

Harris County Department of Education Blog Archive

January 1, 2020 - December 31, 2020



Harris County
Department of
Education

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1. 2020

1.1 January

Spotlight on New HCDE Trustee Andrea Duhon, Position 4, Precinct 3 (2020-01-13 17:14) - hcdetx



[1]



Newly appointed board member Andrea Duhon was sworn into office Dec. 18 to represent Position 4, Precinct 3 within the Harris County Department of Education Board of Trustees.

A self-professed public education advocate, Duhon wants to bolster Harris County student opportunities in early childhood education, adult education workforce certification and second-language acquisition.

“I have been in the fight for public education programs for several years now through galvanizing public support and testifying in the 86th (Texas) Legislature in support of HCDE,” she said. “I will continue to stand up for the good of our community through public education programs.” The Katy resident holds a bachelor’s degree in marketing from McNeese State University. She is a territory manager and marketing strategist for Plant Sight 3D. Her affiliations include community leader for Combined

Arms, formerly Lone Star Veterans Association, a nonprofit helping veterans transition to civilian life. Her husband Hank is active-duty Navy. As a mother to second-grade student Jaci, Duhon talks about education reaching outside the school. “Education does not end in the classroom,” she said. “It extends to the playground, the sports field, the neighborhood and home. When we support our students from a community level, we grow as a society.”

1. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/01/20191218_duhon_002_r.jpg

Early Childhood Educator Conference Feb. 1 Features Best-selling Author Peter H. Reynolds, 50 Breakout Sessions
(2020-01-14 17:28) - hcdetx





New York Times bestselling children's author and illustrator Peter H. Reynolds entertains and inspires early childhood educators Saturday, Feb. 1, from 8:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m. at the R.T. Garcia Early Childhood Winter Conference. As a bonus for registering, attendees will receive one of his children's books.

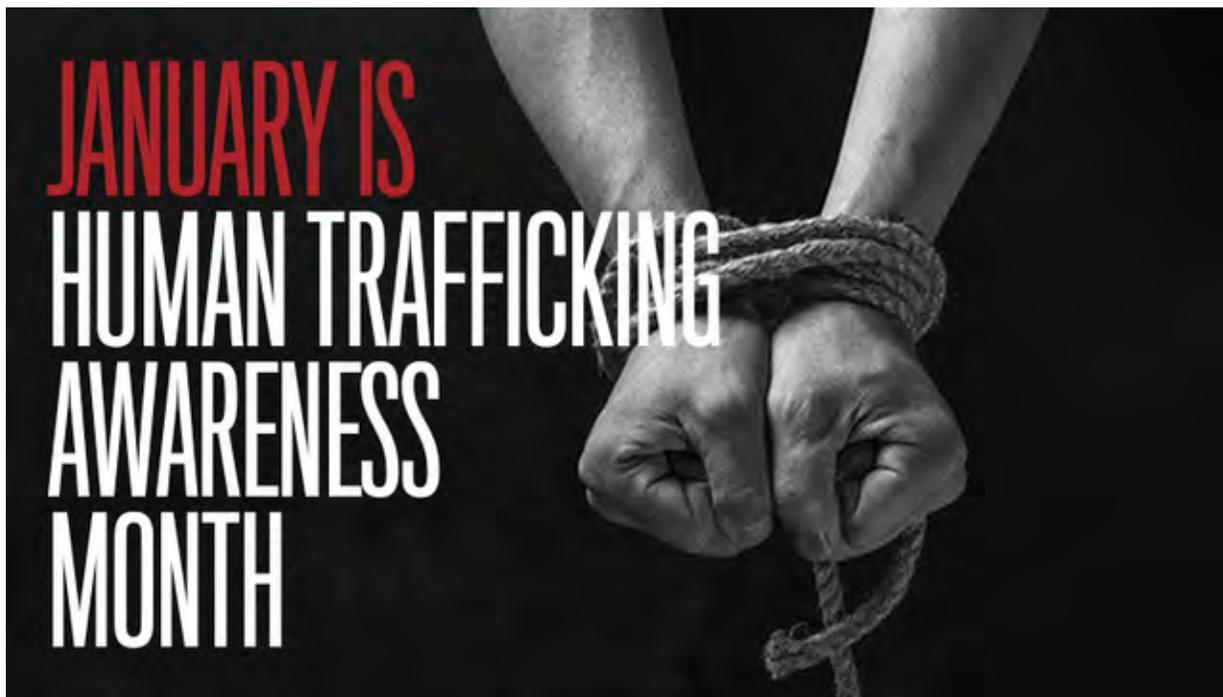
The 34th annual Harris County Department of Education conference held at the Kingdom Builder's Center, 6011 W. Orem Dr., is one of the Texas' largest conferences for children in grades pre-k through second. Bilingual keynote is singer and songwriter Gilberto Soto, professor of music education at Texas A & M International University. "This year, every attendee receives one of six bestseller books from Peter Reynolds, courtesy of Scholastic Books, a generous sponsor and supporter of our conference," conference coordinator Andrea Segraves said. "Reynolds is globally popular as his books are now published in over 25 languages." [2]



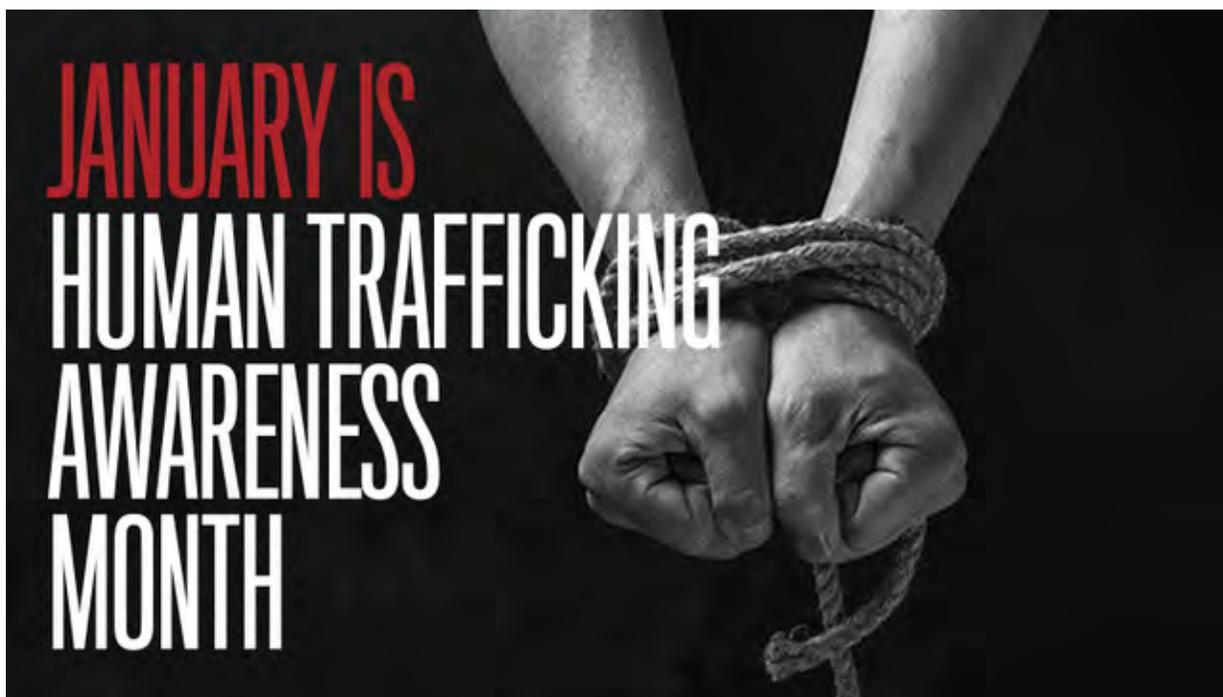
Storyteller Reynolds books are about protecting and nurturing the creative spirit, including the three books in his “Creatrilogy”: *The Dot*, *Ish* and *Sky Color*. He owns the Blue Bunny Bookstore in Denham, Massachusetts and has written or illustrated more than 50 children’s books. More than 50 conference breakout sessions include presentations ranging from classroom management, reading, math, social studies, science and social-emotional learning. Education vendors line the exhibition hall with products and educational services. Historically, HCDE continues to provide the conference at a low cost for early childhood educators. The daylong conference is available for \$125. Register: [3]<https://buff.ly/2PEhT8U>.

1. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/01/author-peter-reynolds1.jpg>
2. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/01/reynolds20say20something2075020copy1.jpg>
3. <https://nam04.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fbuff.ly%2F2PEhT8U&data=02%7C01%7Ccvauahn%40hcde-texas.org%7Ce4790909819d42b0481c08d798713568%7>

Center for Safe and Secure Schools Calls Attention to Human Trafficking Awareness Month (2020-01-15 14:19) - hcdetx



[1]



More than 79,000 youth are being trafficked for sex in Texas each year, and Houston is a major hub for human trafficking. To raise awareness, The Center for Safe and Secure Schools at Harris County Department of Education calls attention to trafficking

crimes during Human Trafficking Awareness Month in January.

Julia Andrews, director of the Center, says human trafficking is a form of abuse or neglect, and educators and the general public must report trafficking.

“Everyone has a duty to immediately report suspected or disclosed abuse or neglect, and educational professionals must report it within 48 hours and may not rely on another person to make that report,” Andrews said.

Below are additional facts about human trafficking. For more information about prevention, go to [2]www.hcde-texas.org/safe-and-secure-schools . To report, call 713-222-TIPS (Crime Stoppers Houston).

- 1 in 3 runaway youth are lured into prostitution within 48 hours.
- 1 in 4 victims of modern slavery are children.
- Human trafficking is a federal crime and is the second largest criminal industry.
- 76 percent of transactions for sex with underage girls are conducted via the Internet.

Developed at the request of local superintendents in the spring of 1999 to advance safe and secure environments for learning and teaching, the Center for Safe and Secure Schools is a leader in the development of increased safety and security strategies in school environments for students and educators.

The Center provides school safety facility audits, school climate and culture training, emergency operation planning and other school safety workshops as needed by area schools.

1. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/01/ht-for-carol-3.jpg>

2. <http://www.hcde-texas.org/safe-and-secure-schools>

Skills through Afterschool Debate Program Earn Alief Teen Spot at Ivy League College (2020-01-15 14:51) - hcdetx

[1]



Before debate, Alief Independent School District Kerr High senior Queen Eche was a competitive force on the soccer field. Upon enrolling in a magnet high school where sports weren't the focus, the spunky, extroverted senior turned to debate through an afterschool program.

Today the Dartmouth-bound, 17-year old insists it's not just her grades that helped her get recruited into the Ivy League college, but rather her steadfast dedication to debate after the school day.

Harris County Department of Education funds debate for inner-city youth through CASE Debates, an afterschool collaboration between HCDE's Center for Afterschool, Summer and Enrichment for Kids (CASE for Kids) and the Houston Urban Debate League. Tournaments scheduled throughout the year give teens the opportunity to compete locally and nationally. Last year Eche went to nationals, climbing her way up the ranks in Washington, D.C. She was named as one of two top national debaters.

CASE Debates offers two debate formats for competition: World Schools Debate and Policy Debate. Eche prefers Policy Debate, honing the pros and cons about an

argument throughout the year.

In a debate round, she feels empowered by sharing facts, putting ideas forth a mile-a-minute. They are contested by teammates and judges. New arguments are researched, reasoned and put forth.

As her team continues to collect awards, she insists it's not about the winning or losing.

"Competition isn't about hard feelings; it's about ideas," she said.

While some high school students might shun afterschool opportunities, Eche welcomes the chance to learn new things, especially when it comes to debate.

"Passion strikes out of nowhere," she said. "You miss all the shots you don't take, and you've got to test new things out."

Parents Peter and Jenifer Eche praise the power of afterschool as they watch the eldest of three children set an example through her activity of choice. They moved to Houston from Singapore and understand the importance of their three daughters venturing into the macrocosm outside their southwest Houston neighborhood.



“Without afterschool, kids have a monotonous life,” said her father. “But afterschool helps kids see beyond the academics, and they become unique by finding new talents and even choosing their future.”

Mom Jenifer elaborates on the benefits.

“Kids spend most of their time in the classroom, but she (Queen) gets to express herself freely within the supervised school space,” she said. “It helps them realize their potential.”

Kerr Principal Vinson Lewis traveled to Washington, D.C. with the debate team members last year as they qualified for nationals. Because of financial limitations,

many students wouldn't have the opportunity to leave the four-square miles surrounding the school, he explained.

"The opportunity for us to partner with CASE Debates and to have that financial support is remarkable," Principal Lewis said.

Once a hobby, debate is now Eche's future as she says 80 percent of her life revolves around it as she researches and shares ideas. Next fall she moves to New Hampshire to join the Dartmouth debate team.

(For more information about CASE Debates and opportunities in area afterschool: [3]www.hcde-texas.org/after-school .)

1. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/01/p1000753.jpg>
 2. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/01/peter_jenifer-eche.jpeg
 3. <http://www.hcde-texas.org/after-school>
-

Center for Safe and Secure Schools Travels to Provide County-wide School Safety Trainings (2020-01-23 09:50) - hcdetx





With the recent passage of Senate Bill 11, Texas now joins the short list of states in the United States to legislatively mandate the implementation of threat assessment teams to promote school safety in its public school districts and open-enrollment charter schools.

Goose Creek CISD Deputy Superintendent Anthony Price is over safety and security and wants to be on top of what's going on within the state, district and area.

Patricia Kay, Crosby ISD assistant superintendent, wanted to bring a team from her district so they can start the threat assessment process.

Harris County Department of Education's Center for Safe and Secure Schools recently partnered with Sheldon ISD to host the Threat Assessment Workshop: The Next Steps at Panther Stadium with hopes of neighboring school districts bringing additional personnel without worrying about travel. About 80 people were in attendance.

By traveling to area school districts, the Center hopes to empower more districts through school safety initiatives. Providing this training closer to many districts in east Harris County provided them the chance to bring additional staff.



“We’re strategically setting up these workshops throughout the county to impact this mandate and help the school districts we serve,” said Julia Andrews, Center director.

“We love that it’s here next to us in one of our neighboring school districts and because of that I was able to bring five others from my district,” Price said.

“I was excited to see it here (Sheldon ISD) and I think that really allowed us to have as many as we have here since it’s right in our backyard,” Kay said.

The board of trustees of each school district is now required to establish a threat assessment team to serve at each campus of their district. Each team is required to complete base training provided by the Texas School Safety Center or a Regional Education Service Center. The base training is based on the training program developed by Sigma Threat Consultants.

“We want to provide every tool and best practice for students if a crisis situation were to occur,” Price said. “I’ve been doing active shooter and risk management trainings for 18 years, so anytime I can learn more information it makes it more important to better serve our students.”

[3]



“This training will provide a take-away where we can have documents that will guide us as we go forward to forming our team and training,” Kay said. “We built a team three years ago, but with the mandates from Senate Bill 11 we wanted to get we wanted to get structured and formal with it plan.”

CSSS teamed up with Sigma Senior Consultant Melissa Reeves to provide the workshop that covers the next steps after the required basic training. Participants learned the legal and ethical guidelines driving higher standards needed for multi-disciplinary threat assessment teams. The session covered best practices, specific resources, an implementation checklist, and roles/responsibilities for establishing and/or refining their teams, protocols, and processes.

Each attendee either learned something new to add into their plan or were refreshed on key points.

“Reeves has shared some excellent points that she made more clear for us on the legalities, going over the law, the things we can do stay in the law and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act training to what we can use during emergency situations,” Price said.

“This training is very productive and refreshed me on what we need to do, think about, the importance to be impartial by blocking out any biases and in fairness to every kid,” Kay said.

Visit the CSSS website for updated training dates at [4]<https://hcde-texas.org/safe-and-secure-schools/>.

1. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/01/threat.jpg>
 2. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/01/423a4471.jpg>
 3. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/01/423a4463.jpg>
 4. <https://hcde-texas.org/safe-and-secure-schools/>
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Choice Partners Honors Vendors, Clients for Helping Support Local Education Projects Via Business (2020-01-29 17:09) - hcdetx

[1]



The unique story of Choice Partners—the Harris County Department of Education one-stop cooperative for facilities services, supplies and food—is best told through its loyal clients and vendors.

On Jan. 24, approximately 100 vendors and members were honored at Choice Partners' annual appreciation luncheon. Guest speaker HCDE Superintendent James Colbert Jr. praised attendees for supporting public education through providing and utilizing competitively bid contracts with Choice Partners.

View photos: [2]<https://tinyurl.com/rf3tys7>

“Today we provide even more services to area school districts and have lowered the tax rate five years in a row,” the superintendent said. “A lot of that is because of the vendors and members in this room today who work with us through Choice.”

Colbert pointed to the funds which flow from Choice and are leveraged to supply services to area school districts, including the new Fortis Academy, the county's

first free drug-and-alcohol recovery public high school.

[3]



Revenue generated through Choice has grown from \$92 million 10 years ago to \$343 million today, allowing for local tax rates to be lowered while pumping money into new education initiatives to serve Harris County students. Profits from Choice are unique in the fact that the funds go back to the education community, said Jeff Drury, Choice Partners director.

Co-op customer and member Rick Gay, procurement director with Spring Branch Independent School District, says his district uses Choice for its reasonable and competitive pricing and time-saving processes.

[4]



“Choice Partners gives us an opportunity to very quickly bring to end-users the materials and supplies they need on a day-to-day basis for us to get the job done, which is to educate our children,” Gay said. “Our mantra is every dollar we save is a dollar we return to the classroom.”

His district depends heavily on Choice for job order contracting which allows for small construction jobs or quick repairs: a door replacement, air-conditioning problems or painting.

