



Wildcat Times

What's happening around the TSBVI campus? December 2019, Issue #2

Welcome



Wrapping Up the First Semester

And just like that, the school year is halfway through! We had a busy and productive fall and are looking

forward to an exciting spring semester. Although we are just in December, please keep alert for summer opportunities for your child. Consider reaching out in January to your child's Texas Health and Human Services or Texas Workforce Commission caseworker about summer opportunities.

We wish you and your family the very best this holiday season! I hope

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you have an opportunity to share a tradition or interest of yours with your child, and also share an interest of theirs. What is their favorite song, show, game, or activity? I hope you all enjoy special time together sharing interests.

Happy Holidays!

Dr. Eden Hagelman,
Assistant Principal

Family Day '19: Recap

TSBVI was thrilled to host a successful and well-attended Family Day on November 9th, 2019. More than 80 families came from all corners of Texas to meet their children's teachers and staff. Families were able to participate in ECC activities centered around Orientation & Mobility and Independent Living Skills, learn about the services and resources available outside TSBVI for their students at the Transition Fair, and learn about career guidance programming at the Criss Cole Rehabilitation Center. Families had the opportunity to obtain information on health and wellness, attended important meetings on "supported decision making" with their young adult students, and got support on technology tips on how to stay connected to TSBVI's teachers and residential staff.

► TSBVI student Darrius M., 8th grade, with family members outside during Family Day.

There were also lots of opportunities to have fun! Families enjoyed the petting zoo, drum circle, motorcycle rides and arts and crafts activities; played in a bounce house and on a rock climbing wall; and experienced the fabulous student art exhibit. Smiles and good cheer abounded! The student council created an escape room where families could try to solve a puzzle while blindfolded. The Lions Club offered vision screening while Wildcat Wear offered the latest styles of TSBVI t-shirts and hoodies. Finally, the entire TSBVI family enjoyed the students' fine arts performance and a screening of the award-winning video, "Special Ed" — you can find the video on the TSBVI website homepage at www.tsbvi.edu.

A big "Thank You!" to all the families that attended Family Day 2019! 🐾🐾🐾



Family Day 2019



◀ TSBVI EXIT student Emma S., with her mom, Tara, talking to someone at one of the Transition Fair tables.

▶ TSBVI student Cameron S., 11th grade, and his mom, Rachel, explore a textured picture at Family Day.



◀ TSBVI student Agapito V., 12th grade, with his family, Agapito and Kimberly, outside at Family Day.



▶ TSBVI student Joel S., 7th grade, and his grandfather have big smiles at Family Day.





◀ TSBVI student Orion W., 4th grade, and his mom, Heather, enjoy the Tiny Tails petting zoo on Family Day.

▶ The TSBVI cafeteria on Family Day. Front table: Carolyn Heath, behavior/collaboration specialist; Angela Wolf, elementary teacher, and her two daughters; and Lauren M., mother to TSBVI student Mia M.



◀ TSBVI student Eric G., 12th grade, wears a helmet while standing with a US Army soldier wearing fatigues.

▶ Staff and families have fun too! O&M Specialist Emilie Jackson (right), her husband (left), and two sons gently pet a guinea pig and a rabbit.



Counselors' Corner

The Lighthouse Guild has launched a national telesupport group for teens who are visually impaired. Topics include school experiences, career interests, post-secondary planning, scientific and medical advances, and more. For more information on how TSBVI is working with Lighthouse Guild's Teen Tele-Support group, email Ria Ferich, TSBVI school counselor, at mferichr@tsbvi.edu.

You can listen to an interview with Tele-Support group leader, Daria Zawadzki, on the June 17th episode of

Reminder: Don't forget to reach out to your TWC (Texas Workforce Commission) counselor in January to learn about summer work and/or educational opportunities for your student in their home community!

the Blind Abilities podcast: "Gratitude and Friendship – Overcoming Anything in Life", available on Stitcher or the Blind Abilities website (<http://blindabilities.com/?p=5134>). Ms. Zawadzki speaks candidly about "her experience as a Blind student, mother, her acceptance of her blindness and most of all, her passion for facilitating the group for teens who happen to be blind."

Orientation & Mobility



◀ Austin B., 11th grade, navigates campus with his O&M Specialist, Ryan Conlin. Austin uses his walker while Ryan wears a microphone; Austin has an ear bud to better hear Ryan.

Orientation & Mobility specialists teach students to travel safely and effectively through their environment.

Staff Spotlight

TSBVI is fortunate and proud to have many superb teachers and staff members. Each issue of the “Wildcat Times” spotlights one teacher or staff member to help our readers get to know these outstanding individuals.

