South San HS celebrates 2020 graduates with outdoor celebration

Hundreds of South San Antonio High School seniors made the final stop of their early academic journey at Alamo Stadium on Tuesday, June 9 under a warm South Texas sky. The Class of 2020 endured some disappointments during the final months of the year with the outbreak of COVID-19 and many traditions were eliminated, but the opportunity to walk across the stage in front of family, friends and a LIVE streamed audience prevailed. By the end of the evening, almost 600 high school diplomas were handed out.

For some graduates, it was a first. They became the first family member to receive a high school diploma. Other seniors earned enough college credits to secure an Associates degree after successfully juggling high school courses and higher education.

Almost 10 million dollars in scholarship money was also distributed to SSAHS students for future studies. “Congratulations class of 2020,” said Jessica Gaytan. “So proud of each and every one of you.”

It took a lot of planning to get to this point, but many are just happy the ceremony was able to happen. “Thank you guys so much for giving our seniors a proper send-off,” said Jennifer De Leon. “Thank you for letting our babies cross the stage.”
Dear South San Community,

The SSAISD Board of Trustees continues their commitment to making a positive impact! The 2019-2020 academic year was one that presented many challenges as well as opportunities. Together we will continue to overcome and persevere as we prepare for the 2020-2021 academic year.

The Board of Trustees is steadfast in their commitment to providing a safe and healthy learning environment that will meet the needs of all students and district employees. Our commitment to safety is paramount and providing an education to all students that exceeds expectations is the priority.

Congratulations to the South San High School class of 2020! The Board of Trustees wishes you the best in your future endeavors, once a Bobcat always a Bobcat.

Congratulations to our Kinder, 5th, and 8th grade graduates for proudly achieving another milestone in your educational journey at SSAISD.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, thank you for your support as we continue to strive for excellence!

Gilbert F. Rodriguez

Gilbert F. Rodriguez, SSAISD Board President

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A Message From the Superintendent

Dear South San ISD Family,

From the moment I took the reins as your Superintendent at the South San Antonio Independent School District, I took that responsibility and ran with it. I'm bringing my passion to support teachers and students as we navigate through what promises to be a challenging 2020-21 school year.

I was honored to participate in many of the school's year-end activities which celebrated the Class of 2020, including graduation and the Senior Flambeau Parade. I was in awe of your strength and spirit despite the challenging times. We will cherish these memorable moments forever. Paws up Bobcats!

This summer, we are working on systems that will keep the learning experience as pure as possible, whether it be from the classroom or at the dining room table at your home. Your child's education will not falter because we're standing by with devoted teachers and other professionals who can keep the road ahead smooth.

Despite the unexpected fork in the road we call the COVID-19 outbreak, I want us to be open to the possibilities and opportunities it has already given our students and our district. Our technology team continues to provide the tools that keep information flowing back and forth.

As soon as plans are put in place, we'll share them with you so you can prepare your children for the new normal coming their way. No matter what, we're in this together and we will make it through any storm as long as we focus on the end result—which is giving your child the best education possible.

Let's take care of business together,

Marc Puig

Marc Puig
South San ISD Superintendent
Dear South San ISD families,

It’s been a life-changing year for me. I began as the district’s Chief of Academics and then found myself sitting in an office across the building as the Interim Superintendent with a whole new set of challenges and opportunities. I was ready to take the responsibility on at full speed. With the help of a very talented team, we were able to steer through the choppy waters of a year we’ll never forget. Together, we gave our students the education they deserve and closed our academic year strong. Every single one of you made it possible. I couldn’t have done it without you in my corner. Thank you for your hard work, your passion and commitment to a district we proudly call home. I am excited for the next academic year and the leadership of Dr. Marc Puig. We will all do great things together because we are family!

Sincerely,
Dolores Sendejo
Deputy Superintendent of Transformation and Innovation

South San HS C/O of 2020
Top Ten Graduates

Donovan David Ricendo
University of Texas at Austin

Leandra Esmeralda
Herrera-Velasco
Salutatorian
Our Lady of the Lake

Ramiro Soria
University of the Incarnate Word

Destiny Lynn Pappas
Texas A&M
San Antonio

Lyndse Marie Mullennix
Texas A&M
San Antonio

Sandra Lynn Galvan
University of Texas
San Antonio

Estefania Martinez Torres
University of Texas
Austin

Amy Lynn Velasquez
University of North Texas

Aramis Elijah Alaniz
Palo Alto College

Timothy Hunter Flores
Baylor University
South San High School principal & staff honor Top Ten students

South San High School Principal Lee Hernandez wanted the Class of 2020 to know they're not forgotten despite the COVID 19 outbreak. He stopped by the homes of the Top Ten students in May to recognize them for their achievements. Each student was given a placard for their front yard and some gifts as family members looked on.

