INSPIRING FUTURES

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Faces of Harmony:

Meet the Faces (Human and Otherwise) Who Are Changing Education

HARMONY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

INSPIRING FUTURES

Faces of Harmony

As a school system, Harmony Public Schools has never been short of accolades, awards, or accomplishments. But ask any classroom teacher, parent volunteer, school administrator, or community partner, and they'll tell you that what makes Harmony truly special is the people. That's why in this edition of Inspiring Futures, we'll be introducing you to some of the Faces of Harmony that make our school system truly unique among Texas school systems.

Inside these pages, you will meet the Face of Robotics, where students collaborate across classrooms to design, build, and solve problems through hands-on STEM innovation. You will also encounter the Face of Student Ambassadors, scholars whose leadership and voice help welcome families and represent their campuses with pride.

We go beyond campus accolades to spotlight the Faces Behind the Lone Star Ribbon, the students whose daily academic excellence helped earn one of the state's highest honors. You will also discover the Face of Family Partnership, which illustrates how alignment between home and school strengthens student confidence, achievement, and opportunity.

In the Faces of Competition, we celebrate scholars who have carried Harmony's spirit of excellence onto regional, national, and international stages, demonstrating the resilience and preparation that define true achievement.

Each story offers a unique perspective as told through a unique Face of Harmony. Together, they form a collective portrait of Harmony's mission in action – inspiring futures through innovation, leadership, partnership, and perseverance.

Every scholar's journey is shaped by many faces, and every face tells a story of possibility.

Real people. Real stories. One community.

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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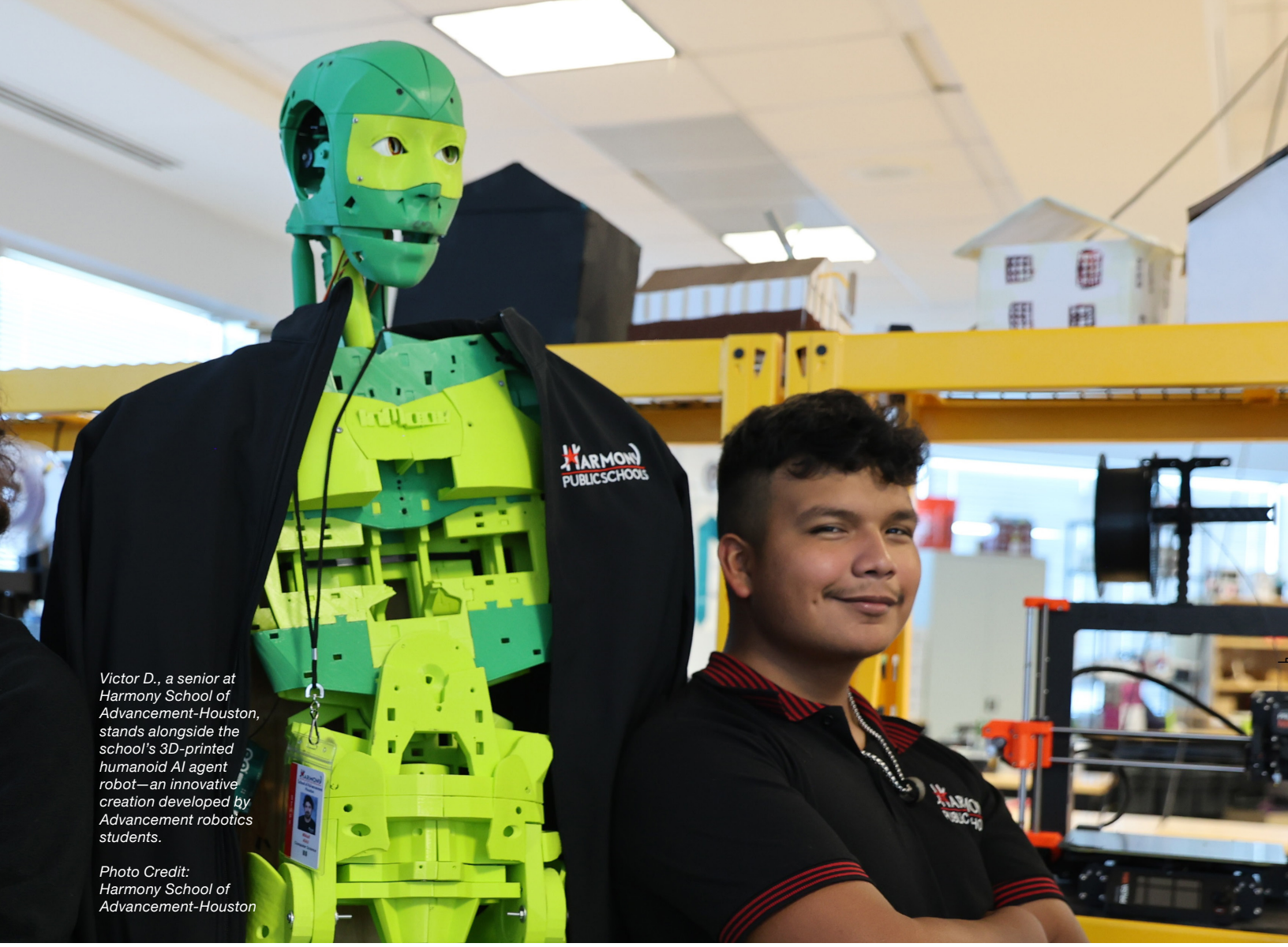

Victor D., a senior at Harmony School of Advancement-Houston, stands alongside the school's 3D-printed humanoid AI agent robot—an innovative creation developed by Advancement robotics students.

Photo Credit: Harmony School of Advancement-Houston

THE FACE OF ROBOTICS

Where Harmony Scholars Design the Future

Contributors: Lisa Proffit, Sally Magnuson, Candice Keutzer, Klarrissa Rios

Inside Harmony School of Advancement–Houston, a robotic creation of remarkable proportions is taking shape.

The robot wasn't built from a single blueprint – or even a single pair of hands. Rather, it is the combined work of students across multiple school years – many who never even met, but each of whom made a contribution to what the AI-powered, humanoid agent has become.

Engineering students designed the framework. Programmers wrote the code that brings the machine to life. Others fabricated parts, assembled components, tested systems and refined performance.

Piece by piece, idea by idea, their efforts formed something bigger than any single project: an interactive creation that blends robotics, artificial intelligence, computer vision and engineering into one cohesive system.

Project-Based Learning initiatives like this reflect a vision that has guided Harmony Public Schools for the past 25 years. When Harmony opened its first campus, school founders recognized a critical need to elevate Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) education, particularly robotics programs that would prepare students for an increasingly automated world.

That vision has grown into a comprehensive robotics framework spanning Pre-K through 12th grade. Today, Harmony prepares students for high-demand careers in artificial intelligence and robotics through a structured progression of coding, engineering and hands-on learning.

