
INSPIRING FUTURES

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 **HARMONY**
PUBLIC SCHOOLS



INSPIRING FUTURES

A Bridge to Better

At Harmony Public Schools, every student's journey is different—but the destination is the same: a future filled with opportunity, confidence, and purpose. This edition of Inspiring Futures celebrates the many ways Harmony builds bridges to that better future, helping students not only reach their goals but reimagine how big those goals can be.

From college coaching and SAT preparation to advanced academic pathways like OnRamps, dual credit, and QuestBridge, Harmony's college-readiness programs ensure students are supported every step of the way.

But a bridge to better doesn't stop at academics. Across Texas, our schools are finding compassionate ways to meet unseen needs with dignity—from on-campus food pantries like the Tiger Pantry at Harmony School of Excellence to Brighter Bites nutrition programs that nourish both body and mind. Our commitment to student wellbeing ensures that every learner has the stability and support to thrive.

The arts, athletics, and leadership programs at Harmony create bridges of another kind—those that connect creativity, character, and community. Whether it's a student discovering their voice in a new theater program, female athletes breaking barriers on the field, or a robotics team using real-world technology to compete on the world stage, these stories show how Harmony nurtures both the heart and the mind.

And perhaps one of our strongest bridges is built through connection itself. With nearly 2,700 staff members participating in the Home Visit Program last year—reaching almost half of all Harmony students—our teachers are extending learning beyond the classroom, meeting families where they are, and strengthening the bonds that define our Harmony community.

At every grade, in every classroom, and through every challenge, Harmony Public Schools continues to build bridges—to success, to opportunity, and to better futures for every student we serve.

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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A BRIDGE TO TEAMWORK AND BELONGING

Milestones in Harmony's Athletic Journey

Contributors: Sally Magnuson, Lisa Proffit, Klarrissa Rios, Dani Marquez

When the Harmony Science Academy–El Paso Tigers Girls Flag Football team battled its way to the 2025 Cowboys Conference Championship game last spring, they couldn't have predicted what would come next.

Yet, there they were, just a few months later, standing mid-field on the big blue and silver star at the Dallas Cowboys' AT&T Stadium, being honored in front of thousands of fans during a nationally-televised Cowboys game.

Freshly blinged out in matching championship game rings and beaming with pride, the Tigers' moment under the brightest lights in Texas represented more than a successful season. It marked a milestone for Harmony Public Schools—a sign of how far its girls' athletic programs have come and how bright its future now shines.

"Our commitment to girls' athletics is about creating pathways for every student to discover their potential," said Harmony athletic coordinator Adele Gomez. "When I see teams like El Paso's flag football program achieving excellence in their first seasons, I know we're building something transformational."

Gomez, a former Harmony P.E. teacher turned dean of students, was promoted to Harmony's first athletic coordinator in August 2024. At the time, Harmony already had made major strides in increasing sports opportunities for its students. However, in naming Gomez to the new

role, Harmony was looking to elevate its athletics programs by expanding participation and ensuring athletes had the resources to thrive.

Her efforts echo the broader legacy of Title IX, which has significantly increased female participation in high school athletics from just 7% in the 1970s to nearly 3.5 million today.

Beyond sports, Title IX has also dismantled barriers for women in STEM and other historically male-dominated professions and fields—progress that aligns perfectly with Harmony's mission to empower every student through innovation and inclusion.

El Paso: From Underdogs to Champions

El Paso coach Matthew Silvas and his Tigers were direct beneficiaries of Harmony's enhanced focus on athletics. Coach Matthew Silvas and his staff built the team from the ground up, guiding them through an extraordinary 11-0 season that included wins over larger 5A and 6A schools.

"We didn't have a field or facilities—just determination and belief in what these girls could achieve," Silvas said. "They proved that anything is possible when you refuse to give up."

"We began as underdogs, but by the end, everyone knew our name," Silvas said proudly. "These girls didn't just play football—they rewrote what people thought was possible."



Quarterback Carmen M., who helped lead the team to its championship run, shared how transformative the experience was. “I didn’t think we could win as a new team,” she admitted.

“This recognition is something I’ll never forget—it showed me that believing in yourself can take you anywhere.”

The Tigers weren’t the only girls team to find success in the traditionally male-dominated game of flag football.

In its inaugural year, Harmony School of Science-San Antonio (Middle/High) claimed a state championship title in November 2025 in the Texas Charter School Academic & Athletic League (TCSAAL) 6–8 grade girls flag football division.

Led by Coach Gabriel Rodriguez, the Sharks competed against top programs from across Texas and secured the championship title.

The victory marked a historic achievement for the newly opened campus and a milestone for female athletics within the Harmony system.

“Our girls showed tremendous dedication, teamwork and spirit throughout the season,” said Rodriguez. “To take the title in our first year is a great accomplishment.”

Grand Prairie: A Perfect Season and a Powerful Beginning

Harmony’s female athletes are thriving off the football field, as well.

That same competitive spirit burned brightly in Grand Prairie, where the Harmony Science Academy-Grand Prairie girls’ softball team made history in their inaugural season. Under Head Coach Cristerna and Assistant Coach Olivia Lopez, the Lady Tigers achieved perfection with an undefeated 9-0 record last season.

“Sports teach lessons that last far beyond the season,” said Coach Cristerna. “It’s about accountability, ownership, and learning that every role matters. I want our players to build resilience—to keep showing up, even when things don’t go their way.”

Creating the school’s first-ever softball program was revolutionary, laying the groundwork for future excellence.

“We’re building something bigger than the game,” Cristerna said. “These girls learned how to work together, communicate, and lift each other up.”

For player Caylynn M., being part of that inaugural team carried deep personal meaning.

“Being the first softball team at HSA-Grand Prairie is the greatest moment of my life so far,” she said. “Representing Harmony is the best feeling ever.”

Her teammate Adriana M. discovered lessons that went far beyond softball fundamentals.

“Even when things get tough, you have to keep going,” she said. “That’s what being part of this team taught me—to never give up.”

Laredo: A Season of Firsts in Volleyball

The power of persistence and teamwork also reached new heights with the Harmony School of Excellence-Laredo Hawks volleyball team, which made school history in 2025 by earning its first-ever postseason appearance in University Interscholastic League (UIL) competition. With a 13–11 overall record and 4–6 in District 31-4A play, the Hawks proved that dedication and unity can transform a program’s future.

