

## Teacher all in with Harry Potter

When you walk into Ashley Thomas' classroom at Arlington High School, you aren't just going to a sophomore English class.

You're being transported to Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry or Devon or London or any other location where the Harry Potter books are set.

That's because Thomas is all in when it comes to the Harry Potter books. She's been to book-release parties, seen all the movies several times, read all the books several times and traveled to London for a Potter-inspired trip.

Thomas decided this year that she was going to turn her classroom into her own ode to Potter and make it pertinent to her classes.

"The school I was at previously used a house system, not a Harry Potter system, across the whole campus" said Thomas, who is in her second year in the



**Arlington sophomore English teacher Ashley Thomas has transformed her classroom to reflect her love for all things Harry Potter.**

AISD and sixth overall. "I loved it and it worked great. When I came over here I

decided to modify it. Being a huge Harry Potter fan, I was like 'I'm going to take this

back to the roots of where it started.' It kind of grew

**SEE THOMAS, PAGE 5**



## A message from Dr. Cavazos

We love to have teachers who are passionate about what they do in our district.

Arlington High School English teacher Ashley Thomas is one of those.

She's been able to bring her love of Harry Potter into the classroom and use that to add to her lesson plans.

That's a great idea, and we have plenty of teachers in the AISD who do just that.

We also have teachers who use writing conferences to make their students better writers now and for the future. Their investment in students today will make

them better students tomorrow, and we will benefit from this work as a district.

It's also great to see the 2014 Bond continuing to impact the district like it's doing with our fine arts program. The new formal uniforms improve the look and feel of student performances.

Congratulations to all our employees of the month as well as the fine customer-service representatives we have throughout the district.

I hope you all enjoyed your fall break and are looking forward to the next three and a half weeks as we close out the first semester on a positive note.

# Help your learners develop key skills

Recently I was reflecting on our purpose in education and the true role that it plays in our society. It caused me to think about my own experiences as a young learner and to consider how the typical experiences I had compare to those that my own children have on a daily basis. The deeper I reflected, the more I came to realize that these experiences are actually more similar than different. The challenge is that the world we live in today isn't the same as the one I grew up in.

So, how has our world changed over the last several decades? One easy experiment you can conduct to begin to answer this question is to simply ask a child to list the technology that they typically use on a daily basis. I think as you review the list, you will quickly see that the majority of the things our children notate didn't even exist when we were kids. These new technologies range from enhanced communication tools to advancements in medicine, entertainment and educational opportunities. They have not only impacted our economies, but have taken a world that was once large and vast and literally shrunk it to a size that fits in the palm of our hands.

As you reflect on those differences, here are some thought-provoking facts to think about:

- The average graduate will change jobs 15-20 times; that's approximately less than every three years (Bureau of Labor, 2012)
- Less than 28 percent of college graduates are actually working in a field that is connected to their major course of study (US Bureau of the Census, 2010)
- 72 percent of high school



graduates have plans to be entrepreneurs (Huffington Post, 2015)

Furthermore, it's interesting that when you survey companies about the primary skills they look for in candidates they wish to hire, most of those skills are what we call soft skills - things like leadership, communication, problem-solving, initiative, etc.

With all of this in mind, I can't help but ask myself how can we best prepare our students for this world. What needs to change in our practice to ensure that these required soft skills are those that we intentionally foster and cultivate through daily tasks/assignments? If we want our students to be excellent communicators, then we know that the tasks we ask students to engage in each day must require them to effectively communicate, both verbally and in writing. If we want our learners to develop the skills to collaborate and interact with individuals that think and act differently than they do, we know that we have to intentionally provide

meaningful opportunities each day for our learners to collaborate. Soft skills, just like others, require daily practice. They are developed with intention, not by accident.

As we plan the learning tasks for our students, I would like to invite you to consider some of the following questions as a way of reflecting if the tasks being provided embody the qualities needed to ensure our learners develop these required skills.

- Will my students have the opportunity to engage in solving problems connected to the real world outside of the classroom?
- Are there opportunities for my students think critically and make cross-disciplinary connections?
- Do the learning tasks my students engage in promote inquiry and the interpretation of new ideas?
- Do my students have choice-opportunities to collaboratively and independently create original products?
- Do I provide my learners with multiple ways for them to demonstrate their mastery of a standard?

