



**Illuminating**

**African Americans**

**and The Arts**



February 23, 2024

Austin ISD Performing Arts Center  
1500 Barbara Jordan Blvd.



# A message from the Superintendent

It fills me with immense pride and gratitude to commemorate the 41st year of the African American Heritage Celebration as your Austin ISD Superintendent.

This annual event, initiated in 1983 under the guidance of former Austin ISD Associate Superintendent William Charles Akins, has evolved into a cherished tradition that honors the rich tapestry of African American history and underscores the exceptional achievements of our students, the dedication of our staff and the enduring support of our community partners.

Through this year's Black History Month celebration theme, "Illuminating African Americans and the Arts," we explore the profound impact of African Americans in the arts. It is a theme that encourages us to reflect on the extraordinary contributions of African American artists, musicians, writers and performers who have shaped our cultural landscape and paved the way for future generations.



Each year, the African American Heritage Committee selects a high school to showcase its talents. This year, Crockett Early College High School students have been selected to host our program. These student artists and performers bring to life the spirit of community, inclusivity and excellence that defines the Austin Independent School District.

The African American Heritage Celebration is not just a month-long event; it is a continuous commitment to fostering an inclusive and supportive educational environment for all our students. It is a pledge to amplify diverse voices, acknowledge harms and pave the way for a future where every student can shine brightly, whatever the path they take.

I want to extend my deepest gratitude to all who have contributed to the success of this celebration – from the students who inspire us, to the educators who tirelessly support their growth and to everyone who worked so hard to make today so very special.

I'm so proud to be part of an organization that understands how essential this work is to becoming the district we aspire to be: Austin's home for inclusive learning with high expectations for all students and high outcomes for all children.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Matias Segura". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a white background.

Matias Segura, PE, MBA Austin ISD  
Superintendent



# Program

Prelude	
Procession of AISD Student Honorees .....	Top Senior Scholars
Presentation of Colors .....	Gus Garcia Young Men’s Leadership Academy Boy Scout Troop#7414 Troop Leader: Dr. David Brown
Pledge of Allegiance to the United States Flag .....	Joseph (J.J.) Manor
Pledge of Allegiance to the Texas Flag.....	Jasmine Rogers
United States National Anthem.....	Crockett Early College High School Choir Students Claire Huth, Ainsley Johnson, Adam Kemp, Denham McKendrick, Savannah Richardson, Juliette Melanie Robles, Marshall Valencia
Welcome and Occasion.....	J.J. Manor and Jasmine Rogers Master and Mistress of Ceremony
Crockett Early College High School Showcase	
Musical Selection .....	Jazz Ensemble
Musical Performance.....	Guitar Soloist, Darnell Osaigbovo and Crockett Early College High School Choir
Superintendent Remarks.....	Matias Segura, PE, MBA Superintendent
Congratulatory Remarks.....	Dr. Kevin Foster AISD Board of Trustees, Vice President
Special Dance Selection.....	Sadler Means Dance Company Visionary Creative Director, China Smith
Presentation of Community Awards.....	J.J. Manor and Jasmine Rogers
Presentation of Student Honorees.....	James Salas
Closing Remarks .....	J.J. Manor and Jasmine Rogers
Finale .....	“Lift Every Voice and Sing” Crockett Early College High School Choir

# Charles Akins Award

## Chief Wayne Sneed



Chief Wayne Sneed began his career with the San Marcos Police Department in the early 1980s, where he was employed until 1991. He served as Corporal over many units including K-9 Handler, Juvenile Investigator, and Motorcycle Officer, before opening the Texas Department of Insurance Fraud Unit as a Sergeant Detective. He worked for the Austin Police Department - Hospital Division. Chief Sneed was recruited by the National Insurance Crime Bureau, where he served as a Special Texas Ranger assigned to the United States Secret Service - Metro Alien Federal Task Force.

Chief Sneed has served as Chief of Internal Affairs Division for the Health and Human Services-Office of Inspector General.

Chief Sneed received his Bachelor of Criminal Justice and Business Management degrees from Texas State University.

Chief Sneed is a Certified Inspector General with the National Association of Inspector Generals. He has also earned the Certified Public Manager designation from the William P. Hobby Center for Public Service at Texas State University-Round Rock. He has over 40 years of service with both criminal justice and law enforcement agencies.

Since 2012, Chief Sneed has worked with the Austin ISD Police Department. He served as a School Resource Officer before assuming the role of the Crisis Intervention Team Coordinator, and later was promoted to Sergeant over the Community Engagement and Crisis Intervention Team Divisions. He later transferred to Sergeant over the Northwest SRO Sector. In 2017, Chief Sneed was appointed as a Board Member to the "Governor's Juvenile Justice Advisory Board." by Governor Greg Abbott.

In March 2022, he was promoted to Lieutenant over the South Sector, until his appointment to Chief of Police in August, 2022.

# Hobart L. Gaines Award

## Anthony J. Lee

Anthony J. Lee, also known as AJ, was born in New Orleans, Louisiana. As a pre-teen, his family moved to Frisco Texas where he graduated from Frisco Heritage High School in 2016. Following graduation, AJ began his undergraduate studies at Collin Community College in McKinney, Texas with aspirations of becoming a forensic pathologist. As with many college students, AJ needed to secure a job to help pay for college. He began working at a preschool where he quickly discovered his passion for working with children. He realized how rewarding the daily interactions of providing students with a helping hand and listening ear could impact the students and families in his care as a preschool assistant teacher.



In 2019, AJ continued his journey of supporting children and families working as a Frontline Therapist with a Crisis Clinic in McKinney, Texas. This position provided AJ with experience working with children and teenagers identified with behavioral, intellectual, and developmental disabilities. This intense learning experience increased his wisdom in the area of behavioral and learning skills.

AJ moved to Austin, Texas in 2021 and began working at Circle C Child Development Center as an assistant preschool teacher. It was in this role that his supervisor observed his strength and passion for working with students and recommended him for a position as an After-School Site Director at Austin ISD. As observed by Principal Marizza Marquez at Sunset Valley, “AJ exemplifies a commitment to education through his exceptional management of the after-school program at Sunset Valley. He manages and cultivates a cohesive team of teachers dedicated to growing the minds of our Sunset Valley students ages 4 to 11. His innate ability to connect with children on a personal level fosters a supportive and engaging learning environment on the campus.” His favorite quote he shares with his team as well as the students he serves, “One team, one heartbeat.”