“These JOC contracts are reasonable and easy-to-use and allow us to move quickly to solve a problem,” Gay said.

Vendor Facilities Sources was the top vendor honored at the luncheon. Company president David Terry said the competitively bid, line-item contracts available through Choice were critical during the rebuilding period, post-Harvey.

Humble Independent School District called Facilities Sources as a Choice Partners vendor. FEMA approval for repairing the 500,000 square-foot Kingwood High after the category five hurricane came quickly because of the transparent pricing.

“Pricing was established prior to the storm, so clients could be assured they weren’t getting some inflated, out-of-town contractor pricing,” said Terry. “It allowed students to be back into school within 90 days, whereas they thought they were going to lose an entire school year because of the damage from Harvey.”

As a cooperative, Terry said he values the Choice Partners reputation for servicing clients and auditing the process while maintaining the quality of vendors.

“That reputation helps you get in the door because our clients know it’s a valid co-op, a local co-op,” Terry said. “If they need something, HCDE is responsive to their needs.”

Spring Branch ISD director Gay said he is very satisfied with the service he gets from Choice, as well as the clear contracts and pricing.

“I would encourage everyone to take a look at co-ops in general, but Choice Partners is probably one of the premiere cooperatives out there,” he said. “Their customer service is second to none.”

For more information: [5]<https://www.choicepartners.org>.

1. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/01/20100124_choice_011.jpg
2. <https://tinyurl.com/rf3tys7>
3. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/01/20100124_choice_006.jpg
4. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/01/20100124_choice_038.jpg
5. <https://www.choicepartners.org/>

Spotlight on New HCDE Trustee Amy Hinojosa: Position 1, Precinct 2 (2020-01-30 14:06) - hcdetx





Amy Hinojosa is the newly appointed board member to Position 1, Precinct 2 for the Harris County Department of Education Board of Trustees.

The Pasadena native, wife and mother of two teenagers still resides in and serves the community where she grew up and says she takes the calling to serve the citizens of Precinct 2 very seriously.

She is committed to serving adult learners within her community and looks forward to assessing facilities improvements needed within HCDE. HCDE provides GED and English as a second language classes along with workforce training at no cost to adult learners in Harris and Liberty counties and operates four special schools for area school districts which serve students with emotional and intellectual disabilities and recovering youth.

As a process engineer, she is employed by Chevron Corporation as project manager in technology development. She earned a Bachelor of Science in Chemical Engineering from the University of Houston.

Hinojosa is passionate about giving local youth the same opportunities she has received.

“I am from Pasadena, and I am a first-generation college student, so I see myself in those kids,” she said. “Be who you needed when you were young.”

Hinojosa shares her passion for education through several student and professional mentoring initiatives. As the founder of Community Leaders Encouraging Academia Through Sports, Inc. or CLEATS, she heads a Pasadena-area, youth athletic program which allows students to explore their college futures by visiting local universities.

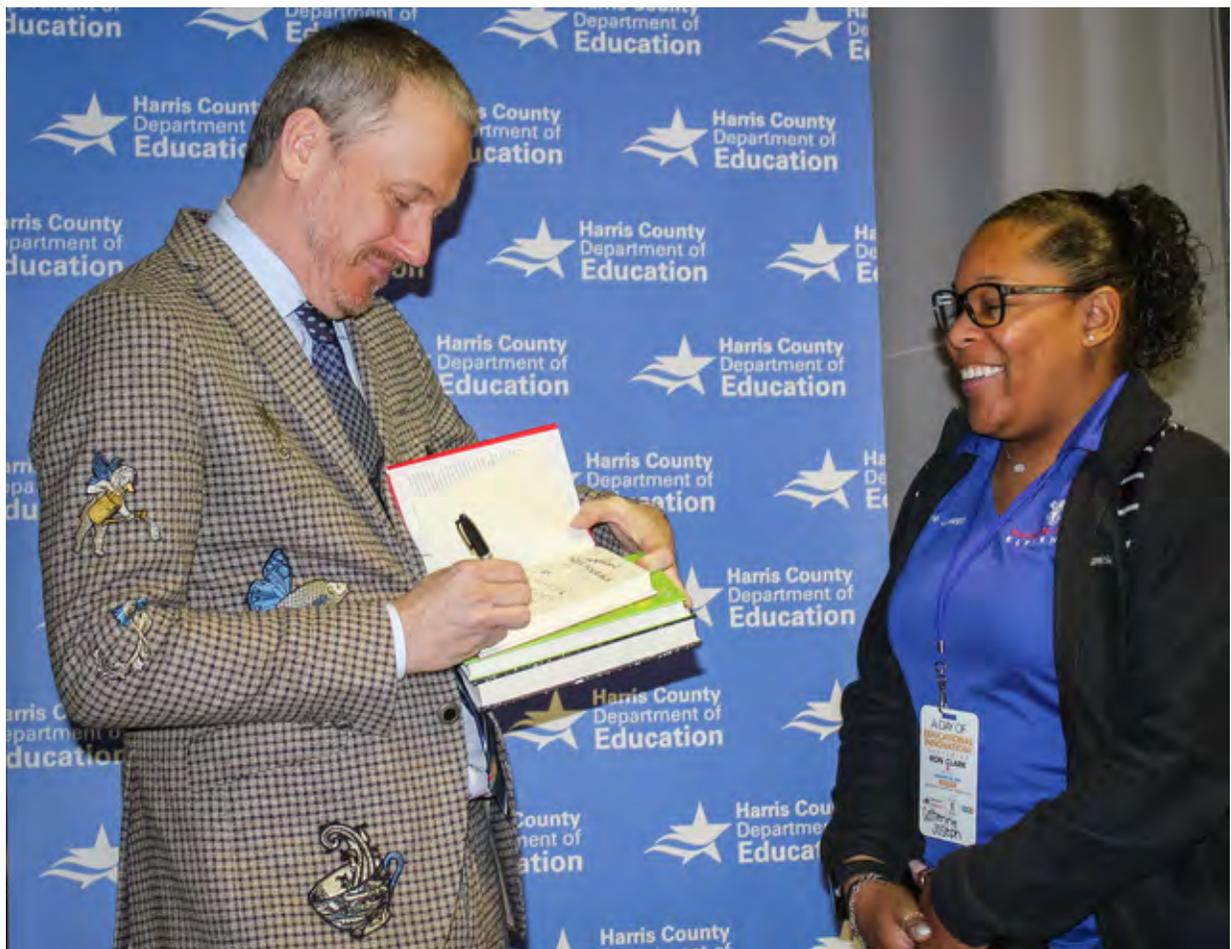
“My journey in education started as a little league volunteer, where I realized I could use sports as an avenue to get the children in my community on our local university campuses,” she said.

During 2020, Hinojosa serves as director on the board of ProUnitas, a nonprofit dedicated to raising awareness for health and wellness resources for youth to be successful in school and beyond. She continues to grow her leadership skills as a Houston Leadership ISD 2020 fellow and a Houston Latinos for Education 2019 fellow.

Hinojosa describes herself as being “passionate about compassion for all animals” as she claims poodle Bruno and cocker spaniel Elvis as additional family members.

1. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/01/hinojosa_r_f.jpg

America's Teacher Ron Clark Energizes Educators at 'Move Your Bus' Conference (2020-01-30 15:12) - hcdetx





An audience of educators pulsed with energy likened to a rock concert as America's educator Ron Clark left the stage to autograph books and pose for cell phone photos Jan. 25.

Photos: [2]<https://tinyurl.com/RonClarkPhotos>

His two-hour presentation and question-and-answer session called "Move Your Bus" was hosted by Harris County Department of Education's Teaching and Learning Center. Many of the 450 faithful followers dreamt of seeing Clark for years and gave up their Saturday for the event held in west Houston.

Third grade teacher Kristina Ponce came with her three friends from Houston ISD's Berry Elementary to get energized inspired by his stories. Ponce clutched her autographed copy of Clark's bestseller and quoted a phrase inside.

"Not everybody gets the cookie," Ponce said. "Just showing up doesn't get you an award. If everyone gets the reward, what's the point of working toward it. You have to earn it."



Clark, a two-time, New York Times bestselling author, friend to Oprah and former Disney American Teacher of the Year told stories about teaching in rural Aurora, North Carolina and New York City's Harlem.

He challenged educators to challenge their students.

"If you tell kids to 'suck it up' but it's with love and coming from a good place, they will reach high standards, and then you'll have great results," Clark said.

The North Carolina native spoke of a grandmother who raised him with rules and expectations like showing respect, shaking hands, and making eye contact.

"Every kid wants structure, and they want to know you are in charge and that you have discipline," he said.

Clark runs a small, nonprofit school called Ron Clark Academy which has experienced great success. Many educators travel to the school to study and emulate the innovative practices.

Teacher Ponce said she holds her students at a high standard for behavior and academic performance and as she highlights the importance of teaching manners in

addition to curriculum. She hopes to visit Clark's school one day to garner new ideas.

To bring excitement into the classroom, Clark promotes music, movement and creative thinking processes. One of his activity examples includes allowing students to blow up balloons and solving a math challenge problem on the balloon. Students successfully answering the problem with a marker get to pop the balloon.

Furr High School Assistant Principal Brian Roberson volunteered as an ambassador at the event and helped prepare for the big crowd and the big day. His takeaway for the day was to spread creativity.

[4]



“Think outside the box,” he said. “We have set curriculum, but the way you deliver that curriculum can be unique. To be the most creative educator you can be can transform not only the classrooms, but the community as a whole.”

For more continuing education events sponsored through the Teaching and Learning Center at HCDE or for customized trainings at your school or district, go to [5]www.hcde-texas.com/workshop-registration or call 713-696-1315.

1. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/01/20100125_clark_023.jpg
 2. <https://tinyurl.com/RonClarkPhotos>
 3. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/01/20100125_clark_038.jpg
 4. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/01/20100125_clark_028.jpg
 5. <http://www.hcde-texas/workshop-registration>
-

HCDE Head Start Employee Receives New Home from Habitat for Humanity (2020-01-30 15:42) - hcdetx



[1]



Two years after suffering a huge loss, Harris County Department of Education Head Start employee Adriane Marks has reason to smile. She will soon be able to call herself
40

a homeowner thanks to Habitat for Humanity and KPRC Channel 2.

“I always knew I wanted to be a homeowner,” she said. “I thought I would have to get a realtor and do the regular process but didn’t think it was going to happen like this.”

In August 2017, she lost all her possessions in the flooding from Hurricane Harvey. At the time, she and her family were living in her father’s house and still paying on it.

The HCDE Head Start Data Compliance Specialist, who checks to make sure children are eligible for the head start program, was overwhelmed with the support her coworkers offered after she and her family were displaced.

“My managers provided me with hair products, HCDE donated money to those of us affected by Harvey and Head Start Senior Director Venetia Peacock took us to her church’s clothing drive,” Marks said. “My kids were very thankful for the clothes.”

After living in a hotel for about four months, they couldn’t afford to move back into the house because the payments went up after the flood renovation. They stayed with family afterwards then started renting a house, but now the rent is cost-prohibited.

Marks filled out the Habitat for Humanity application in September 2019 and found out the next month when KPRC surprised her. This is the seventh house in east Houston for the news station.

“I was at a loss for words when they told me, but I am ecstatic,” she said. “My kids are very excited and are ready to move in.”

Applicants write a letter as to why they are a fit for the program by meeting one of four criteria. A panel of current habitat homeowners reads the letters and chooses the recipient based on the story.

Marks has an 11-year-old daughter and 7-year-old son. The house they are currently renting is behind a convenience store that gets robbed almost weekly, and she doesn’t feel safe there anymore.

To participate in the program, each recipient must volunteer back through sweat equity hours by helping build other houses or at the ReStore center. Candidates also complete financial counseling.

[2]



“My family and friends are also able to volunteer hours to show support for me during this process and it means a lot,” she said.

The work on her new home started about three weeks ago and she hopes to close on it at the end of April. Her house will be 1,206 square feet and consist of three bedrooms, two bathrooms and a one-car garage.

In the meantime, Marks is preparing for her new house by furniture shopping and completing her sweat equity hours.

For more information about Habitat for Humanity, visit HoustonHabitat.org.

To view videos of Marks's surprise and the home building process, visit [\[3\]https://bit.ly/201pih9](https://bit.ly/201pih9).

1. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/01/habitat-home.jpg>
 2. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/01/habitat-home-2.jpg>
 3. <https://bit.ly/201pih9>
-

1.2 February

HCDE Announces 2020 Regional Scholastic Art & Writing Awardees, Celebratory Exhibits and Receptions (2020-02-10 10:14)

- hcdetx





Adrienne Ross, Clear Creek ISD

Talented teen artists and writers in Harris County gain acclaim through the Harris County Department of Education's Regional Scholastic Art & Writing Awards 2020. From a total of 8,997 entries 1,018 Gold Key awardees advance to be judged nationally in New York City through the artistic nonprofit which inspires teens across the country.

Exhibits and receptions are being hosted throughout the city in recognition of 7-12 graders from public, private and home schools: [2]<https://tinyurl.com/ScholasticHCDE20> . Locations for exhibits include the Galleria and Texas Art Supply. (View awardees: [3]www.hcde-texas.org/scholastic-awards)

Awards are provided for Gold Key, Silver Key and Honorable Mention recipients. Recipients come from public school districts ranging from Aldine to Waller and private schools spanning from Episcopal to The Village School. Home school students gain awards as well.

[4]



Tiffany Campbell, Klein ISD

[5]



Anthony Abarca, Aldine ISD

A total of 25 school districts, 23 private schools, several charter schools and home schools are represented as students earn Gold Key, Silver Key and honorable mention awards. Top-award Gold Key recipients advance to national judging to be considered for Gold and Silver Medals which are announced March 16 and awarded on June 4 through a ceremony at Carnegie Hall in New York City.

Students submitted their work through the 800-plus teachers who support and participate in HCDE's regional competition, said Andrea Segraves, HCDE Regional Scholastic Art & Writing Awards program coordinator. Several hundred volunteer art and writing professionals judge the submissions.

“We are grateful for the supporters of the Awards in Harris County—from the community supporters who offer space to showcase works, to the organizations who offer student scholarships, to the hundreds of jurors who volunteer their time,” said HCDE Superintendent James Colbert Jr. “We are honored to be a 16-year regional sponsor of this iconic celebration of artistic talent.”

[6]



Medha Fotedar, Klein ISD

[7]



Vallery Orr, Spring Branch ISD

Ten students earned special-award recognition through the American Voices and American Vision awards. These 10 awards are judged nationally through Scholastic Art & Writing in New York City for the American Voices/American Visions Medals. One in each art and writing category will be selected and announced in March:

American Visions:

- Anthony Abarca, 17, Carver High School, Aldine ISD, Photography, "Love Affair"
- Tiffany Campbell, 17, Klein Oak High School, Klein ISD, Digital Art, "Harvey"
- Medha Fotedar, 15, Klein Collins High School, Klein ISD, Drawing and Illustration, "Stunted Growth"
- Vallery Orr, 16, Memorial High School, Spring Branch ISD, Digital Art, "Disintegrated Identity"
- Adrienne Ross, 17, Clear Creek High School, Clear Creek ISD, Digital Art, "Programmed Discovery"

American Voices:

- Chloe Beaudreau, 16, Carnegie Vanguard High School, Houston ISD, Poetry, "Photo Album"
- Joshua Danziger, 14, Emery Weiner School, Private, Critical Essay, "Discrimination

Without Delineation”

Aditya Namjoshi, 17, Dawson High School, Pearland ISD, Humor, “The Americanized Times of Hindoostan”

James Sy, 16, St. John’s School, Personal Essay/Memoir, “Thrown to the Sharks”

Grace Yin, 16, Tomball Memorial High School, Tomball ISD, Poetry, “Birds”

Regional awardees find common ground with alumni Scholastic Art & Writing honorees and famous writers and artists such as Truman Capote, Andy Warhol, Joyce Carol Oates, Marc Brown, Sylvia Plath, Dan Fogelberg and Robert Redford. Since 1923, the organization’s mission is to bring outstanding visual art and writing created by teens to a national audience by showcasing the work and encouraging creative career development.

The following area school districts are represented: Aldine, Alief, Channelview, Clear Creek, Crosby, Cy-Fair, Deer Park, Friendswood, Fort Bend, Galena Park, Goose Creek, Harmony Public Schools, Houston, Huffman, Humble, Katy, Klein, La Porte, Lamar Consolidated, Calvin Nelms Charter, New Caney, Pasadena, Pearland, Spring Branch, Spring, Tomball and Waller.

Private school with student awards include: Awty International, Annunciation Orthodox, British International School of Houston, Concordia Lutheran High School, Duchesne Academy Of Sacred Heart, Episcopal High School, Houston Christian High School, Incarnate Word Academy, Kinkaid School, Northland Christian, Presbyterian School, River Oaks Baptist School, St Agnes Academy, St Francis Episcopal Day School, Inman Academy, St. John’s School, St. John XXIII Prep, St. Pius X, St. Thomas Episcopal School, Strake Jesuit, Veritas Christian Academy, The Village School, and Emery Weiner School.

Through the art categories, students gain 435 Gold Keys, 577 Silver Keys, and 917 honorable mentions. In the writing categories, students earn 583 Gold Keys, 934 Silver Keys, and 983 honorable mentions.

For more information about HCDE’s regional Scholastic Art & Writing Awards and opportunities to sponsor, judge and enter the competition, go to [8]www.hcde-texas.org/scholastic-awards .

