



Wildcat Times

What's happening around the TSBVI campus? October 2019, Issue #1

Welcome



Hello, TSBVI families! Welcome to the first edition of our family newsletter, *Wildcat Times* — keeping you informed with what's happening around TSBVI.

We're having a great start to the school year with new learning routines, classes, and friendships.

We've already begun planning for Family Day (Saturday, November 9) and hope that you will be able to join us on that day for teacher conference sessions, information booths, fun activities, and a few special student performances! Check out the Family

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Day section on page 3 for more information. You can find the RSVP link for this year's Family Day in your email.

Thank you for the privilege of allowing us to serve your child! We hope this is a special year of learning, growth, and greater independence for each student.

Take care,

Miles Fain, Principal

Family Day 2019

Saturday, November 9th, TSBVI Campus

8 a.m., Cafeteria — Registration & Breakfast
9 a.m. – Noon — Parent/Teacher Conferences and Concurrent Activities
10 a.m. – 1 p.m. — Transition & Wellness Fair
11:30 a.m. – 1 p.m. — Lunch in the TSBVI Cafeteria & Courtyard
12:30 p.m. – 2:15 p.m., Courtyard — Activities and Games
2:15 p.m. – 3 p.m., Auditorium — Performances and Closing Activities

TSBVI welcomes back the parents and families of our amazing students for a day of fun and excitement on our Austin campus! You can RSVP for Family Day 2019 by clicking the

Family Day link in your email. If you have any questions, please contact Wendy Weeks at (512) 206-9114 or Ellen Grimmett at (512) 206-9171.

Counselors' Corner

Medicaid Waiver programs are the best long-term help for children and adults with multiple disabilities in Texas.

In Texas, there are several different waiver programs that offer a range of home and community-based services, such as: adaptive aids, day habilitation, dental treatment,

minor home modifications, nursing, residential assistance, respite, specialized therapies, and more. Rules and funding amounts for different kinds of waivers will be distinct.

If you have questions about Medicaid Wavier programs, call a TSBVI Social Worker: Michael Clinkscales (512) 206-9280, Marcela Contreras (512) 206-9194, or Elsa Wirsching-Guimbarda (512) 206-9172.

Orientation & Mobility

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



◀ Jakayla T. (11th grade), Maycie G. (12th grade), and Chanel D. (12th grade) are riding a Capitol Metro bus independently. They planned their route using apps and will transfer to a second bus before reaching their destination. Mary Faith Cowart, their O&M instructor, follows the bus in a van.

▶ O&M teacher Heidi Anderson instructs Isabel P., a ninth grader, about proper cane use. Heidi shares a cane with Isabel. Isabel has her right hand on the shared cane, and her left hand holds her own cane. Isabel can feel how the shared cane moves smoothly on the sidewalk.



“Paws” for Praise

On September 27th, at the meeting of the Board of Trustees for TSBVI, students were recognized for their accomplishments on the 2018-2019 STAAR tests, which is the state’s testing program based on state curriculum standards in core subject areas. The Board honored students with a plaque describing their achievements.



2019 STAAR Award winners — top-left: Joshua K., for his work in math; top-right: Heather D., for her work in reading, math, and writing; lower-left: Faith N., for her work in writing; lower-right: Andrew W., for his work in U.S. history.

Pictured with them are TSBVI Board Member Joseph Muniz, Principal Miles Fain (image 2, 3, 4), Assistant Principal G’Nell Price (image 1, 2, 3), teacher Erin Shadwick (image 1), and Assitant Principal Eden Hagelman (image 4).

Staff Spotlight

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



Joanne Rodgers, Elementary Teacher

Although Joanne has been at TSBVI for the past 10 years, the last 5 of which she has been teaching elementary students, her journey here was both unconventional and yet set in motion from very early on in her life.

When Joanne was 10 years old, growing up in Toledo, Ohio, she read “Follow My Leader,” by James Garfield — a story of a 13 year old boy who goes blind from a firecracker incident. The story is about accepting blindness, learning braille, and becoming independent in life. After reading that book, Joanne knew she wanted to work with the blind. She even made a scrapbook about Helen Keller, and wrote in her journal in 5th grade that

she wanted to be an elementary school teacher for the blind. This has always been her dream!

Joanne went to college at the University of Toledo where she studied elementary special education and learned braille, but her academic career was put on pause just short of finishing her degree in order to stay home and raise her children.

For the next few decades she homeschooled four children, which she will quickly note was incredibly challenging but gave her invaluable K-12 teaching experience. Throughout the years of raising and homeschooling her children, however, she never

gave up her dream of one day being a classroom teacher.