The implementation of Project-Based Learning (PBL) helped expand robotics programs across Harmony high schools through the STEM SOS PBL Model. Today, 218 teams with 1,532 students participate in robotics leagues including VEX, SeaPerch, FIRST Tech Challenge and FIRST Lego League.

Students form competitive teams through after-school programs while teacher sponsors guide them through engineering design and tournament preparation. Harmony students have claimed victories in local, regional, state, national and international robotics competitions across grade levels from third through twelfth.

The robotics pipeline begins early. STEM extension classes and programs such as Project Lead the Way introduce robotics concepts in elementary school while coding programs serve as the language that brings machines to life.

Block-based coding is introduced in Pre-K, kindergarten and first grade, helping students understand logical sequences, loops and conditional statements that govern robotic behavior. By second grade students begin transitioning to text-based coding while experimenting with design tools and hands-on engineering systems.

In third grade, students begin programming micro:bits, pocket-sized computers that introduce physical computing and sensor-based interaction. As students progress through grade levels they advance through a coding hierarchy that includes CoffeeScript, Python, JavaScript and Java, building versatile programming skills needed for robotics and artificial intelligence applications.

Robotics learning continues through middle school modules that introduce more advanced engineering challenges and autonomous robot behavior. Beginning in the 2026-27 school year, Harmony eighth graders will expand their robotics knowledge through AI classes that introduce machine learning basics and Natural Language Processing.

In high school, students choose Programs of Study such as Engineering Foundations or Manufacturing and Automation Technology. Robotics concepts are integrated throughout these courses while students earn Industry-Based Certifications that demonstrate real-world technical competencies valued by colleges and employers.

For students like Advancement senior Victor D., that vision comes to life in the lab after school.

The Harmony School of Advancement-Houston senior has been developing the 3D-Printed Humanoid AI Agent Robot, the same ambitious project that blends robotics, artificial intelligence, computer vision, software development and engineering into one interactive creation.

The project itself has evolved over time. Developed collaboratively over the past three years, students worked together to design and build the robot's physical structure. The original goal was to create a 3D-printed robot integrated with a chatbot that could respond to user questions. During the 2024-25 school year, that concept became a reality when students successfully created a functioning prototype.

This year, the project has advanced even further. Victor has taken a leading role and is now working independently on the coding and AI implementation, building on the foundation created by previous teams. The goal is to develop a smart robot that can welcome visitors and provide information about the school in real time.

Victor has been a dedicated member of the Robotics Club since his freshman year and is also active in SkillsUSA and CyberPatriot, where he continues to strengthen his technical and leadership skills. Throughout high school, he has looked for ways to challenge himself through coding, cybersecurity, networking and emerging technologies that connect classroom learning with real-world application.

His journey began in the school's Programming and Software Development Program of Study, where he developed strong programming skills and a solid foundation in computational thinking. He learned both Python and Java and earned Industry-Based Certifications in each language.

Now enrolled in AP Computer Networking, Victor has already achieved his ITS Networking certification and is preparing for the CompTIA Network+ certification. These accomplishments reflect both technical ability and determination to master the systems that power today's connected world.

Turning imagination into innovation. Harmony School of Advancement-Houston robotics students Victor D. and Cafer K. are bringing ideas to life through hands-on learning, creativity, and cutting- edge robotics—building not just machines, but the future.

Photo Credit: Harmony School of Advancement-Houston

Harmony School of Advancement-Houston's Victor D. and "Mr. Robot."

Photo credit: Allen Reid

"Engineering is no longer just about solving problems; it is the tangible pursuit of understanding life through the machines we create."

Victor D. fine-tunes every detail of the school's 3D-printed humanoid AI agent robot—a project years in the making and a powerful example of innovation, curiosity, and student-driven learning at Harmony School of Advancement-Houston.

Photo Credit: Harmony School of Advancement-Houston

Through the Engineering Program of Study, he expanded his design and manufacturing skills. After earning certification in Autodesk Fusion 360, he began designing robotic components and producing them through 3D printing. Being able to code systems and physically build them has allowed him to understand how software and hardware work together.

"Engineering is no longer just about solving problems; it is the tangible pursuit of understanding life through the machines we create," Victor said. "It's about the connection between hardware and software, between human and machine, and between who I was behind the screen and who I'm becoming beyond it."

His AI agent robot is designed to operate in a real school environment, interacting with visitors in a helpful and welcoming way. Victor imagines a parent walking into the school for the first time and being greeted by the robot. The robot could introduce itself, explain academic programs and guide families toward resources that support student success.

Rather than replacing human interaction, the robot is designed to enhance it by providing accessible information in an engaging format.

Projects like Victor's reflect Harmony's commitment to real-world problem-solving. Students are encouraged to identify challenges and design thoughtful solutions while developing creativity, collaboration, critical thinking and technical expertise.

The STEM SOS program strengthens this approach by combining interdisciplinary learning with project-based exploration. Teachers guide the process while students take ownership of their learning as they work through complex problems and build projects that demonstrate both academic knowledge and practical skill.

Victor's AI agent robot represents years of dedication across multiple pathways. By combining coding, networking, engineering and design, he has created something that is both technically impressive and purpose-driven.

"My journey began in second grade when I transitioned to Harmony," Victor said. "I carried with me the encouragement of early mentors who saw potential I hadn't yet recognized."

For Victor, the project is not just about building a robot. It is about building the skills and confidence to shape the future.

Across the Harmony network, students are discovering similar opportunities through robotics programs and competitions.

Nicholas G. is one of many Harmony Public Schools students who loves learning about robotics. His journey began during a sixth-grade club exploration where he discovered a passion that led him to join the robotics team the following year. At the time, Nicholas had no prior knowledge of robotics or coding. He began by developing mechanical building skills before moving on to programming.

"My technical skills and problem-solving abilities have increased significantly since I became a member of the team," said Nicholas.

For him, the most rewarding part of robotics is collaborating with teammates through communication and sportsmanship. He hopes to pursue a career in the medical field as either a cardiothoracic surgeon or a cardiac scientist.

"My future career will involve robotics because surgical robotics and medical technology continue to evolve," he said.

Now an eighth grader at Harmony School of Fine Arts and Technology-Houston, Nicholas says competitions create a fast-paced environment that challenges teams to stay focused and solve problems under pressure.

As Robotics team leader, the 13 year old uses his outgoing personality to advocate for his team and serve the school community through outreach efforts. He says the most challenging part of robotics is continually developing new solutions while improving skills through feedback and practice.

"He is a driven individual with high aspirations and a strong advocate for Harmony," said Iman Arroyo, campus ESL and Engagement Coordinator. "He believes the STEAM program has developed his skills and prepared him to be a successful leader in the future."