Photos: American Visions art awardees Anthony Abarca, Tiffany Campbell, Medha Fotedar, Vallery Orr and Adrienne Ross

1. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/02/ross_a_i_13476836.jpg
2. <https://tinyurl.com/ScholasticHCDE20>
3. <http://www.hcde-texas.org/scholastic-awards>
4. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/02/campbell_t_i_13446513.jpg
5. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/02/abarca_a_i_13450902.jpg

6. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/02/fotedar_m_i_13441731.jpg
 7. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/02/orr_v_i_13465652.jpg
 8. <http://www.hcde-texas.org/scholastic-awards>
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Educators Uplifted by Messages of Support, Teaching Takeaways at Early Childhood Conference (2020-02-10 10:35) - hcdetx





Emboldened early childhood educators attending the Early Childhood Winter Conference spent Saturday, Feb. 1 being energized by local leaders who said their lives were molded by the influence of their teachers.

View photos: [2]<https://tinyurl.com/ECWC20>

Introduced by famed children's author Peter Reynolds, upheld by Harris County School Superintendent James Colbert Jr. and affirmed by conference namesake Raymond T. Garcia, the positive influence of the early childhood teachers was unshakeable.

"I can think of the things preschool teachers instill in you, and those basic, sound principles grow with you," said Garcia, former HCDE Board president and trustee and retired businessman. "That's why I come each year to tell these teachers how important they are. It comes naturally to thank them."

The 34th annual R.T. Garcia Early Childhood Winter Conference hosted by Harris County Department of Education is a tradition for generations of early childhood educators. Both longtime and first-time attendees talked about the tools they garnered from the daylong event. Kamaria Price teaches pre-k at Martin Luther King Early Childhood Center. She is a third-year attendee who says the conference inspires, refocuses and rejuvenates. [3]



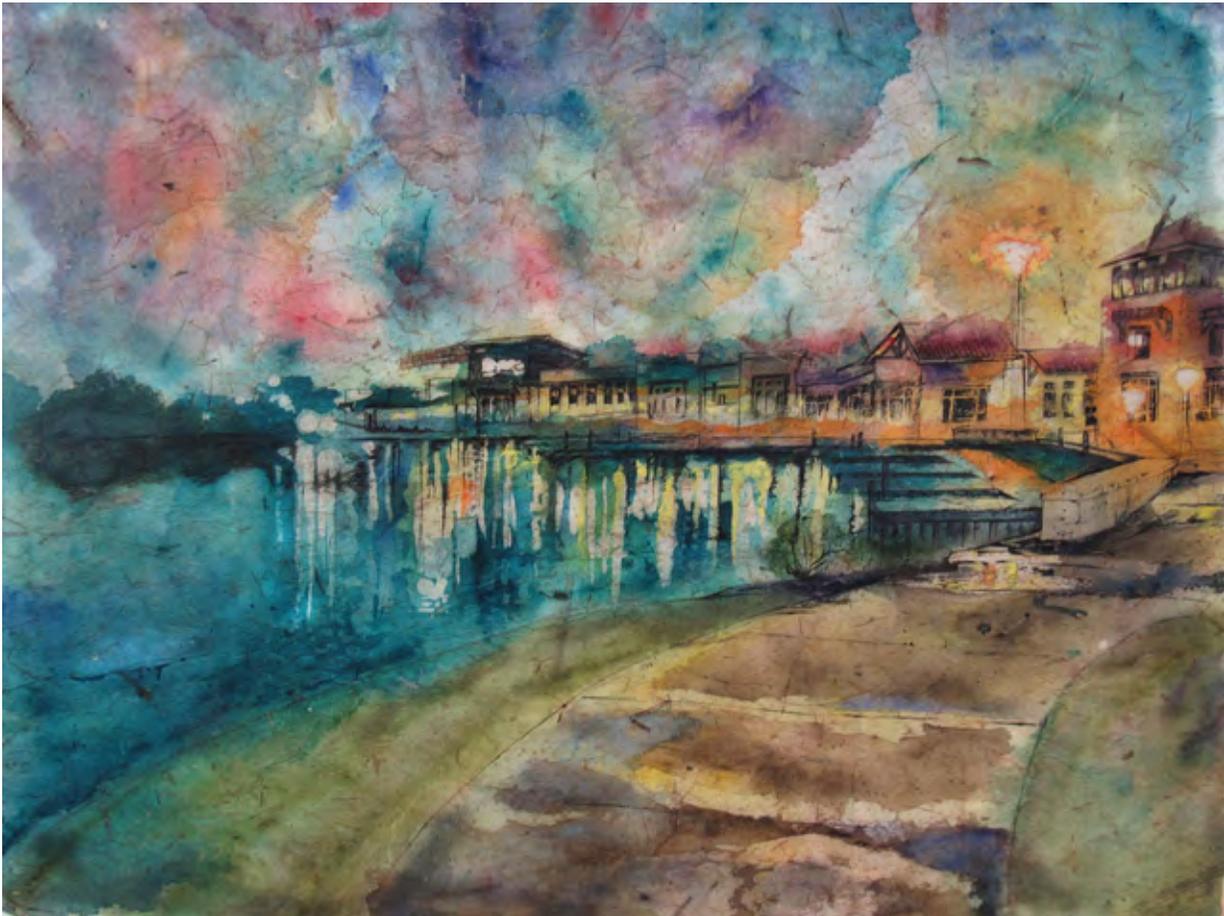


HCDE Board Vice President Danny Norris, Segraves, Reynolds and R.T. Garcia

“This conference is the best place to go to get pumped and excited,” she said. “The best thing I get out of this is collaboration with other teachers, plus the tips I get for my classroom are from some of the best educators around.” HCDE Superintendent Colbert told the educators about a little-known character trait they possess: the ability to see and nurture a child’s soul. “To see in children what their own parents might not see—to believe in them and to come on a Saturday so you can get better at what you do—is amazing,” he said. “Our world is troubled in many ways, but education is a powerful thing. The world will get better because we believe in our children.” Following keynote sessions with Reynolds and bilingual keynote musical educator Gilberto Soto, teachers chose from 50 breakout sessions throughout the conference day. Teaching and Learning Center curriculum directors supplied workshops alongside other area education experts. Vendor showcases lined the conference hallways, providing an interactive presence with materials, activities, games and services. First-year teacher and conference goer Sheila Muzuranic of Sundown Elementary in Katy ISD said she can’t wait to put all the new resources she gained into practice in her classroom. “I can’t wait to see how my kids will react to all the engaging activities,” she said. “I’m loving it so far.” Conference coordinator Andrea Segraves shared with educators that this year’s conference theme, “Love Lifts You Up,” originated from the core values promoted by Reynolds through his prose. “Look at the love in this room,” Reynolds said, motioning to the 800 teachers. “I’m a romantic and an optimist. “It’s not a pretty world out there, but the kids can be the change. Let’s connect the dots.” (The next Early Childhood Winter Conference will be held Jan. 30, 2021. Look for more information at [5]www.hcde-texas.org.)

1. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/02/20200201_ecwc_326.jpg
 2. <https://tinyurl.com/ECWC20>
 3. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/02/20200201_ecwc_041.jpg
 4. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/02/20200201_ecwc_350.jpg
 5. <http://www.hcde-texas.org/>
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HCDE Celebrates Teen Artists through Galleria, Texas Art Supply Exhibits Feb. 18-March 16 (2020-02-14 16:59) - hcdetx



Harris County teen artists and writers in grades 7-12 are celebrated through artist exhibits in the city as awardees through Harris County Department of Education's Regional Scholastic Art & Writing Awards. [1]



The Awards recognize student achievement in the visual and literary arts in 29 categories, including editorial cartoon, poetry, graphic design, fashion, science fiction, photography and more.

Exhibits will be held from Feb. 18-March 16 to honor the artists and writers from public, private and home schools.

- **Top Gold Key Awardees will be showcased at the Galleria, 5085 Westheimer, Houston, Texas, 77007 on the first-floor level near Saks Fifth Avenue during mall hours.**
- **Works from Silver Key artists and writers are being displayed at Texas Art Supply, 2001 Montrose Blvd., Houston, Texas 77066 during store hours.**





HCDE is one of more than 100 regional affiliate partners with Scholastic Art & Writing for the past 16 years. Since 1923, Scholastic Art & Writing has showcased the artist vision, ingenuity and talent of youth. Past honorees include notable alumni like Andy Warhol and Joyce Carol Oates. Students this year submitted approximately 350,000 original works for judging. Regional affiliate HCDE judged 8,997 pieces this year.

Teens awarded Gold Keys will advance for national judging in New York City. National Medalists will be announced on March 16.

[4]





For questions regarding the Regional Scholastic Art and Writing Awards program events, contact Andrea Segraves at [6]asegraves@hcde-texas.org.

View press release with more details about teen artists and writers and other celebrations planned for the year: [7]<https://wp.me/p4QJFI-18s>

1. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/02/paolarocha-reflections-mixed-media-cy-fair.jpg>
2. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/02/valentinabaffoni-patient-photography-houston-isd.jpg>
3. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/02/mikaela-saenz-soul-dealer-photography-katy-isd.j>

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4. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/02/cristianrojas-blue-future-photography-aldine-isd.jpg>

5. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/02/alejandrarincon-moonchild-printmaking-katy-isd.jpg>

6. <mailto:asegraves@hcde-texas.org>

7. <https://wp.me/p4QJF1-18s>

HCDE Head Start Hosting Job Fair Feb. 21 (2020-02-20 10:10) - hcdetx



[1]



Harris County Department of Education is hosting a job interview fair to recruit teachers, teaching assistants, family service providers, cooks and a mental health professional to join any of its 15 locations throughout northeast Harris County. The recruitment event will be held Friday, Feb. 21, 2020, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at 6300 Irvington Blvd.

“We are looking for highly energetic, passionate individuals who enjoy working with young children to join our team,” said HCDE Head Start Senior Director Venetia Peacock. “Our employees help transform lives of children and their families, along with making a difference each day.”

Qualifications for Head Start teaching assistant, Early Head Start teacher and Head Start teacher include experience working with young children and an interest in early childhood education. Those who hold child development associate (CDA)

degrees are strongly encouraged to apply. The mental health professional must have a master's degree in social work, counseling, psychology or education with at least five years' experience working with underserved populations. Interested candidates can apply online at [2]www.hcde-texas.org or call 713-696-8287 for information.

HCDE Head Start provides services to facilities in Barrett Station, Baytown, Channelview, Compton, Coolwood, Dogan, Fifth Ward, Fonwood, Humble, J.D. Walker, La Porte, Pugh, San Jacinto, Sheffield and Tidwell. Head Start ensures future success for students both academically and socially and provides comprehensive health, education, nutrition and financial services to families.

Find more information on positions available and qualifications, visit: [3]<https://bit.ly/36ULgsF>. Visit [4]www.hcde-texas.org/head-start for general information about HCDE Head Start and locations.

1. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/02/20190418_earlyhs_0064.jpg
 2. <http://www.hcde-texas.org/>
 3. <https://bit.ly/36ULgsF>
 4. <http://www.hcde-texas.org/head-start>
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**Aldine ISD Teen Photographer Humanizes Homeless:
HCDE's Scholastic Art & Writing American Visions Nominee
(2020-02-21 13:36) - hcdetx**





Left: Matthew Kirkpatrick and Anthony Abarca

It all started with a 6-year-old boy's daily commute with his parents and a homeless man playing guitar on a busy northeast Houston street corner. The man serenaded the boy's mother as the car idled at the red light. The little boy teased his mom that the "guitar man" liked her. Eleven years later, Aldine Independent School District student artist Anthony Abarca returned to that corner to photograph and meet the man named Northside Ray and tell the old man's story through imagery. The teen's photograph entitled "Love Affair" depicts a weathered homeless man with dried, caked blood on his face. The man's piercing blue eyes make the case for hope, not despair. The photo earned the Carver High School senior an American Visions nomination, one of five best-of-show art awards judged in a pool of more than 5,000 entries with Harris

County Department of Education as regional affiliate of the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards. Teacher Matthew Kirkpatrick says the often cliché influence of photography on teens via social media and advertising is strong, but he tries to show students the meaningful side of photography. The storytelling concept stuck with high school senior Abarca. “It sparked my idea of how every day we see less fortunate people and how we never really get the chance to know their story,” said Abarca, reflecting on his teacher’s influence. “Mr. Kirkpatrick taught me that I can’t be afraid to try new things and that my work must have meaning through a story that I want to tell. I will never forget that and will continue to show it through my work.” Setting out to find Ray wasn’t that hard. Abarca found the homeless man on the same street corner he left him in his memories a decade before. His decision to photograph Ray helped him understand the plight of the homeless. A twist of fate had put Ray on the street, and he never found his way back. As Ray grew older, homelessness became more difficult and dangerous. In fact, the day Abarca took the man’s photo, the old man had just been beaten. Two months after taking the photo, Abarca returned to Near Northside to share the photo and an award he had won in a juried art show. Northside Ray died after being stabbed on the streets. Abarca never got the chance to share Ray’s infamy. [2]



The photograph “Love Affair” will now be judged at the national level through Scholastic Art & Writing in New York City, and that feels good to both student and teacher. Awardees will be notified on March 16, and an awards ceremony will be held in New York City Carnegie Hall in June. “I am both nervous and excited for Anthony and what this means moving forward,” said Kirkpatrick. “I appreciate this contest (Scholastic) in comparison to the others that my students participate in for it’s high regard to concept. I often tell my students that this contest will judge their work as that of an adult artist.” For information about HCDE’s Scholastic Art & Writing 2020 exhibits and receptions or to enter, judge or sponsor the Awards, go to [3]<https://hcde-texas.org/scholastic-awards> or email Andrea Segraves, [4]asegraves@hcde-texas.org. View the Awards press release: [5]<https://wp.me/p4QJFI-18s> .

1. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/02/img_7081.jpg
2. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/02/abarca_a_i_13450902-1.jpg
3. <https://hcde-texas.org/scholastic-awards>

4. <mailto:asegraves@hcde-texas.org>

5. <https://wp.me/p4QJF1-18s>

Monica S Caldwell (2020-02-23 22:10:25)

Absolutely stunning! Volumetric.....far reaching. Great photo, great story, great student, great teacher. What an inspiration you all are.

New Four-Legged Friend Provides Social-Emotional Therapy to Fortis Academy Students (2020-02-21 15:51) - hcdetx





Before the Christmas break, Fortis Academy Principal Anthony Moten thought it would be a good idea to have a therapy pet at the school to help with students' social-emotional needs. Fortis is Harris County's first public high school for students recovering with alcohol and drug abuse addiction.

Fortis English Teacher Rachel Finley was out with her husband at a lumber yard one day and came across a small, black, mixed-breed dog. She asked a worker if it was his, and he said no that she just showed up.

"He told me I could take her home, so we did," Finley said. "She was really good with my kids at home, and thought she would be the same with our Fortis students."

She messaged Moten about the one-and-a-half-year-old chihuahua-yorkie mix and decided to see how she would interact with the students. When school started back in January, Finley took the newly named Allie to school and was pleased about how she did with everyone.

"She did great, and it was like she was born to be here at Fortis," Finley said. "We definitely found our Fortis pet."

In the morning she gets excited when the students start arriving and jumps on them as they enter the school. Allie goes from class to class greeting the students and teachers throughout the day while wearing one of her many Fortis Academy shirts.



“She’s really cute and good with all of us,” said senior Karen Espinoza.

“Allie’s a loveable dog,” sophomore Yadhira Martinez said.

The main goal for Allie while on campus is to help students with emotional therapy. Staff and students have noticed the school environment has been happy since Allie has been on campus. Finley doesn’t take Allie to school when it’s raining, and they see the effects of her not being there.

“That first day I didn’t bring her we were all just having a bad day, and students kept telling me that I should have brought Allie,” she said.

“I was one of those students that asked for Allie that day,” said sophomore Julian Guerrero. “She definitely changes our mood.”

[3]



1. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/02/423a4716.jpg>
2. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/02/423a4733.jpg>
3. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/02/423a4631.jpg>

Harris County Sheriff Gonzalez Talks, Listens to Troubled Teens at HCDE's Highpoint School (2020-02-28 16:36) - hcdetx





Harris County Sheriff Ed Gonzalez dropped in on 20 troubled teens at Harris County Department of Education's Highpoint School on Feb. 24 to just let them know he cares.

The sheriff of Texas' largest county delivered the goodwill message through a litany of hard facts about a county jail system filled with 9,000 inmates. Many suffer from mental illness, addiction or poverty.

"I want you to be successful," he said, making eye contact with teens. "It's important for you to have this same belief in yourself."

Highpoint School is an alternative school for troubled teens. Local school districts contract with HCDE for services. Rules and regulations are rewarded with a point system that reinforces good behavior and adherence to academics. Emphasis is placed on improved social skills with the goal for students to return to their home schools.

Gonzalez told the teens who range in age from 13-17 to see their misfortune as opportunity.

"It's a door opening up to you, so learn something from it," he said. "If you continue down the path that brought you here, some will end up dead, some will end up incarcerated or in prison. Life is too short."

As Gonzalez answered questions, a 16-year old slowly raised his hand.

"What can you do to motivate yourself?" he asked.

The sheriff confirmed the question with a nod, replying slowly with a lowered voice.

“Everyone has this little voice, and sometimes we walk up with more negative thoughts than positive,” Gonzalez said. “That voice is your subconscious. When you find yourself in a tough situation, quit digging a hole and try to get rid of those negative thoughts.”

[2]



[3]



With lunch hour approaching, the sheriff asked the teens if he might return to talk to them again. Heads nod.

“I liked it because it shows people care,” said student Joshua LaFrance. “It makes me think a little differently. It was pretty cool of him to come.”

Emily Sanchez, 14, is enrolled at Highpoint because she was involved in a fight. She sees what can go wrong if she loses her temper again. Something could happen that can’t be reversed. Incarceration could be in her future if she doesn’t gain control.

