

Beautiful dreamers!

STEM Academy's first graduating class has met expectations – and then some

When the STEM Academy's design was in its infancy four years ago, one common theme was woven throughout all conversations: dream big.

"Don't worry about barriers," STEM co-coordinator Michele Davda said. "Dream big."

Dream big meant dual-credit courses with the University of Texas at Arlington, securing top internships for students, and then trickling that mindset down and encouraging these bright, science, technology, engineering and math-focused students in the program to also dream big.

For two STEM Academy seniors, that meant MIT big.

Samantha Maldonado and Trinity Stallins, members of the first-ever graduating class of the AISD STEM Academy located at Martin High School, will be attending Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the fall. MIT is the third-best college in the nation in

the 2019 ranking of the *U.S. News and World Report* Best Colleges.

"Our bar was high, but I don't know – I wasn't thinking Ivy League," STEM Academy co-coordinator Marianne Varner said. "They amaze us every day."

Maldonado and Stallins, both honored as National Hispanic Scholars in the fall, are the epitome of students who were self-motivated with a huge support system around them to help make those dreams as big as possible. And the STEM Academy Class of 2019 as a whole has taken the program to heights it never thought possible. One-hundred six students are graduating with 105 going to college and one going into the Marines.

In addition to Maldonado and Stallins going to MIT, the list of colleges for STEM Academy students is impressive. Among them: the University of Texas at Austin, Texas A&M, Notre Dame, Carnegie Mellon, USC and the University of Texas at Arlington, where 34 STEM students will be attending in the fall.

"I felt like we set our expectations very high and our students have measured up to those expectations," Martin principal Marlene Roddy said.

Maldonado, who went to Swift Elementary and Bailey Junior High, had an internship with Romeo Engineering where she designed and problem-solved the need to move a massive proton accelerator into a hospital, doing her part for the team that earned the company a \$1 billion contract.

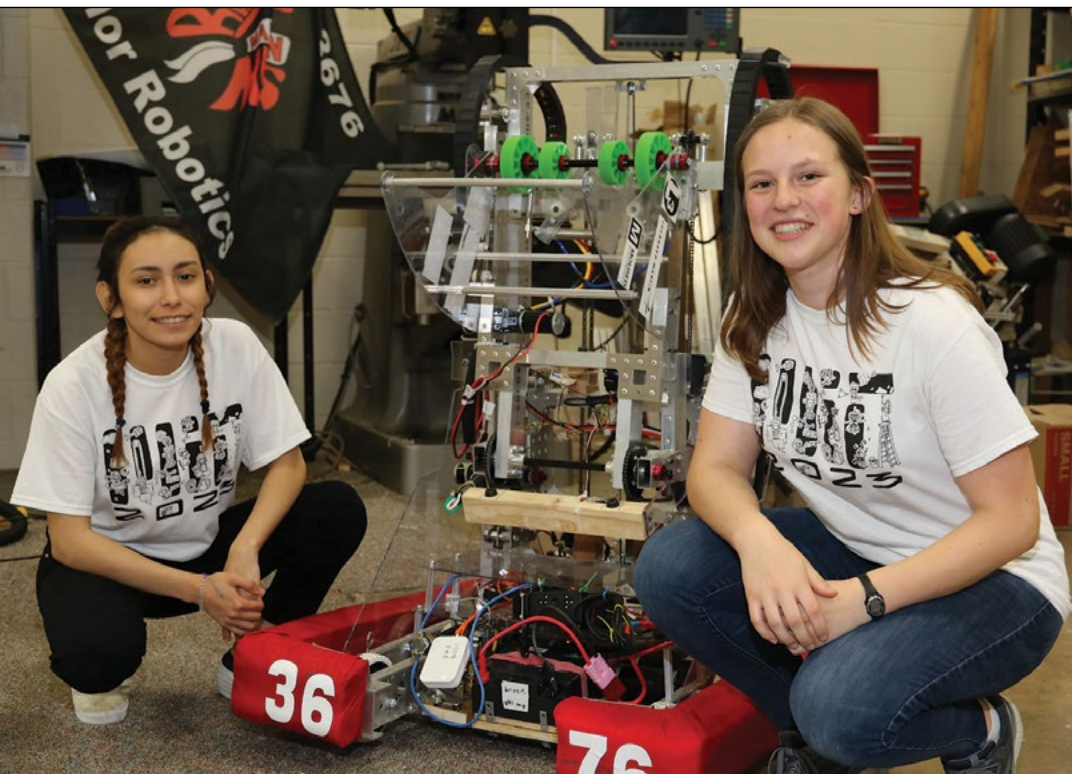
She also was a part of the Martin orchestra during her first two years and, more recently, the national-qualifying and state champion MHS archery team.

Maldonado was pushed by her dad Francisco and Paul Oehler, vice president at Romeo Engineering, to apply to MIT and somewhat reluctantly decided to.

"I guess I never thought I'd be able to go to MIT," said Maldonado, who will focus on mechanical engineering at MIT. "But

with the STEM Academy, you get to meet a lot of people who are like-minded to you. It's people I met who pushed me to be better."

Stallins decided to take advantage of as many opportunities as possible with the STEM Academy and Martin. She was on the



Samantha Maldonado and Trinity Stallins turned their STEM Academy experience into scholarships to the prestigious Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

TEXAS		OTHER
Blinn College (1)	Texas A&M Corpus Christi (2)	Carnegie Mellon (1)
El Centro College (1)	Texas Christian University (2)	Brigham Young University (1)
Sam Houston State (1)	Texas Tech University (4)	Iowa State University (1)
Tarleton State University (2)	Texas Wesleyan University (1)	Kansas State University (1)
Tarrant County College (3)	Trinity University (1)	Massachusetts Institute of Technology (2)
Texas A&M College Station (13)	University of Houston (2)	Northeastern University (1)
	University of North Texas (4)	
	University of Texas (10)	
	University of Texas at Arlington (34)	
	University of Texas Dallas (6)	
		Northwestern State University (1)
		University of Arkansas (1)
		University of Miami (1)
		University of Notre Dame (1)
		University of Southern California (1)
		Wilkes University (1)

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bowling and robotics team that finished as the state runner up, and she had a special internship with two UTA professors – in geochemistry and analytical biochemistry – to assist with research. In mid-May, Stallins had the opportunity to speak at an education symposium for Project Lead the Way, the program that helps write the curriculum for the STEM Academy.

On a scale of one to five, Stallins, who went to Moore Elementary and Boles Junior High, said her excitement about going to MIT is a six.

“My big thing is to take every opportunity; if you don’t know anything about it or if you’re slightly interested in it, do it,” Stallins said. “It pays off to do as much as you can, take every opportunity to learn as much as you can.”

The STEM Academy has created a safe place for students to

dream big. They have built their first successful solar car and recently celebrated a robotics club that finished second in a state competition. They are now looking at the prospect of building an autonomous car and more.

And now that the younger STEM students have seen what Maldonado and Stallins have done – being in exclusive company by being accepted to MIT – the sky is the limit.

“This was really off the charts because we think it has a lot to do with the fact that we started our STEM Academy and both of these young ladies are in the STEM Academy,” Roddy said. “The experiences they were able to have because of the STEM Academy is what got MIT’s attention.

“It’s a big honor to our STEM Academy.”