We are so lucky to be in education and to have the opportunity to make a difference for others! This Thanksgiving season I want to personally express my gratitude to be a member of an awesome team of teachers and leaders who truly care about children and work to prepare them for the incredible world in which we live. May we continue to strive to develop the learning tasks that not only engage our students, but also develop the very future-ready skills they will need to reach their life dreams.

***Dr. Steven Wurtz is the chief academic officer for the AISD***

## Greats deals can be found on perks page

The perks page on the intranet is the place to go for the latest discounts available for AISD employees.

The [page](#) is being updated often. One of the newest additions to

the site is a discount on Dallas Mavericks [tickets](#). A discount from the Fort Worth Zoo will be up in December and other discounts will be added.

And if you're interested in visited the new Enchant

at Globe Life Ballpark, there are discounted [tickets](#) available.

The perks page will be on the move soon. Work continues on a redesign for the intranet. The site is being designed to be

more user friendly with an emphasis on making it easier for our stakeholders to find items they use frequently. Links to pages frequently used by staff members on the redesign should also save you time.



# GT redesign in full swing

Seeking to promote engagement and achievement of our gifted and talented-identified elementary students, the Arlington ISD has embarked on a comprehensive redesign of instructional practices and resources that effectively meet the needs of our K-6 gifted and talented students. Now in year two of a multi-year plan, our elementary schools are currently serving more than 2,700 GT students through a variety of classroom opportunities.

Sparking curiosity and enthusiasm for learning in our youngest GT students, Kingore Planned Learning Experiences introduce our K-3 students to age-appropriate content that challenges their thinking and inquisitive natures, allowing each child to explore personal interests in age-appropriate learning environments.

Students in grades 2-4 were introduced to Literature Circles this year. From a menu of age-appropriate novels, students experience a variety of genres and authors. The curriculum, designed by the Center for Gifted Education at William and Mary University, creates opportunities for students to explore literature in small-group settings and to engage in creative discussions relevant to their reading.

Embracing technology as a means of challenging our students to think, analyze and solve real-life challenges, GT students in grades 3 through 6 chase their passions and explore modern day solutions via Renzulli Learning, an online instructional resource. Through online surveys, students' personal interests, learning preferences and expression styles are determined, allowing teachers to create inquiry-based learning experiences catered to the interests and strengths of students.

Instruction through cluster grouping and pull out ensures that students are afforded creative settings during which they are instructed with their GT peers and with their grade-level peers. Additionally, GT students participate in pull out, a dedicated time period during which their instruction occurs with other GT-identified students via cross-curricular experiences that add depth and complexity to their learning experiences.

Preparing the GT lead teachers to effectively support students and teachers is an additional high-leverage strategy of the GT redesign. GT lead teachers are participating in monthly professional learning.

## The AISD PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

### COACHING MENU



#### APPETIZERS

Partner departments within the AISD collectively support educators in the work of advancing student learning. Many coaching experts in the field share that coaching, on average, yields a 99 percent professional learning transfer to practice of educators whom engage in a weekly coaching partnership (Joyce & Showers, 2002).

#### MAIN COURSE

The AISD Coaching program's journey of more than 13 years has been and continues to be refined to meet the needs of our 21st-century learner. This fall, instructional coaches, SCE interventionists, assistant principals, specialists, coordinators, principals and directors engaged in the AISD Coaching Conversation tool.

<https://tinyurl.com/AISD-Coaching-Convo>

#### DESSERTS

Relationships are foundational in the work of risk taking when trying out new strategies to advance student learning. Educators in coaching partnership relationships feel supported as they have more opportunities to think through their next steps.

James Comer (1995) puts it well: "No significant learning occurs without a significant relationship."