Across Harmony Public Schools, stories like these show what happens when curiosity meets opportunity. Robotics is not simply about machines or competitions. It is about preparing students with the skills, confidence and collaborative mindset needed to shape the future.

Harmony Science Academy-Leander fifth grader Lucas T. wearing his own invention, "A Eyes"–AI-powered computer vision glasses.

Photo Credit: Allen Reid

THE FACE OF COMPETITION

Harmony Scholars Rise to the Challenge

Contributors: Tracie Seed, Klarrissa Rios, Brittany Lehning

Competition takes on many forms at Harmony Public Schools.

On any given day, competition might unfold on a robotics field, inside a science fair judging hall, on a spelling bee stage, in an esports arena, or on a basketball court where teammates cheer each other on.

What connects these moments is not simply the pursuit of excellence – it is the preparation, discipline, teamwork, and resilience that students develop along the way.

For example, while many students use artificial intelligence to create cartoon portraits or edit a paper, Lucas T. is using it to change lives.

The 10-year-old fifth grader at Harmony Science Academy-Leander recently earned first place at his campus science fair, as well as a first-place ribbon at the Greater Austin Regional Science and Engineering Fair for developing AI-powered computer vision glasses. His project, A Eyes, was designed to help children with visual impairments navigate daily activities and improve their quality of life.

"Before I could build anything, I wanted to understand what it actually feels like to be visually impaired. I decided to experience it myself," Lucas said.

Blindfolded, he spun around his home until he lost his sense of direction and attempted to find the Christmas tree.

What should have been a simple task took him 45 minutes. He walked into walls, crouched to feel whether he was standing on carpet or hardwood and listened for familiar sounds like the refrigerator or a ceiling fan to guide him. At one point he grabbed what he thought would be a helpful cane, only to discover later it was a model Santa Claus.

More lasting than the disorientation was the empathy he felt for experiencing life through someone else's lens.

"I was frightened of hurting myself or breaking something. I felt frustrated, and at several points, I wanted to give up entirely."

That experience transformed Lucas's science project into something more personal.

Even though more than 7 million Americans are visually impaired – including nearly 6.8 percent of children under 18 – Lucas' research found that most assistive tools are designed for adults.

"I realized that what I had felt for 45 minutes in a familiar environment is what millions of visually-impaired children experience every single day," he said. "I wanted to do something about it."

Lucas designed and engineered his A Eyes glasses using a Raspberry Pi Zero 2 microcomputer, a wide-angle camera, a portable battery pack, and a Bluetooth earpiece that delivers spoken alerts about nearby obstacles. The components are mounted on custom 3D-printed frames designed to resemble glasses.

Harmony School of Excellence-Austin's first all-female drone team is taking flight and earning awards along the way.

Photo Credit: Allen Reid

Using Python coding and computer vision programming, Lucas built a system that detects objects in real time and converts that information into spoken guidance for the wearer.

To test his idea, Lucas recruited three student volunteers to complete an obstacle course under four conditions: blindfolded with no assistive device, blindfolded with a cane, blindfolded with AI-powered glasses, and fully sighted.

The results showed clear improvements when participants used the A Eyes system. Volunteers reported being 62 percent more confident using the glasses compared with having no device and 37 percent more confident compared with using a cane.

"During the experiment, the participants were unable to identify the objects in the obstacle course when blindfolded using no device at all, and also when using a cane," Lucas said.

"However, the participants were able to identify the objects in the obstacle course when using my system. This shows that my system helped them understand their surroundings, increasing their confidence level."

Lucas is already working to improve the device by exploring brain-computer interface technology using EEG sensors.

"What I have learned through this process is that you do not need to be an adult, a professional, or an expert to work on a problem that matters," said the young innovator. "You just have to care enough to keep going."

For other Harmony students, competition appears in a very different form, but requires the same discipline and determination.

When the word "corbeau" echoed across the auditorium, Ridhaan B. paused briefly before spelling each letter with steady confidence.

Twelve rounds into regional competition, the fifth grader from Harmony School of Innovation-Euless had done exactly what he had trained himself to do: remain calm and trust his preparation.

Ridhaan has earned recognition as a National Math Stars Pathfinder and claimed a Fort Worth regional champion title at the Scripps National Spelling Bee, advancing to compete on the national stage.

Yet the awards tell only part of his story.

Back in his classroom at HSI-Euless, Ridhaan is rarely without a challenge in front of him. After finishing assignments, he often pulls an advanced math book from his backpack and works through problems designed for older students.

During lunch or recess, he reviews unfamiliar words and studies their linguistic origins. For Ridhaan, competition is not about the spotlight. It is a daily habit of curiosity.

For math competitions, he studies higher-level concepts and practices solving problems multiple ways. For spelling, he studies word patterns and language roots to understand why words are spelled the way they are.

"I feel some pressure, but I trust my preparation," he said.

That preparation was tested during an online math contest disrupted by technical issues that limited his practice time. Even then, he answered most questions confidently and walked away with a lesson about adapting to unexpected challenges.

Teachers recognized his academic curiosity early. As a young student he was promoted midyear after demonstrating readiness for advanced coursework.

Kristin Parks, campus instructional coach, says his mindset stands out.

"Ridhaan actively seeks out challenges and enjoys digging deeper to understand complex problems," she said. "His success reflects Harmony's culture of challenging and supporting students to reach their full potential."

At home, preparation remains structured but balanced. His father Ravi Sharma encourages steady effort while keeping pressure in perspective.

"Every test is a treasure hunt," Sharma said. "It helps discover his true interests."

Through Math Olympiad and other competitions, Ridhaan has also grown more collaborative and confident sharing his ideas with teammates.

He dreams of studying at institutions such as Harvard or MIT and hopes to pursue innovative work that solves meaningful problems.

For other Harmony scholars, competition unfolds in the sky.

Female students at Harmony School of Excellence–Austin are taking flight in a field where women remain underrepresented. They compete on the Flying Chihuahuas and Rotor Monkeys while launching The Pixie Pilots, the campus's first all-female drone team.

Together, these aspiring pilots are charting a new course in aviation and emerging technology.

Women made up about 8.4 percent of certified remote drone pilots in the United States in 2024, according to industry data reported by The Drone Girl. While the percentage has increased over the past decade, the field remains largely male-dominated.

At HSE-Austin, that narrative is changing.

Since debuting in 2022 with just a handful of students, the drone program has earned 16 awards across regional competitions and national championships.

The Pixie Pilots recently earned the Coding Award, recognizing teams that demonstrate strong programming skills and document multiple iterations while developing solutions.

Coaches Rebecca Tims and Joshua Gandara described this year as a major milestone for the program, noting that what began with just four female students in its inaugural season has grown into a strong pipeline of competitors who now take on leadership roles in coding, flying and mentoring others.

For the student pilots, competition offers both technical growth and personal confidence.

