

## Micro Society School Program a big success at Sam Houston Elementary

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McALLEN, October 20 - Teachers and students at Sam Houston Elementary School can agree on one thing: “micro-societies” are a fun way to learn life skills such as responsibility and respect.

Celebrating their 12th year as the micro-society of “Houstonville,” the students, faculty, and staff gave tours of their school to visitors from the community, explaining their currency and stores. “It really helps with grades, attendance, and behavior. It’s a really good program,” said 5th grade teacher Nora Treviño. “We also have Market Days where they make their own product and sell them, kind of like a Flea Market.”

Mary Vela, a 4th grade teacher, agrees that it helps the children. “Our attendance has improved – our kids want to be in school. Their scores have also improved because of the mathematical skills they practice with banking, and speaking skills they practice in the newspaper.”

Starting with 1st grade, (even though pre-K and Kindergarten exist at Sam Houston Elementary) each grade is in charge of a sector: 5th graders run the campus radio station and newspaper, along with Future Teachers and Future Nurses; 4th graders run the T.V. station, H.E.B., and I.B.C. Bank; 3rd graders run the I.R.S. for the upper-grades and Wal-Mart; 2nd graders run the I.R.S. for the lower grades, plus the post-office and Target; and 1st graders are in charge of recycling.

This system also teaches math in a fun way: they count and subtract money, budget, and save, all of which are important life skills as well as academic skills.

Reading, writing, and public speaking skills are practiced in the media outlets. The radio station, for example, goes on at 2:00 every Friday, and those students have to be prepared for that job by researching on the Internet and writing stories on Microsoft Word—skills that all young people need to have.

Students indirectly learn civic responsibility by paying taxes to the I.R.S. Lower grades do not earn as much so they pay less, while the upper grades pay a little more.

Exposure to these work places encourages students to start thinking about their future careers at an early age. “I want to be a karate teacher!” exclaimed one 5th grader in Mr. Montes’ class. “We help students who are injured,” said 5th grader Angelique Cano, who is a Future Nurse this year. Alexis Caudillo, 5th grader, has learned “responsibility and respect” from her work.

Principle Sonia Casas believes that the program is helpful: “Above all it is the responsibility that students are gaining from it. Those students that are the managers, the mayor, the city council members, they are all learning leadership skills. It’s a wonderful thing for kids.” Principle Casas wishes to thank all the businesses who support the effort. “We wouldn’t be able to do it without our partners.”



Desiree Mendoza works in human resources at IBC Bank in Houstonville. (Photo: RGG/Steve Taylor)

Local businesses are encouraged to participate in the program. Currently Sam Houston Elementary is the only school in the Rio Grande Valley that uses MicroSociety but McAllen Mayor Richard Cortez wants to expand it to the entire Valley, and cities outside the Valley are interested in it as well.

McAllen Chamber of Commerce President Steve Ahlenius said he would not be surprised to see a future business leader emerge from Sam Houston Elementary, and it most likely would be a female student.

Senior vice-president from I.B.C. Bank Dora Brown has been involved in the partnership since its inception 12 years ago, and can see the positive results for youth. "We're going statewide and hopefully nationwide," says Brown. In fact, banks and school districts from all over Texas were at Sam Houston to see first hand micro-societies in action, and bring them back to their areas.

"Congressmen Hinojosa and Cuellar have taken a video of this and taken it to Washington, and Senator Lucio has introduced it in Austin. The word is getting out there," said Brown. The success at Sam Houston Elementary is spreading, and could provide a model to other schools for productive instruction.

IBC Bank McAllen President David Guerra said the Micro School Program helps develop "honesty, respect, leadership, commitment, and love for one another," in students. "These are the things that, blended in with academic excellence, create outstanding citizens," Guerra said.

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