Senior hitter Anabella C., who had witnessed the team’s evolution from winless district seasons as a freshman, reflected on the journey. “It’s definitely been a lot of hard work and teamwork,” she said. “The amount of collaboration we’ve built over the years is what got us here.”

Under first-year Head Coach Noe Benavides, the Hawks turned early-morning practices and unwavering belief into history, clinching their playoff berth with crucial district victories that eliminated the need for a play-in game. Their season became a testament to the fact that persistence—and trust in each other—can rewrite expectations.



“We began as underdogs, but by the end, everyone knew our name. These girls didn’t just play football—they rewrote what people thought was possible.”

Houston: Breaking Barriers with Bravery

Hundreds of miles away in Houston, sixth-grader Samiya D. and seventh-grader Jaiyden D. made history as the first female duo to join Harmony School of Excellence-Houston's football team—an accomplishment that redefined what inclusion looks like on the field.

"They ran a fast 40-yard dash and caught every throw I sent their way," coach Richard Medina said. "They showed no fear and tremendous skill—but more than that, they showed the kind of courage that inspires everyone around them."

Out of fifteen players who tried out, both girls earned their positions through talent and determination. Jaiyden, who took on the role of quarterback, led the offense with 15 total touchdowns and more than 700 rushing yards. Samiya made her mark as both a wide receiver and a defensive standout.

"The boys accepted them immediately," Coach Medina added. "The girls were vocal, confident, and skilled. They didn't just join the team—they elevated everyone around them and became leaders."

Both athletes also joined the basketball team and maintained strong academic performance, embodying Harmony's belief that students can achieve greatness in every area of life.

Leadership, Learning, and Legacy

Across campuses, Harmony's athletic programs continue to evolve into powerful incubators for leadership and confidence. For West Texas Area Superintendent Dr. Kamil Yilmaz, this growth represents more than athletic success—it's a movement toward lifelong empowerment.

"Our goal is to create an environment where every student feels empowered to compete and lead," Yilmaz said. "When we watch these young women achieve the impossible, we're witnessing the future being born."

Coach Cristerna agreed, emphasizing how lessons from the field translate directly to academic and personal growth. "Athletes show up prepared and learn to balance academics with athletics," she said. "That mindset helps them succeed in life, not just in school."

More Than a Game: Building Character Through Sports

The milestone seasons in El Paso, Grand Prairie, Laredo, and Houston—along with the historic volleyball playoff berth—represent more than touchdowns, home runs, and championship banners. They embody Harmony's mission to guide students from the classroom to the world as confident, capable citizens ready to break barriers.

For families discovering these growing opportunities, the message is clear: every Harmony student deserves the chance to find their sport, discover their strength, and build the character to reach new heights.

"We're not just building athletic programs," Gomez said. "We're developing the next generation of women leaders. Every championship, every breakthrough, every barrier broken contributes to a legacy that will benefit students for decades."





A BRIDGE TO IMAGINATION THROUGH INNOVATION

The Creative Heart of Harmony Public Schools

Contributors: Lisa Proffit, Tracie Seed, Dani Marquez

At Harmony Public Schools, fine arts and culture programs do more than spark creativity—they open doors.

Whether students are stepping onto a stage, capturing a moment through a camera lens, or shaping stories through design, these opportunities become a bridge to imagination, confidence, and new possibilities. Through the arts, Harmony students discover their voices, build important life skills, and gain the courage to explore who they can become.

Setting the Stage

One powerful example of this creative growth is at Harmony School of Excellence-Austin, where a newly-founded theater club is opening a world of dramatic opportunities for students in grades 6 through 12.

Launched in Fall 2025 under the direction of teacher Adrienne Harmon, the after-school program marks the school's first official introduction to live performing arts. Harmon said the idea grew out of a desire to give students more exposure to the liberal arts and a chance to experience the magic of live theater firsthand.

In its first semester, the Theater Club has already offered students remarkable opportunities to engage with professional productions and be introduced to the Austin theater community. Earlier this fall, 36 students and staff attended a performance of "Much Ado About Nothing" at the historic Curtain Theater. The evening was particularly memorable, not just because it was a famous Shakespeare play, but because it was the final performance at the venue.

"It was almost a magical feeling," said Jessie H., a 10th-grade student who was one of two Harmony Public Schools-Central Texas students invited on stage at The Curtain Theater before the performance. "The theater seemed to wrap around me. I liked seeing all the seats surrounding me."

According to Harmon, several students received T-shirts from ATX Theatre, while others were upgraded to box seats. Two students even got the chance to join performers from another high school onstage to read lines and explore the theater's trap doors, a behind-the-scenes look that few play enthusiasts get to experience.

Soon after, 43 students and staff attended Austin Playhouse's

production of “The Importance of Being Earnest.” The outing was equally exciting, featuring free shirts, balcony seats, and an opportunity for students to experience professional theater at its finest.

“It’s one of my favorite plays! When I heard it was being performed, I jumped at the chance to take students,” Harmon said.

The outings were made possible through the generosity of ATX Theatre and the Bennett Raccach Charitable Fund (BRCF), organizations that support access to live performance for Title I schools and student groups.

Due to a fortunate mistake, the partnership began when Harmon accidentally clicked the wrong email link while inquiring about tickets. The error led her to a BRCF representative. This unexpected connection quickly turned into a blessing. The organization offered 50 tickets for each play, ensuring not only Theater Club members but also students from other grades and clubs could attend high-quality performances at no cost.

“It was my best experience,” said Justin N., a 12th-grade student who attended both performances. “The characters were amazing, the stories were interesting.”

Looking ahead, Harmon and her students plan to take their inspiration from the professionals they’ve seen on stage. The Theater Club has announced plans to perform both “Much Ado About Nothing” and “The Importance of Being Earnest” themselves during the spring of 2026.

For Harmon, this is just the beginning of what she hopes will become a long-standing tradition of theater at Harmony School of Excellence.

“The arts teach empathy, confidence, and communication—skills that extend far beyond the stage,” Harmon said. “If our students leave this club with those lessons and a love for the craft, then we’ve already succeeded.”