After her children were grown and went off to college, in 2009, living now in Austin, Texas, she decided to volunteer at TSBVI. Soon after she



was hired as a T.A./certified brailist for teacher Haley Moburg, and after a little encouragement from former superintendent Bill Daughtery, Joanne knew it was time to once and for all finish her degree and realize her lifelong dream of becoming an elementary teacher for the blind.

Joanne enrolled in the Region 13 teacher certification program and finished her degree online from the University of Toledo in 2012, the same year as her youngest daughter graduated from college. She then earned her TVI certification, and has been teaching elementary students here at TSBVI for the past five years, a job that she describes as “truly a dream job.” According to Joanne, her

life story is proof that it doesn’t matter where you’ve been, what you’ve experienced, or the mistakes you’ve made. You can make it! You can always pick yourself up and get back on the road. It might take you years but you can reach your goals.

Joanne says working at TSBVI has been an absolute joy and a dream come true. If you are ever fortunate enough to observe Joanne’s classroom, you’ll quickly notice that the lessons she’s learned from her own life story — lessons of perseverance and the importance of a supportive community that will encourage you along the way — are woven into her classroom culture.

I asked Joanne what she’d like parents to know about her as a teacher and her approach to teaching, and this is what she wanted to share:

“I am a lifelong learner. There is always more to learn, and I love learning, and I want my students to love learning. On a personal note, I’ve learned and grown working here at TSBVI more than any other place in my entire life. In this job you have to think of others, your students, and continually be flexible, and creative, and kind, and loving. You have to be professional and care enough to do the hard work to make a difference. I just want to make a difference in my students’ lives.

I have two requirements for my students: you work hard and you have a good attitude.

Every day I consciously incorporate, “We can do hard things.” throughout our activities, especially when the students have struggled and are not successful at first. I try to teach my students that it’s not about making an A, or completing a certain amount of work. If they work hard and have a good attitude, they’ll believe in themselves and have confidence and be successful in life.”

—Joanne Rodgers,
TSBVI Elementary Teacher



ECC Highlights: Assistive Technology



Rey G., senior, came to TSBVI in 2017 and is currently taking advanced level courses at a local high school

in Austin, Texas, in addition to his TSBVI classes. He credits his academic success in large part to the technology skills he’s acquired since coming to TSBVI and the training and support he’s received from his tech teacher, Rich Lampert.

“Before I came to TSBVI, I did not know how to use a laptop and keyboard.” noted Rey. “I typed all my assignments on my phone and it was not very efficient. At first, I didn’t know how to properly keep my hands on the keyboard, and I just searched around for the keys, so to say that I improved a lot is an understatement and I owe a lot to Mr. Lampert.”

Rey says he relies heavily on his

assistive technology, which now includes a Windows laptop with Fusion, an iPad Pro, an iPhone 6s, and a handheld magnifier to access and turn in his coursework.

He not only has improved his tech skills since coming to TSBVI, but he's also learned how to advocate for himself to his teachers outside TSBVI to make sure he receives his curriculum in an accessible format and with appropriate accommodations.

Now, with his improved technology skills and advocacy skills, he feels better prepared for college and he is confident he will be successful in his post-secondary endeavors. 🐾🐾🐾

Modern Technology empowers our students for success by enhance communication, access, and learning.

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.

Tech Teachers work with students on their use of Assistive Technology

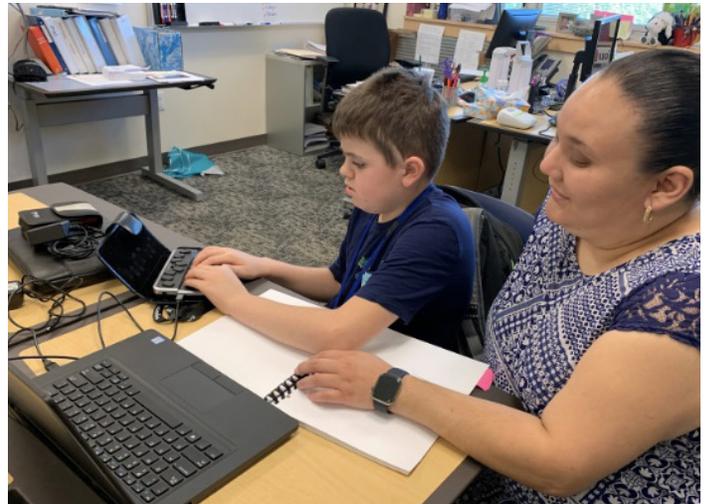
► Jen Guerra works with 11th grader Katelin W. on touch typing.





◀ Laura Lindsey-Ramirez works with Emily T., EXIT student, on researching information about the Texas State Library's Talking Book Program and checking and responding to emails on her iPhone.

▶ Belinda Rosas works with Lukas M., 7th grader, on word processing and sending emails with attachments on a laptop with JAWS and a braille display.



