

Parents As Partners

Educational Development Center

705 Trafalgar

San Antonio, TX 78216

(210)442-3700

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Save the Date

**6/26/21 Family Day
@Texas Autism
Conference (virtual)**

**First day of SY
2021-2022:**

8/16/21

Abigale McFarland

Abigale McFarland is a 5th grader at Cambridge Elementary who loves swimming, going down water slides, and riding roller coasters. She enjoys exploring the outdoors with her family where they hike, ride bikes and cook over a fire. The family has spent a lot of time exploring Texas state parks in their RV over the last year. Abigale loves animals; she's currently teaching her cat Charlie to catch and fetch! She also loves her family, especially her older sister Makenzie, a student at UTSA, whom she considers her best friend. Abigale happens to have Trisomy 21, most commonly known as Down syndrome.



Heather and Greg, Abigale's parents, chose Alamo Heights for Abigale because they wanted her to be in class with typically developing peers. Abigale moved to Cambridge at the start of her 3rd grade year and as Heather puts it, "she's been thriving ever since." Heather adds that she knew they'd chosen the right district when they were asked at their first ARD meeting what they wanted for Abigale. The McFarlands want what any parents want for their child: for her to have options when she's older. For the McFarlands, that means having Abigale fully included in every aspect of school. While at Cambridge, Abigale has had wonderful teachers who have helped her achieve success, but one person stands out above all - Mr. (Dexter) Bell. Heather says, "We have been truly blessed to have Mr. Bell work with her. He is absolutely the kindest, most caring aide".

Outside of school, Abigale has competed in gymnastics through Kinetic Kids and been active in the Down Syndrome Association of South Texas. Most recently, Abigale started playing baseball in the Challenger baseball team in AH Little League. She is a natural competitor and very enthusiastic about playing EVERY position!



At the center of everything is Abigale's family. She loves spending time with Makenzie, with regular visits and sleepovers where they play video games. Her grandparents moved from Nebraska to be closer and Grandpa Bob picks her up from school every day.

What's next for Abigale? Well, honestly, anything she sets her mind to! For now, Abigale, like most girls her age, craves independence, likes things her way, and is excited to be going to the Junior School next year, where she will be on the Gold cheer team.

Lori Aguero

Woodridge Resource Teacher

Lori Aguero joined the Woodridge team last year as a resource teacher. Lori has 17 years of experience as an educator, teaching nearly every elementary grade in San Angelo, Austin, and San Antonio. Lori's work eventually brought her to the San Antonio area, where she served as a Reading Coach in SAISD and eventually a District Instructional Coach in English Language Arts and Reading (ELAR) at Harlandale ISD. Lori says she's always known she wanted to be a teacher; she loved "playing school" as a young child.



Lori credits some great educators who influenced her. Over the last 4 years, Lori switched to working in special education. "As a general education teacher, I found the challenge of navigating different instructional practices to help all learners intriguing and rewarding, which led me to getting my certification in Special Education," says Lori. At Woodridge, Lori provides support primarily to several 5th grade students but also to other students in different grade levels. She uses her vast experience as a reading coach to provide pull out services and in class support. She collaborates with the general education teachers she helps support for learners who are struggling with reading and comprehension. Lori says her favorite part of her job is when she witnesses her student's "light bulb"

"there are more positives than negatives."

Lori Aguero

moments and the joy they have when they overcome their challenges. Lori says of her experience, "it is extremely humbling to see students grow in confidence and perseverance."

Lori's advice to parents is to focus on their child's abilities vs. their disabilities. She adds, "there are more positives than negatives." She also encourages

parents to be patient with their child's progress, remembering the adage that "slow and steady wins the race."

Lori is happy to answer questions and has conference from 1:15-1:50. She invites parents to set up a time to conference by emailing her at laguero@ahisd.net.

On a personal level, Lori hails from San Angelo where she attended Angelo State University and graduated with a degree in Interdisciplinary Studies with a minor in Kinesiology. She has lived in San Antonio since 2014. She enjoys spending her summers and free time with family attending outdoor concerts, shopping, eating at local venues, and relaxing at the beach.