AJ plans to continue his quest for growth and knowledge in the field of Early Childhood Education and will continue to commit excellence to the kids that he has the opportunity and pleasure to mentor and work with. AJ will return to Austin Community College in the Fall of 2024.

# Spirit of Giving Award

Roger C. Davis



Roger C. Davis, originally from Chicago, Illinois, moved to Austin, Texas in January, 1987. Mr. Davis graduated with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Accounting from Florida A&M University in May, 1984. He retired after 35 years serving as an Accounting Analyst and Customer Account Management

Representative with 3M in Austin, Texas. Currently, he serves as a Greater Austin Black Chamber (GABC) Business Engagement Coordinator.

Mr. Davis is married and the proud father of three children. He enjoys time with family, sports, movies, and volunteering in the greater Austin community. He proudly serves as a Church of Christ at Eastside Care Group Leader.

According to Statia Paschel, Austin ISD Director of SEL & CP&I, Mr. Davis, affectionately known as Brother Davis, supports student success in the classroom of life. He facilitates financial literacy workshops, youth athletic events and organic mentorship. He has a heart of gold, and he actively works to connect people and purpose together.



# Friend of Education Award

## The Reverend Randy Knighten

The Reverend Randy Knighten is originally from Baker, Louisiana just outside of Baton Rouge. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree in Religion from American Baptist College in Nashville. He is a graduate of Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary where he received the Ethel Lance Human and Civil Rights Award. Since 2000, Rev. Knighten has served in congregations and community-based organizations in Louisiana, Tennessee, and Texas. Randy and his wife Maya have two amazing sons and an English Bulldog. He loves spending time hiking, fishing, reading, and watching their sons play lacrosse.

As the Outreach Minister at The St. John's United Methodist Church, Rev. Knighten leads the work of St. John's partnership with Austin ISD Licensed Mental Health Professionals (LMHP) to address student and family critical and emergent basic needs.



As part of his outreach efforts, Rev. Knighten utilizes a network of churches and individuals in the community, in an attempt to fulfill the family needs. Rev. Knighten's team at St. John's works directly with the LMHPs to hear the family needs, assess resources, and deliver items to families. A few ways St. John's has touched the lives of families in crisis include furnishing homes with essentials after house and apartment fires, providing clothing for a funeral, new bedding and towels for a family who moved from a shelter into their first apartment, and providing car seats for children who needed immediate transportation safety.

When he is not providing community resource outreach, Rev. Knighten is serving as an AISD mentor. The Reverend Randy Knighten embodies the spirit of "community" and we are delighted to have him as a partner with the AISD community.

# Servant of Education Award

## Sam Herrera



Sam Herrera was a native Austinite, and attended Ortega Elementary, Allan Junior High, and Johnston High School. In 1983, Mr. Herrera graduated from Anderson High School in the top ten percent of his class.

His life of service began as a student, where he served on the Student Superintendent Advisory Committee. He was also a member of both the National Hispanic Honor Society, as well as the National Honor Society.

Mr. Herrera was a person of excellence and an inquisitive learner. As a teenager, he worked in the restaurant and catering business, which inspired him to design an ice chest with compartments and an integrated drink dispenser. He registered his design at the age of 16, and in 1984 his design was patented.

In the Fall of 1983, he attended the University of Texas at Austin in the School of Engineering. Sam was a remarkable person who devoted many hours of volunteer work and was well-known for helping others. His service via the Austin High Orchestra Monster Concert and Carnival was where he shined! He led the construction of the Austin High Orchestra Haunted House and served as the leader of their food committee for 20 years and cooked BBQ every year. His service also included providing leadership involving the Austin High Orchestra Winter Concert Dinner and the Orchestra Silent Auction. In addition to leading, he was also well known for helping with other Student Social Activities and Orchestra trips with Austin High School. His diligence, unconditional love, and great sense of humor impacted many lives, often inspiring people to go above and beyond. He also volunteered at Casis Elementary for 14 years and at O. Henry Middle School for 18 years, eventually leading him to Austin High School, where he volunteered for 21 years.

Sam married Ana Maria Solis-Herrera in 2002. He was a father to two wonderful children, Gabriel and Elizabeth Solis Herrera.

# Team Player of the Year Award

## Frankie Mendoza

Frankie Mendoza is the Restorative Practices Coordinator for Austin Independent School District under the Department of Student Support Services. He is a native of San Marcos, Texas and a graduate of San Marcos High School. Thanks to his high school teacher, Darryl Fleming, Mr. Mendoza was very much involved in theater and was granted a full academic scholarship to attend college. He received his Bachelor of Fine Arts in Acting and Directing and his Masters of Arts in Adult and Community Education from Texas State University-San Marcos and has been in the field of Education for 20 years. Mr. Mendoza held positions as a High School Assistant Principal, Teacher, Dean of Culture, Graduation Coach, Charter School Founder, Restorative Justice Coordinator, Teacher Mentor, Higher Education Coordinator, CTE Manager, and After School Program Director.



Mr. Mendoza is a proud member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. and was initiated into the Mu Nu Chapter at Texas State University-San Marcos. He is also a member of the Gamma Eta Lambda Chapter Executive Board of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. and Chaplain in Austin, Texas. He is also a Committee Member for the Travis County Juvenile Probation Department as well as a partner with the Austin Police Department in training their new cadets on Restorative Practices/Justice. In addition to being a mentor for Austin Partners in Education (APIE). Mr. Mendoza is a devoted member of The Connection Church in Buda, Texas.

Some of his accomplishments include implementing the Alpha Ram Mentoring Program at Marshall Middle School, as well as receiving the Alpha Merit of Achievement Award, President's Award of Excellence of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., and RAVE Award for Austin Independent School District in 2023 and 2024.

Frankie has helped campuses to decrease school suspension, behavior incidents, as well as support staff retention. Frankie believes that implementing connection and restorative practices on campuses supports culture, academic achievement, climate, belonging, employee retention and family persistence.

Frankie has been married to his lovely wife, Stefanie Mendoza for 16 years, and together they have two children, Princeton (14) and Emma (11).

Favorite Quote: "I, Me, My, Mine, these are words that do not shine. Us, We, Ours, Together, these are words that last forever."

# Principal for Continued School Improvement Award

Andrea Williams, Pecan Springs Elementary School



Andrea Williams is a native Austinite. She pursued and obtained her undergraduate degree from Huston Tillotson University, and a Master of Education degree from the University of Texas in 1998. Ms. Williams is proud to be part of the Austin ISD Family for more than 39 combined years.

