

The Seven Lakes High School Spartan Band recently performed at the Sugar Bowl, alongside the Taylor High School JET Band

Katy ISD High School Strengths

Local Campuses Shine in Unique Programs and Student Offerings

Written by Bess Blanco



Students show their pride for Cinco Ranch High School, which was named one of the best public high schools in the U.S. by Newsweek

Katy ISD's six high school campuses all boast an excellent assortment of programs, with talented students and staff who always go the extra mile. All six campuses are rated either Exemplary or Recognized by the Texas Education Agency, adhering to the highest educational values. Only 6% of public high schools in the U.S. made *Newsweek's* list of America's best public high schools. Four Katy ISD public high school campuses were included in the 2010 report. Each school proudly displays their own set of strengths in different areas from fine arts and sports to academics. Here are some of the most noteworthy programs at each school.

Katy High School

Founded in 1898

In its 112th year, Katy High School is the oldest high school campus and is known for both its academic and athletic success. Principal Dr. Steven Robertson holds a deep appreciation for the tradition of excellence that KHS represents. "We are steeped in history and tradition," he says. "Our community has the advantages of a Texas hometown feel and yet the sophistication of a major suburban school district. Our students, faculty, and staff reflect these qualities and values and that makes Katy High School an extraordinary school."

Community Spirit and Tiger Football

With six state championship wins, the Katy Tiger football program is a great source of pride for students, parents, and the entire Katy community. Head football coach Gary Joseph is himself a product of the long tradition of success this school has enjoyed, having coached Tiger athletes for 29 years. Throughout his time at KHS, he has experienced many memorable moments, including going undefeated and being nationally ranked in 2007 and then winning the state championship in 2008. "We were overcoming a lot of odds," says Joseph. "These kids have great pride in the program and don't want to see it fail. The faculty, parent, and community support is paramount [to our success]. We have an outstanding coaching staff and athletic trainees, who are all here for the right reasons - the kids." With a long tradition of success guiding it, the Tiger football program continues to aim for excellence with many goals in sight for the years ahead. "Tradition never graduates," Joseph shares. "I would like to see us continue competing on a high level and compete for state championships."

Special Education Excellence

Another program that sets KHS apart, but which may not be as visible as football, is the school's special education department. Kathleen Trammel, the KHS special education department chair, is leading the addition of more practical applications for students in this area. "At Katy High School, we work very hard to challenge

our students to perform at their highest level of ability," she says. "In special education, we offer academic classes at resource and life skills levels, in addition to the general education classes." The special education program at KHS continues to grow and expand as educators instill a deep appreciation for all students in the community. "Special education is very proud to be part of the Katy High School staff," shares Trammel.

Taylor High School

Founded in 1977

Home of the Mustangs, Taylor High School presents a learning atmosphere rich in history, tradition, and academic excellence. Principal of curriculum Russell Faldyn, speaks fondly about Taylor's values. "[We strive to] always provide opportunities to challenge and enrich our students academically and in extracurricular activities," he says.

Award-Winning Musicians and Dancers

"The level of dedication to music education by the students, booster parents, administration, and community is rivaled by no other," says Christopher Bailey, JET Band director. One of Bailey's favorite moments was receiving the inaugural KatyOne Award from Superintendent Alton Frailey for the positive interactions and teamwork between the JET Band and the Spartan Band from Seven Lakes High School. It was the first of its kind for the district, and was created to recognize teamwork between schools in the Katy area. "The JET Band is historically a very successful band program, winning many accolades over the years," says Bailey. "Of all of them, this award embodies what we are trying to teach our kids every day."

Taylor's hardworking Pacesetters Dance Team also wins numerous awards up to the national level. "Last year, our dance officers competed at the national level, placing first in every category they entered," says Darby Boyd, director for the Pacesetters. Boyd says the Pacesetter program gives young women at THS a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to do what they love and build friendships that last a lifetime.