Karyn Shelnutt

Cambridge SLP

In her second year at Cambridge Elementary, Karyn Shelnutt is a relatively new Speech-Language Pathologist to our district. After 21 years as an SLP across multiple states, and working in schools, hospitals, and Early Intervention, Karyn brings experiences from all over the country to Alamo Heights. She has had to balance her career as a Speech-Language Pathologist and the needs of her family as an Army wife and mother. Mrs. Shelnutt's entire family is in the military and after spending her childhood as an "Army brat," she married into the Army and continued life in the military until her husband retired last year after 31 years of Active Duty service.



Mrs. Shelnutt shared, "When I was in 7th grade, I remember several deaf and hard-of-hearing students in my school. I became friends with a boy named Andy and couldn't understand much of his speech. He began teaching me sign language, and I joined the Sign Language Club at my school to learn more. I was very interested in hearing and speaking, so those seeds were planted early. I started college in Radio/

TV/Film wanting to be a Broadcast Journalist. My older sister was in graduate school for Speech-Language Pathology at the time, and I observed her during her school internship. I remembered my love for the study of hearing and speech, and I loved watching her work with her students. I changed my major, and the rest is history! I may not be talking on the news as my career, but I still made my career out of talking!”

Within the scope of practice in Speech-Language Pathology, Mrs. Shelnutt has developed a love of working with students at all ability levels and with a variety of communication disorders. She has a specific interest in working with AAC (Augmentative and Alternative Communication). Mrs. Shelnutt has especially enjoyed growing with the technology through the years. “I went from learning how to work with students on devices that could cost \$10,000 and were incredibly slow and laborious when I first finished graduate school, to the availability and simplicity of a \$50 iPad app today! One of my favorite things in my field is helping a child learn to use AAC and effectively communicate with those in the world around them! I look at AAC like turning on a child’s cochlear implant for the first time.... rather than turning on their ability to hear, however, it is like turning on their voice! Helping a child ‘find’ that voice is one of the most celebratory aspects to this profession!”

Mrs. Shelnutt and her husband Jeff have a daughter in the 3rd grade at Cambridge and a son in the 6th grade at AHJS. She has 3 older stepchildren as well, and will become a grandmother for the first time in September! In her spare time, she works on arts and crafts projects of any kind, travels to see her family across the country, goes to the beach (especially Hawaii and Florida) or lake, and spends time with her family exploring Texas. Mrs. Shelnutt attended LSU Medical Center for graduate school and is therefore a HUGE LSU football fan! GEAUX TIGERS! She loves to dance and was even a Zumba instructor on the side.

Karyn Shelnutt says that she has spent her life moving from place to place, and now that her family has settled down in San Antonio, there is no place she would rather call home than Alamo Heights, with its comfort, love and small town feel.

Know someone who should be featured or do you have an idea about a topic for a future newsletter article? Email mharrison@ahisd.net with your suggestions!

JS Unified Champions

The Unified Champions Club, National Junior Honor Society Club and the AHJS Student Council joined together to promote Autism Awareness month by hosting a tie dye event on Friday, April 16th. The combined clubs provided the dye and welcomed students to make their own tie dye creations. Everyone was encouraged to wear their tie-dyed shirt on Thursday, April 22nd to show support of their peers with autism.



Ms. Salcedo, Ms. Escalante, Mr. Robinson, Ms. Arrañaga and Ms. Murray

Healthy Relationships

In support of the district's commitment to having a "culture of belonging," and strategic priorities to build a more "diverse, equitable and inclusive community," (Vision 2020) Alamo Heights Junior School's Shannon Stepan, a Licensed Specialist in School Psychology, along with fellow LSSP Linda Luna, have implemented a "Healthy Relationships Group" for Junior School students with an emphasis on their continued social-emotional learning. The curriculum is adapted from the Healthy Relationships Plus Program, which is designed to build strengths, resilience, and coping skills among youth as a way of enhancing interpersonal functioning. Every aspect of the program is designed to model appropriate use of power and respectful relationships and to support youth empowerment. The second cohort ended their sessions with some fun water balloon games that reinforced communication, collaboration, and sportsmanship. Ms. Stepan hopes to continue to offer the class in the fall of 2021.

