



The University of Texas Charter School System

# District Newsletter

*Teaching to the Spirit of Every Child*

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## Superintendents Corner

As 2020 draws to a close, I am reflecting on this unprecedented year and how grateful I am to our faculty, staff, partners and supporters who have gone above and beyond the call of duty to create an environment of kindness and caring for our students. I am deeply thankful to everyone who has not only risen to these challenges but risen above the challenges to be innovative and responsive to the needs of our students. I am sincerely grateful for our partners and supporters who have reached out to me to ask: “how can we help?” Your graciousness is life-changing.

In this end of the year newsletter, you will read stories about members of the UT Charter School System for whom we are grateful. You will learn more about:

- ◇ A founding member of UT Elementary’s Management Board who has served the school for over seventeen years,
- ◇ A UT-UCS Academic Transition Coordinator who helps guide students on their academic pathways,
- ◇ How principals are learning new skills to keep their students and staff safe, and
- ◇ Celebrate the accomplishments of our students who have persevered to reach their goal of high school graduation.

We look forward to 2021 and building upon the lessons that 2020 has taught us. We will continue to practice our value of considering the trauma our student’s have experienced, including the trauma of living through a pandemic, to provide them with the nurturing environment needed to make them successful. We will continue to innovate our classes to engage our students in new ways and we will build upon the new health and safety measures to make us stronger for years to come.

Hook ‘em!

*Melissa*

Melissa M. Chavez, Ph.D.  
Associate Vice President and Superintendent  
The University of Texas Charter School System  
The University of Texas at Austin

## Outstanding Leader Ed Sharpe to Retire After More than 50 Years on the UT Campus



Dr. Edwin Sharpe has played many, many roles at the University of Texas and the University of Texas system since arriving on the Forty Acres as a freshman in 1964. He has been a student, a graduate student, a professor, a vice president, and a vice chancellor. But one of his greatest contributions to the university has been establishing UT Elementary School, along with the late Dan Burck, former Chancellor of the UT System, and Dr. Marina Walne, a lifelong educator.

Sharpe is often called the “godfather” of UT Elementary, and has attended every school management board meeting for the past 17 years—170 in all. He was the chair of the Management Board for 17 years.

Dr. Melissa Chavez, superintendent for the UT Charter School System says, “I have learned what it truly means to be a transformational leader by sharing the leadership role of the school with Dr. Sharpe for almost two decades. He has been my coach, mentor and friend. The school community loves him very much and he will be dearly missed.”

To read more about Dr. Sharpe’s contributions to UT Elementary, East Austin and the University of Texas, please read the full article here: <https://utelementary.org/2020/12/04/ed-sharpe-to-retire/>

## UT Elementary Alum Heads to Law School

### Valerie Flores is the first UT Elementary graduate to also graduate from “Big UT”

After fifth-grade graduation, Flores was determined to become a Longhorn—even if it meant taking a detour along the way. Prior to enrolling at UT Austin, she had to meet a set of requirements through the Coordinated Admissions Process (CAP), which included attending a UT System school for a year and achieving a 3.2 or higher GPA. Despite this minor setback, Flores stayed the course, excelled in her classes at UT San Antonio and achieved her goal.

Now Flores is ready to embark on her next big challenge as she prepares for law school in fall 2021. She discovered this path while taking a class taught by William Kelly, director of the university’s Center for Criminology and Criminal Justice Research. “I am interested in going to law school because I have learned about problems that are created and perpetuated by corrupt systems that exist in this country, which can be improved through better policy,” Flores says. “I hope to use my law degree to later become an advocate and a change-maker.”



## Looking Into Your Future

### Spending Time with a UT-UCS Academic Transition Coordinator

Recently, UT-UCS Academic Transition Coordinator Gail Arredondo met with students at TNC to predict their futures. Well, academic futures that is.

Both of UT-UCS' Academic Transition Coordinators, Gail and Angela Lengenfeld are Texas certified counselors who have also completed the practicum as Licensed Professional Counselors. With the assistance of campus registrars, they analyze every students' transcripts to create Personal Graduation Plans.

