

INSPIRING FUTURES

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INSPIRING FUTURES

At Harmony Public Schools, we believe inspiring educators inspire students to lead inspired lives. That's why this issue of Inspiring Futures is all about our dedicated educators.

Harmony is proud to have one of Texas' most qualified and highly-awarded teams of educators. In 2022-23, nearly 1-in-5 Harmony teachers were designated either Recognized, Exemplary or Masters by the Texas Education Agency. Harmony is able to attract these top-quality educators through a competitive compensation program including multiple stipend opportunities, industry-leading benefits, and an expansive professional development program designed to provide our teachers with a variety of advancement opportunities.

But it's not just their knowledge and training that our teachers bring to their classrooms every day. They also bring a wealth of personal and professional life experiences, and a passion for their crafts, which help make learning come alive for our students.

In this issue of Inspiring Futures, you'll meet some of those inspiring educators. In El Paso, you'll meet a former industrial engineer who left the corporate STEM world behind after finding a love for mentoring young scientific minds at Harmony.

In Sugar Land, a classically-trained opera singer turned principal fills the hallways of his middle school with words of inspiration for his students.

And in Waco, a Harmony teacher earned Texas' top award for encouraging female students to participate in STEM.

You'll find these and other inspiring stories of Harmony educators and alumni all now making a positive impact in their communities and schools inside this issue.

We hope you enjoy this issue of Inspiring Futures.

Harmony Public Schools is a public charter school system providing a high-quality curriculum that places a heavy emphasis on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM). Our engaging, hands-on, project-based approach allows students to design, build, and experiment on projects that provide real-world solutions to prepare students for college success.





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Fatih Ay | CEO
Umit Alpaslan | Senior Deputy Superintendent
Nihat Bayhan | Deputy Superintendent
Emin Cavusoglu | Deputy Superintendent
John Boyd | Chief Communications & Marketing Officer
Mark Kramer | Communications Director
Tim Hallila | Visual Production Manager
Shadan Gunonu | Photographer
Allen Reid | Photographer

Authors	
John Boyd	Sally Magnuson
Susan Campbell	Dani Marquez
Candice Keutzer	Tracie Seed
	Ajdina Selimovic

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Empowering the Next Generation

An El Paso Teacher's Inspirational Journey by Dani Marquez

Educators hold the power to become role models and inspire the next generations. Their journeys not only provide knowledge but also motivation and passion for a subject.

Guadalupe Villatoro's journey is no exception. Villatoro, currently a fifth-grade science teacher at Harmony School of Science-El Paso (HSS) Elementary, brings a three-year teaching career, alongside 14 years of experience within the elementary education system.

Villatoro's impressive journey started in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. With a college education and an established career in industrial engineering, she took pride in becoming one of the few women in a traditionally male-dominated field.

In recognition of her outstanding efforts, she received the Teacher of the Year award in her first year of teaching at HSS and was nominated again the following year.

During her second year of teaching, she became one of only six finalists for the SPARK Award in Texas. The SPARK Award acknowledges elementary science teachers who enhance student achievement and engagement through innovative lesson plans that emphasize the importance and fun of science. She also received the People's Choice Award, which recognizes the teacher with the most social media votes. Furthermore, her commitment was awarded by the community, as she was named the No. 1 "Best of El Paso" Elementary Teacher.

"When you do what you love, you will never have to work."

Everything changed when her daughter entered Pre-K and the school administration invited her to help teach classes. Working with students is how she discovered her interest in teaching. This new passion was both challenging and rewarding as she embraced the world of teaching.

As Villatoro's educational involvement grew, her love for teaching science became evident. Science projects and assignments became a focus of her time spent with her daughter, with whom she diligently emphasized the fun and fascinating aspects of scientific study.

Villatoro customized her teaching approach to involve educational hands-on activities to make the learning process a fun experience for her students.

Villatoro attributes these accomplishments to students' dedication and parents' commitment, highlighting the importance of strong communication in helping students succeed. She has realized that teaching is a profession that has a great impact on future generations.

"When you do what you love, you will never have to work," is a quote that reflects her teaching philosophy. Villatoro's goal is to inspire not only students but all of the Harmony community to pursue knowledge and the joy of discovery.