“I feel like I can change that,” she said. “It’s good he is coming here and presenting to us.”

Gonzalez thanks the teens as he leaves the room and stops to shake a few hands.

“Thank you all very much,” the Harris County sheriff said. “We’re here to help you.”

(Highpoint School provides services to students in grades 6-12 through a small, structured learning environment. The HCDE Highpoint program teaches self-discipline to help students learn to make better choices. For more information, go to [4]www.hcde-texas.org/schools .)

1. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/02/20200224_gonzalez_0215.jpg
2. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/02/20200224_gonzalez_0119.jpg
3. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/02/20200224_gonzalez_0069.jpg

4. <http://www.hcde-texas.org/schools>

Head Start Food Science Fair Promotes Healthy Eating

(2020-02-28 16:44) - hcdetx





Parent Valeria Aparicio appreciates the Food Science Fair initiated at her son’s Harris County Department of Education Channelview Head Start Center.

As a health-conscious parent, she cooks with organic ingredients as much as possible and uses the oven instead of frying the family meals. When son Alexander Ramirez came home talking about vegetables, she decided they could create a buzz about healthy foods through a recipe for the Food Science Fair competition.

Mom and son won first place for their “Spinach Oat Pancakes Recipe.” Second place went to Kennedi Welch for a savory, broccoli rice-cheese casserole, and Zari Cerf gained third place for her favorite banana pudding.

HCDE Head Start uses the Food Science Fair to fold nutrition curriculum into school readiness activities. Each center provides a friendly contest for families as they devise a recipe using a vegetable or fruit. This year’s winning entries included a fresh-fruit peach pie, broccoli salad, banana pudding, carved pineapple and more.



“Nutrition is an integral part of a child’s development, and the fair is a way to partner with families to promote health eating habits,” said Venetia Peacock, senior director of HCDE Head Start. “Nutrition is a critical part of our curriculum because it’s important to a child’s physical and mental well-being.”

Ramirez helped create the tri-fold science display which accompanied the pancakes the judges taste-tested. He washed the lettuce, helped decorate the plate with banana and topped his pancakes with organic honey.

Mother Aparicio plans to start volunteering at the center where parents are encouraged to assist and help make decisions about activities at their school. In particular, the community garden interests her.

“After finding out about the programs parents can be involved in with their children, I would like to be more active,” she said.

Recipe for Alexander’s Award-Winning Spinach Oat Pancakes (serves 6):

1 ½ cups quick-cooking oats

2 cups fresh baby spinach

2 over-ripe bananas

Dash vanilla extract

Dash ground cinnamon

100 percent organic natural honey

Add water as needed

Blend oats to powder, preheat butter in pan for cooking pancakes

Wash spinach leaves

Add spinach and remainder of ingredients to blender; pulse 3-4 times for a smooth batter.

Cook pancakes in pan with butter

1. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/02/img_8429_2.png

2. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/02/zari-cerf-3rd-place-1.png>

1.3 March

Despite Struggles, ESL Professionals Embark on New Career Paths as Adult Learners (2020-03-05 11:39) - hcdetx



[1]



Emmanuel Cabrera

College professor Emmanuel Cabrera, 71, and his banker wife lived a magnificent life in Venezuela before their country became dangerous. After escaping to America with just the clothes on their backs, they became U.S. citizens. In their new world, Cabrera is a maintenance man. The couple lives with their son in Katy, TX.

As a student in the English as a Second Language for Professionals class at Harris County Department of Education, Cabrera joins other older learners who immigrated from South American countries and Asia to rethink their lives.

The unique class was created for ESL professionals who come to the U.S. with college degrees in their native countries and professions in teaching, medicine, banking, technology and public relations.

Need for the class came as HCDE manager May O'Brien researched that 50 percent of the ESL students at the adult learner community location in Katy had college degrees. HCDE Adult Education provides workforce training, ESL and GED classes at more than 65 locations in Harris and Liberty counties at no cost on a first-come, first-serve basis.

Most students studied English as their second language through formal reading and writing classes in their home countries. They need English conversation skills and

practical knowledge about how to write resumes, practice for job interviews and to understand workplace culture and career services.

“Targeting foreign professionals to transition them to a professional job in the U.S. that utilizes their previous educational training and work experience is one of the state initiatives in Texas,” said O’Brien.

Since HCDE provides adult education workforce programs such as certified nursing assistant, phlebotomy, business office technology, customer service and construction, the class acts as the perfect bridge to help ESL professionals find their new careers in America.

Zsa Zsa Caburao, who teaches the class, knows the struggles of being a new foreign professional first-hand. She came to the U.S. from the Philippines and worked at Starbucks as a barista to earn money to pay for getting college credential authentication. Tagalog is her first language, but she studied British English in her home country.



Zsa Zsa Caburao

“It’s not a piece of cake to be back at square one,” she said. “But the whole of life—from the moment you are born to the moment you die is a process of learning.” As a teacher, Caburao asks lots of questions about differences and similarities of her students’ languages. Students work in groups to complete projects, much like the workforce requires. As she collects and checks homework, she finds time to crack jokes and talk about life’s trials.

“For me, she is a great teacher because she helps her students so much,” said Marbella Bolivar, 62, a former math professor from Venezuela.



Marbella Bolivar, far right

Wiping her tears, Bolivar tells a story about her son who is a political prisoner in the country she ran from. Her mother, 82, could not leave, and her condition is unknown.

Within the next few months, it is her goal to leave her restaurant job and become a substitute teacher in Katy ISD with her newly acquired conversation skills.

Claudia Delattibodier, 47, moved from Honduras 14 years ago with a public relations degree in her country and used her Spanish skills to work in a law office. After raising her children, she is ready to become a “change-maker” as she turns to social work as a career. Speaking fluent English will help her realize her dreams.

“We are all here for a reason, and it should be for the good of all,” Delattibodier said.



Claudia Delattibodier, far right

(HCDE Adult Education is the largest, no-cost adult education program in Texas, with a variety of health care and construction career training options in Harris and Liberty counties. Students may also take English as a second language classes and high school equivalency degree classes simultaneously in a traditional classroom setting or online. For more information, go to <http://www.hcde-texas.org/adult-education>.)

1. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/03/20200211_esl_001.jpg
2. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2017/08/20200211_esl_027.jpg
3. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2017/08/20200211_esl_005.jpg
4. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2017/08/20200211_esl_027.jpg
5. <http://www.hcde-texas.org/adult-education>

HCDE Communicators Gain 43 Awards through Texas School Public Relations Association (2020-03-05 15:59) - hcdetx





Harris County Department of Education earned top honors for its work in communications and community engagement through the 2020 Texas School Public Relations Association Conference in Austin, TX.

The Communications and Client Engagement divisions received four awards for “Best of Category,” a “Platinum Merit,” two “Crystal Merits,” 18 Gold Awards, 11 Silver Awards and seven Bronze Awards. The awards were judged among 1,606 entries, the highest number ever received since the awards program was launched.

The Platinum Merit finalist award was garnered for the “See the Impact” campaign which promotes HCDE programs and services, including afterschool, school therapy services, adult education, Head Start and its special schools. The Platinum Award is the highest honor at the awards ceremony.

“HCDE continues to evolve to serve the community, and it’s important to share these stories that shape our students, school districts and our at-large education community,” said James Colbert Jr., HCDE superintendent. “Congratulations to these talented communicators.”

In addition to gaining the awards, communicators led several workshop sessions under the direction of Danielle Clark, chief communications officer. Stephanie De Los Santos was sworn in as TSPRA Executive Board incoming vice president at-large. The

board makes decisions for the approximate 1,000 school PR professionals who are part of the organization.

The Texas School Public Relations Association (TSPRA) is a nonprofit, professional organization

dedicated to promoting public schools through effective communications.

HCDE TSPRA Awards:

Platinum Merit:

“See the Impact” (public awareness campaign), Danielle Clark, HCDE Communications and Client Engagement

Crystal Merits:

“Photography Portfolio,” Dave Einsel

“HCDE Website Launch,” Stephanie De Los Santos, Janet Wachs, John Covanes, Sheridan Labbe, Danielle Clark, Dave Einsel, Carol Vaughn, Angela Hider, Juan Lopez, Jeri Martinez, Daniel Villarreal

Best of Category (and automatic Gold Awards):

Brochure, “College and Career Readiness,” Stephanie De Los Santos, Janet Wachs, John Covanes

Photo, Academic/Classroom Subjects, “Story Time,” Dave Einsel

Photo, Other Subjects, “Selfie Nation,” Dave Einsel

Education Good News Campaign, “Good News You Can Use,” Carol Vaughn, Jeri Martinez, Juan Lopez, Danielle Clark, Dave Einsel

Gold Awards:

External Newsletter, “HCDE and You! Better Together,” HCDE Communications and Client Brochure, Engagement staff

“See the Impact Quadfold,” HCDE Communications

Flyer, “Deer Park Fire: What You Need to Know,” Stephanie De Los Santos, Janet Wachs, John Covanes

Holiday/Commemorative, “HCDE Holiday Card,” Angela Hider and Jeri Martinez

Holiday/Commemorative, “HCDE Division Christmas Cards,” Stephanie De Los Santos, Janet Wachs, John Covanes

Annual Report, “See the Impact: 2018-2019 Annual Report, HCDE Communications and Client Engagement

Writing, “HCDE Public Recovery High School Provides Wrap-Around Approach for Addiction,” Carol Vaughn

Website Template Driven Design, “HCDE Website,” Stephanie De Los Santos, Janet Wachs, John Covanes, Frederick Coppola, Sheridan Labbe, Teresa Juarez

Published News Feature, Edited, “New School Meets Increased Service Demands for Area Students Behavioral Disorders, Autism,” Carol Vaughn

Photo Academic/Classroom, “Hey,” Dave Einsel

Photo Academic/Classroom, “Super Roundtable,” Dave Einsel

Video Feature, "Celebrating Principals," Daniel Villarreal, Dave Einsel, Carol Vaughn
E-newsletter Internal, "Safety Tips of the Week: Hurricane Preparation," Stephanie De Los Santos, Janet Wachs, John Covanes
Social Media Campaign, "New Website is Coming," Angela Hider, Jeri Martinez

Silver Awards:

Published News or Feature, "2 in 5,000: Pasadena ISD's Sam Rayburn High School Artists Earn American Visions Award," Jeri Martinez
Published News or Feature, "Academic and Behavior School Staff Know Importance of CPR Training," Jeri Martinez
Published News/Feature, "HCDE, Lamar Consolidated ISD Partner to Grow Positivity," Carol Vaughn
Photo Other Subjects, "Beaming," Dave Einsel
Photo Other Subjects, "Shy Reindeer," Dave Einsel
Video Promotional, "HCDE School-Based Therapy," Daniel Villarreal, Dave Einsel, Carol Vaughn
Video Promotional, "New Website Promo Video," Stephanie De Los Santos, Janet Wachs, John Covanes
Video General Event, "Lights, Camera, Action, Nutrition," Daniel Villarreal, Dave Einsel, Carol Vaughn
E-newsletter External, "Choice Partners Leaders Choice Newsletter," Stephanie De Los Santos, Janet Wachs, John Covanes
Special Event, "The DO-NUT Campaign," Angela Hider, Danielle Clark
Writing, "Personal Struggle for Deer Park Student Leads to Scholastic Regional Recognition and Nomination," Jeri Martinez

Bronze Awards:

Program, "Rise Against Human Trafficking Summit," Stephanie De Los Santos, Janet Wachs, John Covanes
Specialty/Novelty Writing, "12 Days to HCDE Head Start Christmas Cards," Jeri Martinez
Computerized/Electronic Communication, "Choice Partners Christmas E-blast Video," Stephanie De Los Santos, Janet Wachs, John Covanes
Non-English Speaking Audience, "Training for Career in Adult Education," Stephanie De Los Santos, Janet Wachs, John Covanes
Annual Report, "Rise Up through Recovery," Jeri Martinez, Angela Hider
Image/Identity Package, "Logo and Brand Redesign," Stephanie De Los Santos, Janet Wachs, John Covanes
Advertisement Other, "HCDE Exhibit Display," Stephanie De Los Santos, Janet Wachs, John Covanes

1. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/03/2020_tspra_0112.jpg

Record 176 National Scholastic Art & Writing Medals Awarded to Area Teens after Regional Advancement with HCDE (2020-03-17 17:30) - hcdetx





Vallery Orr, American Visions Award, Spring Branch ISD

Harris County student artists and writers in grades 7-12 earned a record-breaking 176 national Scholastic Art & Writing Medals through awards announced by the New York nonprofit Alliance for Young Artists & Writers March 16.

[2]View Awardee List

The student art and prose entries advanced from a regional competition sponsored by Harris County Department of Education.

Sharing the national limelight are students from Aldine, Alief, Crosby, Cy-Fair, Deer Park, Galena Park, Houston, Katy, Klein, Pasadena, Pearland, Spring Branch and Tomball independent school districts and Calvin Nelms Charter.

Private school recipients are from Bridgeland High, Duchesne Academy Of Sacred Heart, Emery Weiner, The Kinkaid School, Northland Christian, St. Agnes, St. John's, St. Thomas High School, Veritas Christian Academy and The Village School.

The Awards, founded in 1923, allow creative teen artists and writers to earn recognition, exhibition, publication and scholarships. View the list of the Silver and Gold Harris County Medalists: [3]http://hcde-texas.org/media/uploads/2020/03/Scholastic-Gold-and-Silver-Medalists-Sheet_final.pdf

Specialty Gold Medal awards went to two Houston-area teens. Grace Yin, an eleventh grader from Tomball Memorial High School in Tomball ISD earned the best-in-class, prestigious American Voices award for poetry while Vallery Orr, a tenth grader from Memorial High in Spring Branch ISD was named the best-in-class American Visions awardee for her digital art entry.

Gold Medalists are recognized each year at a ceremony in New York City.

Area celebrations and exhibits have been hosted throughout Houston to celebrate the artists, including exhibits at Texas Art Supply and The Galleria.

“Scholastic Art & Writing is important because it allows teens to express themselves creatively and compete through writing and art genres,” said Harris County School Superintendent James Colbert, Jr. “In addition to the prestige of the Awards, students have scholarship opportunities for college. As regional sponsor, we are supporting fine arts initiatives in Harris County schools and celebrate the teachers and volunteer judges, along with the community supporters who provide venues for artist ceremonies and receptions.”

For more information about how to enter, judge or sponsor the Awards in Harris County, go to [4]www.hcde-texas.org/Scholastic or email HCDE coordinator Andrea Segraves, asegraves@hcde-texas.org .

About Scholastic Art & Writing: Founded in 1923, the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards is the nation’s longest-running, most prestigious educational initiative supporting student achievement in the visual and literary arts. Through the Awards, students receive opportunities for recognition, exhibition, publication and scholarships. Past winners include celebrated artists and writers such as Robert Redford, Andy Warhol, Truman Capote, John Lithgow, Joyce Carol Oates and Sylvia Plath. More at www.artandwriting.org .

1. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/02/orr_v_i_13465652.jpg
 2. http://hcde-texas.org/media/uploads/2020/03/Scholastic-Gold-and-Silver-Medalists-Sheet_final.pdf
 3. http://hcde-texas.org/media/uploads/2020/03/Scholastic-Gold-and-Silver-Medalists-Sheet_final.pdf
 4. <http://www.hcde-texas.org/Scholastic>
-

Staying Up-to-Date (2020-03-26 17:36) - hcdetx

[1]



Good afternoon HCDE staff,

To say it has been a wild and crazy couple of weeks in Harris County is certainly an understatement! In the last 14 days, HCDE has transitioned from spring break to remote work for essential employees and online instruction for teachers. Our “new normal” has forced us to shift how we view our daily operations even as we try to keep ourselves and our families healthy and safe.

While many Americans are stuck at home catching up on household projects, there has been a flurry of activity behind the scenes at HCDE. Our facilities, technology, business, HR and communication teams have been putting in lots of hours to ensure the wheels of HCDE continue to turn. This includes opening a few offices so business services can process payroll and vendor payments and then having facilities staff clean from top to bottom. The Help Desk has been scavenging for loaner equipment so essential employees can work from home and while also fielding hundreds of calls for tech support. During this time, our technology network team has fortified our infrastructure so our systems can handle increased traffic even as we implement new processes for standard operations like digital signatures. I want to send a special shout out to all the business, technology, HR and facilities staff who have been working diligently for the last two weeks to ensure HCDE continues to operate at full capacity. Thank you. We truly would not be in such a good place if it were not for your continued hard work!

I am also thankful we have such a strong business model that allows us to support all employees during this difficult time. In fact, our board met for an emergency meeting on March 19 and approved a resolution to not only pay employees during the closure, but to fund meals for 1,350 of our Head Start families. The Executive Leadership Team spent six hours assembling the boxes to hold the meals earlier this week while the Head Start managers packed them on Tuesday with approved goods such as peanut butter, fruit, rice and oatmeal. The first 300 meals were distributed to families living near the J.D. Walker Head Start center this morning. We continue to work with our Choice Partners vendors to secure more food so we can complete the meal packages for the rest of our Head Start families and continue to feed them for the next few weeks. I am proud at how seamlessly our divisions are working together to support our neediest HCDE families in this way! This is a testament to HCDE's amazing culture and how we band together during times of crisis.

On Tuesday, Communications sent out our first special HUB edition. This communication will be sent out twice a week (Tuesdays and Fridays) to all HCDE employees via email. These emails will include important updates about the pandemic and healthy habits to keep you and your family safe. Every Friday I will have a special section so you can hear from me about what is going on behind the scenes at work as well as the

current status of HCDE. Be sure to check your work email for these updates so you can stay connected and informed.