From Theater Arts to Storytelling

Theater isn’t the only place where students are finding their voice through the fine arts.

At Harmony School of Science Middle High-EI Paso, the yearbook club is helping transform school life into a visual legacy that families, students, and staff will treasure for years to come.

From classroom activities and science fairs to academic celebrations and cultural events, students are telling stories through photography, writing, and design while building skills in organization, communication, and leadership.

“The Yearbook Club helps students see the world from a different perspective,” said Sandra Marquez, HSS-EI Paso business manager and yearbook club mentor. “They learn to notice the small but meaningful moments that make up our school community and turn them into lasting memories that everyone can cherish.”

Their work reminds the Harmony community that creativity is not just about art; it is about storytelling, connection, and celebrating every chapter of the journey.

The Science Behind Creative Learning

Behind these inspiring stories lies solid educational research.

With the implementation of STEM SOS, Harmony’s project-based learning model, educators observed an unexpected result: the arts did not compete with science and mathematics but flourished alongside them, because both subjects sparked a deep connection to creative thinking.

Students who spent mornings designing robots spent afternoons composing music, and somehow both pursuits made them better learners.

Zina Hemingway arrived as curriculum director of Fine Arts at precisely the right moment to nurture this organic growth.



Under her guidance, what started as scattered creative activities evolved into a comprehensive arts ecosystem spanning 65-plus campuses across Texas.

“Long before children can hold a pencil or diagram a molecule, they sing, dance, design, and dream,” Hemingway said. “By creating towers of alphabet blocks, students explore the stories that shape both their world and concept of self. Those ABC block constructs are sculptures, the narratives of what has been built are stories, and the nursery rhymes sung while building are often songs. For each turn in the kaleidoscope of effective teaching and learning, the Arts are an essential component.”

The transformation wasn't just administrative. It was deeply personal for Harmony students discovering new dimensions of themselves through creative expression. Guitar classes began drawing students who had never considered themselves musical. Theater clubs attracted aspiring engineers. Visual arts programs welcomed future scientists eager to explore spatial relationships through paint and clay.

Dance and movement programs at Harmony even serve multiple developmental functions. The improvisational nature of dance primes the brain for generating new ideas—essential for innovation in any field. Movement literally activates the brain, increasing blood flow and neural connectivity that enhances learning readiness across all subjects.

“The arts teach empathy, confidence, and communication—skills that extend far beyond the stage.”

Building Bridges to Tomorrow

Similar stories continue to unfold daily across Harmony campuses. Students discover hidden talents, develop confidence, and build skills that complement their STEM education. The arts don't compete with analytical thinking—they enhance it, creating well-rounded graduates prepared for an interconnected world requiring both technical expertise and creative problem-solving.

Rising academic achievement scores, increased student applications and new campuses being built across Texas reflect growing recognition of Harmony's integrated approach. But the real measure of success lives in moments like Jessie's theatrical epiphany and Justin's authentic high school experience.

In Harmony's halls, where STEM meets arts and innovation dances with imagination, every student's story continues to unfold.





A BRIDGE TO LEADERSHIP

How Harmony Cultivates Tomorrow's Changemakers

Contributors: Lourdes Hernandez, Megan Garrison, Lisa Proffit, Ajdina Selimovic

Leadership doesn't happen by chance—it's built through opportunity, guidance, and experience. At Harmony Public Schools, that foundation begins early. In classrooms and hallways across Texas, students are finding their voices, taking the microphone, and leading with confidence. From student ambassadors addressing elected officials to high schoolers debating policy at the State Capitol, Harmony students aren't just learning about leadership—they're living it.

Because at Harmony, leadership isn't left to chance. It's cultivated with intention.

Programs that Build Purpose

Harmony's leadership development begins early and spans multiple pathways designed to engage every type of learner.

Through the Student Leadership Society (SLS), students step into the world of civic engagement, exploring public policy issues, conducting research, and developing legislative proposals that mirror the real work of state lawmakers. Along the way, they gain a hands-on understanding of how laws are created and enacted in Texas, turning curiosity into civic action.

For those drawn to healthcare, HOSA—Future Health Professionals offers a path to purpose. Students dive into medical topics, compete in statewide events, and train as compassionate leaders, learning that empathy is just as essential as excellence.

In the world of business and marketing, DECA provides the stage. At Harmony School of Innovation—Sugar Land,

membership soared past 60 students in its first year.

Chapter President Mysha A. calls DECA "a bridge that connects the fields of study." Students fundraised passionately for their signature jackets and proudly represented Harmony at national conventions—standing shoulder-to-shoulder with peers from across the country.

Meanwhile, SkillsUSA links technical and trade education to leadership and career readiness, empowering students to develop real-world skills, confidence, and professionalism.

Underscoring it all is Character Education, the heartbeat of Harmony's approach to leadership. Across the network, 51 campuses have earned recognition as State Schools of Character and 32 as National Schools of Character—proof that integrity is as valued as intellect.

Recognizing Leaders in Action

Harmony's commitment to developing young leaders doesn't end in the classroom—it shines in the way students put their leadership into action across Texas communities.

In Laredo, students from Harmony School of Innovation were recently recognized by Mayor Dr. Victor D. Treviño and the Laredo City Council for their outstanding achievement in being selected to participate in the prestigious National Youth Leadership Forum (NYLF): Pathways to STEM, held at Rice University in Houston.

Among those honored were students 5th grader Zoe C. and 6th grader Luis Z., whose selection to the program marked a major milestone not only for them personally, but for their campus community as well.

The NYLF series provides hands-on, real-world learning experiences in fields such as STEM, medicine, law, national security, business, and leadership—giving students the chance to explore future careers and develop the confidence to pursue them.

“NYLF Pathways to STEM is a wonderful opportunity for ambitious young students to explore their interests outside the classroom and discover how to innovate and think creatively through hands-on immersive learning,” said Dr. Jan Sikorsky, vice president of Education for Envision.

“Our students are challenged with real-world simulations and problems, working together to develop unique solutions and projects that bring their studies and career goals to life.”

Their recognition by city leaders underscores both the students’ dedication and academic excellence, as well as Harmony’s continued commitment to encouraging participation in transformative national leadership programs—the kind that inspire the next generation of innovators and changemakers.