Camila S. joined the team to challenge herself and expand her STEM experience. Chelsea R. discovered her interest in drone technology through a University of Texas program and now plans to pursue neuroscience and a career in neurology.

Freshman Heidi, along with teammates Lara T., Nataly, and Ximena S. were drawn to the program through their interest in engineering and STEM pathways.

Nataly said watching her brother compete on the drone team encouraged her to try it herself.

"The importance of increasing female representation in STEM boils down to innovation and accuracy," Camila said. "When the people designing our world represent only half the population, we end up with blind spots."

Competitions require teams to demonstrate multiple skills, including autonomous flight programming, teamwork missions, piloting precision, and presentations to judges.

"It's not just about picking up a controller. It's about who you pick up the controller with."

Photo Credit: Allen Reid

A Harmony School of Innovation-Fort Worth eSports team member competes in tournament play.

Students are now preparing for the Regional Championship in Frisco, Texas, where teams must qualify through top awards before receiving an invitation to compete.

"Through drones, I've been able to learn skills like coding and piloting, while also developing important skills like problem-solving and communication that will help me in the future," Lara said.

Beyond competitions, the program is creating a pipeline of young women entering STEM fields and leadership roles.

Across Harmony campuses, competition also creates opportunities for students to build community.

At Harmony School of Innovation-Fort Worth, the esports program has quickly established itself as one of the most exciting new arenas for student competition.

By the time the final match ended at a recent tournament, Jaylen R. had accomplished something rare: he finished undefeated.

For the senior and team captain, the victory represented more than a personal milestone.

Behind the program's growth is coach Angel Jumper.

"Esports is one of the most challenging sports high school athletes participate in," Jumper said. "These athletes are earning scholarship offers from outstanding universities."

Competition at Harmony also extends beyond traditional athletics and academics.

At Harmony School of Innovation-Fort Worth, the Special Olympics Unified Champion School program is transforming opportunities for students of all abilities.

This spring, the Unified basketball team earned second place at a tournament in Arlington. The program has also competed in robotics, golf, bowling and volleyball.

Coach Erin Bollinger says the change in student engagement has been remarkable.

"When the Special Olympics program was started, my students were self-contained in the Life Skills room all day with little interaction with peers," Bollinger said. "Now they are out interacting regularly and feeling like they are part of the school."

"...I feel like we've built a really big community here..."

"This accomplishment is just one stepping stone for HSI-FW's esports team," he said. "Winning that tournament undefeated was a surreal experience that makes me want to strive further to push not just myself as a player but my teammates as well."

In its first year, HSI's esports teams have already qualified for the Texas Undisputed State Championship.

Yet players say the program's greatest impact is the community it created.

"A lot of us didn't even know each other before esports," Jaylen said. "Now I feel like we've built a really big community here at HSI."

Teammate Aaron A. agreed.

"It's not just about picking up a controller. It's about who you pick up the controller with," he said.

The team's success has already opened doors at the collegiate level. Jaylen received an $8,000 annual scholarship offer from Texas A&M University-Texarkana along with offers from UT-Arlington and UT-Dallas.

Senior Troy R. has embraced the experience and his father Scott Ross rarely misses a competition.

"This is a bittersweet time," he said. "I think he loves it, and I think he's going to miss it."

According to Special Olympics Texas, 84 percent of students in Unified programs say participation is a turning point in their lives.

At HSI-Fort Worth, that transformation is visible in classrooms, hallways and on the court.

"There are other teams who have been participating for years," Bollinger said. "I am very proud of all of my athletes."

Across science fairs, spelling bees, esports arenas, drone competitions and Unified athletic programs, Harmony scholars continue to test their abilities and discover new strengths.

Competition, they say, is not only about winning. It is about preparation, teamwork, perseverance, and the confidence to take on challenges that matter.

And for these students, the next challenge is already waiting.

Photo Credit: Allen Reid

Members of Harmony School of Innovation-Fort Worth's Special Olympics Unified Champion School program bring teamwork, energy, and joy to the court.

Harmony Science Academy-Katy student ambassadors step into leadership roles as they guide Texas Education Commissioner Mike Morath on a tour of their campus.

Photo Credit: Allen Reid

THE FACE OF STUDENT AMBASSADORS

Welcoming, Leading and Representing Harmony Across Texas

Contributors: Ajdina Selimovic, Tracie Seed, Brittany Lehning, Megan Garrison

When an international delegate from South Africa walked onto the campus of Harmony Science Academy–Pflugerville, senior Silas D. didn't just offer a handshake. He offered a story — one that began in a classroom where he once sat and now proudly showcases as a Harmony Student Ambassador.

With only days to prepare, Silas led the tour, fielded questions and highlighted the programs that shaped his own journey. By the end of the visit, he wasn't just representing his school — he was representing the possibilities Harmony Public Schools creates for students across Texas.

For Silas and others like him at HPS campuses across Texas, this is the purpose of the Harmony Student Ambassador Program: to empower students to serve as the voice, presence and promise of their campuses.

Student Ambassadors are highly responsible student leaders selected for their character, communication skills, academic integrity and dedication to their campus communities. The program strengthens campus-community relations while equipping students with real-world leadership skills that prepare them for college, careers and civic engagement.

The Harmony Student Ambassador Program is not just about giving tours. It is about growing leaders, building confidence and celebrating what makes each campus across Texas special.

"I enjoy spreading the word about the great things the school that I have attended for the past five years has to offer," Silas said. "I have experienced so much at Harmony through clubs, sports and the Early College High School program, and I love sharing it with others."

Being a student ambassador is about more than academic success. For Silas, building relationships across campus is just as important.

He values having friends from many different groups across campus and takes pride in serving as a role model — someone other students can look to for help and guidance.

"Silas embodies what we hope every Harmony student becomes," Principal Sabri Unal said. "He leads with integrity, compassion and a commitment to excellence. Whether he is guiding a campus tour or excelling in the classroom, he reflects the strength of our Early College High School program and the culture of high expectations we strive to create for every student at HSA–Pflugerville."

For fifth grader Shruti D., representing Harmony School of Innovation–Euless, is about far more than leading a tour. As a Student Ambassador, she understands that every greeting at the front door and every conversation with a visiting family reflects the values of her campus.

During STEMFest, she guided community leaders through student project displays, highlighting Gifted and Talented exhibits, 3D printing designs and classroom STEM work. Visitors praised her professionalism and confidence as she answered questions and introduced them to her classmates' projects.

When welcoming families at Parent Academy and Newcomers Night, Shruti focuses on helping parents feel informed and comfortable. She shares details about academic programs, extracurricular opportunities and campus life so families leave with a clear understanding of what Harmony offers.

Her experiences in the Gifted and Talented Program and Math Olympiad also help her explain complex ideas to visitors.

"They learn how and why the concept works, not just how to do it," she said.

