

Top Six Houston Independent School District JROTC Graduating Senior Cadets

Houston Independent School District's Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC) Department honored the top six graduating seniors from the class of 2021 on Friday, April 09. The JROTC Department conducted a virtual Final Review and Awards Ceremony this year due to COVID-19 restrictions. The top six cadets earned a promotion to Cadet Colonel, which is the highest rank attainable in JROTC.

Fourth Year cadets from each of HISD's 23 JROTC programs competed against one another in a virtual skill and knowledge-based evaluation held on 27 March 2021. Prior to the selection board, cadets earned points based upon their scholastic standing (overall grade point average), and demonstrated leadership skills in school, community organizations, civic groups, and extracurricular activities.

This year's selection board was a virtual competition due to COVID-19 restrictions. At the selection board, cadets earned points for proficiency on a curricular-based skills test, an oral presentation, a personal evaluation consisting of military courtesy, knowledge of current events, appearance in their cadet uniform, knowledge of geography, and an evaluation of first-aid techniques such as cardio-pulmonary resuscitation, bandaging wounds, and assisting sick and injured casualties.

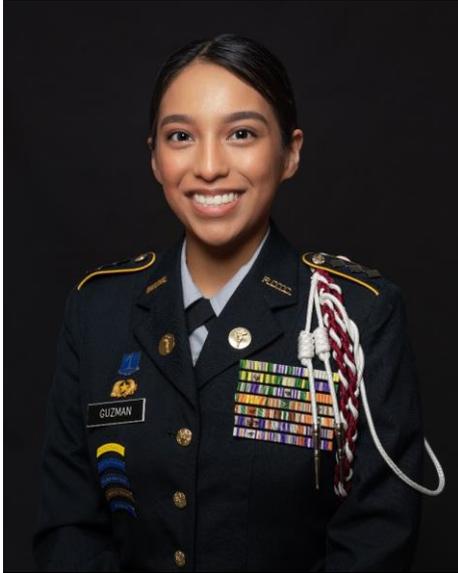
HISD JROTC Cadet Corps Commander (Top Graduate) Cadet Colonel Jason Ridenbaugh Bellaire High School



Cadet Colonel Jason (Jake) Ridenbaugh distinguished himself in academics, leadership, and community activities throughout his high school years. He ranks 85th out of 791 students with a grade point average of 4.73. Cadet Ridenbaugh served as the Battalion Commander for HISD's 20th Army JROTC Battalion. Cadet Ridenbaugh is a member of both the National Honor Society and the German National Honor Society. He serves as an officer in the Bellaire German Club, a member in the Astronomy Club, and a member in the Computer Club. Cadet Colonel Ridenbaugh volunteered countless hours with organizations such as the Houston Marathon, Wreaths Across America, Rose Park Manor Nursing Home, and Ed White Elementary School. Cadet Ridenbaugh served as a commander of the male physical fitness team, captain of the academic team, commander of the raider team, member of the marksmanship team, color guard team, armed drill team.

Cadet Colonel Ridenbaugh also earned the coveted Superior Instructor award. Along with his many achievements in JROTC, Jake tutored students through National Honor Society. He also earned top 3 recognition in several categories of German competitions at the city and state levels. Cadet Colonel Ridenbaugh is an AP Scholar with Distinction. As a junior, he attended the Southwest Youth Leadership Conference at Texas A&M in 2019, and American Legion Boys State in 2020. After graduation, Cadet Ridenbaugh will attend Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas and major in Physics and Mathematics. He intends to pursue a career in physics research.

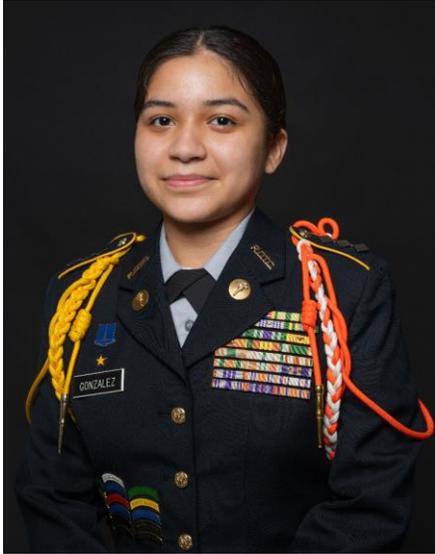
**HISD JROTC 1st Brigade Commander (#2 Graduate)
Cadet Colonel Kayla Guzman
Heights High School**