Medicaid Waiver Programs

Like most parents new to the disability community, Sandi Molina knew nothing about Long Term Services and Supports Programs (LTSS)—formerly known as Medicaid Waiver Programs—when Alex, then 3, was newly diagnosed and she placed him on the interest lists. At the beginning of a diagnosis, it's hard to see past the day, let alone start planning for the future. For some of us, the idea of planning the “what if” scenarios is too difficult since we're still coming to terms with or grieving our child's diagnosis. For others, it may feel like giving up hope on our child's future progress. Regardless of the case, it is essential to start the process of getting a child or loved one on the interest lists by submitting an application as early as possible. The estimated wait time on these lists is between 15-17 years. The goal of these programs is to give people with disabilities the services and supports they need within their own communities via therapies, respite and personal attendants versus State Supported Living Centers, or SSLCs.

After 15 years on the list, Alex's number “came up” to the top of the list earlier this year. Sandi is educating herself on the agencies used to coordinate care for her son and also the various available. They are considering Occupational Therapy, Equine Therapy, Aquatics, and Music Therapy to name a few. She also hopes to secure Recreational Therapy for Alex as well as an attendant who will ensure he has the opportunity to take regular walks and maintain a level of physical fitness. Sandi hopes that the final assessment and determination of his needs will be completed within 45 days, with an estimated start date of mid-July to early August. She's grateful that she was encouraged to start the application process so many years ago.

Likewise, Ginna Crocker recently found out that her daughter Grace is also eligible to start receiving services. The Crockers placed Grace on the interest lists in 2007 when she was only 2 years old. They learned about waiver programs serendipitously; Ginna's parents were hosting out of town visitors for a weekend event at their church. The couple had a daughter with special needs who was receiving services. Even though Ginna's dad, Scott Horn, is a physician, he'd never heard of the Medicaid Waiver programs. The Crockers are looking forward to specialized therapies, respite opportunities, and a personal attendant to help Grace with self care.

If you haven't already begun the application process, please reach out to me, Michelle Harrison, at mharrison@ahisd.net. I can get you the forms necessary to begin. The LTSS interest list can be compared to an insurance policy; you hope your child never needs it, but if he or she does need it in the future, you'll be glad you took these steps now.

5 Things You Need To Know

About Medicaid Waiver Programs in Texas

What does "Waiver" Mean?"

Waivers override certain rules for how that funding can be used. Waivers "waive" (some rules do not apply) certain requirements for Medicaid. If someone meets the eligibility requirements, individuals can get the services they need in their own homes or other community settings, instead of nursing homes, institutions, or facilities.

Are Medicaid Waiver Programs expensive for the State of Texas?

The **average Medicaid Waiver Program is \$51,000 annually** allowing respite, home modifications, and caregiver support. The **average cost of SSLC is \$321,000 annually**. It is considerably less expensive to invest in Medicaid Waiver Funding.

*SSLC- State Supported Living Center

What is a Medicaid Waiver Program?

A Medicaid waiver (or Long-Term Service and Supports) allows the state to be more flexible in how it spends money to provide long-term services to some **people with disabilities** or elderly persons in order to help them live in the community instead of an ICF or Nursing Home.

How many Medicaid Waiver Programs are there?

There are **7** different Medicaid Waiver Programs in Texas: **TxHmL, HCS, CLASS, MDCP, DBMD, STAR+PLUS HCBS, and YES**. Each program has different rules, qualifications, and funding amounts. It is important to speak with someone who understands the differences.

Do I have to wait to receive services?

Medicaid Waiver Programs have **extensive interest/wait lists**, with **some over 15 years long** with **over 150,000 unduplicated citizens waiting for services**. The first step is getting on the interest list. For more information, visit www.navigatelifetexas.org



Special Olympics at AHHS

With the opening of the new natatorium and the support of Coach Norm Collins, AHHS SST students began Special Olympics swimming after Spring Break. Isabella Martinez says, “It’s been a huge team effort to make it happen, and we are so appreciative of the parent support we’ve received. Our athletes are loving the water.” While some of the students are very comfortable and confident in their swimming abilities, others are just learning and acclimating to being in the pool. Ms. Martinez, Ms. Rossi and Coach Collins are emphasizing swimming as a safety skill first and foremost, and they are honored to have the opportunity to teach an important skill. The athletes are excited for Thursday practices and hope to be able to compete at the area level in the fall.