Counselor and Student Ambassador sponsor Kelli Stewart described Shruti as a natural representative who is always the first to volunteer. Principal Rasim Damirov added that she consistently leads by example, stepping in wherever support is needed.

At home, her father Sanjaya Dhakal has watched her confidence grow.

"When we have people over for dinner, you will always find Shruti opening the front door, greeting them and welcoming them," he said.

Her family chose Harmony six years ago for its focus on STEAM education and college readiness. Today, they see those opportunities reflected in Shruti's growing sense of responsibility and purpose.

For younger students who hope to become leaders, Shruti offers simple advice: keep up with your schoolwork, get involved in leadership activities and show Tiger Pride through tenacity, integrity, gratitude, empathy and responsibility.

"Being a student ambassador has given me the foundation for showing leadership and serving others," she said.

At Harmony School of Innovation–Euless, Shruti represents what the Student Ambassador Program is designed to build: a student who leads with confidence, serves with intention and reflects Harmony's mission in everyday moments.

Students like Joshua B. and Ahmed S. in Brownsville show how that leadership journey continues to grow across grade levels.

Joshua, a fourth grader at Harmony Science Academy–Brownsville, and Ahmed, a twelfth grader at Harmony School of Innovation–Brownsville, represent two stages of the same journey — one that is just beginning and one preparing for what comes next.

For Joshua, becoming a student ambassador was a natural step.

"I became a student ambassador because I love representing my school and my fellow classmates," he said. "My school encourages me to be a leader, and being a student ambassador helps me accomplish that."

Joshua defines leadership in simple but powerful terms.

"Leadership is being a role model to students at my school. Being a role model is easy because my school encourages me to be kind, thoughtful and courageous."

Harmony Science Academy-Pflugerville senior and student ambassador Silas D. engages with campus visitors as part of the student ambassador program.

Photo Credit: Allen Reid

Harmony Science Academy-Katy Middle School student ambassadors are ready to greet, guide, and proudly represent their campus with confidence and heart.

Photo credit: Allen Reid

When prospective families visit campus, Joshua highlights the opportunities available at Harmony, from robotics and drone club to STEM classes and more. Through the experience, he has strengthened his ability to communicate his ideas clearly.

"Being a student ambassador has helped me be better at communicating my ideas to others. This helps me in the classroom, too," he explained.

a welcoming space where peers work together through challenges."

When speaking with prospective families, Ahmed prioritizes honesty and authenticity, sharing a genuine perspective on student life at Harmony.

Through organizing National Honor Society events and preparing for FIRST Tech Challenge competitions, Ahmed has strengthened his collaboration skills.

"...I know that wherever I end up, I can work with people on all sorts of tasks..."

Serving in the role has also strengthened his confidence.

"It has given me skills I need to improve myself. I am more confident representing myself to friends, family and strangers."

For Ahmed, a senior at HSI–Brownsville, the ambassador role has helped refine leadership skills he has developed over many years.

"I chose to take on this role as a student ambassador because of the opportunities that have allowed me to gain public speaking and leadership experience," Ahmed said. "I intend to use this valuable experience to help create more opportunities for prospective student ambassadors."

Ahmed believes leadership carries responsibility.

"To me, leadership means taking on the important responsibility of guidance. A leader is someone who creates

"One of the most important skills I have gained has been efficient collaboration," he shared.

Looking ahead to college and beyond, Ahmed feels ready to take the lessons he has learned even further.

"Through my experiences, I know that wherever I end up, I can work with people on all sorts of tasks and make sure there is a warm, welcoming environment for everyone."

From elementary classrooms to high school graduation stages, Harmony Student Ambassadors show that leadership is a journey that grows with every experience. And as they carry those lessons into college, careers and communities across the globe, they continue to represent the very best of Harmony — not just at the front door, but wherever life leads.

The Gonzalez Family

Photo Credit: Harmony School of Science-San Antonio

THE FACE OF FAMILY PARTNERSHIP

How Harmony Engages the Entire Family

Contributors: Brittany Lehning, Megan Garrison, Dani Marquez

On any given day across Harmony Public Schools, the story of student success does not begin and end in the classroom. It extends into homes, conversations at kitchen tables, early morning routines and the steady presence of families who choose to stay involved every step of the way.

These are the faces that often go unseen but are essential to every student's journey. Parents, siblings and caregivers who show up, communicate, encourage and partner with educators to create something stronger than either could build alone.

At Harmony, success is not a one-sided effort. It is a shared commitment. And in many cases, it looks like a family.

At Harmony Science Academy–Fort Worth Middle, that partnership is easy to see. On any given afternoon, it is not unusual to find the Armand family walking the halls together.

Sometimes they are attending a Coffee Chat. Sometimes they are volunteering during Appreciation Week. Other times they are simply present, checking in with teachers or supporting an event. Staff members know them by name. Students recognize them too. Their involvement has become part of the culture of the campus.

For Danilo and Reynisha Armand, partnership is not an occasional act. It is a commitment that began when their oldest son enrolled in Kindergarten. Now a high school senior, he has grown up within the Harmony community. His younger sister, Damaris, now follows in his footsteps.

"We love our Harmony community," Reynisha said. "We try to be supportive of the staff and their needs whenever possible. We recognize that Harmony staff truly care about the success of our children."

That recognition has built trust.

Campus leaders describe the family as enthusiastic and dependable. Danilo is known for stepping in wherever help is needed, from taking photos at events to supporting volunteer efforts. Reynisha has remained active in PTO and parent engagement meetings. Their son attends middle school events to cheer on his sister. They show up together.

Their partnership is rooted in communication.

"We are present," Reynisha said. "I realized early on that communication is key and the child's success is based on positive support inside and outside of the classroom."

That communication has made a measurable difference.

When Damaris faced behavioral challenges last year, teachers chose to reach out rather than allow the situation to escalate. Together, the family and campus made intentional adjustments and reinforced expectations at home and at school. Improvement followed quickly.

That same collaboration has shaped academic growth. Reynisha recalls requesting a specific math teacher for her son in elementary school, knowing the rigor would push him. The result was mastery of the subject and a confidence that still influences his decision to pursue business finance in college. Today, he has been accepted into his first-choice university and manages deadlines independently, often with guidance from counselors who know him well.

Confidence has flourished for Damaris as well. Once shy about speaking publicly, she now volunteers to lead, a growth her mother credits in part to strong classroom expectations and encouragement. At home, that confidence shows up in unexpected ways.

"We are present. I realized early on that communication is key, and the child's success is based on positive support inside and outside of the classroom."

"They always buy me what I need to do my projects and help check my work," Damaris said. "I love that my mommy does PTO things."

For the Armand family, partnership is not a single action. It is a rhythm of consistency, communication and shared responsibility.

At Harmony School of Science–San Antonio, that same spirit of partnership takes shape in a different way.

