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From LEGO Bots to Leadership: An SAISD Grad’s Path to Engineering Success



San Antonio ISD Foundation

Luz Moreno-Martinez speaks to students about her experiences as a STEM professional.

By Christian Shaffer

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When Luz Moreno-Martinez steps onto the production floor at Frito-Lay’s Rosenberg, Texas plant, she’s at home among conveyors, sensors, and problem-solving teams.

But the engineer who now recruits and mentors new talent once started out as a curious SA-ISD middle schooler discovering robots for the first time.

Her journey — from Arnold Elementary to a leadership post at PepsiCo’s snack-food division — shows how early exposure and steady support from the SA-ISD Foundation can launch students into careers they never imagined.

Big Dreams, Small Beginnings

Luz grew up in San Antonio ISD schools, attending Arnold Elementary, Whittier Middle School, and Travis Early College High School. She still remembers the moment she discovered robotics: a demo of a miniature LEGO robot that could follow lines and lift blocks. “I’d never seen anything like it,” she recalls.

Back at Travis, she pitched the idea of starting a robotics team. Principal support was conditional: she had to find a faculty sponsor.

New physics teacher Mr. Julio Castillejo, a Notre Dame engineering graduate, said yes. With that single word and a grant front the SAISD Foundation for start-

er equipment, Travis launched the first FIRST Robotics team in SAISD. Soon Luz was presenting to the district board to secure recognition for the program.

The team was small and scrappy, but Luz’s passion earned her a FIRST Robotics Dean’s List Award in 2016.

When the team qualified for Nationals in Massachusetts, travel costs seemed impossible — until the SAISD Foundation stepped in and covered flights and hotels for Luz, Mr. Castillejo, and math teacher Ms. Battaglia. “Their answer was never ‘maybe,’” Luz says. “It was always, ‘How else can we help you?’”

College Tours That Changed Everything

Foundation support didn’t stop at robotics. Proud Sam Houston High School alumnus, volunteer and college advocate, Mr. Jason Mims, worked with the Foundation to organize and support road trips that took Luz far beyond San Antonio:

- A Notre Dame engineering visit (her first out-of-state campus tour)
 - A week-long Texas Tech summer engineering camp
 - An environmental-engineering program at Allegheny College in Pennsylvania — Luz was the only Texan accepted

“Before those trips, college felt abstract,” she says. “Seeing campuses, sitting in real labs, talking to professors — suddenly it felt possible.”



First-Generation College Success

Motivated by those experiences, Luz applied broadly and ultimately accepted a full-ride scholarship to Texas A&M University. She majored in Manufacturing & Mechanical Engineering Technology with a minor in International Engineering Studies, graduating in 2021.

As a first-generation college student, paperwork was daunting. “I filled out FAFSA alone and spent hours at Café College downtown asking questions,” she says. “My parents immigrated from Mexico; college was a mystery. Teachers and Foundation staff were my guides.”

From Intern to Leader at Frito-Lay

During senior year, Luz landed a summer internship at Frito-Lay — thanks in part to an elevator conversation she’d had years earlier with a PepsiCo regional vice president visiting Arnold Elementary for a recycling award. “She remembered me asking about internships,” Luz laughs. “That blew my mind.”

The internship led to a full-time offer in January 2022. Luz



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Luz Moreno-Martinez graduated from Texas A&M University in 2021.

first managed processing lines, then moved into her current role as Staffing & Capability Supply-Chain Leader — hiring and coaching employees while also visiting schools to promote STEM careers. Her Spanish fluency is a bridge on the shop floor: “When team members hear Spanish, walls drop. They trust you faster.”

Looking Forward

Today, Luz continues to share her story at outreach events and classroom visits, echoing the support she once received. Her advice to SAISD students:

“Go toward the things that scare you. That fear usually means you’re growing — and there’s always help if you ask for it.”

To donors who underwrite Foundation programs, she’s clear:

“You’re the first helping hand. Your gift lets a student take that trip, join that competition, see a world they never knew existed. That push can change a life — I’m proof.”

Why Luz’s Story Matters

Luz Moreno-Martinez is one of thousands of SAISD alumni whose paths were widened by the SAISD Foundation, the non-profit partner supporting San Antonio ISD students from kindergarten through college completion.

By funding robotics parts, college-readiness tours, travel to national competitions, and more, the Foundation turns curiosity into conviction — and conviction into careers.

When former students return as engineers, mentors, or corporate leaders, the impact ripples outward: stronger classrooms, stronger companies, and a stronger San Antonio community. Luz’s story is one more reason to keep that pipeline of opportunity open.



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