### @ AISD LEARNING

## UPCOMING DATES

World AIDS Day	Dec. 1
Full Moon	Dec. 3
National Pastry Day	Dec. 9
Human Rights Day	Dec. 10
Hanukkah	Dec. 12-20
Ice Cream Day	Dec. 13
Bill of Rights Day	Dec. 15
End of First Semester	Dec. 20
Winter Break	Dec. 21-Jan. 5
First Day of Winter	Dec. 21
Festivus	Dec. 23
National Egg Nog Day	Dec. 24
Christmas Day	Dec. 25
Kwanzaa begins	Dec. 26
New Year's Eve	Dec. 31



**Arlington**  
INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT  
*More Than a Remarkable Education*

# Writing conferences a win-win

“If you don’t hook your reader, then they just might walk the plank!” chanted fourth graders during a small group writing conference in Sarah McMurrrough’s science class at Little Elementary.

Students were writing in science class? Writing conferences were held during science class? The answer is a resounding “yes” to both. Writing conferences benefit students across multiple disciplines.

During a recent study in science, McMurrrough asked her students to write an imaginative narrative from the point of view of electricity. The students utilized the information learned in science, their own creativity in creating characters and their understanding of the writing process to create their compositions. Knowing the needs of her students in writing, McMurrrough brought together three students who needed to work on writing hooks/leads for their stories. Specific feedback was given to each student as well as to the group. Within five minutes they had volleyed ideas about how to hook their readers and headed to their seats with the confidence they knew exactly how to improve their writing.

At Bowie High School, Susan McKissack’s English II pre-AP students have also been applying their skills in writing. While all students worked on various stages of their compositions, McKissack chose one-on-one conferences to meet the needs of her students. Individual students made their way to the teacher, sat beside her at a small table and shared their analysis



**Little Elementary science teacher Sarah McMurrrough works with a small group.**

of their own writing. During the writing conversation, the teacher listened, asked the students questions to help them clarify their own understandings, gave them specific feedback and jotted down an area of focus beside each name. This information would assist McKissack in determining mini-lessons for upcoming instruction and would serve as a reminder of what she needs to look for when holding her students accountable for applying the information gained from the conference.

So why are writing conferences important? According to the [International Center for Leadership in Education](#), education comes down to three basic principles – rigor, relevance and relationships. Relationships come first, paving the way for trust and learning. When students find their studies relevant, teachers can increase the rigor to meet the needs of students. Writing conferences provide opportunities for teachers to build relationships with students. As trust is developed, learning increases. When asked, “How do writing conferences benefit you?” Christian D.

in McKissack’s class said, “The teacher’s advice helps improve my writing by giving me strategies. It also helps to build better relationships between the student and the teacher. The students know they can rely on the teacher.”

Providing specific feedback is another important role of writing conferences. According to the meta-analyses of professor John Hattie, an educational researcher, providing feedback has an effect size of .73, considered a large effect. Writing conferences, whether small group or one-on-one, provide feedback to students about what is going well with their writing and gives them one to two areas of focus for improvement. Navie P. from McMurrrough’s class had this to say about writing conferences: “It is important to have conferences because [McMurrrough] help you know what to do so you won’t make mistakes. I like to talk to her. She helps you, but it’s not boring. It’s fun – not like you’ve done something wrong.”

While most teachers agree that writing conferences are important, a shortage of time is often

given as a factor that keeps teachers from conferring/ conferencing with students, especially in situations where teachers may teach 100-plus students.

“Writing conferences are the heart of the writing process because they provide student and teacher with information and direction,” McKissack said. “The student can glean the encouragement and direction needed to continue writing, and the conferences allow the teacher to target authentic student needs before assessment of the writing. As Kelly Gallagher says in his book *Teaching Adolescent Writers*, ‘I can affect more improvement in a student’s writing via a two-minute discussion than I can by taking five minutes to write comments on the paper.’”

The time spent building relationships is well spent.

“I wouldn’t get to know my students as well if I didn’t conduct writing conferences as part of our class routine,” McMurrrough said. “When my fourth graders write, they give me a window into their personal lives that I’ve always felt honored and trusted to see through. The better I get to know them as writers, the better I get to know them as people. This also enables me to take them further instructionally when we learn about showing voice, being specific and using dialogue.”

In reflecting on the mileage gained from building relationships – building a strong foundation for rigor and relevance – as well as the large impact that specific feedback has on learning, how can we afford not to invest in this precious time spent with students?

