South San ISD CARE Zone is ready to help and heal

On most school days, South San Antonio High School students Marc Mendiola, Agustin Perez and Nathaniel Soto are attending classes, taking tests and trying to do all it takes to prepare for college once they graduate. They’re also just trying to be regular teenagers.

On Friday morning, these three young leaders took center stage with their peers as city, county, state leaders and members of the South San Antonio Independent School District came together for the ribbon-cutting ceremony at the South San ISD CARE Zone.

“You are quite literally saving the lives of hundreds who walk after you,” said San Antonio Mayor Ron Nirenberg. “Teamwork and collaboration are our community’s secret sauce,” he added.

The mental wellness center houses hope for people in the South San community who need a helping hand when life deals them an unexpected challenge.

The CARE Zone is partnered with the Children’s Bereavement Center of South Texas, Communities in Schools, Jewish Family Service San Antonio, Clarity Child Guidance Center, Rise Recovery and Family Service to provide wellness counseling for students, families and South San ISD personnel.

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The CARE Zone will also house a study center, food pantry and clothing store to help clients during difficult times.

Free assistance is available Monday through Friday from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. at 2707 W. Gerald Ave. Students are encouraged to reach out to their respective school counselors for referrals.

Patriotic and poignant performances featured at SSAISD Veterans Day Program

Family, friends, students and administrators from the South San Antonio Independent School District enjoyed a morning of patriotic tributes at the South San High School auditorium.

The annual event featured performances from students from every school in the district. After an opening performance from the Dwight Middle School Band, the packed auditorium settled in for heartfelt tributes to the many veterans present for the event.

Renditions of “Yankee Doodle” and the “Stars and Stripes” were performed by students from Armstrong and Athens Elementary School. Benavidez Elementary School students got the audience tapping their toes to “Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy” while Carrillo Elementary School students proudly sang “God Bless the USA” to the group.

Poignant performances by Five Palms and Hutchins Elementary Schools depicted the struggles and sacrifices our military face every day while in uniform.

The South San High School band performed a heartfelt “Salute to the Services” song which brought branch members of the military in the audience out of their seats in appreciation.

Veterans Day is observed every Nov. 11 to remember all the women and men who have served and are serving our country around the world.
A Message from the Board of Trustees

Another school year has begun and the Holidays are around the corner! The Board of Trustees welcomes our newly appointed Interim Superintendent, Ms. Dolores Sendejo. We welcome her leadership and her desire to join us in providing the best opportunities for all our students.

There is a sense of excitement in our school district with the re-opening of Athens Elementary, Kazen Middle School and West Campus High School. The effort to re-open these schools has been a challenge, however, under the “can-do” leadership style by Interim Superintendent Sendejo, we will make the necessary adjustments to ensure the community’s expectations are realized. The Board is determined, energized and driven to make sure we succeed.

In Texas, the law requires that Board of Trustees “set policy and issue directives”. The Superintendent is compelled to implement these Board policies and directives. A team of horses all need to pull in the same direction in order to move in unison and make progress. In the last several months, especially, in the effort of re-opening of schools, we have had to make changes to reorganize staff to accomplish our communities’ priorities. The Board believes that under the direction of Interim Superintendent Sendejo, “all the horses will be moving in the same direction”.

When the Board of Trustees decided to re-open our schools, it was because the community had spoken loud and clear with the election of their new trustees.

Opening these schools has not been an undue drain on our financial resources. Our last Financial Statement (August 2019), required by law, indicates a general fund balance (which is our reserves or savings) of at least $21 Million. That is almost a three month operating expense (the TEA recommends a 2-month balance).

The Board is highly encouraged with the growth of new housing development, especially, in the West Campus High School area. This was a major reason in the re-opening of the high school. Another major reason, was the Board’s attempt to correct a wrong. A wrong inflicted on the West Campus community back in 2007.

The Board of Trustees is well aware of the presence of charter schools in our school district. In fact, we have lost some students to these schools. However, we believe this is an opportunity to excel. Academic competition is a good thing. This new competition has highly motivated the Board, Administration and our Teaching Staff to “think outside the box” in order to retain and re-attract our students. We are not the only school district experiencing these challenges but in our case we welcome this challenge.

The Board of Trustees has decided to bring back this informative issue of Today’s South San after a long absence. It is time for our students to be recognized, our campuses to be highlighted and the community to receive factual information about their school district. With every edition of Today’s South San, we look forward to showcasing our student accomplishments and demonstrate to our patrons that their investment in our school district is accountable. Finally, the Board intends “to set the record straight”, if necessary. Our community deserves the facts, nothing less.