“Rice University was an amazing experience where I learned a lot of new things and learned them in fun and interesting ways,” said Zoe. “One of my favorites was the dissection of the cow’s heart. I learned how the heart works and how the different parts work together to keep us alive.” Zoe added being recognized by the mayor and city council at City Hall was an exciting opportunity that she will remember forever.

HSI-Laredo fifth grade science teacher Sallia Salinas, who helped make Zoe and Luis’s participation possible, said the experience reflects the broader Harmony mission of mentorship, access, and opportunity.

“Watching our students be recognized by the Laredo City Council was an incredibly proud moment,” said Salinas. “Seeing the community celebrate them only reinforces the amazing potential we see in them every day.”



“Our students are challenged with real-world simulations and problems...”

At the state level, SLS students transform from teens into statesmen during their fall leadership conference at the Texas Capitol, drafting mock legislation, debating issues, and voting on peer proposals.

The leadership lessons within SLS are impossible to miss: In April 2025, a bill crafted by SLS students from Harmony Science Academy-Carrollton was officially filed in the Texas Senate by Senator José Menéndez (District 26, San Antonio) as SB 2474. The bill proposed incentives for grocery stores to open in underserved areas, helping to combat food insecurity in communities across the state.

At Harmony School of Innovation–Fort Worth, that transformation is something SLS sponsor Tiffany Roots has witnessed firsthand.

“We’ve had parents and students say, ‘Thank you for giving me the opportunity to find my voice.’ It gave the students the opportunity to see how in touch they were with their community and be a voice for that community.”

A Lasting Impact

These stories—of ambition, advocacy, and achievement—reflect Harmony’s commitment to leading students from the classroom into the world as productive and responsible citizens.

Every speech, every project, every act of service represents more than student participation—it’s proof that when you provide safe, caring, and collaborative environments focused on excellence, students don’t just learn. They lead.





A BRIDGE TO REAL-WORLD TECH SKILLS

Advanced Technology in Action

Contributors: Megan Garrison, Ajdina Selimovic

For Harmony students, the future isn't far away—it's right at their fingertips.

Advanced technology in the classroom is giving students an early glimpse into real careers, allowing them to experiment, build, code, design, and problem-solve with the same tools used by industry professionals.

This hands-on, future-focused approach not only helps students discover what they love, but also builds a powerful bridge to college and the workforce—equipping them with the technical skills and confidence that will set them apart as they step into the careers of tomorrow.

At Harmony Science Academy–Brownsville, one group of determined students has taken that idea quite literally. The Tigers Robotics Team recently built a bridge—not one made of steel or concrete, but one shaped by creativity, collaboration, and cutting-edge technology. In doing so, they achieved an extraordinary milestone, becoming the only team from the Rio Grande Valley to qualify for the VEX Robotics World Championship in Dallas, held May 12–14.

Guided by their coach, Marite Cavazos, and supported by campus IT specialist Luis Aguilar, the Tigers' journey to the world stage was powered by determination, teamwork, and a shared passion for STEM. From early mornings to late afternoons spent designing, coding, and testing, the students' dedication transformed classroom learning into real-world achievement.

"Their commitment to the team is what took them all the way to the championship," said Cavazos. "They got to meet students from all over the world and share their love of robotics. It was such a powerful experience."

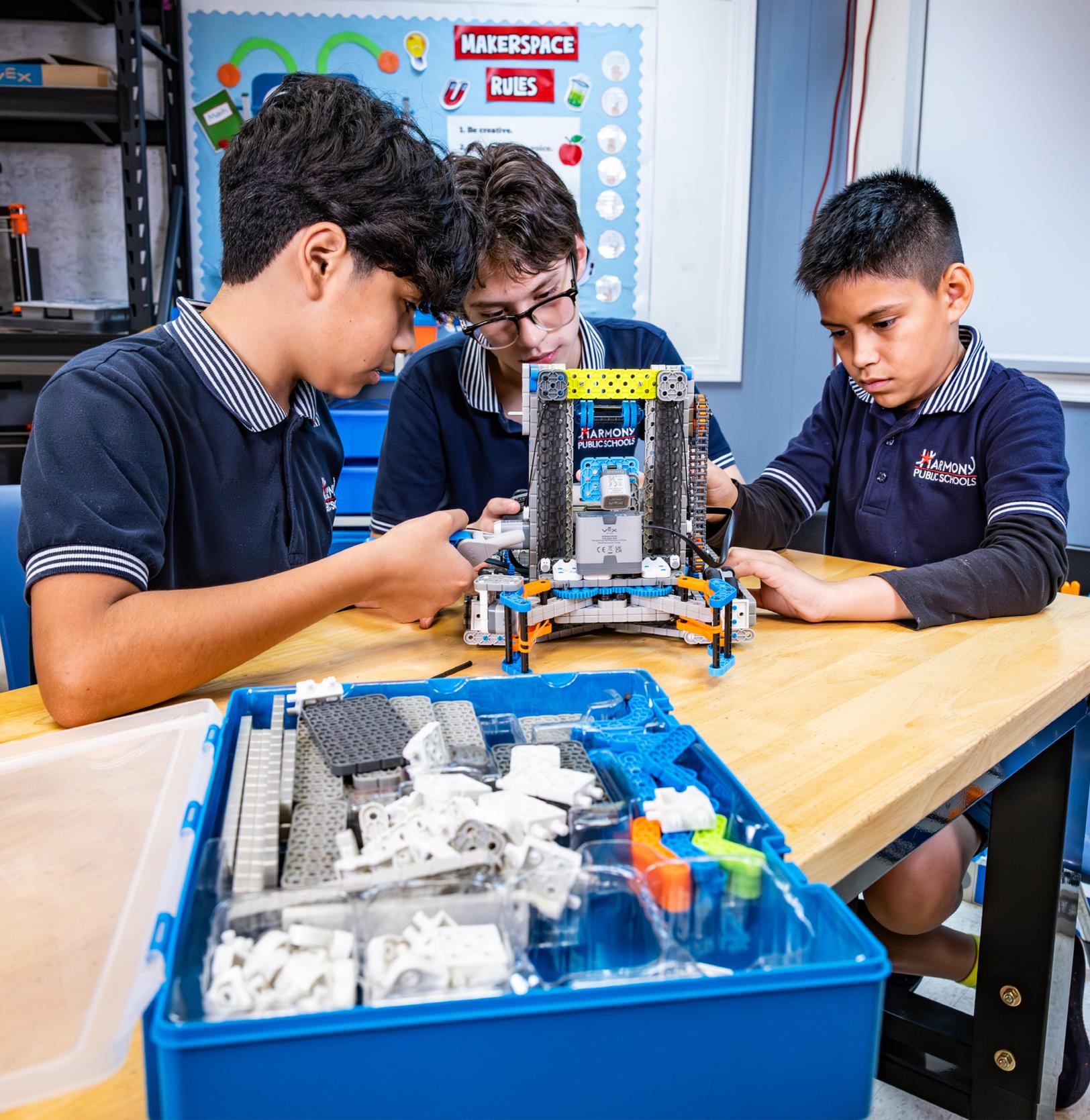
The VEX Robotics World Championship is a global gathering of the brightest young engineers who put their creations to the test. For the Tigers, stepping onto that stage was both a celebration of hard work and a glimpse into the limitless possibilities of technology-driven learning.