As a former scholar in the Austin Independent School District, Ms. Williams attended Oak Springs Elementary, Mary Jane Sims Elementary, John T. Allan Elementary, James E. Pearce Middle School, O. Henry Middle School, and Lyndon Baines Johnson High School.

In 1998, Ms. Williams began her educational career as a teacher at Pecan Springs Elementary. For 15 years, she had the honor of teaching and mentoring fifth and sixth grade scholars as a classroom teacher. In addition to teaching, Ms. Williams served as an Instructional Coach in which she helped promote teachers' efficacy in the areas of reading and mathematics. These experiences allowed her the privilege to not only serve, but also learn from a variety of culturally and linguistically diverse learning communities. Even though Ms. Williams has always felt at home in the classroom setting, she aspired to be an administrator.

As an administrator at several AISD elementary schools (Andrews, Barton Hills, Casis, and Pillow), Ms. Williams continued to deepen her innate passion to lead. This afforded her opportunities to collaborate with many teachers, staff, students, and community members to actualize the campus' vision at hand: *Success for All!*

Ms. Williams envisions continued excellence for Pecan Springs and is certain that, through a shared vision, her campus will inspire and empower scholars to rise to the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century global classroom. "While my work as an administrator has been the most challenging, it has also proven to be the most rewarding. Every black and brown scholar who enters the doors at Pecan Springs reminds me of my own journey. It is for this reason that I am committed to positively changing the trajectory of the lives of every Eagle in the Pecan Springs Elementary Learning Community. I am truly blessed to be the recipient of this award. I recognize that this work is too great for one person. For this reason, I express my sincerest gratitude to the Pecan Springs' Learning Community for embracing my vision, the members in our community for partnering with us, and for the countless mentors who invested their time and energy to build my capacity."

# True Gem Counselor Award

## Robin D. Johnson

Robin D. Johnson, a native of Illinois and one of ten siblings, embodies the Spirit of dedication and resilience. Growing up in a large family, she quickly learned the importance of hard work, community, and the pursuit of knowledge.

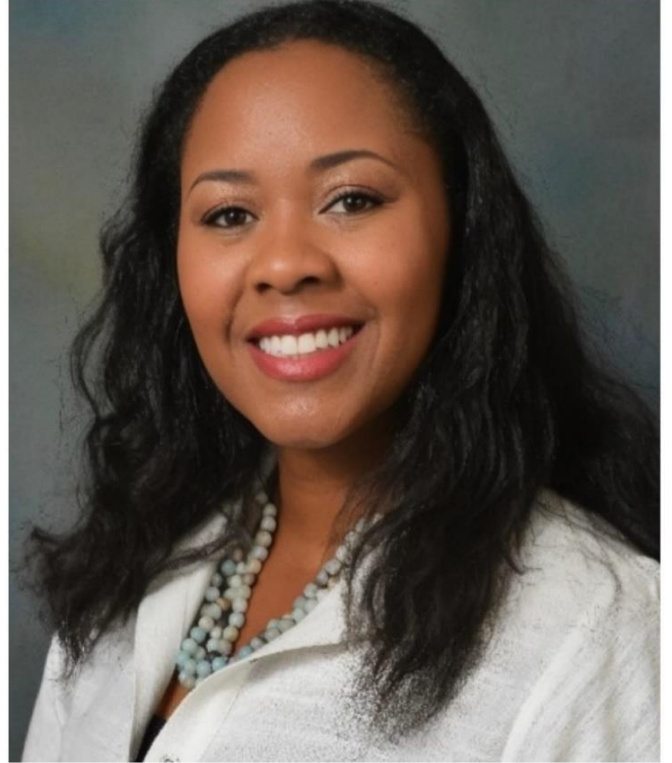
A pivotal chapter in Ms. Johnson's life unfolded at Jackson State University, where she earned a Bachelor of Science degree. This academic foundation paved the way for a twelve-year career as an educator, where she passionately contributed to shaping young minds.

In 2015, Ms. Johnson began transitioning into the role of a Professional School Counselor, recognizing the crucial role mental health plays in a student's overall well-being. Committed to providing holistic support, she pursued a Master's in Education with a concentration in School Counseling.

As part of her commitment to personal and professional growth, Ms. Johnson finds fulfillment in her personal life. Married to Theo Johnson, their partnership is a source of strength and support. Together, they navigate life's challenges, celebrating successes and fostering a foundation of love and stability.

Adding to the richness of her life story are two children currently pursuing higher education. As both a dedicated professional and a proud parent, Ms. Johnson takes joy in seeing her children thrive in college. This facet of her life adds an extra layer of motivation, as Ms. Johnson's commitment to education and mental health extends beyond the professional realm to a deeply personal level.

Robin D. Johnson, with a heart full of passion for education, mental health advocacy, and a thriving family, stands as an inspiring example of the positive impact one individual can have on both their professional community and their cherished loved ones.



# Volunteer Service Award

## Betty Johnson Williams



Betty Johnson Williams, a native of Hearne, TX, has emerged as a transformative force in the realm of education, shaping the lives of countless children with her passion and dedication. From her humble beginnings, Ms. Williams harbored a profound desire to inspire young minds, leading her to pursue her academic journey at Prairie View A&M University, where she attained both her bachelor's and master's degrees in education.

Ms. Williams's pursuit of excellence didn't stop there; she embarked on extensive graduate-level studies at the University of Texas and Texas State University, honing her expertise and expanding her repertoire of teaching methodologies. Beyond the classroom, she is deeply involved in various social endeavors, finding solace and fulfillment in her active engagement at Great Mount Zion Baptist Church.

Ms. Williams assumes multiple roles, serving as a beacon of faith, but one of her most enjoyable outreach moments within her community is working with the students, teachers, and administrative team at Norman-Sims Elementary. Usually, it is donuts for the teachers but, in December, 2023, Ms. Williams and the President of the Capital City Chapter of Top Ladies of Distinction rallied members of this chapter's organization to make a grand gesture to the students for Christmas. Ms. Williams is the Community Partnership Project Chair and other members of this organization were able to donate a total of 20 bikes for the students at Norman-Sims. Ms. Williams serves in numerous other capacities in her community. As the Prayer Team leader, her spiritual guidance uplifts those in need, while her melodious voice enriches the Senior Choir's harmonies. She is an integral member of Mission 2 Circle 3, extending her kindness and support to various charitable endeavors. Additionally, Ms. Williams finds joy in her role as a member of the GMZ Culinary Team for Bereaved Members, providing comfort and nourishment during times of loss.

