

Comal Independent School District

NEWS RELEASE

Contact: Jason Gordon
830-885-1081

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Many in Comal ISD community benefit from new SVHS class

Even though he's only a seventh grader at Smithson Valley Middle, Matthew Muñoz was already feeling apprehensive about the day he eventually would step foot on a high school campus.

That all changed when he first met his mentor, Smithson Valley High senior Krista LaPlante.

"The truth is, I'm pretty nervous about high school," Muñoz said. "But she gives me someone to look up to, and I don't feel that way anymore."

In fact, Muñoz said he feels he can talk to LaPlante about many different subjects.

"I trust her enough to tell her things I only talk to a few people about," he said. "It makes me feel great that an older student understands some of the things I'm going through."

LaPlante said she's happy she's made such strides with Muñoz during the fall semester.

"It's very rewarding," LaPlante said. "I think it gives the students we talk to a different perspective, and it's great when they open up and give you their trust."

The student-mentor program is one of the many branches of Lori Niles' Family and Community Services (FACS) classes at Smithson Valley High.

FACS is new this school year at SVHS. It has similarities of the Peer Assistance Leadership Students (PALS) program that was formerly at the school for the last decade, except, instead of students joining on a volunteer basis and doing all their service work outside the classroom, FACS has state curriculum standards and is an actual high school class.

Students in the FACS class and mentor program take a responsibility pledge based on: trustworthiness and honesty, loyalty and confidentiality, wisdom and justice, morality, and family.

"I'm so excited about this class and this group," Niles said. "They just jump at the chance to help people in any way they can."

In addition to mentoring twice per week at Comal ISD campuses like SVMS, Spring Branch Middle, and Arlon Seay, Bill Brown, Johnson Ranch, and Rahe Bulverde elementary schools, FACS students also write themselves a plan that includes 10 community service hours per semester.

Already those community service projects have included, "Soles 4 Souls," a venture in conjunction with Arlon Seay Elementary to help those who need a good pair of shoes; volunteering at local fire departments; assisting the Garden Ridge Police Department on Halloween night; organizing blood drives; partnering with GVTC on a food drive to benefit Habitat for Safe Seniors; a clothing drive for the Hope Center; and an Angel Tree set up at SVHS to help families in need with Christmas gifts.

"There are just endless possibilities with this class," Niles said. "I'm amazed at what these students have organized and accomplished so far."

Senior Kelsie Lauderdale started a program that helps prepare meals for cancer patients, in honor of her mother, a cancer survivor, and grandmother, who passed away from the disease.

"This is a class where you forget about what people are doing for you, and you concentrate on what you can do for others," Lauderdale said. "Some of the things we do may seem time consuming, but this is time totally well spent."

SVHS junior Shelby Medlin agrees she made a wise decision to take the FACS class.

"The fact we're able to do a lot of things for people they can't do for themselves is wonderful," Medlin said. "It makes us feel like we're really making a difference."

It didn't take Rahe Buverde Elementary principal Merrie Fox long to answer a question about the effect FACS students have had on her campus.

"On a scale of one to 10, with 10 being the most significant, they are absolutely 10," Fox said. "Without a doubt, this program gives our students a sense of self confidence, and it gives them a young adult to look up to and feel safe with."

SVHS principal Chris Trotter said he looks upon students in the FACS classes as leaders on campus and in Comal ISD.

“These kids should be the leaders of our school,” Trotter said. “They are taking on many different responsibilities and doing great things. Students and community members of all ages look up to them, and hopefully they’ll continue to do this kind of generous work long after they graduate.”

-CISD-

IN PHOTOS:

Smithson Valley High students (from left) Ashley Noll, Amanda Schwanenberg, Courtney Bantz and Elizabeth Pawelek pose by just a few of the many presents collected during the Angel Tree drive to help families in need with gifts during Christmas. It’s just one of many programs in Lori Niles’ Family and Community Services (FACS) classes at SVHS that strive to serve the Comal ISD community.

Amanda Schwanenberg drops a present in a gift bag during the Angel Tree drive, which will help many different families in need with gifts during Christmas. It is part of her community service program for Lori Niles’ Family and Community Services (FACS) class.