With kindest regards,
The South San Antonio ISD Board of Trustees

SOUTH SAN ANTONIO INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

Bienvenidos
South San Antonio ISD family!

Tis’ the season to be grateful for the many opportunities that bring all families together during this special time of the year.

Our district continues its quest to provide your children pathways that will open doors during and beyond their time at our educational institutions, but there’s more we want to instill in your children. Together, we’re going to climb academic mountains and prepare them for life’s journey with the assistance of our district’s team who will keep them focused, fed and victorious along the way.

We are proud to report that several campuses earned Distinction Designations in the Texas Accountability Rating System heading into this 2019-2020 academic school year. Five Palms and Kindred Elementary Schools earned distinctions in Academic Growth; Shepard Middle School earned a distinction in Social Studies, and Palo Alto Elementary School earned two distinctions in Math and Academic Growth.

We’re especially proud of the opening of our new South San Antonio ISD CARE Zone. Mental wellness assistance is now available for members of your family in their time of need here in our community. In the spirit of the season, we’ve also opened the Bobcat Clothing Den, a food pantry and assistance from the Carino Coalition, a partnership of care and compassion for our children. In addition, the ongoing services of Community Education Classes, General Education Development (GED) and English as a Second Language classes will also be available as part of our CARE Zone.

At South San Antonio ISD, we are a family and we will continue this journey to educate our students with persistence, passion, and patience. We want to ensure your child is equipped with every tool possible to make their dreams a reality.

We will never say never. Instead, we’ll say let’s do this!

We are Family! ¡Somos Familia!

Dolores Sendejo
Interim Superintendent
Sophomore Bobcat leads school spirit with stroke of a pencil

The ideas can come to her at any time of day or night. South San High School sophomore Valena Tafoya knows she needs to grab a pencil and put that creation on paper as a possibility for the next spirit poster at her high school’s pep rally.

Tafoya is following in the footsteps of her father and brother.

“I’m always drawing in class and I have drawings everywhere,” said Tafoya. She was urged by classmates to make spirit posters during her freshman year and said the idea of sharing her artwork with a lot of people was somewhat scary.

Now in her sophomore year, Tafoya’s days are filled with school, early college courses and JROTC. Every spare minute is devoted to creating the posters, with help from some of her friends.

Tafoya is especially proud of a recent creation which was used for an actual home football game. She took that breakaway poster home every night and kept painting in her garage. All that work was gone in a matter of seconds; all in the name of school spirit and very little sleep.

“It was hard to see them [players] run through it in a second after it took a week to make it,” she said.

As Tafoya continues her high school journey, many have asked her why she hasn’t considered drawing as a career, but Tafoya has other plans. She wants to join the Air Force.

New police officers join SSAISD force

The South San Antonio Independent School District welcomed six new police officers this school year in two separate ceremonies.

The new officers are Adrianna De Leon, Salvador Lopez and Samantha Rodriguez, Andres Rodriguez, Diana Marines and Steve Gomez.

SSAISD Chief of Police Eugene Tovar welcomed family and special guests for the oath of office and pinning events. He told the new officers that they have chosen a noble profession and thanked their families for sacrificing time with their loved ones so the officers could serve the South San community.

He says all South San ISD officers must consider law enforcement, mentorship and education as they wear their badges in the upcoming school year.

“These three components are going to be used to create that bond and fellowship with the students as well as to influence the students of South San and those within the police department’s jurisdiction,” Tovar added.

Athens Elementary School teacher is a breast cancer warrior and survivor

Martha Garza spends her days in her second grade classroom at Athens Elementary School teaching children how to speak Spanish. At the same time, the seasoned educator has spent the past year learning some lessons she never imagined would be put before her.

Garza was teaching at Price Elementary School when she was diagnosed with breast cancer in February 2018. She had not gotten a mammogram in over three years and reluctantly went for an exam at the insistence of her mother.

“I actually did not have any lumps,” Garza said. “It was triple negative cancer.”

This type of cancer is more aggressive than other forms and more likely to spread beyond the breast. There’s also a higher chance it will come back within the first three years after treatment, but Garza immediately began chemotherapy which would last five months.

“I took it hard and I lost a lot of weight,” said Garza. “I didn’t have energy; I didn’t want to do anything,” but her passion for teaching helped keep her on track.

Through all the challenges of the past year, Garza says she saw some dark times.

“When I was going through it, there was a time when I thought I couldn’t do this anymore; I was giving up,” she said. “I’m just grateful that I’m here.”

This Oct. 3, which was the date of her 10-hour surgery in 2018, Garza celebrated being cancer-free for one year.