John Stanley, EXIT Teacher

John Stanley is one of our long-serving teachers here at TSBVI, working primarily with students who are DeafBlind as well as those who have multiple impairments. John is widely respected and beloved at TSBVI and is known for his patience, kindness, and communication skills.

John grew up in the northeast and came to Austin in the late 90s to attend the University of Texas where he majored in linguistics. Like many of our teaching staff, John got his start at TSBVI working in the dorms. In 2000, he got a part-time job at TSBVI as a residential instructor while finishing up his bachelor’s degree at UT. After being an RI for two years, he became a teacher’s assistant where he was inspired to get his teaching certification. In 2003 he joined the Region 13 teaching certification program,



^ John Stanley communicates with his student, Trey L., through a combination of sign language, speech, and tactile symbols.

and upon earning his teaching certification, John worked for one year in Eanes ISD before coming back to TSBVI as a full-time teacher. He’s been in his current role at TSBVI for 15 years.

If you get a chance to talk with John, he’ll tell you that much of what he knows today he learned on the job working at TSBVI. He had no prior experience working with students with multiple impairments before coming to TSBVI, but since then, he’s fallen in love with the school and with the students he gets to serve every day. Over the years he’s honed his craft as a teacher of students with multiple

Making their days more predictable allows me to be more attentive to their communication needs, to acknowledge them, and to honor them when I can. That's my hope anyway.

impairments, learning sign language and braille, and putting his linguistics degree to use by developing custom communication systems for his students. But according to John, much

John says fellow staff members like Fran Laware, Tish Smith, and Kim Conlin helped mentor him early on and taught him a lot about building communication systems and calendar systems to help his students make sense of the world around them, express themselves, and build relationships.

If you visit John's classroom you'll find hundreds of tactile symbols on the walls, on the tables, and in books that are customized for each student. You'll also find custom calendar systems and functional routines based around the interests of his students — helping them navigate each day. Perhaps most importantly, you'll also find a



^ John reviews the tactile symbol words Trey L. selected for his daily word book.

of what he's learned as a teacher came through observing and listening to others.

“TSBVI is such a special place,” notes John, “because there are so many people here who are experienced, highly-skilled, passionate, and supportive. If I do anything right, it's because I've been able to observe and listen to others at TSBVI.”



^ Teacher Aide Daniel Doyle works with EXIT student Christain S. on using a blender during a cooking routine.

classroom that is warm, inviting, and joyful. John and Teacher Aide Daniel Doyle laugh and smile as they work with their students, displaying a truly infectious positivity that makes their classroom a calm and welcoming place for everyone.

In asking John what he wants others to know about his approach to teaching and his goals for his students, this is what he had to say:



“I find it really satisfying finding ways to give these students a voice. A lot of my students are signal communicators, pointing, pushing to reject, etc...., and I really enjoy working with them to make a communication system that works for them. If I can help them with that — to improve their communication — it also helps ease their anxiety by helping them know what’s coming up next. Making their days more predictable allows me to be more attentive to their communication needs, to acknowledge them, and to honor them when I can. That’s my hope anyway. I want to develop communication systems that are valuable for them, and that they can take with them and use at home.”

—John Stanley, TSBVI EXIT Teacher



Tactile Communication: (top, right) Trey’s tactile symbols are stored on the wall for easy access; (bottom left) a calendar system using tactile symbols placed on a large poster board; (bottom right) a tactile symbol book in John’s classroom.