We are surely living in unprecedented times, experiencing something that none of us could have predicted or faced before. While we can't say for sure what is going to happen or how long this pandemic will impact our lives, I can tell you with utter certainty that I have your back, our board has your back, your supervisor has your back and we are truly #HCDESTROONG!

Stay home, stay healthy and stay connected.

1. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/03/20180913_colbert_0003_c_r_f.jpg

'Because We Care' Packages Being Distributed to HCDE Head Start Families (2020-03-26 18:06) - hcdetx



Families Receive Care Packages March 27 at J.D. Walker Head

[1]View photos from packaging and distribution events.

Care packages for Harris County Department of Education Head Start families were assembled and distributed by HCDE staff March 27. The program called "Because We Care" provides food items meeting healthy food guidelines selected by nutrition staff at HCDE Head Start during the COVID-19, stay-at-home order.

[youtube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q3nRKKxZyHY>]

Care packages were delivered to Head Start families from three area centers and two child care facilities: Barrett Station, J.D. Walker and Baytown Head Start centers, as well as Early Head Start child care partners John G. Jones and Let's Learn. Staples included items such as oatmeal, canned foods and peanut butter. Baby food is included in the infant/toddler care package.

Baytown Head Start parent Isabel Rodriguez showed up with her husband and two children. Eduardo, 4, clutched one of two books he received called "What We Will Build."

"The food is very helpful right now with everything going on," Rodriguez said. "Eduardo misses his school, but right now I'm his teacher."

Kadeija Merrill, mother of three, says she has a new respect for teachers as she struggles to keep them occupied and learning. Her 4-year old is full of questions.

"I miss the teachers more than my kids do," she said.

The HCDE Board approved the \$238,000 food program through an emergency board meeting, appropriating the funding from general HCDE funds to accommodate approximately 1,230 families. Food was purchased through Choice Partners, HCDE's purchasing cooperative which supplies one million meals for Harris County students yearly. Distribution assistance was provided by Harris County Precinct 2 Commissioner Adrian Garcia's office.



Harris County Department of Education Superintendent James Colbert and Head Start staff distribute books and boxes with food items to families of students served by HCDE at the JD Walker Center, March 27, 2020.

HCDE Superintendent James Colbert Jr. volunteered alongside HCDE staff and thanked the HCDE Board for recognizing and supplying basic family needs during the coronavirus.

"These families will get staples which are hard to find in the grocery stores," said Colbert. "We continue to find ways and the means to help our students' families."

Head Start Senior Director Venetia Peacock emphasized her commitment to keeping Head Start families healthy.

"As families are vulnerable, this is one of the ways that we reach out and help," said HCDE Head Start Senior Director Venetia Peacock. "We are HCDE strong, and we all care about our students and their families."

Approximately 300 care packages have been put together for HCDE families. More care boxes will be assembled as food shipments arrive through the HCDE co-op Choice Partners. Geographic distribution will follow, and center directors and staff will notify HCDE Head Start families about pick-up dates.

HCDE Head Start serves families of children ages six weeks to age 5 with 15 Head Start centers located in north to northeast Harris County. Income-eligible families and children with disabilities gain free Head Start services to help equip children with academic and social skills for school readiness. Families receive support services in the school readiness program through community partners.

For more information about Head Start, visit [3]www.hcde-texas.org/Head-Start.

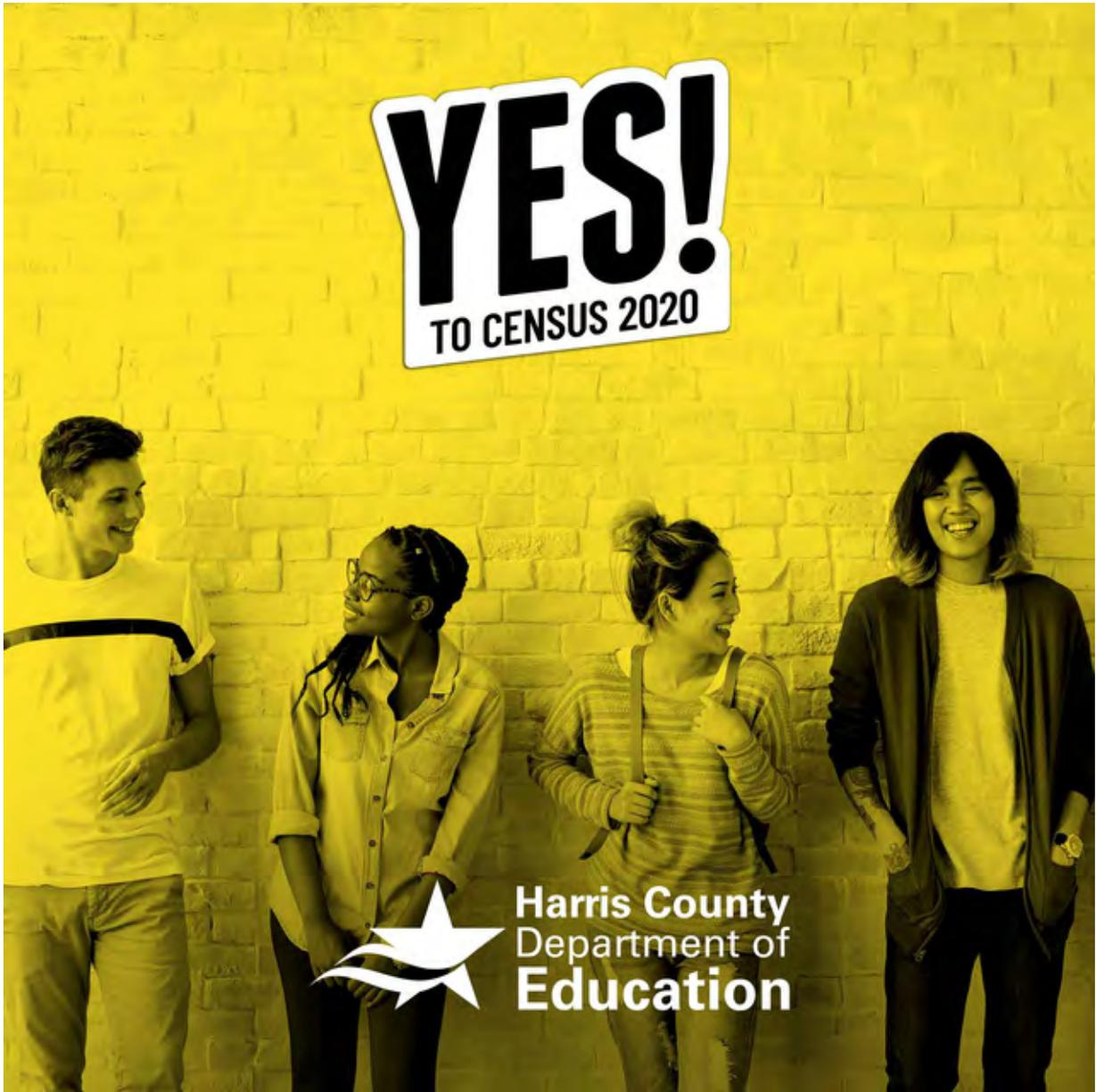
About Harris County Department of Education: HCDE is a unique, educational hybrid serving school districts, governmental agencies, nonprofits and the public in the third-largest county in the U.S. HCDE annually serves a quarter-million students and educators through schools for students with profound special needs; the largest adult education program in Texas; Head Start early childhood education; school-based therapy services; and afterschool programs. Educator professional development and certification, school safety, records management, and a purchasing cooperative are also provided. #SeeTheImpact at www.hcde-texas.org.

1. <https://hcdetexas.photoshelter.com/gallery/JD-Walker-HS-Food/G0000BGZ1c04x1PM/C0000HoHkQIPtBqc>
2. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/03/20200327_headstart_146.jpg
3. <http://www.hcde-texas.org/Head-Start>

It's Time to Say YES! To Census 2020 on April 1 (2020-03-27 10:45)

- hcdetx





April 1 is Census Day and is observed Nationwide. When you respond to the census, you'll tell the Census Bureau where you live as of April 1, 2020.

Every 10 years the census counts how many people are in the community to decide how much federal funding and representation it should receive.

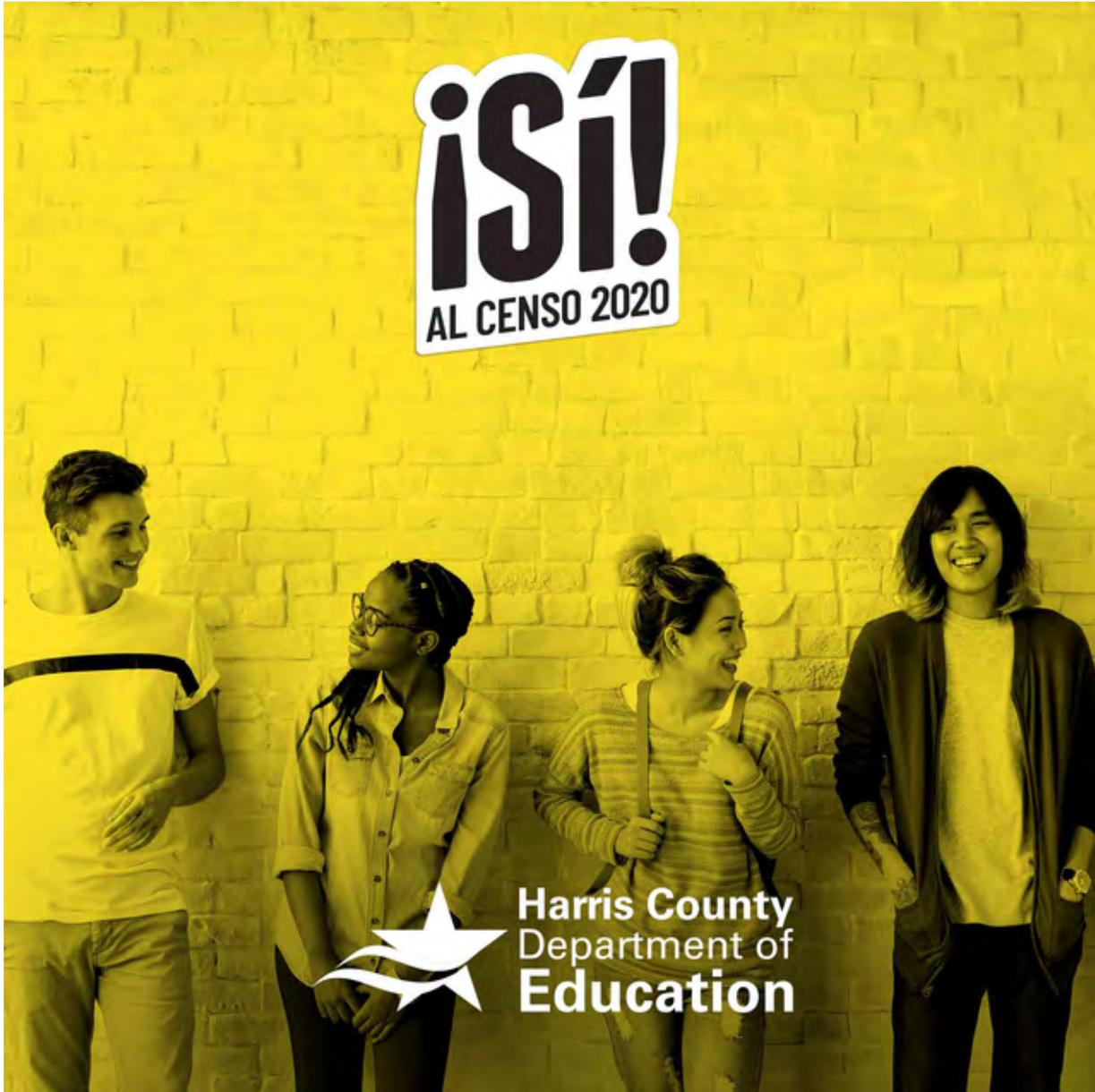
This money supports over 130 programs that could help your family immediately. Everyone should fill out Census 2020, so the community doesn't lose millions of dollars in the next 10 years.

Your responses to the census are important. Your information will not be shared with anyone. In fact, your data is protected by law from other branches of the government.

The census can be filled out by mail, phone (1-800-923-8282) or online

(my2020census.gov). It consists of only nine responses and takes 10 minutes per person to complete. There are 13 common languages, It can be completed by phone or online, with guides available for 60-plus languages. Anyone 15 years old or older can take the census for the household.

[2]



Important programs such as Medicaid, Medicare and SNAP are funded through census results. The money the city receives based on census data is used to support disaster recovery, road improvements, school lunches and over 130 other programs.

After the 2010 census, the city of Houston missed out on over \$10,000 per person not listed on the census. Therefore, it is important for everyone to participate in

Census 2020, so millions of dollars will not be lost in the next 10 years.

1. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/03/census-yes.jpg>
 2. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/03/census-si.jpg>
-

1.4 April

'Care' Boxes Connect La Porte Head Start Families with Food Assistance, Emotional Support (2020-04-02 17:31) - hcdetx





Diana Moore

A loaf of bread, a box of food and a few children's books made the week a bit easier for two Harris County Department of Education Head Start families in La Porte.

[2]View video

"This is going to help us out quite a bit," said Diana Moore, mother of five. "My husband works at a warehouse and had his hours cut back due to social distancing."

Layoffs or shortened work hours during COVID-19 add to already tight budgets for many families. Plus, the challenge of homeschooling multiple children contributes to the mental and physical stress load.

Moore juggles homeschooling her children who are 3, 4, 5, 14 and 16. To add to her worries, daughter Lilliana, 4, who is enrolled at the HCDE Head Start La Porte Center, was recently diagnosed with an autoimmune disorder.

Lilliana, a "super-shy" child, has made friends and has learned social skills in her Head Start class, says her mom. Those soft skills will help her as she starts public

school next year. She has conquered her letters and phonics and can count to 30. She practices counting at home by dropping buttons into a jar.

[3]



Jenifer Howard

Mother Jenifer Howard arrived at the Head Start La Porte Center with her four children to get the family's "Because We Care" package. It is filled with staples like peanut butter, oatmeal, canned goods and bread. The mother waved as staff placed the box in her trunk and handed her books for her children. The food distribution was offered to approximately 70 families at the center, one of 15 to receive the "Because We Care" boxes.

Howard made a point to thank the teachers and staff for all they do for her children.

With her second child attending Head Start, she has witnessed how the program helped her son become "school ready."

"The elementary teachers say they see a difference in the kids who go to Head Start and those who didn't," Howard said.

These days, the Howard family spends the school day divided with online learning for the older children and workbooks, chapter books and art projects for the younger.

As COVID-19 continues to keep Head Start families confined to their homes, they miss the personal contact and support from center managers, teachers and family service providers. Head Start staff miss their families just as much.

“We look forward to these food and book distributions at our centers because we get to check in on our families,” said Venetia Peacock, senior director for HCDE Head Start. “Even if it’s a faraway wave because of social distancing, the connections mean something to us.

“We are family, and we are very happy to connect with these care packages.”

HCDE Head Start and Early Head Start are no-cost, federally funded programs that prepare children from 6 weeks to 5 years old for success in school. Programs support and promote parent participation in order to build stronger families. Low-income families or families of children with special needs benefit from services. HCDE Head Start serves families residing in east and northeast Harris County, providing 15 area centers and five Early Head Start partnerships for approximately 1,350 children and their families.

Head Start is actively recruiting students for the 2020-2021 school year. For more information, go to [4]www.hcde-texas.org/Head-Start.

1. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/04/20200330_headstart_037-1.jpg
 2. <http://Viewvideo//www.youtube.com/watch?v=pMMDUO-eaUM>
 3. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/04/jenifer-howard-still-1.jpg>
 4. <http://www.hcde-texas.org/Head-Start>
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HCDE Occupational Therapist Helps Problem-Solve to Equip Katy Teen with Disabilities During COVID-19 (2020-04-09 09:52) - hcdetx



[1]



(April is National Occupational Therapy Month, and we salute the HCDE therapists who are staffed in Harris County schools. HCDE therapists serve 7,000 students yearly.)

Like many students, Anna Whitten is stuck at home during COVID-19. Because of her learning disabilities, the Katy ISD Seven Lakes High School student faces many more adaptive challenges than the typical teen. Harris County Department of Education occupational therapist Wendy Larson has helped change all that.

Whitten, a student with cerebral palsy who uses her eyes to communicate, was left without her “eye gaze” device as schools were closed. Through a two-hour, online Zoom session with Larson, Katy ISD technology specialist Joyce Waggoner and Anna’s mom, things turned around for the 17-year old.

The augmentative, voice-output device accessed via eye gaze is attached to

Anna's computer and must be precisely calibrated to work properly. Larson got the call last week as frustrated mom Paige Siemers retrieved the computer and tried to set up the device to no avail. Because of social distancing, the technology issues had to be resolved virtually.

Mother, technology specialist and occupational therapist worked with Anna to calibrate the device. Tedious adjustments were interrupted as the host's Internet failed. Two hours later, the team connected the device.

Tears of frustration were replaced by Anna's wide smile as her communication barriers dissolved. Like four astronauts landing on the moon, the team cheered and celebrated their accomplishments.

"This is a new frontier," said Larson. "It made me realize that therapists aren't necessarily the forefront of learning, but we are definitely the support."

"Our therapists love the students that they serve, and it shows in all that they are doing now to help support them through these very challenging times." - Carrie Crabb, senior director for School-Based Therapy Services

HCDE's School-Based Therapy Services Senior Director Carie Crabb says OTs are essential because they help students with disabilities participate in their daily routines and activities at school. HCDE employs approximately 150 occupational and physical therapists, music therapists and assistants throughout the Harris County school districts, providing contract services for approximately 7,000 students yearly.