A Standout Tennis Team

Tennis is definitely a standout activity at Taylor, withstanding the test of time as teams repeatedly place in the state championships. Tennis coach Kirk Kniffen anticipates an interesting and eventful spring as his students compete. "Our district was already one of the toughest in the state and now has become even more challenging," he shares. His goals haven't changed, though, as he talks about his different teams - boys, girls, and mixed doubles. "Our goal is to get all three teams to regionals and state," he says. "We are working hard."

The Katy Tigers have six state football championships under their belts



The Taylor High School Pacesetters are an award-winning dance team





Choir students at Mayde Creek High School are dedicated to learning all about music



The Cinco Ranch High School orchestra recently was selected to perform at the Midwest Clinic's International Band and Orchestra Conference

Mayde Creek

Founded in 1984

The great diversity found at Mayde Creek High School helps students to better understand the viewpoints of all and is an important contribution to society, according to Principal Cazilda Steele. "I have been in schools where students segregate themselves," she says. "I have never seen that since I have been at Mayde Creek." She adds, "We also have a very experienced staff that makes efforts to build sound relationships with students here. I love seeing these students grow up through the years and then bloom into young adults with dreams and aspirations. I am so lucky to have the privilege to watch them mark success."

Choir and Fine Arts Success

The fine arts programs at MCHS help set the school apart as a strong leader in the community. Kerri Watson-Elrod, the school's choir director, speaks about her students with pride. "The diversity in the kids here is special," she shares. "These kids are dedicated, as they work as hard as they can on improving themselves. Here in this program, we are grooming the kids to sight read, as well as to sing. We have kids who are genuinely interested in and committed to choir, and that really adds to the program."

Strong in Student Journalism

Shetye Cypher, MCHS journalism and newspaper advisor, talks about the team she works with every day. "My students feel a great honor in receiving awards and they strive year after year to continue

to place," she says. Mayde Creek's award-winning newspaper *Rampage* is a source of pride among journalism students who work very hard at their work. "Being on publications is a very valuable thing for students," shares Cypher. "They learn teamwork, writing skills, design skills, and how to run a business."

Cinco Ranch

Founded in 1999

Known for high student achievement and strong academic, athletic, and fine arts programs, Cinco Ranch ranked 478th on *Newsweek's* list of best public high schools in the U.S., placing the Cougars in the top 2% of schools according to this list.

Orchestra, Visual Arts, and Fine Arts

Along with numerous awards and accolades over the years in arts, Cinco Ranch's orchestra was one of two U.S. high school groups to perform in the Midwest Clinic's International Band and Orchestra Conference in December. "Somebody once told me that a wonderful magic occurs when you put students and music together; it's true," says orchestra director Brett Nelson. "We're so proud of our students. We worked so hard on this program, and they really rose to the occasion." Cinco Ranch also has an award-winning band, dance team, and choir program resulting in numerous fine arts recognitions and student success stories. Nancy Huffman, lead teacher in Cinco Ranch's visual art department, echoes that stand. "We have a number of students each year who are accepted into premiere art schools receiving scholarships," she says.

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Student Publications

Cinco Ranch also receives accolades for its outstanding student publications like the *Cougar County Line* and yearbook. "I feel blessed to work with students in our program who are dedicated writers and self-directed leaders with a strong desire to create a newspaper and yearbook that are significant to their peers," says Edward Larsen, adviser for student publications. "The moments when I get to see the students really work as a team to accomplish a goal, this is as real world as a classroom can get."

Morton Ranch

Founded in 2004

Morton Ranch High School, named for the historic Katy area family ranch, is enjoying many recent accolades and accomplishments in a variety of programs, such as Future Farmers of America (FFA), Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA), fine arts, and several different sports. Pam Wilson, theater director at MRHS, exhibits pride in her students as she speaks of how committed they are to the drama program. With numerous awards, trophies, and recognitions under their belt, including a national championship, the team's motivation comes from the support of their peers and the community.

