighth-grader Abby Daugherty said.



PHOTO: Gailyn Sutton



PHOTO: Kyler Littlejohn

The UIL Speech and Debate teams placed second overall in White Oak's Dan Noll meet on Jan. 20. Jamie Russell (11) and Colton Mead (11) won first place in CX Debate, and Daytona Vaughn placed second in both prose and poetry interpretation, where Brendon Deary placed fourth and Sarah Clowers fifth. Mead also won persuasive speaking, followed by Russell in eighth. / The Accounting team won first place at Palestine Jan. 27. Parker Haley (10) won first place individually, followed by Bailee Hosak (9) in third, Elise Daugherty in fourth, and Kolby Nutt in sixth. Casey Bogue and Carter Cooper tied for seventh and Hudson Wightman's score earned eighth place.

TOP 3 ACCELERATED READER STUDENTS

1st GRADE

- 1) Emery Gillette, 2) Kylie Matteson
- 3) Ridge Martindale

2nd GRADE

- 1) Liam Morvan, 2) Rhyder Mullins
- 3) Christopher Shelton

3rd GRADE

- 1) Leah Guthrie, 2) Aerilyn Reeves
- 3) Trachell Hare

4th GRADE

- 1) Ember Burnett, 2) Avery Johnston
- 3) Eliza Oxford

5th GRADE

- 1) Reagan Walts, 2) Gabriel Lormand
- 3) Kaydence Deller

6th GRADE

- 1) Isaiah Yaktiyol, 2) Adalyn Hampton
- 3) Ruston Roberts

SPECIAL AWARDS

KINDERGARTEN

Fine Arts: Merritt Montelbano, Jack Morvan
PE: Andee Bill, Parker Adkinson

1st GRADE

Fine Arts: Emery Gilette, Alistair Coddington
PE: Kylie Matteson, Ian Hubbard

2nd GRADE

Fine Arts: Adilynn Cooper, River Noble
PE: Lily Williams, Liam Morvan

3rd GRADE

Fine Arts: Leah Guthrie, Elliott Orr
PE: Ava Tennison, Elliott Orr

4th GRADE

Fine Arts: Brynlea Orms, Kohen Birlew
PE: Ember Burnett, Beau Bayne

5th GRADE

Fine Arts: Kaydence Deller, Harley Herrin
PE: Khloe Payne, Noah Dippold

PERFECT ATTENDANCE

Third grade: Elena Archer, Ryker Canaguier, Allie Halcumb, Juliana Navarro, Leslie Ramos, Riley Velin **Fourth grade:** Kohen Birlew, Aristyn Johns, Halle Martin, Skye Love, Conner Westmoreland; **Fifth grade:** Ian Adams, Gabriel Lormand, Layden Peck, Boyd Potter, Gavin Pritchett, Reagan Walts **Sixth grade:** Gunner Davis, Hannah Hill, River Martindale, Pistol Mitchell, Bentley Smith

Truth about Education Savings Accounts

Everything Voters Need to Know about Vouchers

By Jamie Russell

When voters go to the polls this year, they need to consider the consequences of vouchers disguised as “school choice” or “education savings accounts”.

What are School Choice Vouchers?

“School choice” vouchers allow parents to use public funds to pay for private school tuition or homeschool curriculum and supplies using money that would otherwise support public schools.

What will this do to families?

- Create tax breaks for those who pay private school tuition or donate to private schools
- Enable the use of tax dollars for education that pushes a religious agenda or has no accountability system to ensure the quality of education
- Offer no real choice to low-income families because the high cost of private tuition would not be fully covered by the vouchers or because families living in rural areas have no private school nearby
- Pay parents to withdraw their children from public schools

How will vouchers affect schools?

- Divert public resources from Texas’ already under-funded public school system to private schools
- Further decrease funding attached to attendance by encouraging students’ withdrawal from public schools
- Cut budgets for teacher pay and additional programs

“I have concerns as a public school teacher,” theater, debate and yearbook teacher Sandy Spears said. “Public school money would be given to private schools. Private schools do not teach the same curriculum and are not held to the same standards as public schools. Also, rural schools could lose students, which is a huge concern for keeping schools competitive and being on the same playing field. Now on the other hand, if I lived in the metroplex and was in an area where the schools were not safe, I would want a school voucher to move my kids. It really is a double edged sword.”