For Ysela Gonzalez, her children's future is the driving force behind her partnership with the school.

"Getting to know their teachers and admin allows me to connect with them in a way that I create a supportive network to benefit their academic and personal goals," she said. "We collaborate together on how we can make the school a better place for all students."

A dedicated parent, Gonzalez has built strong relationships with teachers and administrators, creating a network of support that extends beyond her own family. From coaching sports to serving as PTO president, her involvement keeps her connected to students and families across campus.

Her commitment has not gone unnoticed. Gonzalez was named a 2025 Heroes for Children award recipient by the Texas State Board of Education, recognizing her dedication to student success and family engagement.

That dedication is reflected in her children.

Viviana, Madelyn and Salvador have all demonstrated strong academic growth. Viviana progressed from earning C plus grades to achieving A and B Honor Roll status and recently mastered a STAAR exam. Madelyn and Salvador have also excelled academically, each mastering their STAAR exams. Beyond grades, all three have grown more confident and willing to try new opportunities both inside and outside of school.

For Gonzalez's children, school feels personal.

"I like it a lot. Seeing my mom around campus and at all the events makes it feel like I'm cared about and what I do matters," Viviana said.

At home, Gonzalez reinforces that support by helping with schoolwork and creating additional learning opportunities to deepen classroom understanding. Her involvement reflects how family engagement can extend learning beyond the classroom and strengthen both academic and personal development.

That same commitment to partnership is visible at Harmony School of Innovation–Grand Prairie, where another family has made its presence felt across campus.

On any given week, it is not unusual to see Ralisha and John Thomas walking the halls of the school, greeting teachers by name and settling into seats at campus events. Their involvement is not occasional. It is woven into the rhythm of the school year. For them, school is not a place their daughters attend. It is a community they actively help build.

The Thomas family has been part of the Harmony community for five years. They were drawn to the school's STEM focus and close-knit environment, hoping for strong

Photo Credit: Natalie Brown McGensey

Photo Credit: Thomas Family

Photo Credit: Natalie Brown McGensey

Photo Credit: Japhia Venerable & Family

Photo Credit: Japhia Venerable & Family

academics paired with meaningful relationships. What they found was a partnership.

"We have a really good close relationship with bidirectional communication," Ralisha said. "I feel like my children are supported, cared for, and I feel comfortable being integrated in school activities."

That comfort has translated into leadership. Ralisha now serves as PTO president and has remained deeply involved since the family joined the campus. The family attends conferences, supports events and maintains consistent communication with teachers. If concerns arise, they address them early. If goals are set, they reinforce them at home.

Campus leaders say that collaboration has made a measurable difference. By practicing skills at home, reviewing teacher feedback and reinforcing expectations for behavior and perseverance, the Thomases have helped their daughters grow academically and personally. Their children feel confident seeking guidance from teachers and administrators and have developed relationships that will last well beyond their years at Harmony.

For their daughter Jiselle, the impact feels personal.

"They encourage me. Mom studies with me. They are always there," she said. "They show up for everything and cheer me on."

Jiselle said having her family involved means they understand her teachers, her classes and the rhythm of campus life.

"They know what's going on," she said. "They bond with our teachers and have a great rapport."

The Thomases believe presence matters. In their words, children remember who showed up. By staying engaged and working alongside educators, they have helped create a cohesive plan for their daughters' success.

The result is more than strong grades. It is a sense of ownership. Jiselle dreams of becoming an actress and is already exploring that passion through theater arts. Her family and her school work side by side to nurture that goal, encouraging curiosity while building the academic foundation she will need for the future.

At Harmony Science Academy–Odessa, that same connection between home and school is woven into everyday life for the Venerable family. For them, Harmony is not just where their children attend school. It is the community helping them grow.

Second-grade twins Elijah and Jesiah approach school with curiosity, discipline and a genuine enthusiasm for learning. Whether working to meet and exceed their MAP and mCLASS goals or exploring new books, their dedication continues to stand out.

Their mother, Japhia Venerable, brings a unique perspective as both a parent and an educator on campus, where she was recently honored as Campus Teacher of the Year.

"Sometimes my husband and I just have to laugh," she shared. "Before their MAP tests, they actually set their own alarms to wake up early and review. They're in second grade, but they prepare like they're heading into college finals!"

At home, the family reinforces responsibility and consistency through a point system that rewards effort, good habits and accountability. The boys earn points for completing tasks and demonstrating responsibility, helping them understand the value of discipline while staying motivated.

Harmony's support has further strengthened their growth. Through the Gifted and Talented program, supportive teachers and leadership opportunities, Elijah and Jesiah have been encouraged to challenge themselves and build confidence.

One of their most memorable experiences has been serving as the campus's youngest morning announcers, a role that allowed them to develop leadership skills and take pride in representing their school.

For the Venerable family, success is not defined only by grades or recognition. It is found in the small, meaningful moments at home, the lessons in humility and gratitude, and the shared commitment between family and school.

Together, that partnership continues to shape how Elijah and Jesiah learn, lead and grow.

Across Harmony Public Schools, stories like these reflect a common truth. Student success is strongest when it is shared.

Families who communicate, participate and remain present help create an environment where students feel supported, challenged and confident in their ability to succeed.

Whether it is a family walking the halls together, a parent building connections across campus or a household reinforcing learning at home, each partnership adds strength to the community.

At Harmony, partnership has a face.

Sometimes, it looks like a family showing up together.

THE FACES OF EXCELLENCE

Inside Harmony's Lone Star Ribbon Schools

Contributors:
Klarrissa Rios,
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Harmony Science Academy-Euless senior Lisa Kerich leads the Lone Star Ribbon Ceremony in a performance of the National Anthem.

Photo Credit: Brittany Lehning

When the announcement came that several Harmony campuses had earned the prestigious Lone Star Ribbon designation, it marked a proud moment for the educators, students, and families who helped make it possible.

Established by Governor Greg Abbott in 2025, the Lone Star Ribbon Award is one of the Texas Education Agency's most prestigious recognitions, honoring campuses that demonstrate exceptional academic achievement, strong instructional practices, and a sustained commitment to student success. Often described as the crown jewel of achievement in public education, the recognition reflects years of commitment to academic excellence.

Harmony Houston South and West districts now have three campuses that share the Lone Star Ribbon distinction. Harmony Science Academy–Sugar Land and Harmony Science Academy–Katy, which includes both an elementary and middle school, were named Lone Star Ribbon Award winners in the program's inaugural year.

The recognition followed five years of focused work by educators and administrators dedicated to building a culture of strong instruction, accountability, and achievement.

While teachers and staff immediately understood the significance of the honor, many students only fully grasped its importance once they learned what the award represented and how their daily experiences in the classroom contributed to earning it.

Isha G., a seventh grader at Harmony Science Academy–Katy Middle School, had the unique opportunity to speak with TEA Commissioner Mike Morath during his visit in October. She says it was not until then that she fully understood the significance of the recognition.