"It was very exciting to participate with my teammates and learn from other robotics teams," shared Jorge C. Another teammate, Rodrigo L., added, "We'll do whatever it takes next year to go back to the World Championship."

Each robot the Tigers built represented far more than gears and code—it symbolized innovation, critical thinking, and perseverance. Every design challenge required creativity, strategy, and problem-solving under pressure—skills that mirror the real-world demands of engineering and technology careers.

"This program gives students real-world skills," explained Cavazos. "They're not just learning how to build a robot—they're learning how to communicate, how to lead, and how to think like engineers. These are lessons that stay with them for life."

The Tigers' journey wasn't without obstacles. Mechanical malfunctions, coding bugs, and design revisions tested their



“They’re not just learning how to build a robot—they’re learning how to communicate, how to lead, and how to think like engineers. These are lessons that stay with them for life.”

patience, but each setback became a learning opportunity.

“It’s not just about winning,” Cavazos said. “It’s about growth. Every challenge helped them become better thinkers and teammates.”

But technology at Harmony doesn’t end with robotics. Across Harmony campuses, advanced tools are transforming classrooms into launchpads for future careers.

At two of Harmony’s South Texas high schools—Harmony Science Academy-San Antonio and Harmony School of Innovation-Brownsville—students in the biomedical pathway are learning anatomy using state-of-the-art Anatomage Tables, a virtual dissection and anatomy visualization system used in medical schools, universities, and advanced high school health science programs.

The tables allow students to explore human anatomy in 3D using life-size, fully segmented digital cadavers created from real human scans.

These innovative tools show students exactly how classroom learning connects to real-world professions. Future doctors can perform virtual dissections with medical precision; aspiring biomedical engineers can study the intersection of robotics and human anatomy; and budding programmers can apply coding skills to solve complex biological design challenges.

Harmony biomedical science teacher Michael Morales calls it a game-changer.

“Many medical students work with the anatomy table, and a lot of times that’s their first time experiencing it,” he said. “So if they get to use it in high school, they’ll have an advantage over their college peers.”

Morales added that the tables even include actual cadavers that have been scanned and digitally reconstructed. That

hands-on experience, he says, is invaluable.

Senior Kayla G. agrees, noting that the technology has changed how she sees her future.

“We learn each system—the cardiovascular system, respiratory, everything. And we have our different lessons tailored toward a specific system,” she said. “I wouldn’t have felt prepared, but now that I have this to rely on, I feel like it’s going to guide me.”

The Anatomage Tables were made possible by a \$350,000 Jobs and Education for Texans (JET) grant from the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC). The funding supports the training of 100 students as licensed vocational nurses (LVNs), addressing the growing demand for skilled healthcare professionals in Texas.

“The JET grant is certainly creating new opportunities for our students to pursue meaningful careers in healthcare,” said Selcuk Bakir, superintendent of Harmony Public Schools-South Texas District. “The funding has helped support our mission to prepare students for college and career, shaping the next generation of skilled professionals.”

In its first year alone, this grant will help Harmony South Texas train 100 students—contributing to the state’s goal of equipping more than 6,900 students with career-ready skills through the JET program.

From engineering robots that compete on the world stage to exploring the intricacies of human anatomy through the cutting-edge Anatomage Table, Harmony students are experiencing the kind of hands-on, career-based learning that most students don’t encounter until college or beyond.

At Harmony, innovation isn’t a distant goal—it’s happening every day, preparing students to lead, discover, and shape the future.



A BRIDGE FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO HIGHER ED

Guiding Students Every Step of the Way

*Contributors: Candice Keutzer,
Sally Magnuson, Dani Marquez,
Lisa Proffit, Tracie Seed, Yilmaz
Kahraman, Allison Martinez*



When Harmony Science Academy–Pflugerville senior Kayla A. first heard about the Early College High School program, she wasn't sure it fit her dream of becoming a doctor.

"I knew I wanted to be a doctor," Kayla said, "but I was hesitant because it takes so long."

Now, she's on track to graduate with 60 college credits—saving time, money, and a big head start toward medical school.

"My parents encouraged me [to do it like this] because it would help me reach my goal faster, get into medical school sooner, and save money," Kayla said.

Similarly, Allison Martinez, a 2025 graduate from Harmony School of Advancement–Houston, built her path to engineering success with Harmony's strong support system—from middle school STEM classes to internships and college scholarships.

Both students show how Harmony Public Schools helps bridge the gap between high school and college through a

network of programs, resources, and guidance that support every student's journey to higher education.

"I learned how to approach challenges with structure and persistence," Allison said.

Early Foundation Building: Where College Preparation Begins

Allison's journey demonstrates how Harmony's college preparation begins years before students even think about applications. When she stepped into her first STEM course in middle school, she was entering a carefully designed system that builds college readiness from the ground up.

"We give our students early exposure to all things STEM so they're equipped to make informed choices when they reach ninth grade," explained Janet Nimer, Harmony's director of PreK-5th STEM. "By the time they're selecting their Program of Study, they're making strategic decisions based on real experience and passion."