So why are vouchers on the ballot?

Pro-voucher donors have given Gov. Gregg Abbott’s campaign millions of dollars. He needs to pass a voucher bill, and he’s willing to hold up school funding and other bills until that happens.

In October, Abbott made it clear that school funding would not increase until the legislature passed vouchers.

“Once [education savings accounts] are passed, I will put on the legislative agenda full funding for public education, including teacher pay raises for teachers across the state,” Abbott said at a Texas Public Policy Foundation event.

The Senate passed the SB1 voucher bill last fall, but the House did not.

This time, Abbott indicated consequences for not supporting the voucher bill, vetoing Rep. Travis Clardy’s bill on continuing education programs for fire alarm technicians and writing in his veto “This bill can be reconsidered at a future special session only after education freedom is passed”.

Since the vote, pro-voucher groups have attacked Clardy’s conservative status by distributing political flyers painting Clardy as siding with liberals, simply for protecting public school funds.

Other regional representatives who have supported public schools include Jay Dean, Gary VanDeaver, and Keith Bell. However, Mt. Pleasant-based Rep. Cole Hefner and Longview Rep. Matt Schaefer voted in favor of vouchers.

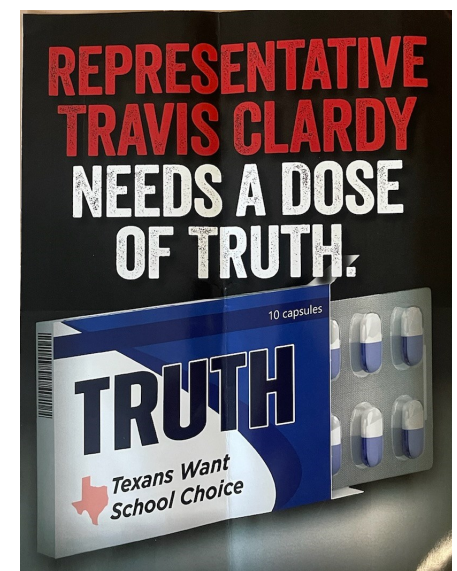
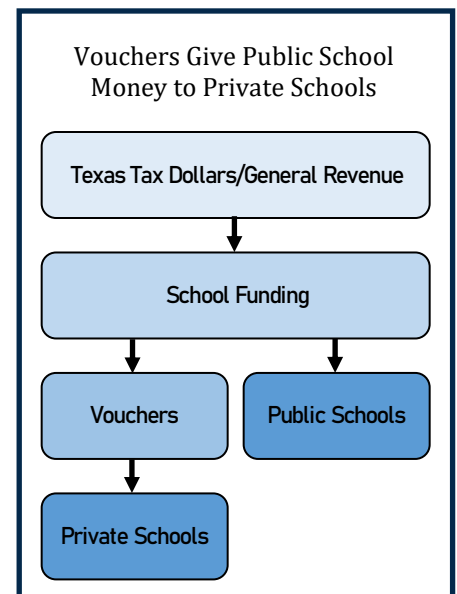
Conclusions

Abbott told the Texas Tribune “Together, we will chart a brighter future for all Texas children by empowering parents to choose the best education option for their child”, but vouchers do not help low-income, underperforming students. Instead, they put money back in the pockets of the wealthy.

Abbott boasts his support for “education savings accounts” (another term for vouchers) to private school audiences like the “parent empowerment night” hosted by Annapolis Christian Academy in Corpus Christi, where the high school tuition is almost \$11,000 per year. These parents would benefit from passing the voucher bill by making their private school tuition only \$3,000 a year and putting \$8,000 back in their pockets.

Other school options, such as charter

schools and inter-district enrollment have a better track record than voucher programs implemented in other states, and students in rural schools have the additional choice of transferring to other local public schools. Every year, Union Grove accepts transfer students from the Gladewater, Gilmer and Longview areas for this very reason.



AFC Victory Fund mailed out this political advertisement after Rep. Travis Clardy voted against using public school funds for private school tuition in November. The ad accuses Clardy of “choosing liberal unions and radicals in Austin over his own constituents”.