“I’m a hands-on, kind of face-to-face person,” said Hernandez. The counseling team helped organize the event to make sure everyone was home. “It was very heartfelt and exciting for all of them,” he added. “You work so hard for four years to be able to finish in the position of Top Ten.”

While this school year is different for the graduating seniors, Hernandez said everyone just needs to keep their eyes on what's important. “The situation in itself is overwhelming,” Hernandez said. “There’s a lot of moving parts to the situation and it’s just trying to be as flexible and as reasonable as possible to ensure we are providing services for our kiddos.”

Destiny Pappas is the fourth senior in the Top Ten and recalls being a little nervous when the district staff arrived at her house. “I first heard the police siren and I thought it was because we had so many cars out there [front yard] because of the COVID regulations,” Pappas said. “I was kind of nervous…but when I went outside and saw the school vehicle…then everyone showed up and gave the sign to me.”

Pappas credits her South San ISD support system for getting her to the Top Ten. She plans to study business management at Texas A&M San Antonio.

Senior Ramiro Soria placed third in the Top Ten and said he was grateful for the tribute. “It was really special that they took the time out of their day to do that,” Soria said. He added he studied hard to keep his A average and wants to become a criminal justice or immigration lawyer.

While the special recognition for the Top Ten was a memorable occasion, there are more chapters each student is looking forward to. “It doesn’t end for us when they graduate,” said Hernandez. “Just because they’re no longer on our campus and on their own; they still reach back for advice and they still let us know how they’re doing.” He adds he gets invited to weddings, birthdays and other gatherings after graduation and each student’s success in all aspects of their lives is celebrated. “We do what we do because we have a passion for the kids,” he said. “We do it because we want to see folks succeed.” Hernandez is quick to credit his team for keeping everything on track despite some bumps in the road. “We do what we normally do anytime we have something hit the campus; we come together as a family because that’s what we normally do,” Hernandez said.
Dear Athens Family,

During these unusual times with students learning from home and shifting our normal routines, one constant remains, the strength and resiliency of our community! Thank you for always being there to support and care for your campus.

Now please allow me to take this time to focus on the great and wonderful event that took place during this school year, the reopening of Athens Elementary School! After being closed for several years, our school board trustees perseverance paid off with a resounding success because Athens Elementary School is open! A lot of hard work and effort on all fronts from district leaders to custodians, made our campus into a shining bright example of how to bring back the community, parents, teachers, and most importantly the students into a loving and caring campus. Numerous events throughout the year showcased Athens' talents, from the Veteran's Day Program to the Holiday Concert. This year was a success, and we now look forward to the next school year. #Somosfamilia

Joseph Carranza
Athens ES Principal
Greetings Armstrong Family!

On behalf of our campus, I want to begin by thanking you for your support and commitment to the Armstrong learning community. Throughout the last few months, we as a campus, community, and country have been tested by the Coronavirus outbreak. It is important that as we close out the academic year, we reflect on the progress we have made as a campus because of the tenacity of our students, the dedication of our staff, and the support of our families. Thanks to our combined effort, we have developed a culture at Armstrong that values the safety of every child, high-quality instruction of all teachers, and fosters a spirit of collaboration with all stakeholders. As the campus principal, I want to stress how much we the campus staff value you the community, and how much of a privilege it has been to work with your children during the 2019-2020 school year. Despite our challenges, I know that we will continue to be stronger together.

Dr. Phillip DeLaPena  
Armstrong ES Principal
Greetings Benavidez Familia!
The 2019-2020 School Year presented us with some of our highest highs and, unfortunately, lowest lows. We are proud beyond words for the fantastic work and progress our students and teachers were able to accomplish. This year, we saw our students make significant academic gains. Our data consistently showed that Benavidez is on the track to student success and achievement. This year also brought us together in a way we never would have expected. Although we are physically apart, I have never felt more closely connected to our Benavidez Familia. Not seeing our wonderful students every day has been very difficult, but again, our Patriots rose to the challenge and ROCKED distance learning. I want to send a sincere GRACIAS to all parents and families for your help. Together we will get through this, come back stronger, and continue to take our students to infinity and beyond!

Mrs. Montemayor-Principal
Mr. Gonzalez-Assistant Principal
Benavidez ES
Greetings Carrillo Family!