Expressive Theater Arts

Morton Ranch theater students have been nominated more than once to attend the prestigious Fringe Festival in Edinburgh, Scotland. However, due to the August date of the festival, they haven't yet been able to attend. The Fringe Festival is one of the biggest arts festivals in the world, and the students don't take this honor lightly. "Our students work behind the scenes - we try to teach them the full process of theater, not just performing in a show," Wilson shares. "The kids go on to more from this program. They strive for excellence and take this experience with them."



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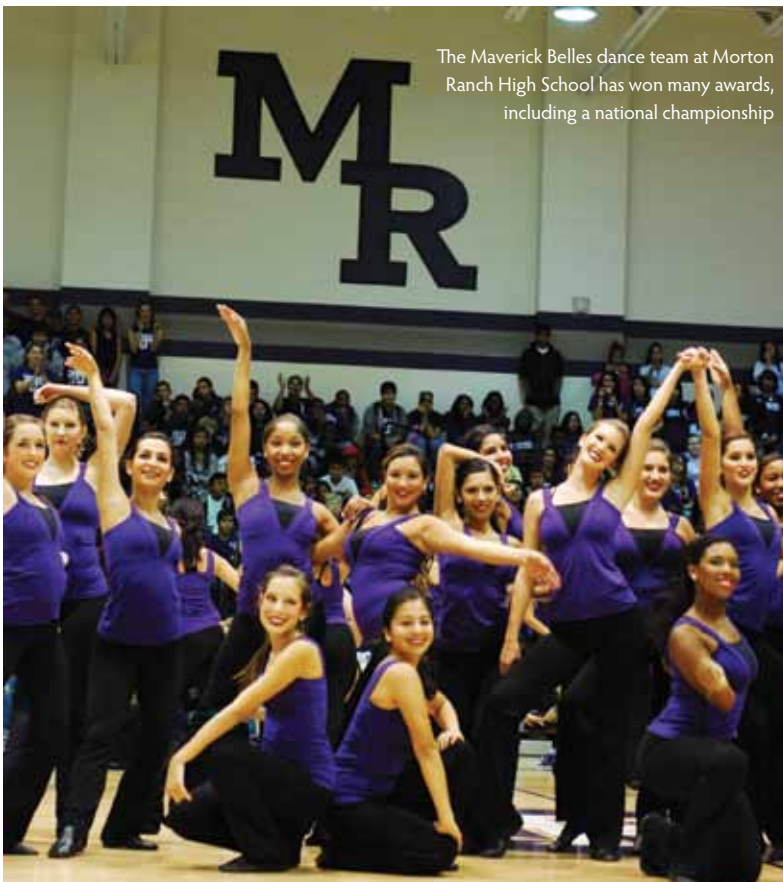
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A Dedicated Dance Team

The Maverick Belles, the MRHS dance team, are making history, as well. April Hunt, the students' director, is proud of the team's growth. With numerous awards, trophies, and recognitions, including a national championship, under their belt, the team's motivation comes from the support of their peers and the community. "The biggest impact on our team is the roar of the crowd," says Hunt. "The girls take pride in representing our school and seem to put that before the trophies."

Seven Lakes High School

Founded in 2005

As Katy ISD's newest and largest high school campus, Seven Lakes High School is already a standout school in many areas. Rated Exemplary by the Texas Education Agency, it is now in its sixth year and continuing the legacy of being a big school with a warm heart, according to SLHS Principal Christie Whitbeck. "We continually receive comments about our positive school culture and willingness to go the extra mile," shares Whitbeck.

Spartan Band and Fine Arts

The Spartan Band is representative of Seven Lakes' overall feel of accomplishment, as band students recently had the privilege of performing at the Sugar Bowl in New Orleans alongside the Taylor High School JET Band. Damon Archer, SLHS director of bands, isn't resting on his laurels, though, as he looks ahead to what the Spartan Band will achieve next. "A goal next year is to travel to Los Angeles to participate in a studio soundtrack recording session," he shares. "We are also hoping to be able to attend a Los Angeles Philharmonic performance under the director Gustav Dudamel." In addition, they hope to perform their own concert in conjunction with the Seven Lakes orchestra in a concert hall in the Los Angeles area.

