

March 25, 2010

Trinity nominee helps autistic children 'GET SET' for life

A teacher described by her principal as a "modern day Anne Sullivan" has been selected by a District committee from several nominees to represent SAISD for the Trinity Prize for Excellence in Education, one of the Bexar County area's most prestigious honors.

"This analogy is fitting because by the time each child leaves Sarah Ford's classroom, they are totally different," described Smith ES principal Lianna Cano.

"Nominating her was without a doubt the easiest decision to make. I have never seen a more worthy candidate for this award in all my years in education."

Like Sullivan, known as "The Miracle Worker" for educating the acclaimed deafblind Helen Keller, Ford has made it her mission to improve the lives of special needs children.

The latest efforts in her 28-year teaching career began in 2008 when she and the Smith campus were selected to pioneer Gain Early Training to Support Effective Transition – whose GET SET acronym she coined.

Ford and SAISD Special Education Supervisor Donna Coyne also developed this 45-day diagnostic placement program open to autistic 3- and 4-year-olds Districtwide to prepare them for special education classes at their home campuses.

Most of the autistic children arrive at Ford's

classroom (which they share in an inclusion setting with pre-kinder students) functioning



Four-year-old Angel Terrazas uses pictures to show that he would like a book.

at a year- to 18-month-old age level, only able to communicate through temper tantrums, screams, and biting and kicking. They depart with better communication skills - able to express themselves through pictures, sign language and/or words – which helps to improve their behavior.

"Only the best (most miraculous) of teachers can accomplish this," her principal stated.

For Ford, it is a pure labor of love.

"Each child is a precious creation that is valued immensely in my classroom setting,"

she explained.

Among her keys to helping them succeed is through observing and supporting their individual learning styles.

Common, however, to autistic children is difficulty in social and new situations – a challenge they are overcoming in the shared classroom setting, thanks to the spirit of mutual respect Ford fosters. This benefits both groups.

"The pre-k children are better able to understand the children with autism, which in turns supports them in building relations based on peer understanding and more self-initiated interactions," Ford said.

To further ensure a smooth transition away from school, she also spends half days working on learning strategies with the parents of her autistic students in their homes.

"I have a deep fascination for the unique traits of my students and continue to this day to feel a deep commitment to serve the special needs population and their families and to truly make a difference in the lives of others," she said.

The Fort Worth native earned her bachelor's of education degree from North Texas State University, now UNT, and has also taught at SAISD's Japhet, Schenck and the former Burnet ES.

Technology upgrades and improvements enter next phase

Math and science lessons soon will be more engaging for students at all SAISD high schools, thanks to interactive whiteboards and video projectors being installed this week.

"Promethean, the company that sells the interactive white boards, has developed lots of interactive PowerPoint presentations that teachers will be able use for their lessons," said William Vinal, the District's senior director for science curriculum instruction.

"These presentations include interactive graphics and a student response system that will allow immediate feedback on how well the students understand the science concepts."

This technology already is being used in some SAISD schools including Longfellow, where it has enhanced both teaching and learning for 6th-grade math teacher Charlene Clark and her students.

"The ability to quickly pull up tools (such

as) an interactive protractor helps students understand math concepts," she said. Likewise, easy access to Web sites "quickly gives me the ability to provide many real-life examples of math concepts."

Clark also likes the professional look the whiteboards provide, and since they never need erasing like their chalk or dry erase board predecessors, she can instantly pull up a blank screen as needed.

They also help teachers prepare students for the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills exam through highlighting key words and phrases. But perhaps best of all:

"Students love using the technology, so they are more apt to volunteer to show their work on the board," Clark noted.

Installation at the high schools is the latest phase of the Districtwide technology refresh program that included 3,240 new Dell

computers that students at each school already are enjoying.

The upgrades were made possible by three-years of stringent budgeting, allowing SAISD to achieve a six-fold increase in funds available for technology purchases this year.



eBryIT, Inc. Project Manager John Belluomini tests the projector and interactive whiteboard just installed at Sam Houston HS.

One alum shares ingredients for success in and out of the kitchen ...

Take a dash of dedication, add a pinch of appreciation for good food and mix with an insatiable appetite for learning and the result is Jesse Perez's five-star recipe for reaching the



Jesse Perez instructs students in the fine art of preparing Seared Pineapple-Fresno Salsa.

top personally and professionally.

And fortunately for about 60 high school culinary arts students from his alma mater, Burbank, and from Sam Houston, Lanier, and Phoenix Middle College, these ingredients - along with tips on creating culinary masterpieces - are no secret. He shared both freely during March 8 private classes held at H-E-B Central Market.

While he comes from a family of great cooks, Perez didn't immediately recognize this as a career choice.

But the dream of being a professor changed while working in restaurants as a way to finance his college education.

"I just had an innate love for cooking," he said. "This was a great opportunity for me, and 12 years later I'm still doing it so I guess it was meant to be."

Perez attributes his Burbank teachers with

fostering his belief in himself, and encourages students to value their own potential and educational opportunities.

In addition to providing his sage advice, Perez also plans to sponsor a \$500 scholarship for SAISD culinary arts students, details TBD.

The dish on Jesse Perez

- **Education** - Burbank HS, class of 1994 and the University of Michigan with a bachelor's degree in ethnic and cultural history
- **Beginnings** - Consulting chef, Francesca's at Sunset San Antonio
- **Currently** - Executive chef, Fuego at Hotel Maya of Long Beach, CA.
- **Signature style** - Authentic coastal Latin American, with a modern twist
- **Pièce de résistance** - Named the Flavors of Passion 2010 Top U.S. Latino Chef

... while another's words of wisdom are literally out of this world!