Cadet Colonel Kayla Guzman, distinguished herself in academics, school, and JROTC activities throughout her high school tenure. She served as the Battalion Executive Officer of HISD's 2nd Army JROTC Battalion. Kayla ranks in the top 10% of her class with a 4.47 grade point average. Among her many achievements in the JROTC program, Kayla earned the Department of the Army-Superior Cadet Medal, American Legion Post Military Excellence Award, Military Officers Association of America Award, Heights Cadet of the Year Award, Superior Instructor Award, Student Government Award, Scholastic Excellence Award, and numerous academic and achievement ribbons. She competed and was a finalist for all four years at the District Cadet Corps Leadership Selection Board. She served as Captain of both the JROTC Leadership and Academic Bowl Teams and a member of the Junior Varsity Marksmanship team. During her tenure at Heights High School, she served

as Student Body President, a member of the National Honor Society, Student Council, Future Business Leaders of America, ZIA, and the HISD EMERGE Program. Kayla volunteered at the Houston Food Bank during the COVID-19 epidemic and works with other campus clubs and extracurricular activities. Kayla is an outspoken advocate for anti-human trafficking. In the fall, Cadet Colonel Guzman will attend Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri and major in Political Science. Dedicating her life to public service and policymaking, Kayla intends to pursue a career in public service. As the future Harris County Judge or member of the Texas Legislature, Kayla will focus on improving the lives of her fellow Houstonians.

**HISD JROTC 2nd Brigade Commander (#3 Graduate)
Cadet Colonel Marlenn Gonzalez
Scarborough High School**



Cadet Colonel Marlenn Gonzalez distinguished herself in academics, school, and extra-curricular activities throughout her high school years. Cadet Colonel Gonzalez served as the Commander of HISD's 17th Army JROTC Battalion. Cadet Colonel Gonzalez is ranked 3rd in her class out of 179 graduating seniors while maintaining a 4.37 grade point average. She has displayed exceptional leadership skills and has distinguished herself by serving as a member of the National Honor Society. Cadet Colonel Gonzalez served as commander of the Color Guard Drill team, member of the Academics Team, member of the Flag Folding team, a Superior Cadet Instructor, and has been the Battalion's Outstanding Cadet for the past four years. Along with her many achievements in the JROTC Program, Cadet Colonel Gonzalez is an active member of the school community and volunteers in school events, as well as Junior Achievement, and the Houston Food Bank. Also, on campus, she is part of

the FUTURES Academy and the EMERGE program. After graduation, Cadet Colonel Gonzalez plans to attend Brandeis University in Waltham Massachusetts majoring in Education and Latin America and Latino Studies.

**HISD JROTC 3rd Brigade Commander (#4 Graduate)
Cadet Colonel Juan Rojas
Austin High School**



Cadet Colonel Juan Rojas distinguished himself in academics, extra-curricular activities, and community service work throughout his high school years. Cadet Rojas served as the Command Sergeant Major and Commander of HISD's 6th Army JROTC Battalion. Cadet Rojas is 2nd in his class out of 342 graduating seniors having maintained a 4.36 grade point average. Cadet Rojas displayed exceptional leadership skills and distinguished himself by serving as commander of the Air Rifle Marksmanship Team, captain of the Academics Team, Superior Cadet Instructor, and was the Battalion's Outstanding Cadet for the past three years. Along with his many achievements in the JROTC Program, Cadet Rojas is an active participant in the Austin High School community service partnership with the Houston Food Bank. Cadet Rojas participated in or led over 40 food drives during his four years as a cadet, providing much needed food assistance to over 1,000 East End families. After graduation, Cadet Rojas plans to attend

Texas A&M and join the Corps of Cadets and major in Mechanical Engineering. Juan wants to serve his country as an officer in the United States Army.

**HISD JROTC 4th Brigade Commander (#5 Graduate)
Cadet Colonel Alejandra Rodriguez
Kashmere Senior High School**



Cadet Colonel Alejandra Rodriguez distinguished herself in academics, and extra-curricular activities throughout her high school years. Alejandra is ranked first in her class with 4.55 grade point average. Cadet Colonel Rodriguez displayed exceptional leadership skills and distinguished herself as Commander of the Battalion Color Guard team. Along with her many accomplishments in the JROTC Program, Cadet Rodriguez volunteered numerous hours with the Houston Food Bank, Wreath Across America, and Special Olympics. Also, on campus, Cadet Rodriguez is a member of the National Honor Society and the EMERGE program. After graduation, Alejandra will attend Wellesley College in Boston, Massachusetts where she will major in Aeronautical Engineering.

**HISD JROTC 5th Brigade Commander (#6 Graduate)
Cadet Colonel Guillermo Pereznegron
Waltrip High School**



Cadet Colonel Guillermo Pereznegron distinguished himself in academics, extracurricular activities, and community service work throughout his high school years. Cadet Colonel Pereznegron served as Battalion Commander for HISD's 9th Army JROTC Battalion. Throughout his tenure in JROTC, Cadet Colonel Pereznegron earned the Veterans of Foreign Affairs Leadership Award, the 9th Battalion Major Savage Honorarium Award, and the 9th Battalion Superior Drill Cadet Award. He served as commander of the Armed Drill Team and the Sabre Guard Honors Platoon. He served as a member of the Junior Leadership and Academic Team as and the physical fitness team. In addition to his JROTC Program accomplishments, Guillermo is a member of the National Honors Society and an Ambassador for the Geographic Information Systems pathway. After graduation, Cadet Colonel Pereznegron will attend Texas A&M University and join the Corps of Cadets. Majoring in Public

Health, Guillermo's career goal is to serve as a Public Health Officer in the United States Air Force.