"Once I realized what it represented, I felt proud because I knew our school truly deserved it. We worked hard as a community, and earning that recognition made all of our effort feel meaningful," said Isha.

For many students, the award simply confirmed what they already felt about their classrooms.

Zoha I., a sixth grader at Harmony Science Academy–Katy Middle School, says the recognition reflects the way teachers approach learning each day.

"My teachers ask questions that make us think deeper about what we're learning. They want us to succeed and make sure we understand the lesson before moving on."

Students say that sense of excellence begins with structure and shared expectations.

Isha explains that one of the biggest influences on campus culture is the school's core values, which guide how students, teachers and staff interact.

"They remind us of what is expected and help create a strong, unified environment that contributed to earning the Lone Star Ribbon," she said.

Students like seventh grader Aarish V. say that the environment makes learning both challenging and welcoming.

He attributes his success to teachers who challenge students academically while encouraging them along the way.

"There are lots of different kinds of people, and everyone brings their own ideas, which makes class more interesting. It feels like a place where you can be yourself and still learn a lot," said Aarish.

Photo Credit: Brittany Lehning

Harmony Public Schools North Texas Elementary Superintendent Serena Jackson and Secondary Superintendent Harun Karan are pictured with the Lone Star Ribbon Award, reflecting their leadership and dedication to advancing student achievement across the region.

Isha adds that the school culture helps students stay focused and supported.

"This culture has helped me achieve success because it pushes me to become a better version of myself," she added.

Clear routines and consistent expectations also play an important role. Teachers monitor progress closely and provide opportunities for students to catch up if they fall behind, reinforcing accountability while ensuring students remain on track academically.

Beyond the classroom, students continue building leadership skills through extracurricular activities and campus organizations.

Zoha is an active member of the Student Council and says the experience has helped her grow in confidence and responsibility.

"I learned how to plan events, listen to other students' ideas, and work as a team. It also helped me think more about leadership and responsibility. I feel like it has made me more confident and better at solving problems."

Students also encourage one another, creating a culture of shared motivation.

"When someone does something well, people notice and congratulate them, which makes everyone want to try harder," said Aarish.

Harmony's strong STEM programs also play a role in shaping student growth. Students regularly apply what they learn in class through extracurricular programs and hands-on activities.

Zoha says those opportunities have a lasting impact.

"STEM activities and events like our STEAM festival help students solve problems and think creatively. These experiences make school more enjoyable and help us grow as learners and individuals."

While classrooms and student leadership help define the Lone Star Ribbon culture, the same spirit can be seen across Harmony campuses.

Walk the halls of Harmony Science Academy–Euless, and it quickly becomes clear that excellence is not an occasional accomplishment. It is something built daily through the combined efforts of students, educators and families.

That culture is what led the campus to earn the 2025 Lone Star Ribbon designation.

Inside the classroom of Hatice Karaca Karabulut, known across campus as Mrs. Derya, the structure behind that success is easy to see. As the campus Chemistry, AP Chemistry and AP Environmental Science teacher and Engagement Coordinator, she designs lessons that encourage discussion and active participation.

"We try to keep instruction interactive," Derya explained. "We constantly focus discussions on the students, encouraging them to ask questions and even directing questions back to other students. It builds connection, confidence, and participation."

Her lab tables are designed for collaborative learning, where students solve problems together.

"I like matching students strategically," she said. "When high achievers help at the tables, it increases their sense of responsibility. You may not believe how effectively they explain concepts to each other. Sometimes they can explain it faster than I can, because students use language and terminology that feels familiar to them and makes the concepts easier to understand."

Equally important is the supportive environment she maintains.

"If a student answers incorrectly, no one shames them," Derya shared. "It's very normal not to know something. We encourage them to share what they know without being afraid."

us with applications. It's comforting to know we can always contact them for support."

Students say that support continues even after graduation through mentorship programs that connect alumni with graduates beginning college.

"College can be stressful," one senior explained. "Knowing we're not going alone and that there are people who've done this before and want to help us makes a huge difference."

For Abrahim N., a student innovator who recently secured his own patent and plans to pursue biomedical engineering, the campus culture is rooted in collaboration.

"It's building a family rather than just people trying to get to the next level," he said. "We're doing it together."

He also credits a middle school counselor who helped him stay on track academically.

"If he didn't help me through that, I probably wouldn't be where I am today," he said.

For Eric P., this year's valedictorian, the path to success came through steady effort.

"To be honest, I didn't think I was going to be valedictorian," Eric said. "I just wanted to give everything my best."

Eric plans to attend The University of Texas to study kinesiology and credits both his family and Harmony's pathway programs for helping him reach that goal.

"All my siblings attended HSA–Euless," he said. "They've been a great support system."

"It's building a family rather than just people trying to get to the next level. We're doing it together."

She also emphasizes skills that prepare students for college.

"Students need to learn how to listen and write at the same time. These are skills they will need in college."

Peer-driven support extends beyond the classroom.

"Our Key Club organizes STAAR boot camps where high school students tutor middle school students," Derya said. "It's student-led, and they've built a strong structure over the years. They really take ownership."

Leadership opportunities continue through competitions and student organizations, including VEX Robotics, TSA, HOSA and debate.

Yet when students describe what makes their school special, many begin with something simpler: Community.

"I think the community that we have is what makes our school special," said senior Ion Bran, who plans to major in biochemistry on his path to becoming a dermatologist. "We can talk to our teachers about anything, even things outside of school. Because we're a smaller school, we're able to connect with one another a lot better."

Senior Lillian I., who plans to major in neuroscience and serves as president of the campus Honor Society, says support from educators makes a significant difference.

"Our teachers and counselors are very intentional," she said. "They reach out with scholarship opportunities and help

He also highlighted the value of the school's academic pathways.

"A lot of other schools don't have the opportunity to build a foundation like this," Eric explained. "Here we have biomedical science, engineering, computer science, and business. We're even able to earn certifications our senior year. That foundation will really help in college."

Students also speak warmly about the relationships they build with teachers. Educators celebrate birthdays, check in when someone is absent and create moments that help students feel valued.

One student fondly recalled campus Dean of College and Career Mustafa Karabulut grilling for students during lunchtime. The simple gesture created a moment where students could gather, connect and feel part of a community.

The Lone Star Ribbon designation reflects measurable excellence. But at Harmony campuses, students say the award represents something even deeper.

It lives in classrooms where students help one another succeed, in educators who invest deeply in their students and in a community that treats success as a shared responsibility.

It is not simply a recognition of performance. It is a reflection of the culture that makes excellence possible.