"The best part of my position is being able to set up an environment of creative learning for all our students," says Archer. "Music is so vital to the development of our students, not only as musicians, but also as valuable members of our society and culture. My fondest memories of teaching are not necessarily when a student achieves a specific rating, placement, or trophy, but when I can look at the student's face and see the understanding and realization of this type of learning. When you couple performing with great sound and a genuine sense of musical expression - that is when the magic

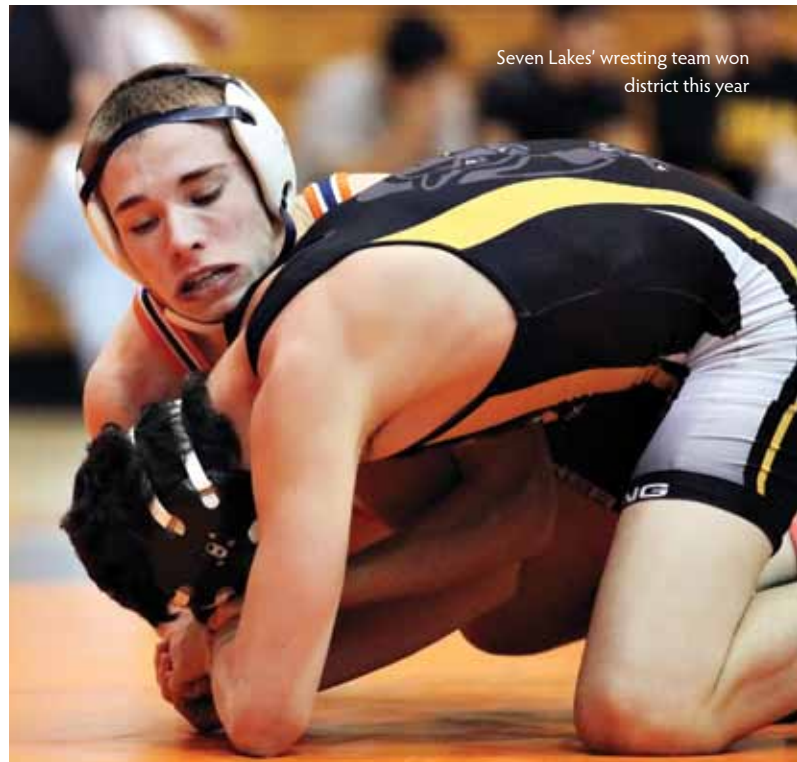
happens!" Seven Lakes boasts many other outstanding fine arts programs, as well, including choir, dance team, and theater arts.

Educational Beacons for Katy Students

As these six high schools continue their traditions of excellence, they will remain educational beacons in Katy ISD. Their dedication to the Katy community can be seen in the many success stories of students going on to lead rich and meaningful lives after high school. **KM**

BESS BLANCO enjoys freelance writing and is constantly reminded of what a great place Katy is to raise her kids.

EDITORS NOTE: Katy Magazine is proud of each Katy area high school and would not have enough room to list all of the outstanding, award-winning programs at each school. The writer chose to focus on a few specific strengths that each high school is most known for.



Seven Lakes' wrestling team won district this year



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Both the Katy Tigers and Cinco Ranch Cougars moved up to the playoffs during the 2010 football season



The Mayde Creek High School girls' choir strives for musical excellence



The Cinco Ranch Cougars enjoy strong athletic programs and were recently ranked on Newsweek's list of best public high schools in the U.S.



Taylor High School's JET Band has earned many accolades over the years and recently received Katy ISD's KatyOne Award, along with the Seven Lakes High School Spartan Band

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