Twelve Pathways to College Success

Harmony's 12 programs of study represent one of the most comprehensive approaches to college preparation available in public education. These four-year sequences create direct pipelines from high school interests to college majors and careers, including Accounting and Financial Services, Biomedical Science, Business Management, Cybersecurity, Diagnostic and Therapeutic Services, Engineering Foundations, Graphic Design and Interactive Media, Law Enforcement, Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering, Programming and Software Development, Web Development, and Networking Systems.

Allison's success in the Engineering Foundations program demonstrates how these pathways work. By high school, her middle school design thinking had evolved into professional-level skills, combining Autodesk certifications with Advanced Placement coursework—the kind of academic rigor paired with industry credentials that distinguishes Harmony graduates.

Academic Excellence Through Multiple Pathways

In Harmony Public Schools–West Texas district, the path from high school to higher education is becoming stronger each year. Through a growing network of Advanced Placement (AP), Dual Credit, and OnRamps courses, students are earning real college experience while still in high school.

The numbers illustrate the effectiveness of this comprehensive approach:

- AP enrollment surged 26% year-over-year,
- AP Exam participation jumped 25%;
- Passing rates climbed 14 points to an impressive 49-52%.

Meanwhile, 26 dual credit courses allow students to earn college credits while maintaining high school support systems

“These programs give our students confidence and a sense of belonging in higher education,” said Mesut Yilmaz, West Texas district college access coordinator. “When they realize they can succeed in college-level courses now, it changes how they see their future.”

Harmony students can begin taking college-level courses as early as their freshman year, receiving guidance from college advisors, success coaches, and Harmony teachers who help them balance their academic responsibilities.

Harmony's OnRamps program provides another pathway to college readiness by offering university-level coursework with comprehensive support systems built in.

Industry Certifications and Professional Experience

When Harmony Public Schools–Houston North District received a \$233,225 Jobs and Education for Texans (JET) grant, the investment went directly toward expanding pathways to college success through industry certifications.

Allison's story shows how industry partnerships can open unique doors for college and career preparation. Her strong performance in a coding competition caught the attention of Lockheed Martin, leading to an internship where she was the only high school student on a professional engineering team.

“It wasn't just about technical work,” Allison said of her three summers with Lockheed Martin. “It was about discipline, perseverance, and continuous improvement.”

She also presented her breadboarding project—an electronic voting machine she designed—to the Walton Family Foundation Board of Directors, including Jim Walton.

“That experience was surreal,” Allison said. “When Mr. Walton said my project was the best, I realized how powerful STEM education can be.”





Personal College Coaching: Individualized Support

At the heart of Harmony’s comprehensive approach lies the Alumni College Coaching program, where personal connections transform overwhelming college processes into manageable pathways. Each graduate is paired with a coach who understands both the academic demands of higher education and the unique challenges faced by first-generation college students.

“Watching students realize they can succeed in college is the best part,” said Aliye Koral, college success coach for Houston’s South and West districts. “Our coaching gives them the tools and support to get there. The real win is seeing their confidence grow as they discover their own path forward.”

These coaches provide comprehensive support, including help with college selection, application assistance, financial aid navigation, scholarship identification, enrollment support, and academic coaching that continues through the first year of college.

Financial Accessibility Through Multiple Programs

Harmony addresses college affordability through multiple pathways:

QuestBridge: For high-achieving, low-income students, Harmony’s partnership with QuestBridge creates pathways to full scholarships at top-tier universities.

Summer Bridge Program: This program allows incoming college freshmen to earn nine credits before their first semester, providing both academic advancement and financial savings.

Financial Aid Workshops: Conducted in multiple languages, these workshops guide families through FAFSA applications and college financing strategies.

Harmony’s SAT prep courses ensure students arrive at test day confident and prepared, while the College Connect Program offers campus visits, college fairs, and seminars that familiarize students with higher education environments.

Alumni Networks and Ongoing Support

Harmony’s enhanced alumni portal creates ongoing bridges between current students and college graduates who’ve successfully navigated similar paths. Both Allison and Kayla now serve as mentors for younger students, demonstrating how the support system extends beyond graduation.

This network provides ongoing mentorship from successful college graduates, professional connections that support internships and career opportunities, academic support during the college transition, and living proof that college success is achievable for students from all backgrounds.

Measuring Success Through Multiple Metrics

Harmony measures college preparation success through college acceptance rates and scholarship awards, dual credit completion and college credit accumulation, Industry-Based Certification achievement, AP exam performance, and college retention and graduation rates.

The Comprehensive Difference

What distinguishes Harmony’s approach is the integration of all these elements into a comprehensive system rather than isolated programs. Students like Allison benefit from early STEM exposure, Programs of Study focus, industry partnerships, college coaching, and alumni networks working together to create seamless pathways to college success.

“Watching students realize they can succeed in college is the best part. The real win is seeing their confidence grow as they discover their own path forward.”

“Many of our families have never filled out a FAFSA form or understood the difference between grants and loans,” said Maria Martinez, college and career counselor at Harmony Science Academy-Pflugerville. “Our coaches sit with families for hours, walking them through every form, every deadline, every option.”

Comprehensive Support Systems

The multifaceted approach to college preparation develops more than academic skills—it builds character traits that serve students throughout their lives. “Our students are resilient,” said Martinez. “They learn how to dedicate themselves fully to whatever they do in life.”

This resilience is built through comprehensive support that includes academic counseling, career exploration through internships and industry partnerships, leadership development, social-emotional support, and family engagement programs.

Similarly, Kayla’s success results from the combination of early college coursework, comprehensive academic support, college coaching, and financial accessibility programs that make her medical school dreams achievable.

The impact extends beyond individual students to transform entire families and communities. When students succeed in college through Harmony’s comprehensive support system, they become role models for younger siblings, resources for other families, and leaders in their communities.

Harmony doesn’t just build one bridge to college—but builds a comprehensive network of pathways, programs, and support systems that ensure every student can successfully transition from high school to higher education. Through early preparation, academic excellence, professional experience, financial accessibility, and ongoing support, we transform college from a distant dream into an achievable reality for every student we serve.