\$6,160

Amount currently paid to Texas public schools per student

\$8,000

Amount Gov. Gregg Abbott proposes giving as a voucher

\$250k

Amount Jeff Yass, GOP mega-donor from Pennsylvania, gave Abbott in October

\$600k

Amount Texas Federation for Children spent campaigning against candidates who oppose vouchers since June 2020

\$1.3m

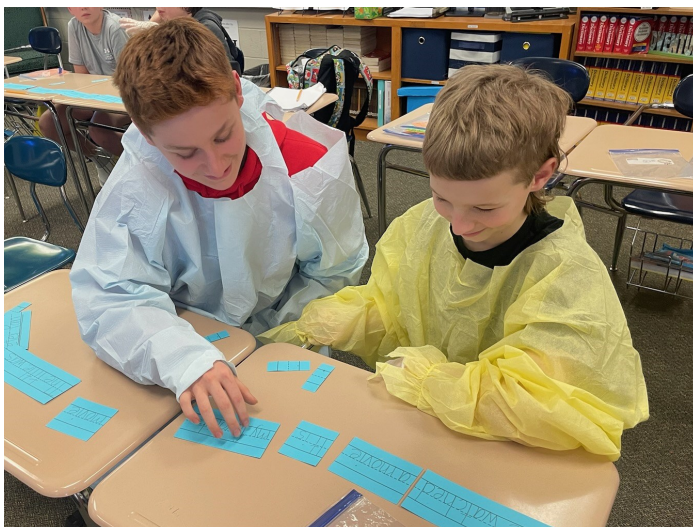
Amount spent by Texas Federation for Children to support pro-voucher candidates

\$6m

Amount Jeff Yass donated in December, according to state campaign finance data

\$31m

Amount Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation has given to voucher backers since 2001



Hands-On Learning

Seventh-grade ELA students Colin Deaton, Derick Anderson, Carmen James and Kyleigh Blackstock perform “Sentence Surgery” to reinforce comma rules regarding appositives and compound-complex sentences. PHOTOS: Kimber Smith



History of Failure

Voucher Programs in Other States Yield Negative Results

At this point, only 25 voucher-type programs exist in 16 states—Arkansas, Georgia, Indiana, Louisiana (2), Maine, Maryland, Mississippi (2), New Hampshire, North Carolina, Ohio (5), Oklahoma, Utah, Vermont, and Wisconsin (4)—plus Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico.

However, studies performed in some of these states have shown vouchers make a direct negative impact on student achievement.

Arizona

The Department of Education reported that 75% of Arizona’s voucher participants did not attend public school, and last October, budget experts figured that the state’s voucher system would funnel about \$34 million of public funds into the private school system for children whose families previously paid their tuition in full. Superintendent of Public Instruction Kathy Hoffman called the program “a taxpayer funded coupon for the wealthy”.

Louisiana

An evaluation of the Louisiana Scholarship Program published in “American Economic Journal: Applied Economics” showed that attending an LSP-eligible private school increased students’ chances of failing math exams by 50%.

Indiana

A similar study published by Waddington and Berends in the “Journal of Policy Analysis and Management” showed achievement losses in math with the Indiana Choice Scholarship Program.

Ohio

Filio and Karbowannik of Northwestern University found that voucher students in Ohio performed worse on their state exams than “closely matched peers” who stayed in public schools.

Wisconsin

A pilot program in Milwaukee gave low-income families tuition subsidies starting in 1990. Initially, the small program indicated academic benefits, but these benefits did not last long. In fact, in his Hechinger Report article, Professor of Education Policy with Michigan State University Joshua Cowen, who has studied vouchers for almost 20 years and was part of the official evaluation of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program voucher plan, called vouchers “dangerous to American education”.

“In small doses, years ago, vouchers seemed like they might work, but as more states have created more and larger voucher programs, experts like me have learned enough to say that these programs on balance can severely hinder academic growth — especially for vulnerable kids,” Cowen wrote.

Consumed by Comparison

Social Media's Harm to Teen Health

Op-Ed by Briana Bowling and Konner Long

While applications like TikTok, Snapchat and Instagram allow users to learn new things and connect with others, social media also conveys false and unobtainable images of perfection that teens compare themselves to, and constantly losing that comparison (You can't beat Photoshop!) hurts in more ways than one.

Gen Z (1997-2009) and Gen Alpha (2010-2024) are the first generations to grow up with social media, and their extended social media use and exposure to unrealistic beauty standards has proven unhealthy.