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the teachers and staff at Carrillo ES for all that they do. This year was definitely different from how we expected to end the year. When I came as the new principal at Carrillo, I did not know the teachers and staff. Nine months later, Carrillo has evolved into a family coming together. We have seen gains in 3rd – 5th math, reading, and science scores on district assessments. During the pandemic, all teachers and staff came together to ensure that students were participating in distance learning. Teachers stepped up with grace, care and professionalism. Ms. Samantha Garcia, Special Ed. teacher, came for almost all the learning packet and chrome book distribution to ensure that all students were equipped to participate in virtual learning. Almost 100% of Carrillo teachers participated in the Cinco de Mayo Parade. Teachers were able to see how much their students missed them. It was wonderful to see our community come together to see Carrillo’s teachers and staff parade through their neighborhood. Carrillo truly has a caring and loving community.

Sandra J. Sandoval
Carrillo Principal
Dear Five Palms Family,

The 2019-2020 school year has been like no other before. It all began with the excitement of a new year, new teachers and of course new students. Expectations were set high. Little did we know what we were going to run into.

The school was running smoothly, students were doing well on assessments and our outlook was tremendous. Then the unthinkable happened, we were hit with Covid-19. The Five Palms Staff took charge and set up distant learning activities and continued to keep the learning moving forward. This was accomplished through video chats, online activities and constant communication. What this incident actually did was create a community of learners and not just students. The staff honed their skills to become better with technology and to be innovative with our lessons. Let’s not focus on what we missed out on but what we have learned through this crisis.

Greg Martinez
Five Palms Principal
Dear Hutchins Scholars,

What an eventful school year this has been for our Mighty Viking Families! When we left our school building before Spring Break, none of us knew it would be for the last time this school year and we would learn to adapt through remote learning. I was so excited that this year we were able to give every family a ChromeBook for those who wanted an electronic device. Your parents have been our amazing teaching partners and learned with you on how to use online programs. While I miss your smiling faces, the Friday morning dancing, and celebrating your accomplishments at awards assemblies, I am excited for all the virtual things we have done since Spring Break. Enjoy your summer break and I promise that we will be ready to come back even stronger with fun and exciting learning in the upcoming school year.

Sincerely,
Mrs. Elizabeth Martinez
Hutchins ES Principal
Hello Kindred Family,

As we look back at the 2019-2020 school year, we reflect on all the accomplishments that each of us can take away from our days here at Kindred. For some of us, we may have learned our letters, a new word, a new math concept or just how to write our name. But one common thing that we have all learned is how to persevere. This year we were faced with new challenges that none of us have ever experienced. Despite this, I am confident we can persevere against any obstacles and maintain our drive to learn and to achieve. We can continue to strive for excellence because everything that we have learned this school year has better prepared us for the future. We are STRONGER today than we have ever been. Stay focused and learn, for the future shines bright. WE ARE KINDRED FAMILY!!!

Sincerely,
Eric Boysen
Kindred ES Principal
Dear Gator Families,
As I reflect on everything that has happened these past months, I would like to thank you for your continued support and understanding during this difficult period due to COVID 19. At this time I hope that our families remain safe and well, and just know that we will continue to put measures in place to ensure the health and wellness of our community. Our staff and parents adapted to the new way of remote learning. This was new to our teachers as well as to our parents and caregivers teaching at home. I salute you and your efforts during this time. Great job! I would like to wish you all the very best for summer vacation and look forward to welcoming you all back, refreshed, for what will be an exciting, new academic year. We are and will be Stronger Together.

Missing You,

Jo Ann Buchanan
Madla ES Principal
Hello Mighty Rams,
When the school year started, you were all busy writing your own stories. Your teachers, families, friends, and classmates were motivating and inspiring you to do great things. Throughout these months you continued to learn valuable lessons beyond academics. You learned how to respect others, be leaders, and most importantly realize your own potential. While writing this story, I'm sure you never imagined that you would have a chapter like this. Right now, it might seem a little scary and it's okay to feel sad; however, remember this is only one part. Your story is far from over, and we look forward to seeing where your next chapter leads you. RAMS, we want you to continue to motivate and inspire yourself to be the hero of your own story. Now is the time, more than ever, for all of us to be heroes.