Camden Caldwell



Daisy Flores



Trent Fehrenkamp

Spring 2021

Inaugural AH Games

The Junior School was the venue for the AH Games on Thursday, May 20th, where students from SST (Student Supported Team) classes at Cambridge, the JS, and the HS came together. AH Games was created by Darci Woods and Charley Gilbert as an opportunity for special education students to shine and receive encouragement while completing various games. Because of continuing COVID precautions, the fans in the stands were general education peers who cheered the SST students on throughout the various events. The HS PALs (Peer Assistant Leaders) manned the different stations while JS Peer Tutors were paired one-on-one with each SST student (elementary, JS and HS) to help them compete in the games. Athletes competed as mixed teams from all three campuses in games like Pizza Box Run, Team Beach Ball Relay and Beach Ball Obstacle Run. Teams were comprised of both SST students and Peer Tutors who ran modified versions of the course the SST students ran. No Alamo Heights sporting event would be complete without music and cheering; talented students from the JS and HS Mighty Mule Band played and the Varsity cheer team cheered while the student athletes entered the gyms. Many thanks to all of the students who cheered, encouraged and motivated our athletes. In the future, Woods and Gilbert plan to host both AH Games and the Basketball Olympics.



Adam Lopez



Jackson Bartlett



Evan Williams

Nathan Coppock

AHHS CoTeacher

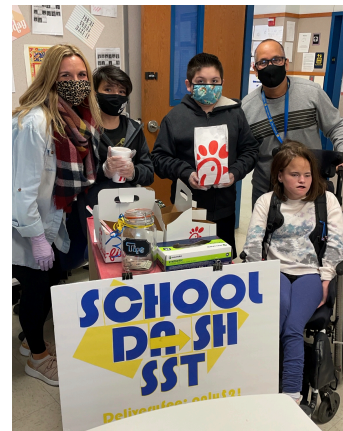


Nathan Coppock is combining two of the things he loves to do in his roles at Alamo Heights. Nathan majored in kinesiology and minored in education at the University of the Incarnate Word. He joined AHISD last year as a special education teacher at the high school. Nathan teaches English I,II and integrated physics/chemistry, as well as serving as an assistant coach for the swim team. Of his role as a teacher, Nathan says, “I enjoy watching the students grow as learners and as people.” He firmly believes that parents play an essential role in creating the right plan for their child.

He encourages parents to advocate for their child stressing that they understand what is best for their child. He also encourages parents to be flexible, as what is best can change from year to year or even from class to class. Cooperation is the key to a student’s success. “Being able to combine what you’ve observed at home with what we’ve observed at school will allow us to come up with the best IEP possible.” When not teaching class, Nathan either spends time with his wife and two dogs or swimming. His summers are usually spent coaching swimming. Nathan can be reached at ncoppock@ahisd.net and is available for conferences during 3rd period.

School Dash

As featured in the May 4th episode of On Location with Dr. Dana Bashara, Darci Woods and Charley Gilbert came up with School Dash, the school version of Door Dash wherein students in SST have the opportunity to practice social skills, employability skills and community involvement. Teachers at the JS are able to place a lunch order from a restaurant the class visits each Friday during their Community Based Instruction (CBI) outing. Students get the opportunity to put all their skills together in a mock job environment. They work on placing the orders, money skills and the soft skills necessary for future employment.



Dear Students, Parents and Colleagues,

I am grateful for this opportunity to share with you that I am retiring from AHISD on June 14, 2021. Of my 39 years of teaching service, the past 19 years with AHISD have been the most rewarding and treasured experiences of my career.

As a Transition Coordinator, I begin working with parents of preschool or elementary school students and provide support until the student exits the district. I have many happy memories of watching these students grow into young adults.