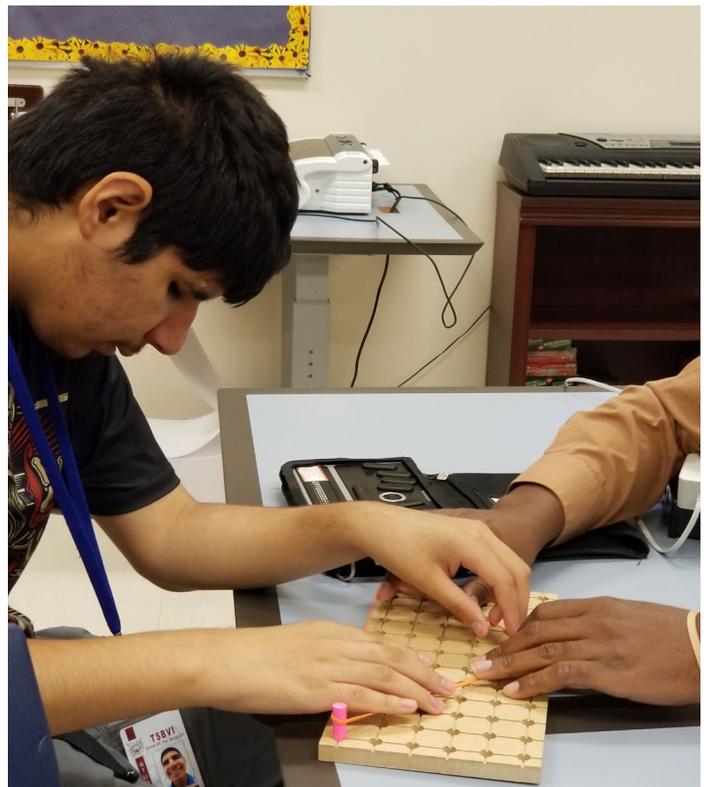
ECC Highlights: Compensatory Skills



Compensatory Skills are skills that allow students with vision impairments to access their education curriculum, including communication skills, strategies for accessing print materials, study skills, organization skills, and concept development.

◀ Justin K., 8th grade, works on geometry and problem-solving through a game.

▶ Brandon A., 10th grade, uses his hands to explore a peg board with three pegs encircled by a rubber band creating a triangle. Craig Edgley, his geometry teacher, uses his hands to help Brandon systematically explore the sides and angles of a triangle.





◀ Justin K., 8th grade; David S. 8th grade; and Joshua K. 9th grade. check their daily schedule with support from Speech Language Pathologist Carla Wright and Teacher Aide Missy Monroe.

ECC Highlights: Independent Living Skills



Independent Living Skills (ILS) is the area of the ECC that includes cooking and food management, eating skills, housekeeping, clothing management, personal care, communications, personal record keeping, financial management, and home mechanics. “Independent living” is not only defined as living on one’s own, or being employed in a job fitting one’s capabilities and interests, or having an active social life, but has to do with a student’s self-determination. It is about having the right and the opportunity

◀ TSBVI student, Ashley L., 8th grade, independently makes soup in the dorm.

to pursue a course of action of their own choosing. Also, it is about having the freedom to fail — to learn from one’s failures, just like everyone does. Independent living means having every opportunity to be as self-sufficient as possible.

At TSBVI, students are learning Independent Living Skills (ILS) every day; whether in their classroom or in the dorm, students are working on personal organization, cleaning, food management, personal care, eating skills, and so much more.

When asked about teaching ILS to her students, Savannah Jones, a residential teacher, said, “My favorite thing about teaching ILS to students is the active, meaningful lessons. ILS are always skills and tasks that students are going to use in real life. These are opportunities for students to demonstrate what they know and it is meaningful and fun. It is playful, and making mistakes is part of it... adults make the same mistakes which makes it authentic and easy to build trust with the students.”

► TSBVI student, Faith N., 8th grade, independently folds her shirt on her bed using an adapted folding device.



A typical day in the dorm for TSBVI students is individualized for every student. But after-school time often includes recreation and leisure time, homework, instructional skill development (cooking, cleaning, chores), community-based-instruction and group activities.

The residential teachers would like to encourage families over the holidays to include their child in as many household tasks and events as possible: making their beds, recipe planning, shopping, decorating, and outings. Also be sure to allow them time to engage in solitary activities that include listening to or reading books and podcasts, outdoor time, and exercise. Keeping a schedule over the break will help them come back to school refreshed and ready to maintain their skill development.

Helpful Hints for Cleaning at Home

1. Develop a pattern — always clean from left to right (or right to left, whichever is comfortable).
2. Start at the top and work down.
3. Clean horizontally and then vertically — this prevents you from missing any areas.
4. Clean the inside then the outside.
5. Rinse your cleaning cloth frequently.
6. Use the palm of your hand instead of just your fingertips; more area is cleaned.
7. Use the proper cloth in the proper area — in the kitchen, use dish cloths to clean, but dishtowels to dry.
8. Dry after wiping with a wet cloth. The reason to dry is two-fold:
 - a) If you miss something with the wet cloth but break it loose, you may get it when you dry it.
 - b) Drying areas prevents water spots and looks cleaner. You can't feel water spots but they can make something not "look" clean.
9. Always check your work tactually to see if it is clean — don't be afraid to feel it!

What is the ECC?

The term *Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC)* is used to define concepts and skills that often require specialized instruction with students who are visually impaired in order to compensate for decreased opportunities to learn incidentally by observing others. There are nine areas of the ECC: Assistive Technology, Career Education, Compensatory Skills, Independent Living Skills, Orientation and Mobility (O&M), Recreation and Leisure, Self-Determination, Sensory Efficiency, and Social Interaction Skills. Each issue of *Wildcat Times* highlights two of these areas, along with O&M.