# Fine arts gets big boost from bond

Junior high music uniforms and a concert piano for the future [Fine Arts Center](#), along with hundreds of new instruments, highlighted phase three fine arts bond purchases. Much of the \$1.6 million worth of equipment and uniforms started arriving in the district in August.

Uniforms for junior high band, choir and orchestra were a notable part of phase three orders as this is the first time the AISD has provided them. Previously, junior highs had to use their own activity funds if they wanted uniforms.

“The formal uniforms our students wear from the AISD bond have made a huge, positive impact on the orchestra,” said Jennifer Martin, Boles Junior High’s orchestra director. “A successful orchestra performance requires discipline, focus and professionalism in both demeanor and in dress. These are also skills the students will need in many different career paths. I see my students transform from junior high students into professional adults when they change into their formal uniforms.



They feel a shared sense of pride, confidence and professionalism that has enhanced our performances.”

A committee of fine arts staff from across the district selected the uniforms. Unsatisfied with what was commercially available, the committee developed and ordered a design specifically for the AISD.

The uniforms are the same for all AISD junior highs, so if enrollment at one school increases, it can pull from a surplus at another school.

Phase three bond funds were also used to order a [Steinway & Sons](#) concert piano for the future districtwide

Fine Arts Center. Though the Fine Arts Center isn’t slated to open until 2020, the piano was ordered now because it takes nearly two years to build.

The other instruments ordered in phase three shouldn’t take as long to receive. The nearly 1,000 new instruments include 312 violins, 152 violas, 149 cellos and some of everything else, from 49 flutes to one vibraphone. Other equipment ordered includes items like chairs, risers, Orff instruments, cases, miscellaneous percussion instruments, pianos, bows, supplemental high school uniforms and more.

## THOMAS FROM PAGE 1

from there. I’m a nerd. I have a lot of this stuff at home. I took it up here because it makes me happy.”

While there’s no required Harry Potter reading for the 165 students Thomas teaches, there’s definitely a Harry Potter feel. The students are divided into four houses – Ravenclaw, Hufflepuff, Slytherin and Gryffindor – and compete against each other. There is a point system she uses for reading assignments and the houses know where they all stand. It serves as motivation for the students as they can encourage the house members in other classes to get going to help their house.

“I don’t force them to do anything,” she said. “I do teach with it some. We do an archetype lesson that I use Harry Potter with. We do a couple of different fiction lessons where I use excerpts from it. We have several kids who have chosen to read it just because they want to figure it out.”

And if they needed a little more

encouragement, they could just step in Thomas’ classroom.

There are banners on the wall. There’s a sorting hat. There’s Dumbledore’s podium. There are also pictures and sayings on the wall that are written in the Harry Potter font. If you need to call Thomas, she’ll answer on her phone that has a Harry Potter phone case.

If it’s chilly, she’ll wear her Harry Potter sweater. At Christmas, her students will notice a Harry Potter tree in the classroom.

And that’s all fine with Arlington Principal Shahveer Dhalla.

“Ms. Thomas does whatever it takes for her kids to be successful,” he said. “Her room is just one example of that. You walk in and you are transported to a different world. Even if you don’t know about Harry Potter, you know there is something different about her classroom. The level of engagement she receives from students is a big portion of why they are so successful.

And her room is just one more way for her to get that engagement from students, it’s like a hook.”

Thomas has been hooked since she was a sixth grader at Bebensee Elementary.

That’s when she read her first Harry Potter book, which was the fourth book to come out. The love of Potter followed her at Ousley Junior High and Seguin High School. It didn’t stop in college, either, as her freshman English paper was a comparison of Harry Potter and Great Expectations.

So why Potter?

“It’s just so well written,” she said. “It’s a story that it doesn’t matter where you are in life it speaks to you. There’s something you can take away from it. I’ve read the entire series 12 times and every time I read it there’s something new that I didn’t catch the first 11 times. It’s not just a story. You get immersed in everything.”

Just like her students when they walk into her room.



## Risk Management Review November 2017

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### \*\*\*Accident\*\*\* What to Do Next?