"OTs focus on academics, play and leisure, social participation, self-care skills and transition or work skills," said Crabb. "Occupational therapy services include analyzing and modifying tasks, routines and environments to reduce the barriers to participation."

Because technology often plays such a large part in serving children with disabilities, therapists face challenges as classrooms move from school to the home. Parents of children with disabilities also find themselves without many of the support and caregiving services they depend upon because of social distancing.

"Home life is so different," said Larson. "With digital and home learning, we don't know what families are going through."

Anna's mom is thankful for the freedom that the new technology at home is giving her daughter. Larson routinely calls to work with the teen on her homework assignments, identifying any challenges she may have with completing assignments from her teachers.

"I have never wanted her to just sit in front of the TV," her mom said. "For a

kid that can't verbalize, she is sharp as a tack. I am always trying to find learning activities that enlighten her intellect and help her feel stimulated."

Larson has worked with Anna for five years as a therapist serving students in Katy ISD. Reflecting on the team effort to help Anna, she says so much of her job involves problem-solving and finding solutions. In the end, tears-turned-to-smiles are well worth it.

"Therapists (during COVID) are capitalizing on their creativity and knowledge of analyzing and modifying tasks and curriculum to develop unique ways to support students in their new 'home classrooms,'" said Crabb of the therapists and managers who work in her division.

"Our therapists love the students that they serve, and it shows in all that they are doing now to help support them through these very challenging times."

1. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/04/anna.jpg>

Therapist Ashley Scott's Workspace Incorporates Shower Curtain, Family Dog, Plenty of Patience (2020-04-09 09:58) - hcdetx





Reinventing her office space during COVID-19 is an exercise in creativity for Harris County Department of Education occupational therapist Ashley Scott.

A shower curtain behind her chair in her bedroom serves as a backdrop for her whiteboard. She rehearsed her first online session with her mother, wanting to get things right before communicating virtually with students, parents and their teachers.

Dog Tommy, an Australian Shepherd, is stuck to her side, so she incorporates him into her sessions.

“You have to be creative, and the students enjoy variation,” she said. “My dog has helped a lot.”

Scott is one of the 150 School-Based Therapy Services staff who provides ther-
122

apy services for children in school districts and charter schools in and around Harris County on behalf of HCDE. Children with disabilities benefit as the occupational therapist helps them participate in daily routines and activities at school. Occupational therapists also support academic achievement and promote positive behaviors necessary for learning, said Carie Crabb, senior director for School-Based Therapy Services.

“With some kids, it’s about staying focused, but that is hard when their whole routine has changed,” Scott said.

Parents are suddenly put into teaching roles, so she helps with activities and suggests how to improvise outside the classroom.

“Do you have a cookie sheet?” she recently asked a parent who is practicing the mechanics of writing letters with her child. “Have the child write letters with cool whip. Make letters from play dough.”

Many children have learning challenges associated with autism, Down syndrome and ADHD. When scheduling sessions with parents and students, she plans each session in advance.

“We’re helping them with what teachers are assigning in school,” she said. “If a child is having trouble organizing on paper, sometimes graph paper helps.”

She gives ideas about how to motivate learning. Breaks are a must, she cautions.

“You have to gauge how your child is doing attention-wise,” she said.

Sometimes breaks are needed to hop like a bunny, leap like a frog and lumber across the room like a bear.

For older kids, she recommends videos which incorporate exercise to give students a break in their daily lessons.

“I am giving parents coaching on how to use technology at home,” she said. “Tomorrow an older student is having trouble navigating Google classroom, so I’m helping with that.”

Scott will interact with multiple students within her contracted Houston Independent School District schools each day and hosts meetings with team members and teachers.

“By being a school therapist, you get to be a consultant and coach for teachers, and I like the idea of being on the move and going from school to school,” she said. “And I love working with kids.”

Regarding Tommy the dog, Scott is planning to use him in more activities as a reward for her students' attentiveness.

"We'll see how he behaves though because he's pretty young," she said. "He tries to steal the playdough and is constantly trying to chew up my pencils."

1. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/04/ashleyscott.jpeg>

PriyaM (2020-04-09 14:04:26)

I can't thank you enough Scott for doing this wonderful service for all the parents of special needs children. Things are really tough right now and any help is much appreciated. You are going beyond your boundaries to offer your expertise in teaching them technology. love your cookie sheet and whip cream idea, my son would love to play with it too; Your positive vibe has been passed on to Tommy too! Stay blessed.

HCDE Hosting Demands for Moodle Platform Increase as COVID-19 Distance Learning Booms (2020-04-16 16:11) - hcdetx





When online learning became the new norm in Cypress Fairbanks Independent School District due to COVID-19, teacher Cathy Austin was already best friends with the platform used in the district. For years she had used “Moodle” through a collaboration between host Harris County Department of Education and her district.

The system allows educators to create a private space online to build courses, activities and assignments with software tools for their students. It also allows teachers to track student progress. Students benefit because they don’t have to download apps to complete their work. It’s also a one-stop-shop for all their assignments.

“The other thing I like is that it allows us the ability to give students everything they need in delivering their curriculum,” said Austin.

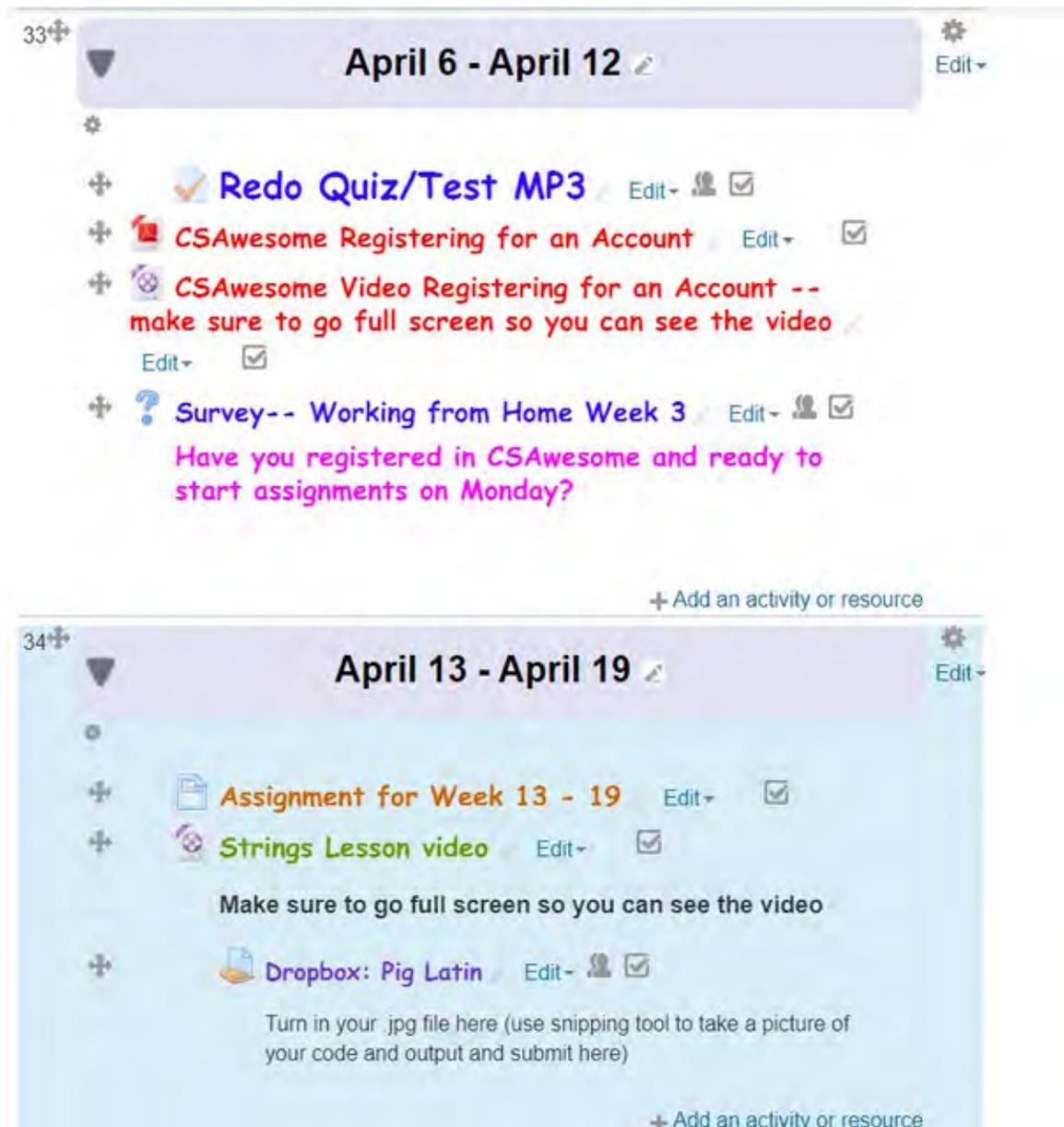
Colina Poullard, director for Digital Education and Innovation at HCDE, has seen a 30 percent increase in online traffic in Moodle since COVID-19 prompted 100 percent distance learning in Cy-Fair. Moodle is available to all 12,000 teachers at the fourth largest district in the state. In addition to teachers and students using the system for assignments, Moodle can be used to host professional development and internal communications workshops for school districts.

“Because some teachers are using Moodle as their only teaching medium, we are seeing nearly 2,000 daily log ins,” Poullard said. “We support teachers through

every aspect of the platform.”

Austin teaches computer science and computer programming to students in Cy-Woods High School. In her school, approximately 400 students use Moodle. She has 100 students on the hosted platform each day.

[2]



Class assignments

Moodle can even perform surveys so that instructors know basic information

about students having dedicated computers versus having to share them with other family members.

“Total online teaching opens new realms of Moodle we’ve never used before,” Austin said. “It will handle instructional videos so students can get all my curriculum in one post.

“It can track who did what assignment and let us know who is working and who is not.”

When working with computers, often you must expect the unexpected, the computer science teacher said. Internet goes down. Software needs updating. Glitches must be worked out.

“I’ve been extremely impressed in the last year about how Moodle is working, and we’ve not had one issue with Moodle since COVID began,” Austin said.

Moodle is also used as a learning management system within HCDE to certify teachers in online teaching.

“We have teachers all over the state who are being certified in online learning,” said Poullard.

Poullard expects more districts to look to Moodle as a one-stop-shop for hosting learning for both their students and teachers.

“While Cy-Fair is a very large district, this type of platform can be really useful for smaller districts who need a user-friendly learning management system to support their teachers and students,” Poullard said.

“As districts’ needs continue to change, HCDE evolves to offer new virtual learning initiatives. We’re here to help.”

1. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/04/img_3632.jpg

2. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/04/moodle-2-week-view.jpg>

New COVID Learning Community Joins Principal, Teacher, Parent, Student Virtually through HCDE Special School (2020-04-23 12:19)

- hcdetx





Alex Busler, 11, gained an additional teacher this spring when his dad became a part of his virtual learning team during COVID-19. The adjustment to online learning is challenging. However, the new team comprised of student, parent, teacher, teacher's aide and principal is gaining momentum as Alex adjusts.

Busler is one of 127 students attending Harris County Department of Education's Academic and Behavior School East, one of HCDE's four schools which serves unique and challenging student populations. Districts in greater Harris County contract for services with HCDE, and students benefit from highly structured, small classrooms.

Single dad Phil Busler admits it's not easy to tackle the schoolwork for several hours a day with his son, but he depends on his teacher and teacher aide for curriculum, motivation and behavior modification as they get online for meetings.

“They are doing a fantastic job,” said Busler.

Principal Donna Trevino-Jones commends her staff for an “all hands-on-deck approach.”

“Everyone is doing what they need to do to work together,” she said.[2]



The special school serves students ages 5-22 and includes children with autism spectrum disorder, emotional disabilities and development disabilities.

Students distance learn through various age-appropriate technology platforms. Teachers communicate with parents through Class Dojo which tracks assignments and rewards students for accomplishments and behavior. Microsoft Teams and Google Classroom allow for person-to-person exchanges with students and parents. For those with no or limited computer access, curriculum packets are mailed out.

Alex’s teacher LaToya Duckworth says she and teacher’s aide Cierra Davis have multiple meetings with their students. From photo to video to app, it’s a different world in terms of the “new normal.”[3]



“The challenges are that my students’ schedules and their sleep patterns are not the same as when they were in school,” she said. “Sometimes we wait until late evenings to contact students. The victories are seeing how diligent the students are and how they take ownership of their learning—sometimes without me or their parents.”

Trevino-Jones manages meetings between teacher teams, districts which the school serves, and parents.

“We are helping some of the most vulnerable and neediest children in Harris County, so to have them online for extended amounts of time is unreasonable,” she said. “We work to be supportive of our students and their parents. It is hard to have the same level of expectations when we cannot be directly there with them, but we

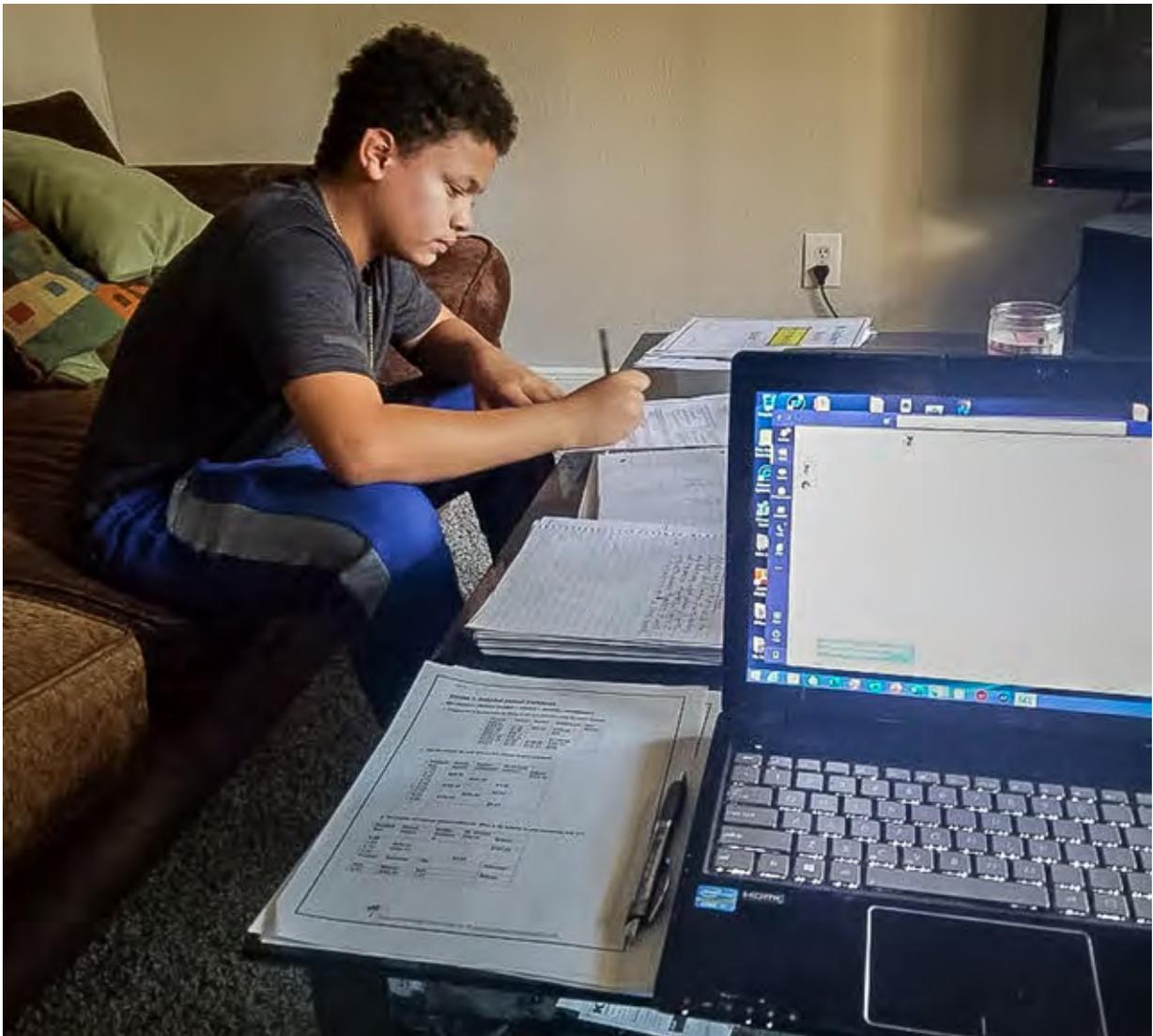
continue to be relentless with our support and communication.

“With our students we have to be flexible, creative and supportive, but I also have to be that way with my own staff.”

She constantly reminds herself that her teachers and staff are also parents, and they have children they are educating and sharing technology with at home, too. Students like Alex benefit from exercise videos which are sent back and forth as motivation tools.

Alex is managing emotional and anger issues but is turning his life around by taking action and facing his problems, his dad explained.

[4]



Coping with the new COVID-19 learning environment takes constant explaining,

said Busler, who describes himself as being a strict-but-loving dad and teacher.

“I explain to him that it’s a different type of school, but there are still consequences for not completing his work,” Busler said. “I expect him to put forth the effort and try his best.”

Counselors at the school have their own challenges. Students need help, but sometimes the personal touch is lost via technology. Parents need help with the behavior modification models used by the school. Appointments are scheduled weekly to touch base.