A life's journey that includes multiple orbits around the Earth brought Bernard Harris back full circle to the place where it all began more than three decades ago.

"It was here that I put the final touches on my dreams of being an astronaut," he said before taking the stage as keynote speaker at the March 13 annual Friends of Sam Houston Breakfast.

Harris already had decided his life's aspiration prior to high school, and credits the math and science education he received at his alma mater with providing him the academic foundation to make his dream a reality - subjects he encourages today's students to embrace.

"No matter what you do in life, math and science will be involved. TVs, cell phones, computers, all of those come from technology.

"They came from someone's mind - someone who had enough education and knowledge to innovate and create this new technology.

"So I want to challenge the students here to be creators and innovators for the 21st century. And that requires education."

On board with Bernard Harris

- **Education** - Sam Houston HS, class of 1974 and the University of Houston; Texas Tech University School of Medicine; the Mayo Clinic; NASA Ames Research Center; the Brooks AFB Aerospace School of Medicine; and UT Medical School, Galveston
- **Highlights** - First African American to walk in space
- **Currently** - President of The Harris Foundation Inc., a non-profit organization he founded to assist America's youth in math and science education and crime prevention



School Board President James Howard greets Dr. Bernard Harris at the Friends of Sam Houston Breakfast, held annually to fund college scholarships.

Financial Forum

A look at the recent and current state of SAISD's fiscal situation

In this - part one of a two-part series - we mark our fiscal progress thus far as we enter the mid-way point of the 2009-10 school year's second semester.

General Fund

Results for 2008-09: superior.

Overview: We ended the school year with a \$9.9 million surplus, despite a \$2.5 million decline that can be attributed to lower enrollment. Our actual revenue was \$387.8 million compared to actual expenditures of \$377.9 million. This was \$12.1 million less than 2007-08, with the savings primarily due to school closures.

School nutrition fund

Results for 2008-09: superior.

Overview: The trend of sustaining losses in the millions of dollars over the past few years - including a deficit of \$3.4 million in 2007-08

- has been reversed. This can be attributed to new school nutrition fund administration and cafeteria staff Districtwide meeting the School Board's challenge to restore the fund to a positive fund balance.

However, operating revenue was \$4 million more than last year due to the increase in local collections caused by two factors: dropping Provision 2, under which school districts pay the difference between the cost of serving meals at no charge to all students and the federal reimbursement; and the implementation of the 100 percent breakfast program which feeds all students for free, regardless of ability to pay.

Debt service fund

Results for 2008-09: superior.

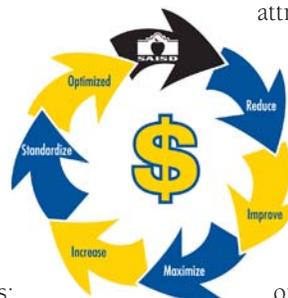
Overview: The fiscal year ended a \$2.3 million

surplus. Actual revenue was \$43.2 million, \$1.5 million less than last year. This variance is attributed to a combination of: reduced earnings from investments caused by lower interest rates; less state aid due to lower average daily attendance and; higher property values.

However, the latter was partially offset by \$2.1 million more in local tax collections. The resulting fund balance of \$43.1 million accounts for just over a year's worth of expenditures. This is a significant asset that will provide SAISD with the ability to lessen the impact of any potential tax rate increases resulting from future bond issues.

On the horizon

Using this information as a basis, in our next issue of Financial Forum we will attempt some predictions for the months ahead.



Courtesy photo



in the Spotlight

Pint-sized peacekeepers

Their success in the art of diplomacy earned Ogden ES Peer Mediation Program students (pictured with sponsor and school counselor Dan Zapata during the recognition ceremony at the downtown Grand Hyatt Hotel) the 2010 Peacemaker Award in the schools category from the San Antonio Bar Foundation. They were among recipients including Elf Louise, aka, Louise Locker, former Mayor Phil Hardberger and the Center for the Intrepid who were honored for their contributions to peacemaking efforts and for making a notable, positive difference in their communities.

Many happy returns!

District 7 Trustee Ed Garza presents Jefferson HS junior Donnie Dents with a certificate of recognition at the March 23 School Board meeting while assistant secretary and District 6 representative Olga Hernandez leads the applause. The kick returner was honored for his selection to the Texas Sports Writers Association 2009 All-State Football 4-A First Team.



Higher ed-bound 8th-graders

They may only be in middle school, but these exceptional students already have earned \$8,000 each in scholarships to the University of the Incarnate Word for their projects at the Alamo Regional Academy of Science and Engineering Fair. Pictured with the recipients are (**top right**) Harris Academy sponsor Roseanne Volpert (far left) and (far right) science teacher Javier DeHoyos; and Hawthorne Academy (**bottom right**) sponsor and school librarian Bonnye Cavazos (far right) and teacher Bob Pfeifer. **Pictured above**, Carlos Campos (left) and Jesus Gudino represent Whittier Academy.



Whittier Academy



Harris Academy



Hawthorne Academy

Courtesy photos



San Antonio Independent School District
141 Lavaca St.
San Antonio, TX 78210
phone: 554-2250
fax: 299-5790
www.saisd.net

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Leslie Price, Executive Director
René Lynn, Newsletter Coordinator
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Gustavo López, Design and Layout

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