- Contact supervisor. If an emergency response professional is needed, call 911.
- Contact the risk management office at 682-867-7649
- [Complete workers' comp packet](#)
- Completed packet should be sent to risk management office at the administration building.

**Make it a habit to tell people thank you. To express your appreciation, sincerely and without the expectation of anything in return.**

**Truly appreciate those around you, and you'll soon find many others around you.**

**Truly appreciate life, and you'll find that you have more of it.**

**Ralph Martson**

### Can I Go to My Own Doctor If I'm Injured at Work?

No. You must select a primary care physician from the Alliance list of doctors. This list can be found at [www.pswca.org](http://www.pswca.org). You must go to the selected primary care physician for all injury care. If a specialist is required, your primary care physician will refer you.

Treating outside of the Alliance Network could result in you being responsible for paying the bills.



### Washing Hands Prevents Infection

Keeping hands clean is one of the most important steps we can take to avoid getting sick and spreading germs. Many diseases and conditions are spread by not washing hands with soap and clean running water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based sanitizer.



### How to Avoid Injury Risks In the Office

Labor-intensive industries get all the attention when it comes to work-related injuries. But employees working in office settings are also at risk. The best way to avoid these injuries is by preventing them. When working at a computer, keep wrists in a neutral position, elbows by your side, shoulders back and sit up straight. Keep regularly-used items, like your phone or coffee mug, within easy reach. Adjust your chair so your feet rest firmly on the floor with your knees bent at a 90-degree angle. Position your computer monitor directly in front of your head, just at or slightly below eye level.

### Be Thankful for Awareness

November is a month to be especially thankful for family and many other things in our lives. Remember to be thankful for being able to be aware of making better decisions about working as a team instead of individually. Be thankful for being able to recognize a situation that may be unsafe. At the end of the day, be thankful for being able to respond positively to any situation.



**Be Alert and Stay Safe!**



**ACCESSIBILITY**  
**TANGIBLES**  
**RELIABILITY**  
**RESPONSIVENESS**  
**EMPATHY**



**Accessibility**

**Elizabeth Ramos**  
**Pope Elementary**

**What they said:** Elizabeth has moved my classroom three times since June! If that's not enough, she went above and beyond to get tape residue out of my carpet and made the carpet look like new. She also helps with students in the cafeteria at breakfast and lunch.



**Tangibles**

**Carlos Williams**  
**Bowie High School**

**What they said:** Carlos always goes above and beyond to provide the absolute best customer service to our campus. He fulfills our requests for help promptly and always with a smile on his face. He takes it a step further by anticipating our needs and planning ahead.



**Reliability**

**Nicolas Umana**  
**Warehouse**

**What they said:** Nicolas is always willing to help. When you have a question, even when he does not know the answer, he will find out for you. He is dependable, consistent and accurate. Deliveries are picked up and dropped off in a timely manner at our office.



**Responsiveness**

**Brittany Calhoun**  
**Miller Elementary**

**What they said:** Brittany went above and beyond working with her own students and she completed beginning of the year assessments and data collection for the fourth-grade teacher who was out on maternity leave. Brittany took it upon herself the responsibility for doing ARD prep.



**Empathy**

**Cirilo Martinez**  
**Lamar High School**

**What they said:** My key would not unlock my door. Cirilo came directly to my office and tried to help and when he realized that it was really broke he immediately put in an emergency work order so it would be repaired ASAP and I would be able to get back into my office.

**A customer forms an impression of service received over time depending on a range of experiences. Have you recently experienced exemplary service from anyone in the AISD? If so, affirm their practice by sending a shout out to [bit.ly/AISDSERVE](https://bit.ly/AISDSERVE), and we'll recognize them! Be sure to let us know which component of the framework was exemplified (accessibility, tangibles, reliability, responsiveness or empathy).**



# NOVEMBER EMPLOYEES OF THE MONTH



**Lasonia Blackston**  
**Ellis Elementary**  
**Elementary Teacher of the Month**



**Evodia Banda**  
**Food and Nutrition Services**  
**Department Employee of the Month**



**Ashley Booker**  
**Barnett Junior High**  
**Junior High Teacher of the Month**



**Candace Ortega**  
**Career & Technical Center**  
**High School Teacher of the Month**