“Since parents aren’t equipped with our techniques, we have suggested role plays and give them social skills strategies to use,” the principal said. “These are things we constantly work on during the year, so the parents get to see this.”

One example is anger management. Through Boys’ Town curriculum, positive behavior is modeled. Parent and child practice together.

[5]



Before the coronavirus, Trevino-Jones recalls staff members having their aligned roles and responsibilities. Now roles are sometimes shared in the school community. The cafeteria manager is bilingual, so she is helping with teacher-parent conferences.

Teachers who are tech-savvy are sharing their knowledge with teachers who are just gaining new tech skills.

“Many of our teachers are constantly working together and taking the lead, which creates a high level of synergy,” said Trevino-Jones, “and that is a beautiful thing.”

1. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/04/phil-busler_alex-busler.jpg
 2. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/04/donnatreviso_jones.jpg
 3. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/04/latoya_duckworth.jpg
 4. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/04/alex-busler.jpg>
 5. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/04/cherissajordan_dwaynejohnson_sheridanwarren.jpg
-

Second Wave: 'Because We Care' Food Distributions Include Masks, Gloves for HCDE Head Start Families (2020-04-23 15:41)

- hcdetx



A second round of food distributions began this week as Harris County Department of Education Head Start and Early Head Start families continue to receive "Because We Care" food boxes.



Olga McGallon and family

The HCDE Board approved the care package program through an emergency board meeting in March, appropriating \$250,000 in funding for food for Head Start families. To date, approximately 5,800 meals have been provided to our Head Start families. The second round of food distribution continues to benefit our 1,350 Head Start families. Included are COVID-19 protection kits for families with masks, gloves and hand sanitizer.

"As we continue to care for our Head Start families during this pandemic, the HCDE Board of Trustees wanted to include some protective supplies for families," HCDE Superintendent James Colbert Jr. said. "We are all struggling in this together, but hopefully these boxes will add a little relief from the daily burdens these families face."

Multiple families were served this week at the La Porte and J.D. Walker center locations. Additional distributions are planned next week.



Dewanna Lewis and her family drop by J.D. Walker for their care box and protective supplies.

Inside the boxes are food staples like peanut butter, beans, canned vegetables, bread, rice and fruit. Food is supplied through Choice Partners. Infants and toddlers are provided formula, baby food and diapers.



Head Start staff prepare food boxes, books and protective gear for families for the second "Because We Care" distribution to Head Start families.

Head Start staffs the distribution, and families drive through to receive the care boxes. Students are also given books to help with at-home learning.

“Through the generous support of the HCDE Board, funds appropriated will continue to support our families through a third, planned food distribution in May,” HCDE Head Start Senior Director Venetia Peacock said.

Head Start is currently recruiting Head Start and Early Head Start students for the 2020-2021 school year. Families interested in the no-cost program may call 713-672-9343. For more information, go to [4]www.hcde-texas.org/Head-Start .

1. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/04/mom-1.jpg>
2. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/04/mom-2-1.jpg>

3. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/04/hs-staff.jpg>
 4. <http://www.hcde-texas.org/Head-Start>
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23 Adult Learners Celebrated During Pandemic as ESL/GED Learning Shifts to Online Platforms (2020-04-30 09:21) - hcdetx



[1]



Venezuelan native Marbella Bolivar faced many struggles in her lifetime. She fled political upheaval in her country and joined family in the United States. She lost her financial livelihood and retirement. Now COVID-19 poses new challenges as the determined, 62-year-old adult learner continues to gain English conversation skills.

Bolivar is one of 23 students being inducted into the National Adult Education Honor Society by the Harris County Department of Education Adult Education Division. The honor is a nomination from teachers who recognize student leaders who make an impact by helping fellow students, as well as positively impacting their communities.

Traditionally honorees are brought together to a pinning ceremony which celebrates the national honor with teachers, family and friends at a ceremony at HCDE. Induction brings notoriety and written recommendations for future employment and education advancement.

Like many ceremonies, it had to be cancelled during the pandemic. ([2]View the list of honorees.)

“The impact of COVID-19 abruptly stalled the progress that our students were making towards their goals,” HCDE Adult Education Director Stephanie Ross said. “It is very important to acknowledge the hard work that our adult learners have accomplished over the past year.”

This year, the induction roster ranges from millennials to baby boomers. Teacher nominations come from workforce, ESL and GED classes.

Bolivar misses her ESL teacher Zsa Zsa Caburao. She worries about her classmates who have lost their jobs. Her own progress in the workforce was halted as her position as a substitute teacher in Katy ISD came to an end. Now she works temporary jobs.



Marbella

“I miss my teacher very much for being an excellent teacher, and I affirm this with knowledge because I am also a teacher,” Bolivar said. “I also miss the personal interaction with my classmates. For me, this interaction isn’t the same as when shared online.”

HCDE operates the largest adult learner program in the state of Texas. The shift to online learning during the coronavirus was not as difficult because many of the online platforms were already in place. Several software programs support ESL and GED learning. Teachers are in contact with their students through Zoom, phone calls and texts.

“Through innovation, distance learning and online tools many of our adult learners have become re-engaged in the program,” said Ross. “I am delighted and proud that they can gradually move forward to a sense of normalcy where education is at the forefront in spite of all that is going on in the world today.”

Adult learners struggle with the same conditions younger students must adapt to. Families have limited access to Internet. Multiple family members share computers. However, adult learners are also breadwinners and parents. Now they must teach their own children.

“We’re not just educating our adult students,” said Ross. “We are also providing them with education about resources.”

Teachers are being provided with community resources to introduce to their adult students: How do you apply for unemployment? What does homeschooling your children look like? How do you cope with mental stress? What is available through 211 community resources? How do you find COVID-19 testing?

“Teachers are opting in to get these tips and are also receiving them through emails,” said Ross. “They can also go online with us to walk through these resources.”

Carly Henderson, 19, is one of the youngest honorees this year inducted into the National Adult Education Honor Society. Her teacher Linda Patin praises her young student for reaching out to others in the class, especially since Henderson is proficient in math.[4]



Henderson enrolled in GED class after dropping out of school to take care of her mother at age 17. After three months, she is ready to take the math and reading tests but unsure about her writing. She wants to return to class in the summer session to brush up on her writing skills but wonders what class will look like.

“I will take one step at a time,” she said.

Schedules for upcoming classes—whether they be a hybrid of in-person or distance learning platforms—will be forthcoming for the summer and fall semesters.



Carly

Teachers like Caburao are equipped with new technology and resources to help their students as they navigate through COVID-19.

“When the coronavirus started, my students were very sad and they kept asking when they could come back to class,” said the teacher. “Some of them are frustrated because they have lost their jobs.

“It was somewhat difficult to shift them to online and virtual platforms,” Caburao said. “However, HCDE is giving us support, training and the tools to provide this type of transition for the students.”

(HCDE Adult Education is the largest, no-cost adult education program in Texas, with a variety of health care and construction career training options in Harris and Liberty counties. Students may also take English as a second language classes and high school equivalency degree classes simultaneously in a traditional classroom setting or online. For more information, go to [6]<http://www.hcde-texas.org/adult-education>.)

1. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/04/img_1343.jpg
 2. <http://hcde-texas.org/media/uploads/2020/04/NAHS-2020.pdf>
 3. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/04/img_1869.jpg
 4. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/04/unknown-3-copy.jpg>
 5. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/04/unknown-2-copy.jpg>
 6. <http://www.hcde-texas.org/adult-education>
-

City Connections Supplies Virtual Learning Activities Hosted on CASE for Kids Website in 11 Council Districts (2020-04-30 10:33)

- hcdetx





Single mother Camille Rowdon is a law student studying remotely by day but also doubles as teacher to her 8-year-old daughter during the pandemic. Keeping Luna busy with engaging, meaningful enrichment activities is important.

Luna is usually engaged in afterschool activities that keep her actively learning. This semester those out-of-school time activities are being made available online.

Resources: [2]<http://hcde-texas.org/media/uploads/2020/04/CC-COVID-19-Resource-List-1.pdf>

As families search for educational and recreational resources outside traditional homework assignments, the Center for Afterschool, Summer and Enrichment for Kids, or CASE for Kids, launches virtual learning activities through a city of Houston partnership called City Connections. The city of Houston and council members have 150

embraced the program since 2015, continually supporting afterschool efforts with funding to nonprofit organizations.

Service providers typically travel to schools, churches or community centers to deliver activities ranging from photography to musical theatre to physical fitness to jazz music lessons. Then COVID-19 happened.

“Everyone in greater Houston benefits this semester as these online activities and lessons are available to anyone,” said Lisa Caruthers, director for CASE for Kids. “City Connections promotes crime prevention, child safety, career exploration and enrichment activities. It also supports the mental health of our families.”

CASE for Kids is an afterschool intermediary which provides resources, trainings and funding for students in grades pre-k through 12 in afterschool programs in schools, childcare facilities and community centers and is a division of Harris County Department of Education.

This semester, nonprofit organizations in each of the 11 council districts receive a share of \$307,517 in city funding from March 9-May 15, 2020. Through requests for proposals, council members select nonprofits to provide services.



Councilwoman Karla Cisneros and CASE for Kids director Lisa Caruthers pose for a City Connections grant recipients Amy Chung and Jackson Guillen of Houston Youth Symphony at City Hall, December 6, 2017.

Council Member Karla Cisneros recently promoted the online enrichment activities for students in her district through her newsletter. Other council members advertising the new, online resources through their websites and eblasts include Mayor Pro Tem Dave Martin, District E, and Council Member Abbie Kamin, District C.

“Kids’ need access to opportunities and resources,” said Cisneros. “That was true before COVID-19, and it is even truer now. More than ever, the programming provided through the City Connections project is filling a huge need in helping kids grow and learn. In addition to annual funding underwritten by the city, as a council member it’s been my pleasure to invest additional funding in CASE for Kids programming every year.

“Because of the pandemic, we are being challenged to stay apart and must think about new ways to reach goals. I appreciate how virtually all the provider organizations have done exactly that by creatively shifting to use

technology to deliver enrichment programs.”

Working directly with kids versus delivering the educational content online is challenging, said Mary Glover, CASE for Kids manager, but the nonprofits adapted quickly. CASE for Kids wanted to assist both the nonprofits and the council members in providing more resources that students and families could use to stay as safe and connected as possible.

CASE for Kids City Connections Coordinator Adrian Izaguirre said the nonprofits have “stepped up to the challenge without hesitation.”

“For afterschool, the change during COVID has been drastic but also evolutionary,” Izaguirre said. “We’ve heard many times that education in the future would need to find a way to be delivered virtually or digitally, and this pandemic has pushed us to do it sooner than expected.”

1. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/04/20200429_223345-1.jpg
2. <http://hcde-texas.org/media/uploads/2020/04/CC-COVID-19-Resource-List-1.pdf>
3. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/04/20171206_cityconnections_0034-4.jpg

1.5 May

Teaching and Learning Center Provides New Frontier Using On-line Educator Development Platforms (2020-05-07 09:20) - hcdetx



[1]



During the pandemic, gaining professional development hours is next to the last thing on educators' minds. Teachers are tasked with posting online lessons and grades. They're meeting with students, parents and administrators on Zoom. Educators are coping with teaching their own children.

Harris County Department of Education's Teaching and Learning Center sees the challenge as an opportunity to revamp professional development, flipping over to the virtual world.

"There's a new frontier in professional development," said Kelly Tummy, TLC's curriculum director for English language arts and social studies. "Everyone is testing the waters. Not only is it because of COVID, it's time out of the classroom."

Like other education institutions, Tummy and fellow curriculum directors at TLC

began cancelling national and local presenters scheduled for the spring and summer as the pandemic hit.

“I started thinking about the livelihood of our independent consultants who offer these workshops and conferences,” she said, remembering the cancellation calls and emails. “They have mortgages and families too.”

A solution came as national literacy consultant Kate Roberts agreed to present virtually in May for HCDE. Tummy set up her sessions online through Zoom. Roberts agreed to do three, two-hour sessions in April-May.

Sixty-one teachers and administrators signed on for the workshop. “People said it was rejuvenating,” said Tummy. “Plus, it was nice having professional development to sink their teeth into to get them going again.”

Sheila McAninch, secondary English language arts and reading coordinator for Waller Independent School District, attended the virtual training. She liked the spaced, short sessions.

“I truly loved how Kate Roberts made it seem personal, like we were sitting in her house and chatting,” McAninch said. “I was able to soak in, share and even implement what we’re learning.”

Andrea Segraves, director of TLC at HCDE and Brenda Arteaga, curriculum director of TLC’s Special Populations hosted a similar virtual conference recently for 175 early childhood educators. Six-hour, back-to-back sessions with presenters like Dan St. Romain allowed for training ranging from teaching strategies to takeaway activities for early childhood educators.

Online attendees came from educational communities in Plainview and Allen looking for resources.

“I think that because we are currently in COVID, online platforms are the only option for professional development,” said Segraves. “There is power in the face-to-face, but virtual platforms we are using will change the future of professional learning, and we’re realizing that it can be done.”

The virtual connections her 175 attendees made at the early childhood virtual conference this month give teachers a chance to cultivate resources and professional relationships.

“We’re finding ways to virtually create a community for educators,” Segraves said. “Teachers are connected with other teachers in other areas of the state and nation through online professional learning whom they wouldn’t ordinarily be able to meet and collaborate with.

“It’s truly a whole new virtual world.”

1. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/05/tumy-final.jpg>

School Districts, Institutions Look to Co-ops like Choice Partners for COVID-19 Solutions (2020-05-07 10:07) - hcdetx



[1]



As the manufacturer of hand sanitizer and distributor of industrial disinfectants, Choice Partners vendor Buckeye Cleaning is operating on a 24/7 schedule. During the past six weeks, the company sold 20,000 cases of hand sanitizer, 8,000 dispensers on stands and is currently manufacturing 10,000 cases for the Houston market.

President Reagan Lapoint of Buckeye International in Houston has this piece of advice for institutions looking for disinfectants and cleaning supplies: *“Use your co-op.”*

“Hand sanitizer will be in every building you go into from here on out,” said Lapoint. “The co-op has guaranteed pricing. You lock the pricing in, and we must honor that pricing. The co-op is made for times like this.”

Choice Partners Director Jeff Drury says Buckeye has been a vendor with Choice
160

for 18 years. Both small and large school districts and institutions benefit from buying through Choice's legal procurement and contract solutions to meet government purchasing requirements for its approximate 2,000 members. The 624 vendors benefit too from a loyal client base.

About 72 percent of Buckeye's business comes from Choice member orders, and COVID-19 has escalated demand for the company's three-tiered approach for industrial cleaning.

[2]



Drury and Lapoint

Since mid-March, the 16-member team at Choice has operated in high gear, organizing a list of vendors who provide COVID-19 products and services to members.

A marketing survey was sent to vendors with approximately 80 responses for available products/services from cleaning supplies to food to technology to facilities: <https://www.choicepartners.org/covid-19> .

Like many companies, Choice Partners has moved from face-to-face customer service through avenues like conferences, trade shows, trainings and person-to-person sales calls to Microsoft Teams meetings, Zoom trainings and phone calls.

“We are so people oriented and there is nothing like face-to-face interactions, but we have adapted with technology,” Drury said.

A “Virtual Vendor Orientation” is scheduled for May 12 and targets Choice Partners’ new vendors and provides updates for current vendors. Topics and issues range from the legal and competitive aspect of Choice Partners cooperative contracts to supply catalog vendors to job-order contracting.

“We want to make sure our new vendors gain clarity and understanding in an orientation and understand what we have to offer, from marketing to excellent customer service,” Drury said.

Although many food contractors and office vendor companies are suffering through the loss of school district demands during COVID-19, Drury points to companies like Buckeye which are meeting new supply-and-demands of institutions during the pandemic.

“We are continuing to see interest in products and services from the co-op,” Drury said.

“Both companies and institutions are tasked with reducing the spread of COVID through taking on the responsibility of social distancing and bringing many innovative ideas to the table.”

Learn more about Choice Partners at [3]www.choicepartners.org.

1. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/05/buckeye-cleaning-center-warehouse-sanitizer_edited.jpg

2. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/05/img_2187.jpg

3. <http://www.choicepartners.org/>

College Graduates: Looking for a New Career? Consider Teaching (2020-05-07 10:20) - hcdetx





Harris County Department of Education is recruiting college graduates for a fast-track, alternative certification program which has a proven track record for success. Online and onsite classes make the program convenient, and flexible payment plans provide affordability. Small classes allow students to gain experience from veteran educators who operate the program.

Teacher candidates gain jobs after the first five to 10 months of intensive training, and HCDE assists with job placement opportunities.

“Our program is built around an extensive network of support to ensure our teachers are prepared to step into the classroom ready to teach from day one,” said Lidia Zatopek, director for Educator Certification and Advancement. “Our one-on-one and small group onsite training is complimented by online support and resources.”

“Teaching is a very stable and rewarding career, and teacher salaries have been on the rise in recent years,” said Zatopek.

Eligible areas of certification provided by HCDE are core subject areas for grades pre-k through 12, including elementary Core Subjects EC-6, secondary math, science,

and English, as well as special education, English as a second language and bilingual education.

Teachers receive support and professional development from the program even after they are certified. Teachers gain jobs in school districts throughout Harris County and beyond through the program which has produced award-winning teachers for the past 10 years.

[2]



For the past three years, HCDE teacher preparation program supports a 100 percent pass rate as interns complete the state teacher certification exams. In addition, 100 percent of interns gain full certification credentials within two years. References from teachers completing the program are available upon request.