Lazo, middle, accepts International Open Jiu-Jitsu Award

Kicking It Up a Notch

Martial Arts Club Teaches Students Life Lessons by Candice Keutzer

With the popularity of Netflix’s “Cobra Kai,” martial arts have been thrust back into the limelight. Through martial arts, young minds not only learn defense moves, but also mastering discipline, self-control and confidence. The movement hasn’t been lost on Harmony School of Innovation–Sugar Land teacher Carlos Lazo.

Lazo, formerly a top-ranked fighter in the world according to the International Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu Federation, currently sponsors HSI’s Jiu-Jitsu Club.

From there, Lazo started his training by watching VHS tapes, practicing with friends and then with fellow Marines in the Marine Corps’ Martial Arts program.

After his service, Lazo formally became involved with Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu in 2008 during graduate school at the University of Houston. At one point, Lazo was the number one fighter in the world for International Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu Federation’s Medium Heavyweight Division in the Master Three age category at Brown Belt.

“My passion is to teach and coach others based on the skills and knowledge that I have provided them and seeing them succeed in all dimensions of society.”

“I feel that it is important for these teenagers to learn this martial art as it provides them with guidance, discipline, confidence, and gets them in shape,” Lazo said. “I have seen teens and adults alike who are otherwise not in shape or athletically inclined doing things that they never would have thought possible.”

Lazo’s interest in ground fighting and grappling arts began back in the 1990s when he saw the very first Ultimate Fighting Championship match. It was then he saw Brazilian fighter Royce Gracie defeat opponents twice his size.

In its second year at HSI, Lazo’s club has grown to roughly 30 students interested in learning Jiu-Jitsu.

“I love seeing people grow and develop and finding a meaning in this sport,” Lazo said. “My passion is to teach and coach others based on the skills and knowledge that I have provided them and seeing them succeed in all dimensions of society.”



Career Ready, Life Ready

Harmony's Dedication to Career & Technical Education Programs

by Ajdina Selimovic

At Harmony, our goal is to not only have our students enjoy their education, but leave our doors better prepared for college and career success ahead.

To help graduates enter the workforce career-ready, Harmony embeds a variety of Career & Technical Education (CTE) programs within its upper-level curriculum.

Harmony offers 10 different programs of study that will lead students to postsecondary education as well as expand opportunities for students to engage in STEM-related occupations in the future.

Harmony's current crop of high school students already had earned a combined 1,123 career-relevant certifications from Harmony prior to the start of the 2023-24. By the end of the year, hundreds more will be completed. Among them will be critical workforce certifications, such as Adobe Certified Associate (ACA) - Premiere Pro, Certified EKG/ECG Technician, CompTIA Security+, etc.

While CTE programs only become available in high school for students, K-8 Elective STEM courses are vertically aligned with high school CTE programs. This gives younger students the opportunity to build foundational skills before entering high school, where they'll be able to take the next steps in toward college and career readiness.

CTE Programs Offered by Harmony:

-  **Biomedical Science**
-  **Healthcare Diagnostics**
-  **Engineering**
-  **Cybersecurity**
-  **Programming and Software Development**
-  **Web Development**
-  **Design and Multimedia Arts**
-  **Accounting and Financial Services**
-  **Business Management**
-  **Law Enforcement**

**Exact program offering varies by campus depending on student enrollment and participation.*



FULL CIRCLE

A Harmony Graduate Goes Back to His Future by Tracie Seed

In his fourth year with Harmony School of Excellence-Austin, Victor Rodriguez-Alcaron has grown to be a familiar face with the many students who benefit from his work as a College Seminar and Success Advisor and 10th grade world history teacher.

However, his fellow teachers know that the history teacher's history with HSE goes even further back. Rodriguez-Alcaron is one of more than 40 former Harmony students now working for HPS as part of the Grow Your Own Teacher (GYOT) program.

"My parents chose HSE because of the curriculum, and it was about a mile from home," he explained. "I was apprehensive about leaving my friends, but mom convinced me by saying I wouldn't have to wake up as early and could walk home from school."

After graduating from HSE (with some team awards for Ballet Folklorico), Rodriguez-Alcaron matriculated to Texas A&M University in College Station. While earning a major in anthropology and a minor in Spanish, he visited HSE and learned about GYOT. This fateful visit lit a spark, and Rodriguez-Alcaron knew his future would lead him back to HSE as a teacher.

"I immediately knew teaching Harmony kids, especially at my alma mater, was what I wanted to do, so I applied," he said. "Since there was a Harmony in Bryan (near Texas A&M), I could intern there."