Ms. Williams's contributions haven't gone unnoticed; she has garnered numerous accolades throughout her illustrious career. Her exceptional service has earned her titles such as Outstanding Victory Tutor, Teacher of the Year, and Top Lady of the Year, a testament to her enduring impact and influence. Furthermore, her dedication was recognized with special commendation from the AISD, solidifying her reputation as an esteemed educator and community leader.

Ms. Williams always says, "It's not what you do for yourself, but what you do for others without being told to do something."

# Servant of Education Award

## Val Barnes

Val Joe Barnes, Sr. was born and raised in the small town of Lufkin, in East Texas. After graduating high school, Mr. Barnes enlisted in the United States Army in September, 1972. He completed basic training in Louisiana, and was later stationed at Fort Hood in Texas as part of the maintenance battalion and then transitioned to air defense before serving with a tank battalion. In November of 1994, Barnes retired from the US Army as a Sergeant First Class after twenty-two years of honorable, decorated service.

After retiring from the military, Mr. Barnes began to prepare himself for the dream job that he always wanted to do and that was to go into law enforcement. He graduated from Angelina College Police Academy in May of 1995, and traveled to Austin seeking employment. After testing at several local agencies in the Central Texas area, Mr. Barnes was informed of an opportunity with the Austin ISD Police Department. In August of 1995, he was sworn in as a police officer with Austin ISD. During his time with the Austin ISD Police Department,

Mr. Barnes served as the School Resource Officer at Kealing Middle School and the Alternative Learning Center until he was promoted to Sergeant in October of 2011. Sergeant, Barnes supervised the Night Shift Patrol Division for one year and then supervised the School Resource Officers and Dayshift Patrol Officers for the Northwest and Northeast Sectors for approximately 11 years. Sergeant Barnes is currently assigned to supervise the North Central Sector SROs and Patrol, including Webb Middle School, Dobie Middle School, Lamar Middle School, McCallum High School, Northeast Early College High School and International High School.

Sergeant Barnes thoroughly enjoys the opportunity to work with students and hopes to bridge any perceived gaps between today's youth and law enforcement. Sergeant Barnes encourages the officers under his supervision to share in that opportunity and to build positive relationships to ensure student success. He also loves the camaraderie among his officers and the rest of the staff and administration.

With his 22 years of military service and 29 years of police service, Sergeant Barnes has amassed an awe-inspiring 51 years of public service.

“When I work with young folks, I hope that I have the type of impact that leaves them a better person than when I first met them.

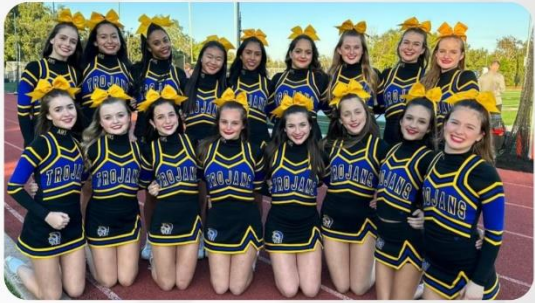


# Artistic Achievement Award

## Anderson Trojan Cheer Team



The Anderson Trojan Cheer Team is comprised of 3 teams, a Freshman team, a JV team, and a Varsity team for a total of 50 athletes, 1 mascot, and 1 manager. The Competition team is comprised of a subset from the three (3) teams. This Competition Team won 5<sup>th</sup> in the state and 12<sup>th</sup> in the Nation recently at National Cheerleaders Association (NCA) competitions held in Dallas in December and January.



Trojan Cheer supports all aspects of the school and serves as ambassadors to the student body and the community. Team members cheer at all Football games, and home Basketball games, attend other sporting events like Volleyball games and Wrestling matches as well as special appearances and events throughout the year. They lead 3 pep rallies in the fall, 1 in the winter, and 1 in the spring so that all sports feel supported, acknowledged and celebrated! These athletes get up 2 to 3 times a week for practice at 7a.m. The team members are smart, creative, athletic and true leaders. Being an Anderson Trojan Cheerleader is a VERY FULL and YEAR LONG endeavor!



Coach Gayla Stuart is on her 8<sup>th</sup> year coaching the Anderson Trojan Cheer Team. A former Trojan Cheerleader herself, she went on to cheer at TCU and then had a daughter who also was a Trojan Cheerleader which is ultimately why she began coaching the Cheer Team at Anderson. Coach Gayla agreed to stay until her daughter graduated from Anderson. That was back in 2019 and her daughter went on to cheer all 4 years at Texas Tech and meanwhile, Coach Gayla is still with the Anderson Trojan Cheer Team. She will tell you *"I came back to coaching for my kid and they all ended up becoming my kid! I truly love it and feel called to shape and mold these athletes through the sport of Cheer! We truly have a blast!"*

Varsity Captains this year are Marley Wenzel and Caroline Young. They will tell you that *"Trojan Cheer has been some of their best memories of High School and I will truly miss it!"*



# 4th Grade Essay Contest

The African American Heritage Composition contest is open to all fourth, seventh, and tenth grade students in AISD schools. Submissions are reviewed by a panel of judges from the AISD Southfield staff.



Second Place  
Pearson Witcher  
Teacher, Samantha McSparrin  
Principal, Marizza Marquez  
Sunset Valley Elementary School



Third Place  
Lincoln Alexander  
Teacher, Jamie Holoubek  
Principal, Grace Martino-Brewster  
Mathews Elementary School



First Place  
Aven Stone  
Teacher, McKenzie Blaker  
Principal, Beth Cantu  
Baranoff Elementary School

## **Michael Jordan By Aven Stone**

Micheal Jordan, a known basketball player and star, has transcended sports and impacted fashion for the last 40 years! Micheal Jordan is so talented that the brand Nike developed and named the shoe style, "Jordans" after him. There is also Jordan clothing with the famous Jumpman logo on it. Half the kids at my school wear Jordan's Jumpman clothing. Even other famous celebrities wear Jump Man clothing. The logo has become a symbol of strength. And, Michael is strong! Did you know Micheal Jordan averaged at 23 points per game when he was 38 years old?

Micheal Jordan is a huge inspiration and role model to young basketball players, and young people in general. He is a big part of pop culture because he has influenced so many parts of our culture like movies, fashion, basketball, and charitable contributions to education and the Make-A-Wish foundation. His movies have been seen by generations of kids starting with "Space Jam" in 1996 and more recently, "Space Jam - A New Legacy", released in 2021. Micheal Jordan also owns a racing team called 23x1 Racing. This race car team was in a racing show called, "Full Speed". From all of his work, he makes over 6 Billion dollars a year! Isn't that Mind blowing?! What is even cooler is that he donates much of this money to organizations that support underprivileged kids. Micheal Jordan was NBA (National Basketball association) scoring champion 4 times! He is an American Businessman. Micheal Jordan has shaped pop culture exceptionally!