◀ Isabel Castro works with 4th grader Rosie R. on using a BrailleNote.



▶ Julie Nielson works with 8th grader Heather D. on using the “Fun with Typability” program to practice her touch typing skills.



ECC Highlights: Career Education

At TSBVI, students get a comprehensive look at the world of work through a spectrum of transition services provided on- and off-campus.

Students develop not only practical work skills but also the important social nuances and soft skills that are needed to be successful in the workplace. They practice self-advocacy, as well, to educate the community and employers about what they need and how they can best contribute to the workplace.

Fall 2019 continues to offer tried-and-true programs and classes as well as new initiatives such as farm-to-table and hospitality programming. Depending on a student's age, career education is offered in the classroom, or through work-based education. Some additional programs and courses for students include: Wildcat Coffee Shop, hospitality center, assembly and manufacturing, animal care (small animals), or the farm-to-table Wildcat Bistro.

Skills students learn are comprehensive and often important in a variety of settings. For example, at Wildcat Coffee Shop, students learn to make different drinks, operate barista



style equipment, handle money and credit card exchanges, and provide customer service. In assembly and manufacturing, industrial embroidery machines are used to design logos for local businesses and on-campus needs. The TSBVI Bistro is now open every Friday and students provide a lunch service in a commercial kitchen including food harvested from the TSBVI garden.

Some students work off campus. Our current off-site work settings include Pinthouse Pizza, Johnson Backyard Farms, and Tiny Pies. We also have started making coldbrew



◀ Darren G. makes a coffee drink in the Wildcat Coffee Shop.

coffee and other handmade items that are sold at our on-campus “farmers’ market”.

TSBVI has begun to focus on developing partnerships with regional businesses that might be found across the state in order to potentially provide opportunities for our students to gain competitive and paid employment when a student returns to his or her local community. The most recent example of this is the DoubleTree Hotel.

At TSBVI there are a lot of skilled professionals, from teachers to job coaches and other support staff, working very hard daily to support

students to learn the skills they need in order to have meaningful and engaged lives as adults. Ensuring students have sustainable employment options when they leave TSBVI is a goal of the career education department. 🐾🐾🐾



Embroidery: (left) Dia W. removes an item from the embroidery machine while teacher Mark Ramirez provides guidance. (right) Emily T. prepares to put a tag on an embroidered conference bag.

TSBVI Gardens

◀ A welcoming sign, “TSBVI Garden”, at the entrance to our garden plots.



▶ Aaron Mason observes as Javier L. waters plants at the TSBVI Garden.



◀ Donye dumps compost in the TSBVI garden to support farm-to-table career education.



Wildcat Photobooth



Sports & Rec

◀ TSBVI students on tandem bikes on a weekly eight-mile neighborhood ride with volunteers from the cycling community.

Academics

► Kate M. , an 11th grader, dumps a measuring cup of corn starch into a bowl. Jakayla T. holds the bowl steady. Students in Mr. Jim Clark's Environmental Systems class mixed *oobleck* (corn starch and water) to discover its properties. The students discovered that oobleck is both a colloid and a non-Newtonian liquid. When they pushed on the oobleck it felt solid, but when they held it in their hands it ran like a liquid.



Fine Arts

◀ Jewels A. (6th grade) finishes a row of weaving.



▶ Victoria S. (11th grade) plays the flute in jazz band practice.



◀ Alyssa B. (12th grade) paints glaze in the clay bowl she created.



Calendar of Events

October 11th — End of Quarter / Travel Day

Parents can expect progress reports and report cards soon!

October 14th — Travel Day

Teachers engage in professional development while students return from the long weekend.

October 16th — TSBVI celebrates White Cane Day

Students and staff celebrate independence for people with a visual impairment.
Travel home; have a great winter break!

November 5th — TSBVI Jazz Band Performance

“The New Motown” will perform 6:30 p.m. – 8 p.m. at Ross’ Old Austin Cafe, 11800 North Lamar Blvd, Austin, Texas, 78753.

November 8th — Fall Fair

Students display art and other classwork while Elementary students perform musical works. Student-made artisan crafts, snacks, and refreshments will be for sale.

November 9th — Family Day

Check out the schedule on page 3!

November 14th–16th — Goalball Championships

TSBVI athletes compete for the title.

November 22nd — Fall Break / Travel Day

Have a wonderful fall break!

December 1st — Travel Day

Students return to campus from the fall break.

December 3rd — TSBVI Jazz Band Performance

“The New Motown” will perform 6:30 p.m. – 8 p.m. at Ross’ Old Austin Cafe, 11800 North Lamar Blvd, Austin, Texas, 78753.

December 19th — End of Quarter / Winter Break / Travel Day

End of second quarter, students travel home; have a great winter break!