Love,
Judy Benavidez
Palo Alto Elementary Principal
Future Price College Students,
I am so proud of all the hard work you have done from virtual learning. I got to see all of the amazing photos of you doing work from your home. It was always great to visit with you on Google Meets and afterward realize how much I missed you all, but knowing that you were safe made me feel better.
I’m really sad that we were not able to come back together for the remainder of the school year, but just knowing how dedicated you, your teacher, and parents made me the proudest principal ever! Enjoy your well deserved summer break. I look forward to seeing you next year stronger and ready to learn. Price 5th grade students, we are so proud of your accomplishments and know you will thrive in middle school. You all will truly be missed. Stay strong and be safe!

Sincerely,
Ms. Castillo, Principal
The beginning of the 2019-2020 school year at Dwight was an exciting one filled with enthusiasm and goals to meet. As Dwight’s new principal, I was anxious and enthusiastic to work with a new group of staff, students, parents and a new community. We set goals in academics, increasing parent and community involvement, increasing student attendance and enrollment, developing well rounded students, and improving the campus climate and culture. Throughout the school year, students, staff and teachers of the month were recognized for their hard work. We were wrapping up a wonderful 2019-2020 school year when we hit a bump in the road with COVID 19. This brought teachers and staff together to brainstorm, plan, deliver instruction and social emotional support to our students and families. I can say that this year was a unique and successful one and we can’t wait for the next school year.

Ms. Elizabeth Sandoval
Dwight MS Principal
The 2019-2020 school year was a memorable one for Kazen Middle School as we re-opened the doors. Throughout the year, we held various activities to give our students a great middle school experience. Students participated in field trips to local businesses, attended dances, participated in competitions and festivals. For the past two months, the faculty and staff worked to ensure that Kazen families had what they needed for remote learning. To honor our local heroes, the KMS familia held a Superhero Parade for our community, the families, and students. We enjoyed seeing our students and community members out in the yards waving as we drove by. Great memory! As we close out this school year, please know that we are still here to support our families. We continue to plan for the upcoming year. And we look forward to the opening of the new Architecture, Construction, & Design Academy! Go Panthers!

Ms. Anna Lopez
Kazen MS Principal
This has been a challenging, interesting, and enjoyable year. I made it a point to get to know the staff as well as possible. They in turn accepted the changes and guidelines that were set. The rules set for the students were done together and applied by the staff. The students felt safer and were happier. The school culture began to change for the better. Student behavior began to change positively. Teachers felt more at ease to teach while students were more apt to listen and do the work. Our school environment was also positive and staff seemed to be more encouraged. Unfortunately, this virus changed our plans to continue. I feel that given a full year with this staff and students we could have seen much more of a positive performance for all.

Dr. Frank Zavala
Shepard MS Principal
It has been an extraordinary school year - full of events we did not see coming but that have affected us in ways we will never forget. Moving forward, let this year serve as your reminder that life is full of surprises. Walk boldly, proudly and with confidence into your future knowing that you hold the keys to your success. Approach unexpected obstacles on your path as an opportunity for growth and use them to make yourself smarter, stronger, and more capable with every success and failure you face. Remember the words of Maya Angelou, Jaguars, to “do the best you can until you know better then, when you know better, do better” and know that the strength to succeed is within you.

Daniel Mauldin
Zamora MS Principal
This will be the year that goes down in history! No one could have seen this coming, but I couldn't be prouder of how our team chose to handle it. Everyone came together to do the best we could for our students. However, the hardest hit was our seniors. These times created a sense of uncertainty, and an overwhelming sense of unfairness. This was supposed to be their year to celebrate everything they had worked for, and it felt as though it was all stripped away. That's when the campus and community went full throttle. South San, being known for that home feel, was true to the statement, “We are family.” Although this pandemic impacted us in so many ways, spirits remained high, and we were determined to do as much as we could for our seniors and watch them walk the stage. PAWS UP!

Dr. Lee Hernandez
South San H-S Principal
As we are continuing to monitor the developing health situation, West Campus is considering various plans for ensuring that our students are ready to learn and focus on academics. I am considering the uncertainties around public health, but have no decisions at this time on how learning will be taking place. As more information is released about COVID-19 in San Antonio, as a district we will work together to create the best course of action for learning. TEA's presentation has offered us simply a guide for school districts choosing to modify their academic calendars. It is ultimately up to our school district to plan how we will be moving forward. One thing I can ensure as your Principal at West Campus is that our teachers and staff are ready to learn and grow with our students. Together we are COUGAR Strong!

With Great Expectations,

Mrs. Cardenas
West Campus Principal
Community Hosts Senior Flambeau Parade
IT TAKES ALL OF US TO SAVE LIVES!
If we work together, fewer of our friends and family will be affected by the coronavirus. Hospitals won’t be overloaded and lives will be saved.
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