When I retire, I plan to remain in the San Antonio area with my family and my dogs and enjoy working in the garden. Before June 14, please contact me if you have any questions about transition or long term community services. My contact email is mhillis@ahisd.net or 210-394-4059.

Sincerely,

Mary Hanlon-Hillis

“You know I’m never too far my friend
Until we meet again.”

Retiring:

Howie Baer- AHHS In Class Support Biology and Food Sciences

Mary Hanlon-Hillis-09 Academy Transition Coordinator (see note above)

Linda Luna- Bilingual Licensed Specialist in School Psychology

Pam Wanieck- Cambridge Resource and Auditory Impairment Teacher

Moving On:

Natalie Brown- Campus Coordinator for Cambridge and Woodridge; assuming a director role

Kelly Masters- Cambridge Behavior Specialist; traveling the country for a year

Brett Robinson- AHJS ACE teacher; taking Behavior Specialist position at NISD.

Spring 2021

Parent Liaison

Michelle Harrison



As we close out the 2020-2021 school year, I can't help but be filled with joy, gratitude and optimism. Collectively, as a district and community, we have succeeded in ensuring our children are healthy, safe and continuing in their educational career, but maybe more importantly, we've all learned more about empathy, flexibility, putting others before ourselves, and resiliency. I'd argue that those characteristics are as important, if not more so, than the lessons mandated by any education agency. These are the characteristics that make each of us better employees, better community members, and better *people*. Was this the year we envisioned? Absolutely not. It presented challenges, disappointments and frustration. Some of us dealt with illness and quarantine, some with academic or behavioral setbacks, and others with just the unshakeable feeling of "this isn't what I envisioned." Continuity and tradition are things we value, but perhaps we should begin to place more value on the ability to become more comfortable with change. Change is where growth occurs; the opposite is stagnancy, and its logical, if not extreme, outcome is death. I recently realized that the very things my son struggles with (transitions, change, inflexibility) are the things I struggle with, too. I like things a certain way and am disappointed when things don't go as planned. Our family works so hard to help Wyatt become more flexible, to learn perspective, to learn to "read the room," and to consider others through his actions and words, but I was convicted that I don't spend nearly enough time working on those soft skills myself. Why am I holding him to a standard I'm not meeting myself? I am not by nature an optimistic person. I consider myself a realist. Part of my need for a plan is that I want to consider all possible outcomes and know how to be best prepared for them. This need for control is exhausting and *unattainable*. This year has proved it. A beautiful lesson I have learned from the amazing Kelly Masters is that the only thing I can control is my reaction and how I frame the situation (I can hear her asking, "is this a little problem or a big problem?") So, if you're exhausted from this year, too, I think I have found the solution. Gratitude. It's simple, though not easy to practice. I want to invite you to celebrate with me. Celebrate that our kids got to go to school the ENTIRE school year. Celebrate the small and large strides our kids made towards their academic/behavioral/functional goals. Celebrate that we have dedicated and passionate teachers and administrators. Celebrate the overall health of our community. Celebrate no more packing lunches! Celebrate those you love, both the small wins and just the fact that they're in your life. Happy summer. I hope you have many moments to celebrate.

With Gratitude,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Michelle". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kinetic Kids Summer

Parent & Me

For children ages 18 months to 5 years with special needs who are unable to participate in mainstream sports and recreational programs due to a limitation related to their diagnosis. Each participant is partnered with a parent.

GYMNASTICS • 6 Weeks • \$75

Gymnasts explore trampoline, bars, beam, vault and floor with parent participation.

Sundays starting June 13, 4-4:45pm

Endurance Elite Gymnastics & Dance, 15814 University Oak 78249



SWIMMING • 6 Weeks • \$75

Participants explore water in a safe, controlled environment to progress swimming skills.

Sundays starting June 13, 3:15-3:45pm

Das Rec, 345 Landa St, New Braunfels 78130

Sundays starting June 27, 4-4:30pm

Emler Swim School, 15502 Huebner Rd. 78248

Sundays starting June 27, 4-4:30pm

Emler Swim School, 6626 Loop 1604 78254



Champion

For children ages 5-18 who need assistance following directions or staying in line in a group setting.

