Student in the Spotlight: TJ Andrews from THS

TJ Andrews, a homebound student from THS has always been a “talker”. Even though he can’t talk using his voice like other students, he can communicate what he needs you to know.

TJ started his career in Katy ISD as a young toddler in what was then called the Early Childhood Program. He would use his eyes to say “yes” and he had a very cute pout when he didn’t like something.

From there, TJ moved on to JHE where he received his first communication device. This device would speak the messages that he put together using his head and a small button switch.

His lifeskills teacher, Ms. Brown, and his speech pathologist, Sara Dipalma, spent many hours helping TJ learn the device.

The following year he was moved into resource. TJ began to blossom as his teacher, Norma White Baisden, searched for different ways to help TJ let people know what was trapped inside him.

Ms. Baisden says this about TJ: “When I first began working with TJ, I was a little intimidated. I had never worked with a student who needed so much, but TJ was very patient with me, and we developed a great relationship. Working with TJ was a defining point in my career as an educator. While working with TJ, I discovered what it truly means to be a teacher.”

MPJH was next on TJ’s trip through KISD. It was during this time that Mrs. Andrews researched communication devices and helped him obtain his first communication device that utilized eye gaze to make selections and he flourished.

TJ is currently a senior receiving homebound services. His teacher, Brittany Spurlock, says, “I’ve had the privilege of being TJ’s teacher for the last four years. During this time, he has actually become my teacher and I’ve become the student. He teaches me something every time I am with him, whether it is about outside-the-box communication strategies, learning through struggles with OHI, or life lessons in perseverance. I’m excited to work with TJ’s new reading program this year. My goal is that TJ will be able to use these reading lessons and apply them toward reading for enjoyment, staying on top of current events, and for entertainment in his future.

I’m grateful to Joyce Waggoner for envisioning this program for TJ and making it happen!”

Like every teenager, TJ has his idol. JJ Watt is TJ’s Hero. He had the opportunity to meet JJ as part of his “Make a Wish.”

TJ continues to use his eyegaze at home. He watches videos, accesses Facetime, listens to music, and sends emails. He also uses it to communicate his wants and needs.

More importantly to TJ, he uses eyegaze to watch the Houston Texans.

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When entering a PPCD (Preschool Program for Children with Disabilities) classroom in Katy ISD, you are immersed in the sights and sounds of children playing. Playing implies a simple, enjoyable act; however, acquiring new skills is an extraordinary dance of sensory exploration, language development, problem solving and social skills. PPCD encompasses a large continuum of services outlined to provide students with general and special education settings that focus on their specific needs in early development. These classrooms are driven by student IEPs and the Texas TEK Guidelines for Pre-Kindergarten classrooms. Through these guidelines, the state challenges teachers to provide ample opportunities for instruction in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. PPCD has eagerly accepted that challenge and is running on full steam to provide our young learners with these opportunities.

Science instruction focuses on the use of tools to observe and connect those observations to solve problems and explore the world we live in. Mary Davila at Morton Ranch Elementary provides her students with multisensory science focused learning opportunities each time she enters the classroom. To introduce the concept of fall with her students, she collected a variety of foliage and placed them within her sensory box. When the container was opened, you were immediately taken to the outdoors with the sights and smells of autumn leaves. The students could explore the materials within the sensory area with a magnifying glass, draw within their personal journal, and sort by color, shape or size. This play encourages the science guidelines for prekindergarten but also strongly supports the classroom with language rich play and methodical exploration. Technology is anything that assists us in completing a task. It can be a visual that helps us to know what will happen next within our day; however, technology in the minds of most is the use of electronic devices. Utilizing technology within the classroom to support the learning and teach students how to generate something rather than only be entertained is our charge. Kelli Graham at Stanley Elementary carefully plans opportunities in her classroom each day for just that. After a week’s worth of mini lessons regarding shapes, she asks her students to use the shape tool on her smart board to create the formations they have learned. The students one by one draft a rectangle, square, and two circles as a group. Then, a magical moment happens, when Kelli asks the class “After seeing a real garbage truck with our community helpers, do you think we can make a garbage truck out of these shapes?” The students have just been asked to create something from simple shapes that correlates with their recent learning about community helpers. This mathematics lesson is made possible through the use of technology. Kelli uses it to create and explore the science, engineering and math concepts that are the foundation to learning in later years.

Mathematics at the ages of 3, 4, and 5 is a variety of geometric, numeracy and spatial awareness skills. It isn’t algebra, however it is certainly laying the foundation for skills students will need in upper grades. Jennifer Powell and Sandy Brown at Rhoads Elementary lead the Blended Pre-K/PPCD classroom. They created structured play stations within the classroom with a focus on community helpers that embraces mathematics and engineering in a way that is inspirational. They transformed their lego table into an architect’s drafting table by posting “blueprints” on the wall to inspire children to create their own. The teachers also set the stage for a student to become a postal carrier by sorting envelopes into mailboxes based on the number of stamps on the envelope or to scoot over to the writing area and design their own postage stamp with a template and materials for design. All of these play areas had a method to the madness. Learning can be a fun and imaginative experience.

Through these opportunities the students practice math and engineering skills that they will build upon each year of their education. When a child plays, their mind, body and hearts are connected. PPCD is running at full STEaM to provide each child we serve opportunities to encourage learning in the areas of science, technology, engineering and mathematics each and every day.
Have you heard about Google Forms for data collection? Last summer, at the Special Education Summer Blitz, Teri Rabe and Bekah Sams presented a session titled “Can you track it? Tools for Data Collection” and it was wildly popular. The participants who attended the session had great things to say. Special education teacher, Tina Looper, responded, “It has transformed documentation at my school. I am getting better, more reliable data.” Don Curran attended the session as well. He stated, “Your class at [Summer] Blitz really inspired me- I thought, wow this would make data so much easier to collect!”