A BRIDGE TO CONNECTION

The Power of Home Visits

Contributors: Lisa Proffit, Klarrissa Rios



When Harmony educators stepped into the home of Harmony Science Academy-Carrollton high school student Varshaa H. and her family, they were not just visiting; they were building a connection.

Sitting in the family's living room, surrounded by the scent of freshly made Indian tea and homemade bread, it became clear that this visit was about far more than academics.

Varshaa, a bright student with aspirations to become a trauma surgeon, shared her determination to succeed in STEM. Her counselor, Volkan Kaya, HSA-Carrollton Dean of College and Career, came prepared with test scores, academic reports, and a personalized roadmap to help her stay on track toward her goals.

"We are so pleased with the school," said her mother, Poornima Rajendran, smiling as she served traditional snacks and tea. "We tell our friends about Harmony all the time. We want them to know how much the teachers care."

The conversation opened the door for Varshaa's parents to share their family's journey from India, the importance of

preserving their culture, and their hopes for their children's future.

Varshaa's father said the visit was a meaningful experience for their whole family. "Having the teachers in our home was wonderful," he said. "They provided valuable insight into how our daughter is doing in school. I see how this experience strengthens the relationship between students and teachers, and I hope every family gets to experience this."

That same sense of connection is echoed by students themselves. Harmony School of Excellence-Dallas Senior and Student Council President Emily B. says her home visit made a lasting impression.

"It can seem a little awkward at first, but after having a home visit, I feel more comfortable approaching my teachers or anyone at the campus," she said. "It has helped me build a bond with them. When I have a problem, I can go to them, and we can come up with a plan together."

Emily's mother, Karen Birge, said the visit offered more than just conversation; it created a sense of trust and reassurance.

“These connections help steer the trajectory of the student, but most importantly, change the lives of the educators at the helm of the campus.”

“Bringing someone into your home who has the same goal as you do is rewarding,” she said. “You know they want the best for your child, just like you do. When they left, they gave us their contact information, and now we know exactly who is around our student. That makes us feel safe and comfortable.”

These stories are just a few of many that demonstrate the scale and impact of Harmony Public Schools’ commitment to family engagement through its Home Visit Program. Last year alone, 2,700 Harmony staff members participated in the program, reaching almost 50 percent of students across the state. For more than two decades, this initiative has been a cornerstone of Harmony’s approach to education, creating transformative experiences that benefit both families and educators in profound ways.

What Families Gain: Trust, Understanding, and Partnership

For families across Harmony’s network, home visits create unprecedented opportunities to connect with their children’s education. Parents gain direct access to their child’s academic progress while receiving personalized guidance on supporting learning at home.

Like Varshaa’s parents, families discover they have a voice in their child’s educational journey. Parents share their cultural backgrounds, family values and hopes for their

children’s futures, knowing these perspectives will inform how educators support their students.

The visits provide safe spaces for families to ask questions about graduation requirements and college preparation without the formal atmosphere of meetings on campus.

Parents learn about available resources, support systems and pathways to success they may not have known existed. They gain confidence in navigating educational systems and advocating for their children’s needs while developing stronger connections to the broader school community.

Through these meaningful exchanges, families experience education as a partnership rather than something that happens to their children. They gain practical knowledge, emotional support and the reassurance that their child’s success matters deeply to the entire Harmony community.

What Staff Members Gain: Deeper Understanding, and Professional Growth

For Harmony educators, home visits provide invaluable insights that transform their approach to teaching and student support.

Emine Gurer Bahadir—Harmony’s 2018 Teacher of the Year and dean of academics at Harmony School of Excellence—Houston—has completed 100 home visits. Each one offered a powerful reminder of how these experiences can transform an educator’s perspective.





“These connections help steer the trajectory of the student, but most importantly, change the lives of the educators at the helm of the campus,” Bahadir said.

When Bahadir learned about students facing family challenges — such as a student whose father was battling cancer — those relationships provided crucial context for understanding student behavior.

“Every kid needs someone to believe in them — even through the bad times,” she said.

Joseph Ince, principal at Harmony Science Academy-Waco has completed 58 home visits — more than any other principal in the system. He said these experiences have fundamentally shaped his leadership approach.

“These visits make me a more empathetic and intentional leader,” Ince said. “When I share stories with teachers, they see their students in a new light.”

Jennifer Bunting, a veteran teacher at Harmony School of Innovation-Garland who completed 102 home visits last year, discovered how visits reveal students in their authentic environments.

“At school, we see the polished version, but at home, we see their families, their pets, their photos — the things that matter most to them,” Bunting said.

Personal Fulfillment and Lasting Impact

Beyond professional benefits, many Harmony staff members find personal fulfillment through home visits.

“When I get up in the morning, I look at my job as a way to fill my well,” Bahadir said. “Being there for the kids serves my own emotional well-being.”

Nihal Senlik, college and career counselor at Harmony Science Academy-Eules, with the most home visits in the

system for 2024-25 at 163 visits, experienced one of her most meaningful career moments through a long-term relationship that began with home visits. After supporting a student whose mother had passed away from seventh grade through graduation, Senlik watched her graduate as valedictorian.

During her graduation speech, the student tearfully said, “My counselor, Mrs. Senlik, cared for me a lot. She believed in me for most of my life. She is the most impactful person in my life.”

“Love, belief and consistency can change a child’s life forever,” Senlik said.

Building Stronger Communities

The benefits extend beyond individual relationships to strengthen entire school communities. Students become more open and confident while parents feel more connected and empowered to participate in their child’s learning.

“A home visit forms a bond,” Bunting said. “It reminds everyone that we are in this together for the success of the child.”

For Bahadir, the philosophy extends beyond professional duty.

“If I support other people’s kids, God will find someone to help my kids, too,” he said. “We rise by lifting others.”

Home visits are a cornerstone of Harmony’s family engagement philosophy. By meeting families where they are, educators gain a deeper understanding of their students’ backgrounds, challenges and dreams while families develop trust in their educational partners.

For a school system known for its 100% college acceptance rate and dedication to STEM education, the heart behind that success is clear: a personal touch that puts people first. 