# 7th Grade Essay Contest

The African American Heritage Composition contest is open to all fourth, seventh, and tenth grade students in AISD schools. Submissions are reviewed by a panel of judges from the AISD Southfield staff.



First Place  
Olive Whang-Narcisse  
Teacher: Eudocio Garcia  
Kealing Middle School

## Kwame Alexander- Using poetry to change the world one verse at a time

By: Olive Whang-Narcisse

Kwame Alexander has never failed to amaze the world with his stunning works such as *Crossover* and *Rebound* and his Emmy award-winning producing skills that push the boundaries of what “African American” really is. When you think of poetry, your mind probably doesn’t jump to the rich, traditional African poetry dating as far back as 25 BCE. But with Kwame’s stunning, innovative, and modern poetry, which explores everyday life within black families, he strives to bring change. As Kwame once said, “Others' expectations of you are determined by their limitations of life”.

Kwame was born in New York but was raised in Chesapeake, Virginia. He was surrounded by books during his early life which he happily indulged in. His parents were very academic working in education and literature themselves. This along with hard work and dedication is the reason that he has the career he does today. This hard work has paid off as he has won several awards for his books including the John Newberry medal for his novel “Crossover” and the Golden Kite award for picture book text for his book “The Undefeated”.

His works explore different generational points of view, giving us insight into thoughts and ideas that not many people know. Along with this, he works relentlessly to challenge the generational norms that we are put into especially those of older black generations. One of the ways he does this is with his memoirs “Why fathers cry at Night”. He contributes so much to conversations about African American culture, race, and identity. One of the ways I’ve found that he has done this is by consistently focusing on the idea of vulnerability throughout his works and overall public presence.

But more than just what he has done in the past he is also focusing on the present and future, as he is working at the Chautauqua Literary Arts a nonprofit educational facility as the Artistic director of literary arts which teaches both youth and adults. It is very important that we educate everyone who wishes to be educated, including adults who can make just as big of a change, or at least set a great example by wanting to learn. Kwame has proved time and time again his dedication to making the world a better place by way of hard work and art.

# 10th Grade Essay Contest

The African American Heritage Composition contest is open to all fourth, seventh, and tenth grade students in AISD schools. Submissions are reviewed by a panel of judges from the AISD Southfield staff.



First Place  
Mara Brandt  
Teacher: Jameson Roberts  
Bowie School

## African American Influence on Music Mara Brandt

Music has been a huge part of expressing culture and identity for a long time, and no group has had a bigger impact on the American music industry than African American musicians. From the soulful blues music to the hip-hop beats you hear on the street, African American musicians have really shaped the way and set the blueprint for American music today.

Imagine you're in New Orleans and you are on your way to eat, and as you are walking towards the restaurant there's a few guys on the corner of the street playing some tunes. One guy has a saxophone while the other plays the trumpet, and one strums the guitar as he sings. That jazz music you hear wouldn't be the same without African American Influences. Iconic African American Musicians like Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong helped innovate Jazz music by infusing it with elements from blues. The way they were able to intertwine their instruments and the melody, with unique rhythms really made this new way of music stand out and paved the way for future generations of musicians.

Now as you're walking into the nice candle lit restaurant, the melancholic strains of guitar and harmonica fill the air. The music is calming but it's deep, kind of sad; it's blues. Blues music was born out of the African American experience. Evolving right after the end of slavery, blues music is known for its deep lyrics that capture the feelings that African American people experienced. Some of the best Blues musicians like the king of blues, B.B. King and Aretha Franklin not only helped create a new type of music, but also helped influence future music like jazz.

Dinner is over though and as you exit the blues-filled atmosphere, the energetic beats of downtown New Orleans engulf you as you encounter a lively street party. The rap and hip hop beats take over you, and your body starts to move. What seems like just another party is in fact a testament to the Influence of African American Musicians in that genre. Some of the most famous rappers such as Dr. Dre, the Notorious B.I.G and Tupac really laid the groundwork for rap and hip hop music. African American influence still makes an impact on rap music today as African American artists like Nikki Minaj and Drake rise to the top of charts.

Music is everywhere, and most of the time we don't think twice about where the music came from and how it got there. In reality though it's thanks to African American musicians that helped influence and make music better, that we are able to enjoy the music we do!

# Outstanding Students

## High Schools

### **Akins Early College High School**

9<sup>th</sup> AnJolie Brown  
9<sup>th</sup> Amare Kratzer  
10<sup>th</sup> Dyshon Morrow  
10<sup>th</sup> Jasmine Woods  
11<sup>th</sup> Aubrey Dill  
11<sup>th</sup> Thomas Loving  
12<sup>th</sup> Ugochukwu Asika  
12<sup>th</sup> Jamiya Dawson

### **Anderson High School**

9<sup>th</sup> Braeden Coleman  
9<sup>th</sup> Ifunanya Muoneme  
10<sup>th</sup> Meesha Akbar  
10<sup>th</sup> Trevor Rener  
11<sup>th</sup> Avery Allen  
11<sup>th</sup> Chinonyelum Muoneme  
12<sup>th</sup> Sydney Lind  
12<sup>th</sup> Makhai Maldonado

### **Austin High School**

9<sup>th</sup> Makeda Sade Garcia  
9<sup>th</sup> Alexander Lamont Hill  
10<sup>th</sup> Lilyan Gottlieb  
10<sup>th</sup> Isaiah Christopher Moore  
11<sup>th</sup> Jalon Adonis Hunt  
11<sup>th</sup> Lana May Pham  
12<sup>th</sup> Tombe Luwan Jurkin  
12<sup>th</sup> Savannah Vasher

### **Bowie High School**

9<sup>th</sup> Gabrielle O'Halloran  
9<sup>th</sup> Zayden Toohey  
10<sup>th</sup> Justin Nabers-Lewis  
10<sup>th</sup> Savannah Riggins  
11<sup>th</sup> Simone Baskin  
11<sup>th</sup> Barrington Young  
12<sup>th</sup> Gabrielle Elisa Gbolahan  
12<sup>th</sup> John Walton

### **Crockett Early College High School**

9<sup>th</sup> Sadie Dedeaux  
9<sup>th</sup> Kiante Smith  
10<sup>th</sup> Deareon Dawson  
11<sup>th</sup> Amiyah Drake  
11<sup>th</sup> Nathaniel Santaro  
12<sup>th</sup> Sadie Jefferson  
12<sup>th</sup> Brock Limerick