Teri and Bekah started their career in Special Education in Katy ISD last year at Mayde Creek High School, transitioning from the position of a general education teacher out of district. They decided to start a secure and easy to use system for data collection. They started using this system for the students they worked with in their classes, and have now expanded to training teachers to use it campus wide. The Google forms contain information to monitor use and effectiveness of accommodations, IEP goals, and additional information, such as turning in homework, that may be helpful in monitoring student progress. The forms are shared with specific teachers and support staff that work with the student. To access the forms for data collection, users must login with their Katy ID and password. Teachers, support staff, and the special education case manager can then access the summary of form responses, at any time, to effectively monitor student progress throughout the year.

When asked how Google Forms has impacted her ability to collect data, Bekah said, “Using Google Forms to track data during class has increased the efficiency of my data collection. It keeps me more organized because all my students’ files are in one compact location. No papers to ruffle through and shuffle around. Getting the data to my student’s case managers couldn’t be easier since they get each submission instantly. The increased look of professionalism in a printed report from using the Form Publisher Add-on is a huge bonus. All in all, using this program has made me a more organized and efficient teacher when it comes to data collection.”

Teri Rabe had similar experience after moving to Google forms for data collection. She states, “I love using google forms to track data on my students in my classes, because it is easy, quick, and efficient. I can collect data on my iPad or phone and help students, as I collect data on their accommodations and goals. I don’t have to carry around a binder with me or keep up with a lot of papers and it is easy to access at school or at home.”

Katy ISD appreciates Teri and Bekah for working hard to develop systems that not only help the teachers and support staff on their campus but many others in Katy ISD.
Congratulations to Melinda Stone, Principal at Woodcreek JH. After December 11, she will be known as Dr. Melinda Stone. Dr. Stone will receive her Doctorate in the area of Educational Leadership with Specialization in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Houston Clear Lake. After graduating from the University of Arkansas in 1995 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Communication, Melinda moved to Nashville and began a career as a sports producer. Shortly thereafter in 1998, she moved to the Katy area and began her educational career as a Spanish teacher at MCHS. Melinda continued at MCHS for 11 years, 6 of those years as a teacher and 5 years as an instructional technologist. She then accepted an Assistant Principal position at MCJH. During the next 4 years at MCJH, Melinda, would begin a pilot collaborative teaching project that focused on common planning time for general education and special program teachers. It wasn’t long thereafter that the high school campuses began calling on this talented educator. In 2013, Melinda opened OTHS as an Assistant Principal and after a brief 1 ½ years was asked to fill the Associate Principal assignment at KHS. Then in 2016, Melinda accepted the Principal position at WCJH. It has been a very busy past several years and factor in the doctoral program, Melinda was asked, how did you do it? Her response was “it was the hardest thing I have ever had to do, it was a mental marathon.”

The first year of teaching is a learning experience so don’t be discouraged by the roadblocks and remember, “you can never go wrong when you do what is right for kids.” It’s hard to believe Melinda has any free time, but she is on a United States Tennis Association competitive women’s tennis team and plays acoustical guitar as well as sings in a local band with her husband. Melinda and her husband enjoy life with two sons and one daughter. Her husband is a teacher at OTHS and her children attend OKE and TJH. The family is actually within a 2 mile radius of home, school and work each day. Melinda is enjoying her first year at WCJH and we look forward to many more years of her leadership in Katy ISD.
Kia Jones

Kia Jones is very thankful for a family friend who encouraged her to check out a career in speech pathology, otherwise she might have been an engineer. Because of that friendly advice, Kia enrolled in a beginner’s level course in speech pathology at The University of Texas at Dallas. And now, rather than a career of making things work, she works to give her students, as she puts it, “the gift of communication.”

Kia has a B.S. in Speech Pathology and Audiology from the UT-Dallas and an M.A. in Communication Disorders from the University of Houston. She has worked at preschools, elementary schools, skilled nursing, private practice and is currently the Speech Language Pathologist at Cinco Ranch High School.

Kia is very active at CRHS, and a member of the CRHS Class of 2002 — the school’s first-ever graduating class! She played basketball, volleyball and ran track for the Cougars, as well as playing basketball for UT-Dallas and two years at the semi-pro level. Kia is a proud member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc.

Kia also initiated the celebration of Black History Month at CRHS, which recently included special daily announcements and fun facts by students. She has served as a chaperone at both Homecoming and the Senior Prom.

And she can truly say she married a Prince — because that’s her husband’s first name. She has two sports-minded sons: Prince Jr., Princeton and Preston who was born last April. She has coached four of the boys basketball teams in Katy Youth Basketball — and won all four championships.

CRHS Principal James Cross sums it up:
“Kia has stepped out beyond her role as a speech pathologist here at Cinco Ranch. While she is outstanding in her role as our speech pathologist, she looks for ways to connect to our student body and to make our school better. She takes such pride in our school and wants to share it with everyone. Kia looks to make an impact with her students and this school and community. She is doing both extremely well.”

KISD is thankful for her dedication and appreciates her giving the gift of communication to those that need it.
Katy Independent School District, the leader in educational excellence, together with family and community, provides unparalleled learning experiences designed to prepare and inspire each student to live an honorable, fulfilling life...to create the future.

Katy Independent School District Department of Special Education

Mission Statement
The Special Education Department exists to provide leadership and service to equip campuses with knowledge and skills in order for students to create their own future success.

Department Values
Excellence
Service to Campuses
Students as Individuals
Teamwork and Collaboration
Importance of Servanthood and Leadership