According to the CDC, diagnoses of anxiety or depression among children 6-18 years old have increased for years. Even before COVID-19, which is often attributed for high rates of these conditions, diagnoses increased from 5.4% in 2003 to 8.4% in 2011.

Cell phones and social media are part of the problem.

In fact, a scientific study conducted by the Research Department of Epidemiology and Public Health from the University College London in conjunction with Millennium Cohort Study found that social media use directly impacts sleep, online harassment, self-esteem and — you guessed it — body image among young people.

Filters, poses and flat-out alteration of images without labels have caused teens of both genders to be insecure or feel inferior about their own bodies, resulting in negative or warped body-images and — in some cases — severe body dysmorphia and self-hate.

These insecurities can lead to eating disorders such as anorexia, bulimia, crash-dieting or over-exercising and other dangerous behaviors.

Some may argue that body insecurity is a personal choice, and that individuals just need to "love themselves", but body insecurity is often deeply rooted in societal expectations, and — sadly — in modern society, many people expect Instagram models.

In the January survey emailed to students, 90.3% of students reported they knew that social media could harm their mental health and more than 60% acknowledged social media use as the leading cause of body image issues.

For the sake of children's mental

health, we urge parents to make their children wait until they are 13 before using social media.

And for teens and young adults who already have social media, it's time to put down the phones.

The "perfect" posts on social media aren't real, and making unfair comparisons is dangerous. In the words of Bruno Mars, "you're amazing just the way you are."



Social Media Survey Stats

Which Social Media Platforms Do Union Grove Students Use?

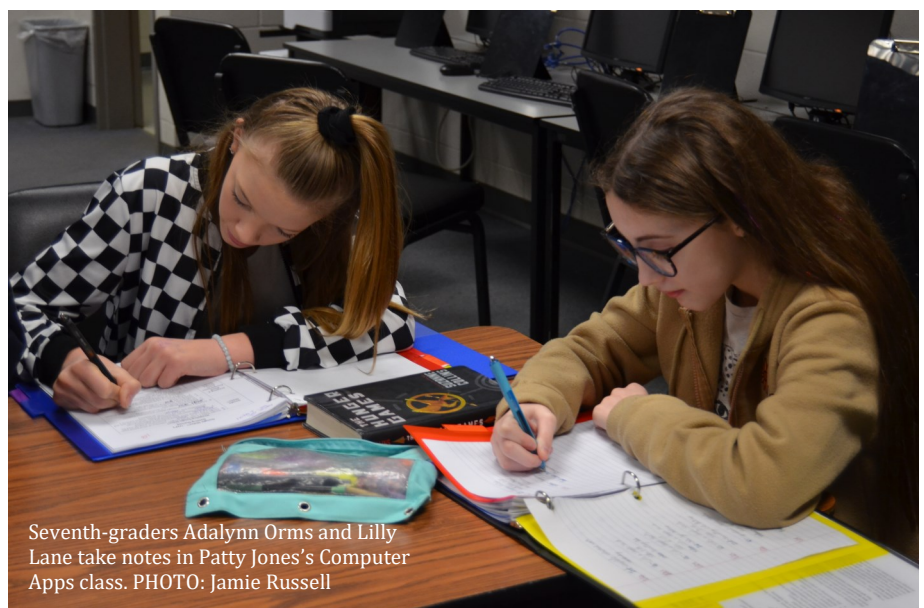
67% TikTok
68% Snapchat
58% Instagram
19% X/Twitter
54% Facebook
9% No Social Media

34% of students said they use social media more than 21 hours per week

22% of students checked their screen time and realized they spend more time on their phones than they thought

87% of students agree that social media can make teens insecure about their bodies, and more than 60% agreed that social media is the leading cause of body image issues

Students also listed in-person bullying, pressure from family members or friends, health issues, and advertising from beauty companies as causes of body image issues



Seventh-graders Adalynn Orms and Lilly Lane take notes in Patty Jones's Computer Apps class. PHOTO: Jamie Russell

Upcoming Events

Feb. 1
 JH Band Solo & Ensemble @Gilmer
 HS Athletic Banquet — 6 p.m.

Feb. 2
 HS Band Solo & Ensemble @Gilmer

Feb. 3
 HS One-Act Play Workshop @Panola
 Softball @Spring Hill

Feb. 5
 Girls Powerlifting @Home
 JH Boys Basketball @Ore City — 5
 School Board Meeting — 6:30 p.m.