### **Eastside Early College High School**

9<sup>th</sup> Cameron Bakari Davis  
9<sup>th</sup> Olivia Sterling  
10<sup>th</sup> Evan Hamilton  
10<sup>th</sup> Zyra Laura Zavala  
11<sup>th</sup> Keeton Ede  
11<sup>th</sup> Alexis Sterling  
12<sup>th</sup> Charles James Floyd  
12<sup>th</sup> Megan Kebe

### **Garza Independence High School**

10<sup>th</sup> Jonathan Jones  
11<sup>th</sup> Katherine Bunton  
11<sup>th</sup> Richard Carson Jr.  
12<sup>th</sup> Isabella Burnett  
12<sup>th</sup> Chukwuma "Malcolm" Obianwu

### **International High School**

9<sup>th</sup> Ernesto Besebese  
9<sup>th</sup> Miranda Tsimba-Mdumba

### **Lyndon B. Johnson Early College High School**

9<sup>th</sup> Elijah Neal  
9<sup>th</sup> Sheila Nyamsi Djieku  
10<sup>th</sup> Rhiana Hardaway  
10<sup>th</sup> Kahleel Mays  
11<sup>th</sup> Gahmoto Malangalila  
11<sup>th</sup> Imani Williams  
12<sup>th</sup> Samuel Crittenden, III  
12<sup>th</sup> Naisha Giles

### **Liberal Arts and Science Academy**

9<sup>th</sup> Nash Baldrige  
9<sup>th</sup> Kyndall Johnson  
10<sup>th</sup> Bianca Hill  
10<sup>th</sup> Allan Matheka  
11<sup>th</sup> Emily Laux  
11<sup>th</sup> Cyrus Rule  
12<sup>th</sup> Olufemi Makinde  
12<sup>th</sup> Aleah Ragan

### **McCallum High School**

9<sup>th</sup> Luca Adolphus  
9<sup>th</sup> Rylee Darriana Sterns  
10<sup>th</sup> Corinne Renee Hampton  
10<sup>th</sup> Evans Thayer  
11<sup>th</sup> Felix Watts Kahlor  
11<sup>th</sup> Lucy Zanker  
12<sup>th</sup> Biniam Marco Gonzalez  
12<sup>th</sup> Gigi Kahlor

### **Navarro Early College High School**

9<sup>th</sup> Kaitlyn Simmons  
9<sup>th</sup> Robert Young  
10<sup>th</sup> Daonjanea Rich  
10<sup>th</sup> Trae'Von Washington  
11<sup>th</sup> Raheal Gbrmariam  
11<sup>th</sup> Jacobi Simmons  
12<sup>th</sup> Yousif Abdelrahmen  
12<sup>th</sup> Marley Archie

### **Northeast Early College High School**

9<sup>th</sup> Shemaiah Unique Hill  
9<sup>th</sup> Adonnis Kyno Lundford  
10<sup>th</sup> Eleni Abraha  
10<sup>th</sup> Mellisa Elizabeth Baluka  
11<sup>th</sup> Dimitri Rivas  
11<sup>th</sup> Mya Upshur  
12<sup>th</sup> Imfura Hakizimana  
12<sup>th</sup> Jypsi Madionnie

### **Ann Richards School for Young Women Leaders**

9<sup>th</sup> Joli-Elise Snelling-Foster  
9<sup>th</sup> Rachel Lee  
10<sup>th</sup> Annika Wood Akinmusuru  
10<sup>th</sup> Lucia Niemeyer-Lowe  
11<sup>th</sup> Angelina Pouhe  
11<sup>th</sup> Indigo Hymes Carlin  
12<sup>th</sup> Oluwafeyikemi Oni

### **Travis Early College High School**

9<sup>th</sup> McKenzie Lynn Leary  
9<sup>th</sup> Jaylen Michael Tutaj  
10<sup>th</sup> Amiyah S. Carroll-Jackson  
10<sup>th</sup> Tyrique Lamon Foxworth  
11<sup>th</sup> Jordan Davis  
11<sup>th</sup> Mikayla Aundrea Gonzalez  
12<sup>th</sup> Mireya Arianna Gonzalez

# Outstanding Students

## Elementary and Middle Schools

### Allison Elementary School

6<sup>th</sup> Lamont Eugene Fisher  
6<sup>th</sup> Aaden Damontre Marshall

### Bailey Middle School

6<sup>th</sup> Kinsley Ellis  
6<sup>th</sup> John Paul Pratt  
7<sup>th</sup> Fox Holiday  
7<sup>th</sup> Sasha Johnson  
8<sup>th</sup> Mya Adkins  
8<sup>th</sup> Thiago Jones

### Bedichek Middle School

6<sup>th</sup> Akira Mae Currie  
6<sup>th</sup> Jaxon Todd Reese  
7<sup>th</sup> Conner Ryan Tillman  
7<sup>th</sup> Mariah Jean Williams  
8<sup>th</sup> Melody Deann Thompson  
8<sup>th</sup> Braiden Hardy Tillman

### Burnet Middle School

6<sup>th</sup> Olivia McNeely  
6<sup>th</sup> DeMarion Smith  
7<sup>th</sup> Sovereign Franklin  
7<sup>th</sup> Shalom Tulula  
8<sup>th</sup> Breayana Fisher  
8<sup>th</sup> Ewnetu Zenaw

### Covington Middle School

6<sup>th</sup> Cynthia C. Okafor  
6<sup>th</sup> Damarius Carter Smith  
7<sup>th</sup> Juliet Love Brewer  
7<sup>th</sup> Ajani Immanuel White  
8<sup>th</sup> Keziah Jo Moore  
8<sup>th</sup> Franti Oliver Romero

### Garcia Young Mens Leadership Academy

6<sup>th</sup> Derek Miller  
7<sup>th</sup> Khamari Jerdan  
8<sup>th</sup> Robert Sykes

### Gorzycki Middle School

6<sup>th</sup> Adrian Allen Neal  
6<sup>th</sup> Caleb Osoro Nyaribo  
6<sup>th</sup> Indigo Lucille Orsburn  
7<sup>th</sup> Jack Garner Chervenak  
7<sup>th</sup> Sydney Elizabeth Purdy  
8<sup>th</sup> Tyler Lockhart  
8<sup>th</sup> Corinne Reid Wendell