SSAISD reopens schools

The San Antonio Independent School District welcomed several new principals to our re-opened campuses this year. Joseph Carranza has taken over the reigns at the newly-opened Athens Elementary School, while Anna Lopez returns to the district as the principal at Kazen Middle School. Dr. Lee Hernandez will do double duty as principal at both South San High School and the re-opened West Campus High School. Six other schools welcomed new principals. Read all about them at southsanisd.net.
Choice Academies prepare South San ISD students for future success

The South San Antonio Independent School District is giving students from fifth to eighth grade a front-row seat to the future with some hands-on experience before they make their career choice.

The STEM Academy at Dwight Middle School features a curriculum based on the idea of educating students in four specific disciplines to include technology, engineering, and mathematics. The program creates critical thinkers, increases science literacy and helps to create the next generation of innovators at an early age.

Students enrolled at the Fine Arts Academy at Shepard Middle School will be able to lay the foundation to be an actor, entertainer or musician through the many hands-on courses offered. Classes allow attendees to think outside the box as they rehearse for an upcoming performance or play and sing a favorite mariachi song that will be featured at South San Antonio ISD events.

Zamora’s Health Science Academy helps fifth through eighth graders gain knowledge and skills necessary to build a foundation in a health science career by offering prep courses in the areas of emergency medical technician, licensed vocational nursing, pharmacy technician, as well as medical billing and coding.

The Architecture, Construction and Design Academy at Kazen Middle School launching next year, is looking for students with creative minds who are ready to learn to design and build using state of the art technology. Students will learn general design concepts, as well as valuable skills through hands-on projects through courses such as graphic and interior design, basic carpentry, as the principles of architecture, construction, technology, and communication.

“Preparation is key,” said Cynthia Bills, SSAISD director of strategic planning and innovation. By allowing students to get real experience before they even graduate from our high schools, we’re building confidence and assuring each student can be competitive in a demanding work arena.”

The academies are open to all students residing in Bexar County. The application deadline is December, 13. For more information log on to www.southsanisd.net

South San High School football and volleyball seasons end

Varsity Volleyball
The South San High School Lady Bobcats had their hands full as they battled their way through a tough 27-6A District during the 2019 volleyball season. The team racked up 16 wins and 20 losses this year. Senior Lady Bobcats led the team to a 3-11 district record. Now that the season is over, work is already underway with underclassmen on the Bobcat team as they strategize a winning formula for next year’s opponents. Congratulations on a job well done! Bobcat Nation is eagerly awaiting next year’s exciting volleyball action. Go Bobcats!

Varsity Football
Every football season, teams across the state set their eyes on winning that coveted championship prize. It takes hard work and persistence to get to that winning destination. For the 2019-20 South San Bobcats, they’re well on the way. The Bobcats came out of the gate strong winning four of five games in the first half of the season. Ultimately, they finished the season, at 4-6, 2-5 in district play in a tough 27-6A schedule. Their sixth-place in district this year was better than last season proving the Bobcats are headed in the right direction. Preparations for next season are already underway. Thank you Seniors for leading by example on and off the field, in the classroom and within our community. Go Bobcats!
Campus Happenings 2019

Armstrong Elementary:
Neil Armstrong Elementary School held its Fall Festival in October. Countless volunteers and parents stepped up to the plate to lend a hand and make this event a huge success! There was food, fun and even a haunted house. Many Armstrong Elementary School families came by to join us and everyone had a fantastic time.

Athens Elementary:
Athens Elementary took part in a week of festivities celebrating Red Ribbon Week, Truck or Treat and Dia de los Muertos. Students and teachers dressed in different themes each day leading up to Truck or Treat where our parents participated in decorating the trunks of their cars and having the students make their rounds collecting goodies.

Benavidez Elementary:
Benavidez was excited to have parents and students participate in the Reading Night and Open House. Thank you to the San Antonio Police Dept. for sending McGruff to kick off our Red Ribbon week and Don’t Be a Monster event (Anti-bullying rally). We’ve also performed in Veteran’s Day celebrations, STEM Night and held our first-ever fatherhood initiative.

Carrillo Elementary:
Our Wildcat family received the ReWorksSA Recycling Certified Silver Award by the City of San Antonio Solid Waste Management Department for our school-wide recycling program that was initiated by our student council last year and is now being facilitated by our safety patrols. Students and teachers also dressed up for our annual storybook costume parade.

Five Palms Elementary:
The Five Palms family joined together to engage in learning activities such as building straw rockets, the amazing architects, fun with circuitry and I-Bot races. The Five Palms Positivity Rock Garden became reality through a donation of time, effort and materials from Five Palm grandparent Mrs. Munoz and parent Mr. Vasquez. Students have come together to create rocks for the garden.