Unseen Faces of Harmony

Behind every thriving Harmony school is a team of dedicated professionals whose work often happens quietly behind the scenes. From health aides and nutrition staff to office teams and campus support roles, these unseen faces help create the safe, welcoming environments where students can learn and grow. Their daily care, consistency and commitment are essential to the Harmony experience. Here are just a few of the many faces that help make every student's success possible.

Cecilia Castillo
HSI-Garland, Health Aide
Cecilia Castillo has served Harmony students for nine years, first at Harmony Science Academy-Dallas and now at Harmony School of Innovation-Garland. As a Health Aide, she provides far more than medical care, offering students a trusted space for support, encouragement and reassurance. Known for her positive spirit and favorite phrase, "We got this," Castillo regularly assists across campus, from the clinic to the front office and cafeteria. Through compassion and dedication, she helps create the caring environment that allows Harmony scholars to feel supported and ready to succeed.

Wendy Mendoza
HSA-Dallas High, CNA
Wendy Mendoza has served as a Child Nutrition Assistant at Harmony Science Academy-Dallas for two years, helping ensure students start their day with healthy meals and a welcoming presence. With a background in the food industry and aspirations to pursue a career in education, she values the opportunity to learn more about the school environment while supporting students each day. Known for her teamwork and dedication, Mendoza plays an important role in the daily rhythm of campus life. She finds the greatest reward in watching students grow and knowing she contributes to their success.

Iris Gonzalez
HSI-Austin, Health Aide
Iris Gonzalez has served as the Health Aide at Harmony School of Innovation-Austin for six years, where she supports students' health and well-being each day. Motivated by a strong desire to help others, she works to ensure students feel safe, cared for and ready to learn. Principal Michelle Hanvey says Gonzalez has made an incredible impact since joining the campus in 2019, maintaining high standards of care while also helping connect families with community resources. In addition to her work at Harmony, Gonzalez also works part time at a hospital, bringing valuable patient care experience back to support the students she serves.

Iliana Frausto
HSI-Austin, Attendance Clerk
Iliana Frausto has served as the Attendance Clerk at Harmony School of Innovation for four years, where she helps families and staff understand the critical role attendance plays in student success. What began as a job quickly became a passion for supporting students and strengthening her school community. Principal Michelle Hanvey says Frausto consistently demonstrates a strong work ethic while mentoring colleagues and helping others succeed in their roles. Known for her dedication and positivity, Frausto takes pride in making a meaningful difference for students, families and the campus each day.

Fulgencio Morales
HSE-Houston, Custodian
Fulgencio "Mr. Kuke" Morales has served as a custodian at Harmony School of Exploration-Houston for 11 years, helping ensure the campus is safe, clean and welcoming for students and staff. Known for his reliability and strong work ethic, he previously served at Harmony School of Fine Arts and Technology and the district office before joining the Exploration campus. Principal Dr. Gemma Olson says Morales is a trusted and valued member of the team who responds quickly to campus needs. Though much of his work happens behind the scenes, his dedication plays an essential role in supporting the Harmony community.

Chanel Wilson
HSI-Houston, CNA
Chanel Wilson has served as a Child Nutrition Assistant at Harmony School of Innovation–Houston for nearly four years, helping ensure students have consistent access to healthy meals. She believes nutrition is foundational to student success and takes pride in creating a welcoming cafeteria environment. In addition to daily meal service, Wilson supports campus operations, food distributions and family engagement initiatives. She says working at Harmony has allowed her to grow as both a leader and a servant of the community while supporting the whole child academically, emotionally and physically.

Noemi Fraide
HSA-Grand Prairie, Custodian

Noemi Fraide has faithfully served HSA–Grand Prairie for 11 years, beginning each day before sunrise to ensure a clean, safe campus. From preparing the cafeteria and playground to helping younger students at lunch, she approaches every task with pride and care. Known for always carrying tools to fix what is broken and stepping in wherever help is needed, she models responsibility and consistency for students. Through quiet dedication and kindness, she helps create the welcoming environment where learning can flourish.

Alexander Guardado
HSA-Plano, Security Officer

Alexander Guardado, known across campus as "Mr. Alex," serves as the security officer at Harmony Science Academy–Plano and is often the first face students see each morning. In his first year on campus, he has become a trusted presence, helping students feel safe, supported and welcome. Through steady leadership and genuine care, he helps create the safe and welcoming environment students rely on every day.

Erica Holguin
HSS-El Paso Middle High
Health Aide & Cheer Coach

Erica Holguin has been a dedicated member of Harmony since 2016, serving in roles including Health Aide, Attendance Specialist and Cheer Coach for middle and high school students. She has supported campuses at Harmony School of Innovation, Harmony School of Science Elementary and Harmony School of Science–El Paso Middle High, where she currently serves. Known for her reliability and positive attitude, Holguin works closely with students, parents and staff to support student success. Her willingness to step in and help wherever needed makes her a valued member of the Harmony community.

Sandra Amaya
West Texas District
Operations Manager

Sandra Amaya serves as the West Texas District Operations Manager and brings nine years of experience in education. Currently pursuing her MBA, she is committed to supporting student success while driving efficient and impactful operations. Amaya is passionate about expanding access to high-quality STEM education and fostering a safe, inclusive, and multicultural environment. She values the strong sense of community among staff and families and enjoys spending time with loved ones, running, hiking and going to the movies.

Jessica Alegria
HSA-San Antonio,
Attendance Clerk

Jessica Alegria has spent the past five years helping make the environment at Harmony Science Academy–San Antonio feel like a second home. As both an Attendance Clerk and parent of four—including two Harmony students—she is passionate about building meaningful connections and ensuring every scholar feels welcomed, supported, and ready to learn.

Jennifer Balderas
HSE-Elyson Elementary,
Registrar

Jennifer Balderas has dedicated 20 years to Harmony, serving at three campuses in multiple roles along the way. She values opportunity to build meaningful relationships, often being the first point of contact for families and creating a welcoming bridge into the school community. Having been part of Harmony since its early days, Jennifer cherishes the strong, family-like community that celebrates differences, fosters respect, and creates lasting bonds that extend far beyond the classroom.

Irela Brito,
HSE-Houston North,
Health Aide

Irela Brito has spent 13 years caring for students and building trust within the school community. Her journey with Harmony began in 2006, and after time abroad in Chile, she returned in 2016 with the same passion for helping others. Inspired by her background as a medical assistant, Irela values being on the front lines of care—offering comfort, clear communication, and reassurance to both students and their families. Guided by a giving spirit and strong family support, Irela continues to grow in her field, always striving to provide the best care possible for every child she serves.

Liliana Flores
HSI-Laredo,
Child Nutrition Assistant

Liliana Flores has served as a Child Nutrition Assistant for two years, where she focuses on creating a welcoming and positive cafeteria experience for every student. She enjoys being part of the Harmony community and takes pride in helping students feel valued each day. Outside of work, she enjoys spending time with her family, playing board games and having movie nights with her sons.

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