### Govalle Elementary School

6<sup>th</sup> Eric Allen  
6<sup>th</sup> Zaria Rider

### O. Henry Middle School

6<sup>th</sup> Nicholas Hill  
6<sup>th</sup> Ella Ramirez  
7<sup>th</sup> Kaylin (Shai) Coates  
7<sup>th</sup> Raleigh Crowther  
8<sup>th</sup> Roman Simpao  
8<sup>th</sup> Jourdan Stevens

### Kealing Middle School

6<sup>th</sup> Prentiss Marie Reaves  
6<sup>th</sup> Seth Lee Spears  
6<sup>th</sup> Chase Devon Turner  
6<sup>th</sup> Christian Young  
7<sup>th</sup> Peter Herman Gallimore  
7<sup>th</sup> McKenzie Tawn Lee  
7<sup>th</sup> Matt Muindi Matheka  
7<sup>th</sup> Kumiwah Ofosu-Amaah  
8<sup>th</sup> Amara Layli Kazzi-Loyde  
8<sup>th</sup> Russell De Shawn Johnson Jr.  
8<sup>th</sup> Sean Harrison Spears  
8<sup>th</sup> Chloe Indianna Vasser

### Lee Elementary School

6<sup>th</sup> Micah Carrington  
6<sup>th</sup> Piper Kahlor

### Lively Middle School

6<sup>th</sup> Ciara Michelle Smith  
6<sup>th</sup> Kaiwah Suarez  
7<sup>th</sup> Kay Idinmachukwu Chukwunyelum  
7<sup>th</sup> Khalel Alexander Ruiz  
8<sup>th</sup> Dylan Kirt Roberts  
8<sup>th</sup> Penelope Luna Warren

### General Marshall Middle School

6<sup>th</sup> Jeremy Tolbert  
6<sup>th</sup> Gabrielle Williams

### Martin Middle School

7<sup>th</sup> Kimorah De'Lawn Hill-Chatman  
7<sup>th</sup> James Keith Mills  
8<sup>th</sup> Esonali Raymond Guerra  
8<sup>th</sup> Malayzia Arianna Harrison

### Mathews Elementary School

6<sup>th</sup> Adaeze Gottfried  
6<sup>th</sup> Xavier Jules

### Murchison Middle School

6<sup>th</sup> Kingsley Biller  
6<sup>th</sup> Maelys Parks  
7<sup>th</sup> Nayeem Nassor  
7<sup>th</sup> Layla Watson  
8<sup>th</sup> Naliyah Anderson  
8<sup>th</sup> Patrik Lindelow

### Paredes Middle School

7<sup>th</sup> Noah Alexander Hall  
7<sup>th</sup> Zaiharía Serene Lister  
7<sup>th</sup> Madison Rose Winbush  
8<sup>th</sup> Jaxxon Earl Rooks  
8<sup>th</sup> Kaellen Reneice-Yvonne Wise

### Rodriguez Elementary School

6<sup>th</sup> Serenity Fleming

### Small Middle School

6<sup>th</sup> Roselyn Essuman  
6<sup>th</sup> Bernard Morgan  
7<sup>th</sup> Julien Fadiora  
7<sup>th</sup> Syla Toney  
8<sup>th</sup> Rae Westen Bagnall  
8<sup>th</sup> Findley Botchway

### Ann Richards School for Young Women Leaders

6<sup>th</sup> Dakota Buckley  
6<sup>th</sup> Jade Wilson  
7<sup>th</sup> Dorothy Adam  
7<sup>th</sup> Brea Pabon  
8<sup>th</sup> Olivia Coleman  
8<sup>th</sup> Winnie Hakizimana

### Bertha Sadler Means Young Women's Leadership Academy

6<sup>th</sup> Maya Fawcett  
6<sup>th</sup> Teagan Levack  
7<sup>th</sup> Jilleah Hargis  
7<sup>th</sup> Azaria Roberson  
8<sup>th</sup> Liyah House  
8<sup>th</sup> Serenity Thacker

### Widen Elementary School

6<sup>th</sup> Aubrianna Harris

# Senior Scholars

These students have demonstrated exemplary academic achievement, having been named to the list of Outstanding African American Students for each of their four high school years.



**Ugochukwu Asika**  
**Akins Early College High School**



**Savannah Vasher**  
**Austin High School**



**John Walton**  
**Bowie High School**



**Brock Limerick**  
**Crockett Early College High School**



**Jypsi Madionnie**  
**Northeast Early College High School**



**Mireya Arianna Gonzalez**  
**Travis Early College High School**

# *Proclamation*

*Be it known that*

*Whereas,*

*African-Americans have had a profound influence on the history and culture of our great country, state, and city; and*

*Whereas,*

*The history of the African-American in Austin has brought us where we are today, working to amplify those great things in our community and to improve those areas needing attention; and*

*Whereas,*

*The City of Austin is pleased to join with Austin Independent School District in celebrating African American Heritage Month with the theme, "Illuminating African Americans and The Arts"; and*

*Whereas,*

*We extend special congratulations to the outstanding students and other award winners being honored today;*

*Now, Therefore,*

*I, Kirk Watson, Mayor of the City of Austin, Texas,  
do hereby proclaim*

*February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2024*

*as*

*African-American Heritage Celebration Day*

*in Austin.*

*In witness whereof, I have hereunto  
set my hand and caused the seal of the City  
of Austin to be affixed this 23<sup>rd</sup> Day of  
February in the Year Two Thousand Twenty Four*

*Kirk Watson*

*Kirk Watson, Mayor, City of Austin*





## Travis County Commissioners Court Proclamation

*Whereas*, each February, Travis County continues the tradition started by Dr. Carter G. Woodson's "Negro History Week" founded in 1925, and proudly recognizes "Black History Month" by proclaiming that African American history is a vital part of American history, and we proudly celebrate and highlight notable African Americans and their contributions that have shaped American history and contributed to American culture, both in Travis County and America as a whole; and

*Whereas*, from the stories of Travis County's forty-two African American rural schools, which were testaments to their belief that despite their current circumstances, education was the vehicle to a better life, family uplift, community leadership, satisfying work, and the common good, to the exemplary service of past and current Travis County African American elected officials, to the vast history of African American settlements in Travis County such as Clarksville, Kincheonville, Littig, and many others, settlements that were started by freed slaves after the Civil War and emancipation, the history of Black Americans within Travis County is rich and extensive; and

*Whereas*, in a time when the teaching of African American history and efforts for equity and inclusion are under attack in Texas and across the nation, the Government of Travis County values and celebrates this extensive history, heritage, traditions, and culture of our African American residents; and

*Whereas*, Travis County has taken great care to recognize the gifts, skills, and talents of its African American residents, whether their service has been in vital roles such as elected office, boards and commissions, service and social clubs, businesses, and community organizations; or as Travis County employees, African American contributions to the vitality of Travis County have been longstanding and historic; and

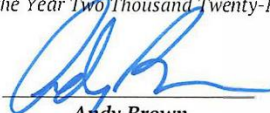
*Whereas*, to celebrate this Black History Month, we invite everyone to join us in celebration at the Travis County Health and Human Services 2024 "Rising Above in Unity" Black History Month Program on Thursday, February 8th from 11:00am to 1:00pm at the Central Austin Community Center at 5325 Airport Blvd, Room 3079, and to also join the Austin Independent School District 41st African American Heritage Celebration, on Friday, February 23rd at 6:30pm at the AISD Performing Arts Center at 1500 Barbara Jordan Blvd.