Hutchins Elementary:
Fall Fest came on a windy and cold October day and we had a great turnout! We even got a visit from Interim Superintendent Mrs. Sendejo. The Viking Spirit Squad shined as the halftime performers of a Spurs game in October at the AT&T Center. The Vikings Runners Club participated in a Para Mi 5K hosted by Centro Med. All 10 clubs kicked off at Hutchins for all grade levels in October.

Kindred Elementary:
Every month Kindred Elementary School showcases its student’s talents in a grade level Student Showcase. Under the direction of Fine Arts teacher Carlos Espanza and grade level teachers, students practiced songs, dances and skits to display the numerous talents that our students have. Parents are invited to the school to see their children in action at the end of each month. WE ARE KINDRED FAMILY!
Madla Elementary:
Madla Elementary hosted a successful Fall Festival for students and their families! Families enjoyed games such as the cake walk, soda toss and more. A special booth featured our friends from the Wings Foundation which raises awareness for breast cancer. One lucky student won a brand new bike for perfect attendance. IT’S A GREAT DAY TO BE A GATOR!

Palo Alto Elementary:
Palo Alto hosted its first Leader in Me visit. Administrators, teachers and other campus leaders traveled from different parts of Bexar County to see how we represent a Leader in Me school. Our guests were taken on a personal tour of the campus by our amazing Student Lighthouse leaders (who range from third grade to fifth). This visit validates all the wonderful things going on at Palo Alto!

Price Elementary:
At Price Elementary School, our World Changers are making a difference by practicing the United Nations Sustainable Goals by growing fruits and vegetables through gardening and aquaponics. Currently on campus, we are using recycled bottles collected by our Student Council. We’re using old donated tires and planting plants inside them to help beautify our school.

Dwight Middle School:
Our family came together to celebrate Fall Fest with games, food, fun and music. In October, we celebrated Drug-Free and Anti-Bullying week with activities which included fun dress days and a pep rally with the Spurs Coyote as our special guest. Dwight students were recognized by Duke University’s Talent Identification Program (TIP) based on our Spring 2019 STAAR scores. Our STEM Academy also opened a second STEM lab for sixth and seventh graders.

Kazen Middle School:
Kazen Middle School is proud to highlight our partnerships with district, staff and local organizations which provide students with different learning opportunities. Gear Up sponsored field trips for our students to learn about college. We also announced the new Architecture, Construction and Design Academy at KMS for the 2020-2021 school year. We are Family!

Shepard Middle School:
The Shepard Middle School House of Terrors performance took place before a huge crowd thanks to the hard work students and teachers put in. Several of our seventh graders were invited to join the prestigious 7th Grade Talent Search for gifted students sponsored by Duke University’s Talent Identification Program. TIP provides resources to help these students reach their full academic potential.

Zamora Middle School:
Zamora Middle School held a Fall Festival on Nov. 15. We also celebrated Red Ribbon week and had an anti-bullying presentation. Nine Zamora students were recognized by Duke University’s Talent Identification Program (TIP) based on their Spring 2019 STAAR scores. We also welcomed our community for evenings of fun activities and learning on academic nights for ELAR on Oct. 23 and for Math on Nov. 6.

South San HS/West Campus: South San High School hosted its annual College Fair in the high school cafeteria. The event was open to all grade levels. Students had the opportunity to find out more about the many universities they are considering upon graduation. We would like to send a huge shout-out to Ms. Melendez, Ms. Hernandez and our counseling staff for hosting the event. The students at the recently re-opened West Campus are enjoying their first semester attending classes at the historic building. After a special celebration held at the beginning of the year, the students jumped right into their daily routine of learning as they make their way around the newly renovated facilities.
TOP STORIES:

- Patriotic and poignant performances featured at SSAISD Veterans Day Program
- South San ISD CARE Zone is ready to help and heal
- Athens Elementary School teacher is a breast cancer warrior and survivor
- Sophomore Bobcat leads school spirit with stroke of a pencil

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Save the Date

- Thursday, Dec. 5: Christmas Card Unveiling Reception at SSAISD Board Room at 9:30 a.m.
- Saturday, Dec. 14: Blue Santa Parade & Community Festival at Miller’s Pond at 10 a.m.
- Jan. 22, 2020: SSAISD Board Appreciation Month reception at 5 p.m.
- Jan. 8, 2020: Teacher of the Year submission deadline
- Scheduled School Board meetings at SSAISD Board Room:

If you would like to receive a mailed copy of our newsletter, please send us an email with your name, address, city, state and zip code to: communications@southsanisd.net