Feb. 6
 HS Basketball v. McLeod — 4 p.m.
 Softball Scrimmage v. Arp — 4:30

Feb. 6-10
 All-State Band Clinic/Concert
 @San Antonio

Feb. 7
 CX Debate @Ore City

Feb. 9
 HS Basketball v. Harleton — 5 p.m.

Feb. 9-10
 FFA @San Antonio Speaking Contest

Feb. 12
 Blood Drive
 Boys Powerlifting @Union Hill

Feb. 12-13
 FFA @ San Antonio Livestock Show

Feb. 13
 V Boys Basketball @Linden-Kildare
 Softball @Sabine — 5 p.m.
 Kilgore College FAFSA in Library

Feb. 14-16
 Shotgun Team @San Antonio

Feb. 15
 Girls Powerlifting @Home

Feb. 15-17
 NSDA @Longview/NTCC
 Softball @Sabine Tournament

Feb. 16-17
 FFA @San Angelo Meats Contest

Feb. 17
 Fishing Team @Bois D'Arc

Feb. 18
 FFA @SALE Meats Contest

Feb. 19
 OAP Workshop @Home
 Boys Powerlifting @Union Hill

Feb. 20
 JH Track @Sabine Practice Meet
 Softball v. Alba-Golden — 4:30 p.m.

Feb. 21
 Elementary Spring Pictures

Feb. 22
 V Girls Track @Sabine

Feb. 23-24
 Softball @Atlanta Tournament

Feb. 24
 FFA CDE Double Header
 FFA Alumni Crawfish Boil — 5 p.m.

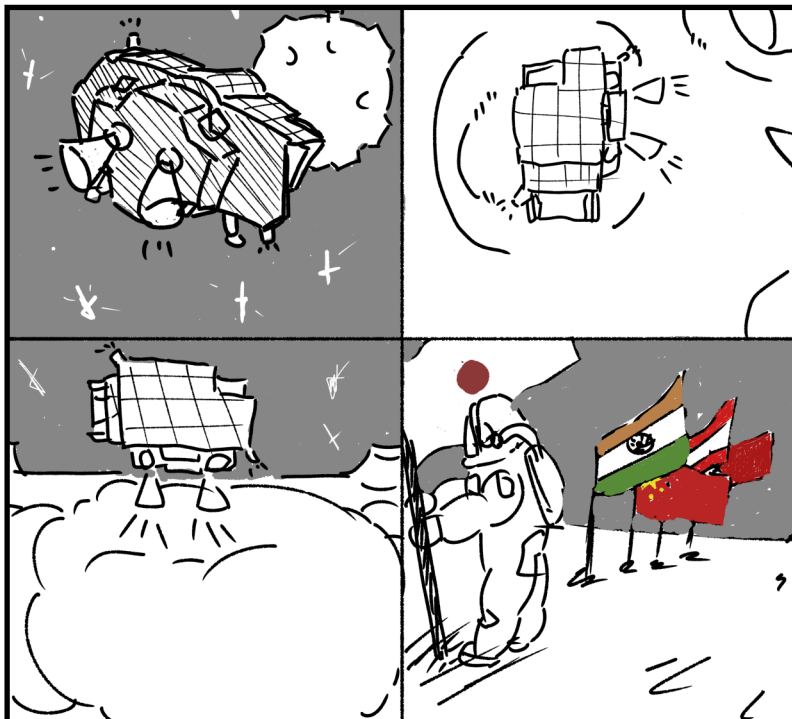
Feb. 26
 FFA Area Convention @Carthage
 JH Track @Home

Feb. 27
 FFA Applied Engineering Contest @TSTC
 Softball @Eustace — 5 p.m.

Feb. 28
 ACT Testing for Juniors
 Golf @Grand Saline Invitational

Feb. 29
 Second Grade Music Program — 5:30 p.m.
 FFA @Jacksboro CDE Invitational

“Late to the Race” by Lucky Woodard



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Valentine Candygrams

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Order Feb. 2-8 from Mrs. Smith (C16) before or after school or from a journalism team member at lunch

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Senior Kameron Townsend and junior Travis Fowler will perform in the All-State band clinic and concert in San Antonio Feb. 6-10 after earning seats at the area contest. This will be Townsend's third time to play in the All-State band and Fowler's first. PHOTO: Faith Woodall

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