"I want to show [students] that despite difficulties, they have the power to reach their goals."

Rodriguez-Alcaron took that chance and now says it was the best decision because he learned about classroom management, best practices, routines, and – most importantly – patience.

Upon graduation, Rodriguez-Alcaron got his toe in the door at HSE in 2019 as a teaching assistant and quickly moved up to teacher, where he now rubs elbows with his former educators.

"I knew in my heart that I would return to HSE no matter what it took. Now, I get to inspire my students and show them through example and leadership that great things can happen through hard work and perseverance," he said. "I want to show them that despite difficulties, they have the power to reach their goals."





In It for the Long Haul

From the Philippines to Nearly 20 Years at Harmony by Sally Magnuson

Do you remember where you were 18 years ago? Twitter was founded, “Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man’s Chest” was the top movie and Nintendo released the Wii console. It was also when Anna Tiu, Engagement & Federal Programs Coordinator for Harmony School of Excellence-Houston, began the teaching career that would become her calling.

studies teacher, discipline coordinator, and engagement coordinator. Tiu is currently helping with federal programs and other campus administrative duties.

She also is the proud mother of her son Ekin, a Harmony alumnus who is now studying at Stanford University.

“Preparing us for the future is the key to success”

Mrs. Tiu’s love for education began in her own home while growing up in the Philippines. She is one of six kids who became educators.

“Preparing us for the future is the key to success,” Tiu said. “We all learned how to persevere, endure hardships, work in diligence, appreciate small things, stay positive in life, strive more, and we learned to believe in ourselves.”

She found her way to Houston and Harmony Public Schools in 2006. Like many of Harmony’s hardworking educators, Tiu wore many hats. She was a music, math, science, and social

“The opportunities for him to learn and grow were abundant at HSE,” said Tiu. “The training and skills that he received made him become a more well-rounded person. This exemplifies the beauty of Harmony.”

So why has Mrs. Tiu stuck around Harmony for nearly two decades?

“There is a true sense of fulfillment in working with students, colleagues, and with the HSE community,” she said. “HSE has become part of me and my family.”



From the Opera House to the Principal's Seat

Meet Dr. Jamie White, Harmony School of Excellence - Sugar Land Middle School Principal

by Ajdina Selimovic

Dr. Jamie White, principal of Harmony School of Excellence-Sugar Land, has always been known to let his voice be heard.

"I tell my students every day, 'Let's go! Let's go! Let's go!'" White says.

White is used to commanding an audience ... though it hasn't always been in a middle school hallway.

Before becoming an educator, White was a classically trained opera singer with experience with the Houston Symphony Chorus, Opera in the Heights and Houston Ebony Opera under his belt.

White never planned to end up in education. He graduated from Jackson State University with a master's degree in music education, before moving to Houston to pursue his musical career. However, a short stint in teaching changed his outlook.

"I tell my students every day: 'Let's go, let's go, let's go!'"

In 2012, White joined Harmony as a choir teacher in 2012. There, he combined his love of music and education to help Harmony's students discover their own hidden talents.

As White's love of teaching grew, so too did his career at Harmony. He would later be named Testing & Federal Programs Coordinator and then Dean of Students, all the while working on his doctorate from Grambling State University in Leadership, Student Development and Personnel Services.

Now as principal for HSE, he's helping students find their own voices – in whatever calling that may be.



More Than Just a Job

Harmony SpEd Teachers Go Above & Beyond to Inspire

by Susan Campbell

Through dedication and passion, teachers can inspire students to believe in themselves, pursue their dreams, and make a positive impact on the world.

Harmony's Special Education (SpEd) teachers epitomize this. Their work regularly helps each student with special needs reach their potential—not only in the classroom, but beyond.

Amanda Devoto, a TEA-Recognized SpEd teacher from HSA-Carrollton, comes from a family of educators. She knew she wanted to work in an area with the greatest need.

“What continues to inspire me each day is the relationship I’ve built with my students,” said Devoto. “As a SpEd teacher, I usually work with students year after year and I’m invested

“Harmony believes every child deserves the opportunities to excel academically, socially, and vocationally in order to meet their full potential as adults”

At Harmony Science Academy-Carrollton, principal Sevde Aslan sees her SpEd teachers inspiring students by making crucial connections every day where students are actively learning and participating.