The role of the Academic Transition Coordinator is essential at UT-UCS. Due to the transitional nature of our students, many have attended multiple schools or earned partial credits and their transcripts need to be researched and intensely reviewed to ensure that students do not repeat classes and, most importantly, to inform students on the credits they need to earn their high school diploma.

On a sunny, fall afternoon, Gail dressed as a fortuneteller to meet with students at the Texas NeuroRehab Center. She met with students to show them their transcripts and guide them on their path to graduation. After she met with students, Gail said:

*I am always amazed when I have a student say to me, "No one has ever told me about this..." My sense of self-fulfillment comes from hearing excitement in their voices. Not to sound cliché, but their tone goes from hopeless to hopeful. In many cases students conclude with, "Thank you for telling me this, Miss..." At that point, I know I was able to make a small impact.*

Most schools do not have a need for intensive transcript research and analysis so this role is unique to UT-UCS. We are lucky to have Gail and Angela on our team to help support our students and guide them to their diplomas and whatever their futures may hold.



Gail advising students at the TNC campus in October.

## UT-UCS Celebrates Six Graduations This Fall

The University of Texas at Austin University Charter School is proud to announce that there will be six graduation ceremonies this December!

Settlement Home – 1 graduate

Munday Campus – 1 graduate

Seton Home – 1 graduate

Annunciation Maternity Home – 1 graduate

Methodist Children's Home – 10 graduates

And St. PJ's had their very first graduate in November!

***Congratulations to all of our December graduates!***



## District-wide COVID-19 Testing Program

The UT Charter School System is taking part in the free, statewide COVID-19 testing program. Starting the week of November 9, our schools began offering rapid COVID-19 tests. The Texas Education Agency has partnered with the Texas Department of Emergency Management to provide test kits and training to all school districts in Texas who have students being educated on campus.

This program allows our schools to test both symptomatic and asymptomatic individuals and reduce the risk to our community. This program uses **BinaxNOW tests**, which provide results in 15 minutes and are administered using a nasal swab in the front area of the nostril. These tests have been shown to be highly accurate, with accuracy rates of 97-98% for symptomatic individuals.

We will be offering these tests to staff working on campus on a biweekly basis. These tests are optional, but we will encourage all staff who work on campus to participate in the testing program. Additionally, UT Charter School will test any individual who is experiencing symptoms consistent with COVID-19 including our students whose parents/facilities give us permission to test. Autumn Leal-Shopp, the Assistant Superintendent of Operations, will be leading these efforts with the campus principals who are administering the tests for the district.

For more information, please see the Texas Education Agency's website: <https://tea.texas.gov/texas-schools/>



*Executive Principal Kris Ann Schmidt in her PPE*

## Recycling and Gardening Grants for UT Elementary

In January, UT Elementary will implement some of the grants that they have received over the last year. UT Austin's Green Fund awarded the school the funding to purchase recycling stations for each grade and to create new signs to help ensure their proper use.

The City of Austin—Austin Public Health has granted an extension to the \$2,500 grant that was awarded to rebuild gardens at the school. STEAM teacher Scarlett Calvin will be adding the gardens to her curriculum in the spring and using the funds the school raised during the Hornraiser event as well.

## Important Fall Dates

<b>December 18</b>	Teacher Workday/Student Holiday (Tracks 1, 2, 3 & UTES)
<b>December 18</b>	Half-Day for Students, Full Day for Teachers (Track 4 only)
<b>December 21</b>	Staff Development/Student Holiday (UTES only)
<b>December 21-31</b>	Winter Break (ALL Tracks & UTES)
<b>January 1</b>	Staff/Student Holiday (All Tracks and UTES)
<b>January 4</b>	Staff Development/Student Holiday (All Tracks and UTES)
<b>January 18</b>	MLK Holiday (All Tracks & UTES)
<b>January 20</b>	<b>UT-UCS Advisory Board Meeting</b>
<b>January 26</b>	<b>UTES Management Board Meeting</b>