“Paws” for Praise

Garver Engineering Donates \$5k to the TSBVI Makerspace



^ A Garver engineer works with EXIT student Cristian G. to put tracks together.

Last spring, TSBVI Comprehensive Programs students competed in the Garver Engineering Chain Reaction Challenge, spending several weeks researching, designing, prototyping, testing, and filming a successful chain reaction video for the competition.

Garver gave each participating school a starter STEM kit and \$300 to design an original chain reaction (like a dominoes track, or a Rube Goldberg device). In science class, teacher Kat Heitman and her students embraced the challenge and used some ingenuity to design a modified system, which

allowed the students to build support structures, click tracks together, and add the tracks to a chaos tower creating an elaborate chain reaction. “It was a great lesson in team building, in persistence with trial and error learning, and most importantly, self-determination,” said Kat. A few weeks after submitting their final video, Kat received word that the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired was one of ten schools selected out of hundreds to win a \$1000 cash prize.

TSBVI students not only won the competition, but Garver was so impressed and moved by our students’ perseverance that they donated an extra \$5000 to the TSBVI Makerspace and partnered with TSBVI to build STEM kits specifically for students who are blind or visually impaired in other schools they serve.

► The TSBVI Makerspace in the LRC.



TSBVI Student Devin Gutierrez Recognized at 151st Annual Meeting of the American Printing House for the Blind: Art Insight Awards

Every year in Louisville, Kentucky, superintendents, principals, and other teachers of students with visual impairments from schools for the blind around the nation gather to address current research and trends at the annual meeting of the American Printing House for the Blind. This includes topics such as ECC, assistive technology, curricula for STEM, reading and other compensatory skills, art and fine arts, and other areas.

This year, TSBVI students were recognized in the APH 2019 InSights Art Competition for their short film, “Special Ed”. TSBVI EXIT student Devin Gutierrez was selected as the student representative to accept the award on behalf of all those who took part in the production of the short film. Devin wrote the music, co-produced, and performed throughout the film.



^ Devin accepts the award from APH President Craig Meador and another APH staff member.



^ TSBVI EXIT student Devin Gutierrez accepting the award from APH President Craig Meador while the audience sits at round tables over dinner. The short film, “Special Ed”, is playing on the screen in the background.

Wildcat Photobooth

Academics

▼ Joel S., 7th grade, and Lukas M., 7th grade, collaborate on a paper boat during the Middle School Colonial Day Celebration.



▲ Jacob M., 9th grade, holds an electronic baby doll for a health class project.



Fine Arts

◀ The TSBVI Jazz Band — The New Motown — performed at Ross' Austin Old Cafe including Devin G., EXIT, plays keyboard while Mary Rose B., 7th grade, is at the mic.

Sports



Wildcat Cheerleaders at White Cane Day.

Back Row: Devin E., 12th grade, Heather D., 8th grade, Kate M., 11th grade, Chanel D., 12th grade, Jakayla T., 11th grade, Maycie G., 12th grade, Dia W., 7th grade, Katelin W., 11th grade.

Front Row: Julia S., 11th grade, Sponsor Tiayr English, Cheer Coach.

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Save The Date!

March 12th — Spring Fair!

Students served by instructional teams 1-4 display their art and other classwork; elementary students perform musical works; student-made artisan crafts, snacks, and refreshments will be for sale.

Calendar of Events

December 18th — Holiday “Big Show”

Students served by instructional teams 1-4 will perform holiday favorites and original numbers in the Auditorium.

December 19th — End of Quarter / Travel Day

Expect progress reports and report cards soon! Have a great winter break and enjoy the new year!

January 6th — Travel Day

Welcome back, students! / Beginning of Spring Semester (3rd Quarter)

January 23rd–25th — SCASB Championship

SCASB Wrestling, Cheerleading, and Performance Arts Championship: TSBVI will be hosting students from south central schools for the blind in competition.

January 31st – February 1th — UIL Regional Swim Meet

Athletes selected for UIL swimming will participate in a swim meet off campus.

February 1st — Braille Challenge

Students participate in academic competitions designed to motivate blind students to emphasize their study of braille.

February 3rd — Picture Retake Day

Students who missed picture day or who would like to sit once again for another photo will have another opportunity to “say cheese”.

February 11th — Wildcat Swim Meet

TSBVI students on the swim team will compete on campus.

February 12th — Jump Rope for Heart

TSBVI students along with the Girls School of Austin participate in the national challenge to raise awareness for heart health.

February 13th — Travel Day / End of Quarter

Expect progress reports soon! Students travel home for a long weekend.

February 17th — School Holiday / Travel Day

Presidents’ Day holiday; students return to campus.