“Harmony believes every child deserves the opportunities to excel academically, socially, and vocationally to meet their full potential as adults,” said Aslan. “Our teachers provide instruction and assistance not only in academics, but also in life skills—from the morning ‘hello,’ to cafeteria culture, participation in PE and other classes, and interacting with other students in a variety of settings.”

in seeing them continue to grow.”

Devoto adds that the best part of her job is the moments when she sees her students’ efforts come to fruition.

“When I see students pass the STAAR for the first time, the excitement is contagious,” she said. “And being the one to share it with them is even better.”



Every **STORM** has a **STORY**

*KPRC Meteorologist Discovered
Her Love of Science at Harmony*

by Ajdina Selimovic

Before captivating her viewers with tales of weather and science as a broadcast meteorologist, Daji Aswad spent her 6th-12th grade years at Harmony Public Schools.

Daji began her academic journey at Harmony Science Academy - Braeswood. She later transferred to Harmony Science Academy - Houston where she spent her high school years, graduating in 2011.

After her graduation from Harmony, Daji pursued her college dreams at the University of the Incarnate Word in San Antonio where she earned her degree with a major in broadcast meteorology and minor in communication. From there, she set her sights on telling the story of our everyday weather — rain or shine.

The Harmony alumna began her meteorological career with AccuWeather, reporting on major weather episodes from hurricanes to snowstorms. She focused her stories on telling the stories of people who endured these events with resilience and ability to walk with hope and positivity in the face of tragedies.

***“I hope to inspire the next generation of girls
who love science and a good story.”***

Daji later moved onto WISN in Milwaukee, Wisc. where she covered climate stories and grew her love for storytelling and mother nature before returning to Houston.

Today, you can catch Daji on Houston’s KPRC Channel 2, doing what she does best – bringing weather forecasts into Houston-area homes.

“I hope to inspire the next generation of girls who love science and a good story,” Aswad said. “Follow your dreams, and never be afraid to pursue your passions. The world needs your stories.”



Rewarding Inspiration

Harmony Teacher Honored for Promoting Girls in STEM

by Susan Campbell

Harmony School of Innovation-Waco teacher Tiffani Cortez has been awarded the Texas Girls Collaborative Project 2023 Educator Stand Up for STEM Award.

The recognition was given to Cortez during the Stand Up for STEM Awards, held during the Texas Women and Girls in STEM Summit on Dec. 1, 2023.

This award recognizes individual educators or educational teams from K-12 schools, PreK schools or non-profits, educational non-profits and similar organizations. Nominees must demonstrate a commitment to engaging STEM mentors and role models in programs encouraging women and girls to pursue STEM careers, increasing the diversity of those pursuing STEM careers, and retaining women and girls who enter the STEM education pipeline.

“This recognition highlights the importance of the collaborative approach taken, from educating peers and fellow educators to designing programs that incorporate STEM mentors and role models,” said Cortez. “It also emphasizes the community effort required to encourage girls in STEM careers.”

Nominees were evaluated on following attributes:

- Demonstrated passion for encouraging girls to pursue a STEM career.
- Educates parents, other educators, and/or the community to encourage girls in STEM careers.
- Designs, supports or offers programs for students, parents, educators, etc. that actively and thoroughly incorporate STEM mentors and role models.
- Engages in mentoring or leads STEM mentoring programs that address aspects of STEM student success including sharing/exploration of academic and career pathways, encouraging a growth mindset, emotional and social support, self-confidence and self-efficacy, and career-related skills.
- Demonstrates willingness to share skills, knowledge, and expertise with others and develops networks.

Cortez, who joined Harmony in 2011, already has several educator awards to her credit.

HARMONY AT A GLANCE



More than twenty years ago, Harmony Public Schools opened its first campus in Houston's historic Braeswood neighborhood.

Since then, we've grown into one of the state's most trusted and recognized schools for college preparation, character education and STEM curriculum. See how we'll be expanding even further within the next few years to create even more opportunities for children across Texas.



HPS STRATEGIC GROWTH PLAN

CURRENT HARMONY CAMPUS **NEW CAMPUS or EXPANSION**

*Locations are approximate.