BASKETBALL • 6 Weeks • \$75

Players learn FUNdamentals of basketball through skills, drills and scrimmaging.

Mondays starting June 21, 5:45-6:30pm

Shearer Hills Baptist Church, 12615 San Pedro Ave 78216



GYMNASTICS • 6 Weeks • \$75

Gymnasts explore trampoline, bars, beam, vault and floor

Sundays starting June 13, 5-5:45pm

Endurance Elite Gymnastics & Dance, 15814 University Oak 78249

Mondays starting June 21, 6-6:45pm

Aerial Athletics, 17361 Bell N Dr, Schertz 78154



MARTIAL ARTS • 6 Weeks • \$75

Participants learn basic forms, defense techniques and martial arts skills in a safe, controlled environment.

Tuesdays starting June 29, 6-6:45pm

University United Methodist Church, 5084 De Zavala Rd 78249



MUSICAL THEATRE • 8 Weeks • \$75

Combines music, theatre and dance. Ends with a performance.

Thursdays starting June 24, 5:45-6:30pm

University United Methodist Church, 5084 De Zavala Rd 78249



SWIMMING • 6 Weeks • \$75

Participants explore water in a safe, controlled environment and progress swimming skills.

Sundays starting June 13, 2-2:30pm

Das Rec, 345 Landa St, New Braunfels 78130

Sundays starting June 27, 4:40-5:10pm

Emler Swim School, 15502 Huebner Rd. 78248

Sundays starting June 27, 4:40-5:10pm

Emler Swim School, 6626 Loop 1604 78254

Sundays starting June 27, 4-4:30pm

Sundays starting June 27, 4:40-5:10pm

Emler Swim School, 6044 FM3009, Schertz 78154



Allstar

For children ages 5-18 with a physical disability OR those with developmental disabilities who follow directions in a group setting.

BASKETBALL • 6 Weeks • \$75

Players learn FUNdamentals of basketball through skills, drills and scrimmaging.

Mondays starting June 21, 6:30-7:30pm

Shearer Hills Baptist Church, 12615 San Pedro Ave 78216



GYMNASTICS • 6 Weeks • \$75

Gymnasts explore trampoline, bars, beam, vault and floor

Sundays starting June 13, 6-7pm

Endurance Elite Gymnastics & Dance, 15814 University Oak 78249

Mondays starting June 21, 7-8pm

Aerial Athletics, 17361 Bell N Dr, Schertz 78154



MARTIAL ARTS • 6 Weeks • \$75

Participants learn basic forms, defense techniques and martial arts skills in a safe, controlled environment.

Tuesdays starting June 29, 7-8pm

University United Methodist Church, 5084 De Zavala Rd 78249



MUSICAL THEATRE • 8 Weeks • \$75

MUSICAL THEATRE • 8 Weeks • \$75

Combines music, theatre and dance. Ends with a performance.

Thursdays starting June 24, 6:45-7:45pm

University United Methodist Church, 5084 De Zavala Rd 78249



SWIMMING • 6 Weeks • \$75

Participants explore water in a safe, controlled environment and progress swimming skills.

Sundays starting June 13, 2:30-3:15pm

Das Rec, 345 Landa St, New Braunfels 78130

Sundays starting June 27, 5:20-6:05pm

Emler Swim School, 15502 Huebner Rd. 78248

Sundays starting June 27, 5:20-6:05pm

Emler Swim School, 6626 Loop 1604 78254

Sundays starting June 27, 5:20-6:05pm

Emler Swim School, 6044 FM3009, Schertz 78154



TENNIS • 6 Weeks • \$75

Players are taught FUNdamental tennis strokes and game play.

Wednesdays starting June 30, 6-7pm

Clark High School, 5150 De Zavala Rd 78249



Virtual

For children ages 5 and up who can follow directions in a virtual setting independently or with help.

VIRTUAL MOVEMENT 360 • 6 Weeks • FREE

Join weekly workouts with activities focusing on improving strength, balance, coordination, and endurance that can be modified for all ability levels, and can be completed easily at home

Tuesdays starting June 23, 6:15-7pm

Practices held via Zoom



Spring 2021