**Now therefore, be it proclaimed**, that we, The Travis County Commissioners Court, do hereby recognize the month of February 2024 as

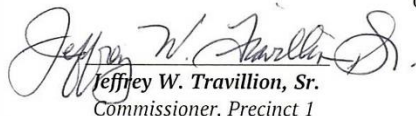
### **"Black History Month"**

in Travis County, Texas and urge all public officials and all citizens of Travis County to raise awareness and celebrate the contributions of African Americans and urge all Travis County residents to participate in the celebration of African American History as we honor those who made a way for our present and celebrate those who are paving a way for the future.

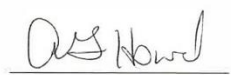
In witness whereof, we have hereunto set our hands and caused the seal of Travis County to be affixed this 6<sup>th</sup> day of February in the Year Two Thousand Twenty-Four



**Andy Brown**  
County Judge



**Jeffrey W. Travillion, Sr.**  
Commissioner, Precinct 1



**Ann Howard**  
Commissioner, Precinct 3



**Brigid Shea**  
Commissioner, Precinct 2



**Margaret Gomez**  
Commissioner, Precinct 4







STATE OF TEXAS  
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

Diversity adds to the spirit and vitality of our great state, populated by people of all races, nationalities, and backgrounds. African Americans, in particular, have long contributed to the rich, varied, and remarkable history of our people, and we recognize the impact they continue to make in Texas and America.

African Americans have left an indelible mark upon the Lone Star State. Politicians such as Barbara Jordan inspired Texans from all walks of life to take their place in the pantheon of government service. Military heroes like Richard Overton and Doris "Dorie" Miller shattered stereotypes while answering the call of country. Their indomitable spirit will live forever in the hearts and minds of fellow Texans.

Each year, the month of February is set aside to honor the sacrifices, tribulations, and triumphs that define African American history. We acknowledge the accomplishments of the inspiring African Americans of the past and of the influential African Americans of today.

At this time, I encourage all Texans to take pride in our rich tapestry of community and to strengthen the bonds that unite us as one indivisible nation.

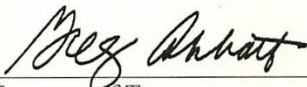
Therefore, I, Greg Abbott, Governor of Texas, do hereby proclaim February 2024 to be

## Black History Month



in Texas and urge all Texans to observe the occasion with appropriate ceremonies and activities.

In testimony whereof, I have hereunto affixed my signature this the 4th day of January, 2024.

  
Governor of Texas

# Program Participants

**Crockett Early College High School  
Master of Ceremony**



**J.J. Manor**

**Crockett Early College High School  
Mistress of Ceremony**



**Jasmine Rogers**

**Crockett Early College High School  
Choir**



**Claire Huth, Adam Kemp,  
Denham McKendrick, Marshall Valencia**

**Crockett Early College High School  
Guitarist**



**Darnell Osaigbovo**

# Program Participants

## Crockett Early College High School Jazz Band



**Matthew Chavez, Selina McCormack, Joshua Jimenez, Maricela Flores, Brianna Perez, Haley Freund, Hunter Freymuth, Roberto Garcia-Calero, Vivian Hernandez-Martinez, Marcos Harros, Kian Kuo, Adelina Salinas, Caitlyn Freund, Phoenix Wright, Eusebio Salinas, Diego Williams, Lincoln Ball, Brooks Moren, Rohen Farris, Director Brianna Moehnke**

## Gus Garcia Young Men's Leadership Academy Boy Scout Troop#7414



**Derek Miller, Shakir Osorio, Christopher Portillo, AlAin Cruz, Mateo Castro, Osvaldo Gonzalez, Caleb Lara, Kevin Casanova, Aquinas Molina, Jovan Flores**

## Sadler Means Dance Company



**Laila Cruz, Virginia Ibanda, Laila Dorsey, Alexis Parish, Trinity Phillips, Mikinzi Williams**

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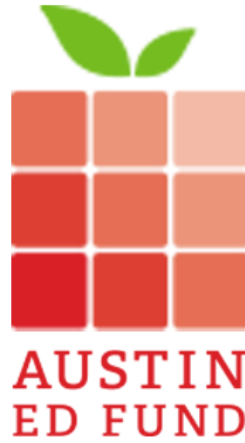
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# Sponsors



Helping Here.



AMY & KEN JONES

MARIAN & CHRIS CASEY

# Lift Every Voice and Sing

Words by James Weldon Johnson  
for a celebration of Abraham Lincoln's birthday

Music by John Rosamond Johnson, 1901  
African American National Anthem

*Lift ev'ry voice and sing,  
Till earth and heaven ring,  
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty;  
Let our rejoicing rise  
High as the list'ning skies,  
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.  
Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us,  
Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us;  
Facing the rising sun of our new day begun,  
Let us march on till victory is won.*

*Stony the road we trod,  
Bitter the chast'ning rod,  
Felt in the days when hope unborn had died;  
Yet with a steady beat,  
Have not our weary feet  
Come to the place for which our fathers sighed?  
We have come over a way that with tears has been watered.  
We have come, treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered,  
Out from the gloomy past,  
Till now we stand at last  
Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast.*

*God of our weary years,  
God of our silent tears,  
Thou who hast brought us thus far on the way;  
Thou who hast by Thy might,  
Led us into the light,  
Keep us forever in the path, we pray.  
Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met Thee,  
Lest our hearts, drunk with the wine of the world, we forget Thee;  
Shadowed beneath Thy hand,  
May we forever stand,  
True to our God,  
True to our native land.*







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Teaching, Learning and Leading

## illuminating African Americans and The Arts

Cover art: Illustrations by current and former Austin ISD students