RECENT AWARDS



Best High Schools in America
(U.S. News & World Report, 2023)



National School of Character
(Character.org, 2020-23)



State School of Character
(Character.org, 2020-23)



"A" Rating for
Financial Accountability
(Texas Education Agency, 2023)

STUDENT DATA

41,977

Students
Enrolled
PreK-12



Economically
Disadvantaged



67%

English Language
Learners (ELL)



34%

College
Acceptance Rate



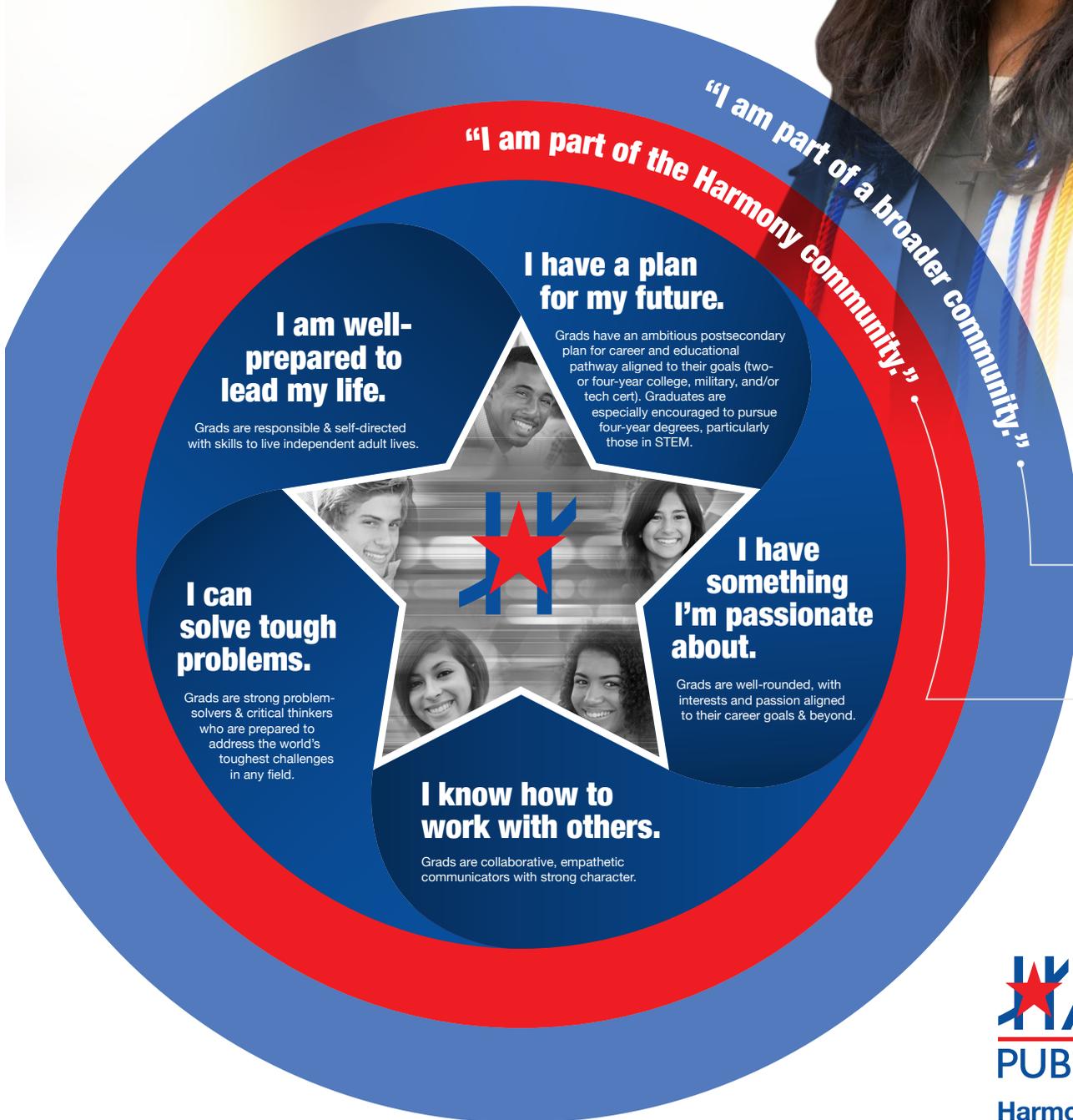
94%

Graduation
Rate



100%

| Harmony Public Schools
Graduate Profile
 | Our North Star



"I am part of the Harmony community."

"I am part of a broader community."

Grads understand themselves as part of - and are ready to contribute to - **their community, state, country, and world.**

Grads understand themselves as part of - and are ready to contribute to - **the HPS community.**



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