A BRIDGE TO HEALTHY FUTURES

Harmony Food Programs

*Contributors: Tracie Seed,
Ajdina Selimovic*



At Harmony Public Schools, nourishing students goes beyond the classroom. From creative campus pantries to fresh-food programs and community partnerships, Harmony schools are finding new ways to support students' well-being—ensuring every child has access to what they need to learn and thrive.

One example is the Tiger Pantry, launched in 2021 at Harmony School of Excellence—Austin. Built on a simple but powerful idea—that no student should have to learn while hungry—the pantry provides food, toiletries, and other essentials to low-income students and families with dignity and discretion.

Spanish teacher and pantry manager Jennifer Gomez said the goal has always been to meet students' needs in a way that preserves their self-respect.

"Our goal was to create something that offered help without embarrassment, a place where students could get what they needed, when they needed it, in a way that preserved their dignity," she said.

The initiative has since grown into a campuswide effort supported by staff, mentors and community partners who

help keep shelves stocked and the space welcoming. The Tiger Pantry stands as a testament to Harmony's commitment to caring for the whole student—mind, body and heart.

Building on Harmony's commitment to student wellness, campuses across Texas also have partnered with Brighter Bites to make healthy eating more accessible for students and their families. Through this ongoing collaboration, families receive bags of fresh fruits and vegetables, along with recipes, nutrition tips, and hands-on learning experiences that encourage healthier choices at home. The partnership not only addresses food access but also empowers families with the knowledge and confidence to prepare nutritious meals. Over the years, Harmony's work with Brighter Bites has become a cornerstone of its wellness efforts, fostering healthier habits and stronger communities.

In addition to its partnership with Brighter Bites, many Harmony campuses actively participate in their local food banks, helping to combat hunger within their communities. Students and staff often volunteer their time sorting donations, organizing food drives, and distributing meals to

families in need. These efforts not only provide essential support to local food networks but also teach students empathy, civic responsibility, and the power of service. By engaging directly in these initiatives, Harmony students gain a deeper understanding of the importance of giving back and supporting those around them.

To deepen students' connection with healthy living, several Harmony campuses have launched Garden Clubs, hands-on learning programs that allow students to grow fruits, vegetables, and herbs on campus. These gardens are more than just green spaces; they're outdoor classrooms where science, teamwork, and responsibility come together. Through these programs, students learn valuable lessons about nutrition, sustainability, and the environment while seeing firsthand the journey of food from seed to table. In doing so, Harmony's Garden Clubs cultivate not only gardens but also lifelong habits of wellness, stewardship, and connection to nature.

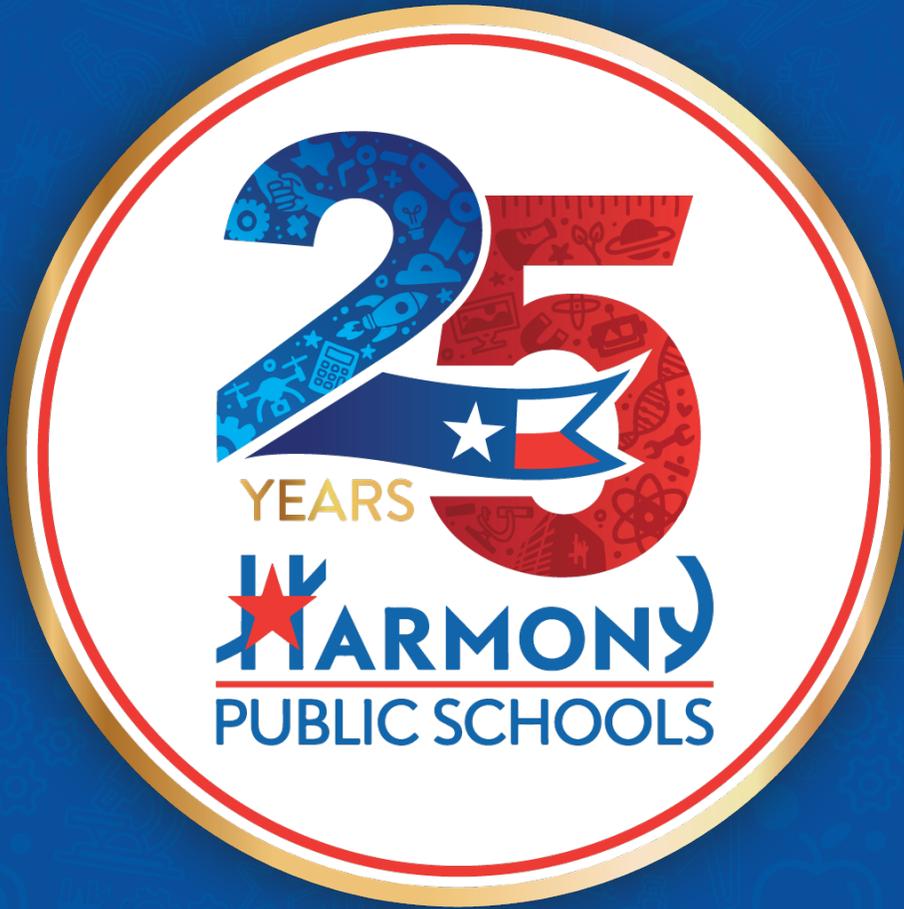
To further promote healthy and inclusive eating habits, a handful of Harmony campuses celebrate National School Lunch Week with a global twist. Throughout the week, students enjoy themed menus that highlight flavors from around the world, such as Taste of Asia, Taste of the Caribbean Islands, and Taste of Latin America, among others. These special lunches introduce students to diverse cuisines and cultures while emphasizing the value of nutritious, balanced meals. The celebration transforms the cafeteria into a place of exploration, where food becomes a way to connect, learn, and celebrate the richness of global traditions.

“Our goal was to create something that offered help without embarrassment...”

These initiatives are part of a broader commitment by Harmony Public Schools to support the well-being of all students. Approximately 67% of Harmony students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, reflecting the network's dedication to serving diverse communities, many of which face economic challenges. Harmony continues to expand its efforts to provide comprehensive support systems that address not only academic growth but also students' social, emotional, and physical needs.

By addressing these hidden challenges with care and intention, Harmony is not only meeting immediate needs but also helping bridge students toward a healthier, more stable future where they can learn, grow, and succeed. 🌟





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