For more information about upcoming enrollment in the program, email [3]hcdeacp@hcde-texas.org

1. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/05/423a0216.jpg>

2. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/05/423a0227.jpg>
 3. <mailto:hcdeacp@hcde-texas.org>
-

HCDE's Center Continues to Support School Safety While Challenged by Intruder 'COVID-19' (2020-05-14 10:01) - hcdetx



[1]



School safety has a formidable intruder with the invasion of COVID-19, and no one is more aware of that fact than Julia Andrews, director for Harris County Department of Education's Center for Safe and Secure Schools.

The Center was created in 1999 at the request of Harris County superintendents and is tasked with the mission of supporting school districts' efforts to have safe and secure learning environments.

The Center is in contact several days a week with emergency operations leaders from approximately 25 school districts and six charter schools within greater Harris County. The meetings allow for sharing best practices and strategies in emergency operation planning and security.

The pandemic is the new, formidable enemy that continues to spread uncertainty

through area school districts and beyond.

“We are very busy sharing COVID-19 updates and recommendations via emails and newsletters and have been contacted by several school districts to do virtual professional development as well,” Andrews said.

Recently the Center hosted an operations meeting which included the Texas School Safety Center officials who shared a draft of what reopening schools in Texas might look like.

[2]



In that meeting, Rich Vela, executive director HCDE Facilities, led a discussion on cleaning and disinfecting school classrooms and buildings. Several districts called for follow up on procedures and products. Members were referred to HCDE’s Choice Partners co-op for easy access to cleaning supplies and food products.

“We’re using all the resources we have to help school districts,” said Andrews.

Requests for assistance from the Center run the gamut. Staff are concerned about not being able to locate missing students. Educators need guidance on how to effectively communicate with parents from home. Parents need resources for their children sheltering in place at home.

“We also need to be aware of identifying and checking on students who may be suffering from abuse,” said Andrews. “School was their outlet for normalcy, and many are home suffering.”

This week the Texas Education Agency submitted [3]adoptive recommendations and models for reopening schools. Ideas are flowing down the back-to-school pipeline.

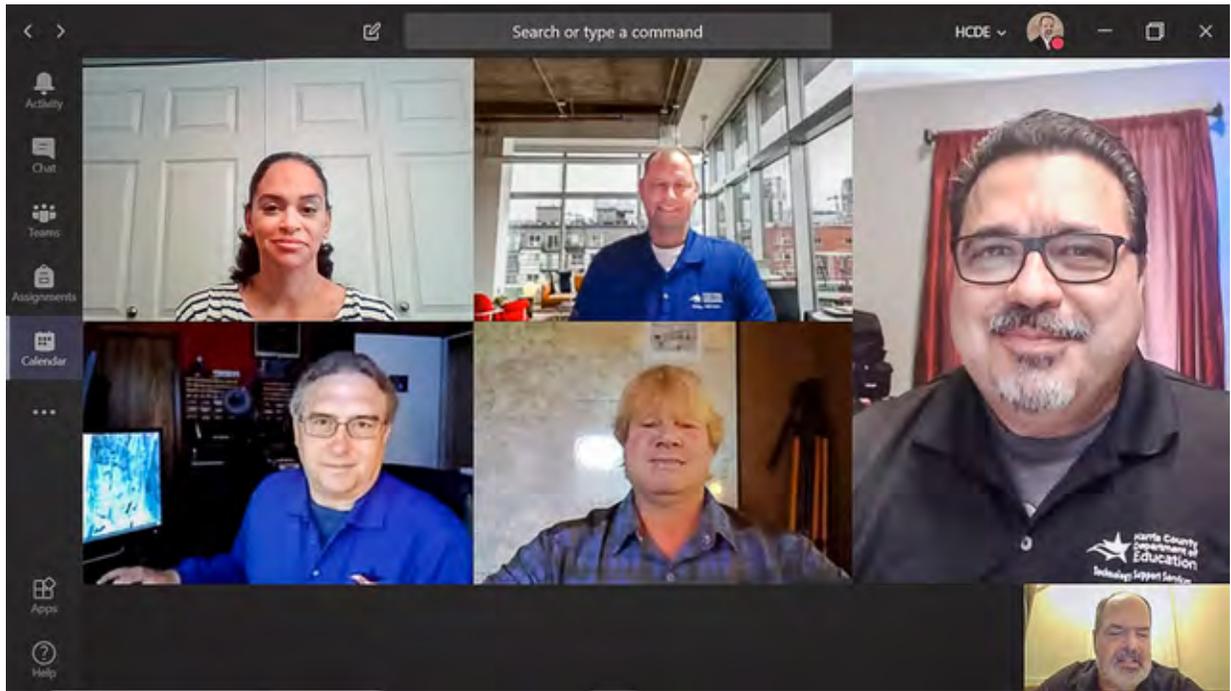
“We have a lot of things to think about as when we open schools back up,” Andrews said. “We’ll need to be patient, flexible and listen to health care experts.”

The Center provides a resource guide on its website to address physical and mental health, as well as education resources: [4]<https://hcde-texas.org/safe-and-secure-schools/culture-climate/>

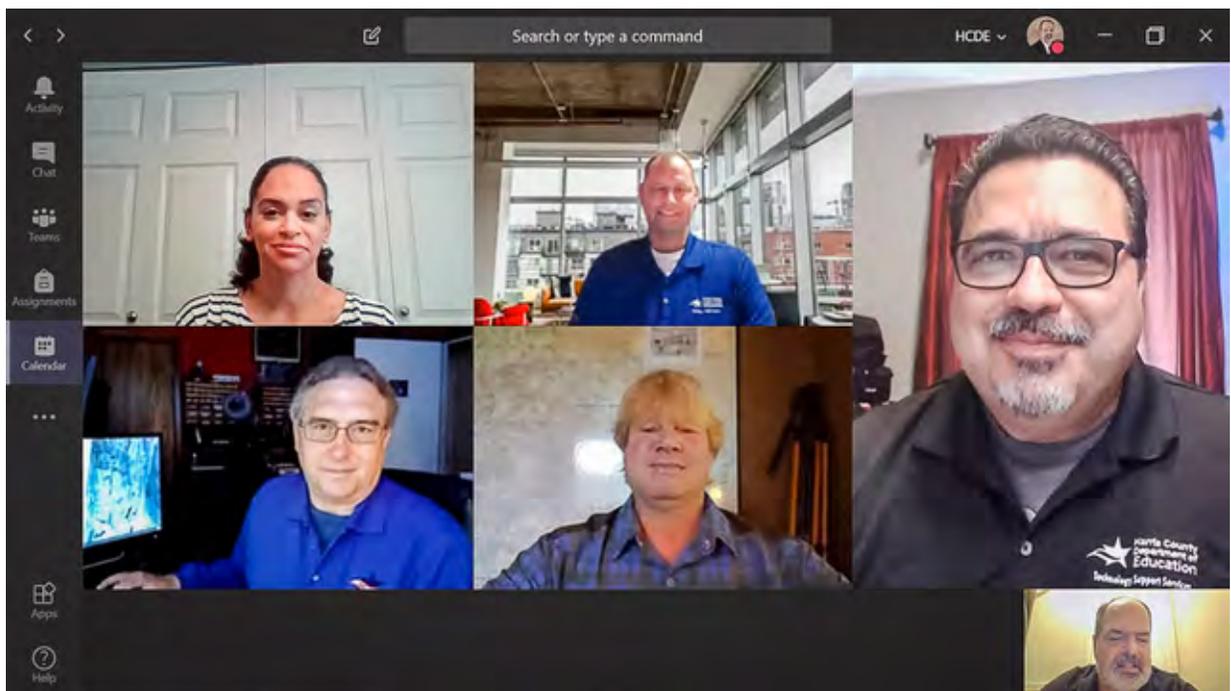
(For more about the Center, go to [5]www.hcde-texas.org/safe-and-secure-schools.)

1. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/05/img_3611.jpg
2. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/05/img_3554-1.jpg
3. <https://abc13.com/school-texas-schools-districts-houston/6176518/>
4. <https://hcde-texas.org/safe-and-secure-schools/culture-climate/>
5. <http://www.hcde-texas.org/safe-and-secure-schools>

HCDE's IT Services Division Builds Framework for Teleworking, Learning Success Ahead of Pandemic (2020-05-21 14:21) - hcdetx



[1]



On an ordinary workday at the end of January 2020, news came about a Harris County Department of Education employee's family member being exposed to COVID-19. After quarantining, the person tested negative, but the virus had hit too close to home.

HCDE's IT Services Division team was already ahead of the curve to equip staff to work remotely.

Director Lowell Ballard, operations manager Chris Hoesel, applications manager Tim Davis, service desk manager Jaime Salinas and information security officer John Kracht began discussions as more cases of the virus showed up throughout the country. Working silently behind the scenes, the IT team and its staff planned the wraparound technology needed in the event staff couldn't return to work after spring break.

Behind the scenes, division leader Ballard and his management staff knew they had already built the framework to empower employees and students to work and learn from home. Ballard worked on a pandemic planning committee in a leadership post in Virginia 14 years previous, so he was aware of the IT services needed to get through a potential pandemic. To prepare before spring break, all employee accounts were enabled to allow VPN access and support to telework. Microsoft Office 365 was launched the year before, and a bulk of divisions already had documents migrated to One Drive in the Cloud. IT staff and several other divisions had already begun using Microsoft Teams for meetings. Student accounts were created and were being tested. Teams classroom sites were being tested for students as well. Finally, all employees were given access to Adobe services. Adobe Sign was enabled for testing for a small group of HCDE leaders.

The next week, all hell broke loose as Texas and Harris County went into lockdown. Spring break was extended a week for staff, but IT staff kicked it into high gear.

“Like any disaster, you plan for it but you're not sure it will happen,” said Ballard. “We are using the same platforms that Fortune 500 companies are using, so that gives us options and flexibility that may not have been available in the past.”

Initially, the Service Desk was challenged with work hours without boundaries. Salinas recalled his team members fielding calls well into the evening to equip HCDE staff.

“Our staff members were working through their personal situations, so they had odd hours themselves,” he said. “Staff had their own children at home in addition to their students to take care of.”

Salinas ordered laptops which were already in high demand throughout the nation. To accommodate HCDE staff, laptops were taken from computer labs in the conference center. Service desk staff handed out approximately 80 laptops to enable staff to work from home.

Davis and his team worked with the Schools Division to move student accounts

and Microsoft Teams for classroom use from testing into production. They edited all HCDE forms on the portal to be fillable using Adobe Sign and created a central forms library.

Teachers were equipped to communicate with students. Now approximately 100 HCDE teachers and 650 students have access to Microsoft Teams collaboration software for use in their remote classrooms, mirroring the same software being used by HISD teachers.

Several weeks post spring break, demand seemed to slow as employees settled into the new norm of working from home.

“In the beginning, the call volume was extremely high with double the calls and now it has leveled off,” Salinas said.

IT Services moved from crisis mode to the more routine as management meetings shifted from once a day to twice a week. IT Services teams now meet three times a week.

Being prepared and working ahead of the curve is something IT personnel must do to help an organization thrive.

“It’s an iterative or incremental process,” said Hoesel. “You can’t do everything at once. We’ve been making changes over the last one-and-a-half years and it’s enabled us to help staff work at this level during the pandemic.

“Lowell had this vision for strategic change,” Hoesel said. “We used to think that everything is working, so why change. Now we’re going in the direction of where industry is moving.”

IT Services staff members continue to work through challenges and make plans. Here are some future initiatives:

- **Upgraded phone system will allow employees to call using their work phone caller ID on their smart phone via an app.**

“Effectively, their smart phone may be used like a work desk phone,” Ballard said. “A second phase is planned that allows calls to be sent/received using Microsoft Teams.

- **Connect online forms to systems and workflows.**

“We won’t need to include paper documents floating around the workplace.” Davis said. “Moving away from paper, making forms fillable and being able to be signed is what made administrative processes keep functioning,” Ballard said. “The next phase is connecting the data collected by online forms into integrated workflows and systems so that processes run faster and people don’t need to re-enter data collected from the forms into other systems.”

- **Computer security during COVID-19 is heightened.** A significant increase in

phishing attempts has occurred during the coronavirus. Kracht is moving forward with employee education initiatives; enhanced “multi-factor authentication” settings and coronavirus-related phishing prevention as threats increase.

1. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/05/it-services-managers-in-teams-v7.jpg>

Records Management Customers Make the Switch to Digital Convenience from COVID-19 and Beyond (2020-05-28 11:57) - hcdetx





During COVID-19, more school districts and municipalities are seeking digital solutions for record keeping. The steady flow of requests keeps six digital record keepers busy at Harris County Department of Education's Records Management Division.

Fifty-four customers mean being responsible for storage of 625,000 hard copies and 4,000 microfilm records. HCDE's spacious records warehouse at 6005 Westview at North Post Oak accommodates the information.

Records range from student transcripts to employee personnel files to other legal documents. It's business as usual during the pandemic as HCDE Records Management staff work two days a week onsite and three days a week at home.

"COVID will change our business model tremendously," HCDE Records Management Director Curtis Davis said. "With all current and new customers, we will insist on digitizing daily use records. We have the software to help customers through our secure, work-at-home technology."

Services from the 20-year-old Records Management Division continue to evolve to meet the needs of clients. In addition to time spent with hard copy storage and digital scanning, meetings have gone virtual with Microsoft Teams and Zoom. Document shredding and strict record security measures ensure customer confidentiality and customer web training continues to thrive. Additionally, the Records Management staff members ensure that administrative matters are answered promptly.

A large digital project with the City of Houston HR Benefits recently required 1.7 million pages to be processed. The job took 10 months to complete as staff meticu-

lously scanned 701 document boxes.

[2]



Several scanners help Records Management complete high-volume jobs: a Canon DR-G1130 image formula scanner for regular copies and a Contex HD Ultra for large construction maps. Microfiche and microfilm are converted with the E-Image microfilm scanner.

The process of scanning or digitizing is not that tedious, but it is precise, says Davis. Document security is paramount.

When being digitized, all documents are checked for cleanliness, and then they are scanned. For quality control, pages are reviewed for clarity. Each capture of information is identified. To complete the process, a CD is sent to the customer.

Although most customers are moving to digital record-keeping, some customers retain hard copies and microfilm storage. Davis urges clients to think about pandemics, natural disasters and other emergencies that make digital copies more convenient and safer.

“Think about how many times you looked for that one paper you needed right away and could not find,” Davis said. “I know I would like to see all my records without going to storage and find a box.

“As we face the new normal, I think we will rely on digital records more than ever.”

For more information about Records Management Division services, go to [3]<https://hcde-texas.org/records-management> or email cdavis@hcde-texas.org.

1. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/05/img_1948-2.jpg
 2. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/05/records-digitizers-1.jpg>
 3. <https://hcde-texas.org/records-management>
-

Mural Artist, Principal Share Vision for Aquatic Sensory Room at New HCDE School (2020-05-28 11:57) - hcdetx





Mural artist Anat Ronen and Harris County Department of Education Principal Dr. Victor Keys share pride and a sense of accomplishment as they view the muraled sensory room at Academic and Behavior School West. The room is a cool, colorful, artistic, under-the-sea playground filled with flora and fauna.

The pandemic gave the unlikely pair the perfect space and time to collaborate on the project.

[2]View photo gallery

[3]View video

The 20-by-25, square-foot room is now a place where children with autism and behavior disorders can go to decompress and connect with friendly sea creatures: a giant thoughtful turtle, curious zebra fish, an smart octopus, a smiling shark, 180

inconspicuous stingrays and more.

[youtube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j92IPLsnQeg> &w=560 &h=315]

“Wherever you go is a story,” Ronen said, spinning around with a 360 view of the room with the underwater view. “I do murals, and I cater to the location and its needs.”

Originally Ronen had a one-week deadline to complete the artwork in the sensory room, an umbrella term used to talk about a therapeutic safe space used for therapy for children with limited communication skills.

When the pandemic hit, Ronen decided to stretch the project to two weeks to tell the underwater story. The challenge was to come up with a fish tank which was not repetitive. The panoramic view of the room tells a complete visual aquatic story.

[4]



“I hope this room brings these students peace and joy and that they concoct all kinds of stories in their heads,” the artist said. “This will be their own room to have fun and relax in.”

Keys is looking forward to the day when his students with intellectual, developmental and behavioral needs experience the sensory room at the new school.

“It’s breathtaking,” he said, pointing to his favorite wall with a string of sting rays. “This is something that is magnificent.”

Within the sensory room, sound systems and visuals will add to the calming ex-

perience. Plans include using the room for physical and music therapy.

“This room will give out students a chance to calm down and refocus their attention,” he said. “We’ll also use experience as a behavior reinforcement.”

Ronen, 49, is a self-taught artist who moved to Houston from Israel with her husband 13 years ago.

Keys is amazed at the processes the artist used to create the sensory room with acrylic and water-based house paint. A wall projector allowed the artist to bring the Google-referenced likenesses of the sea creatures into the room. They soon took on their own personas.

The turtle is the cornerstone of where the story began.

[5]



“Once I complete a section, I have a key for the rest of the room,” Ronen said.

Mr. Turtle is Ronen’s favorite character in the sensory room because she associates his slow, thoughtful moves with her own. Keys favors the stingray because he is always looking and watching, much like a principal.

“The next thing you know, he comes out of nowhere,” Keys said, laughing at the commonalities.

The students who will use the room can be likened to the sea creatures: each is unique, individual and beautiful unto themselves.

“I was on a mission to make things right,” Ronen said, checking the room over for a last time. “And it felt good to know this room is for kids.”

(Approximately 150 students ages 5-22 from Alief, Houston and other surrounding school districts will attend ABS West in southwest Houston at 12772 Medfield Drive, through contracted services with their districts. Sections of the school accommodate life skills students with intellectual disabilities, adaptive behavior students and students on the autism spectrum. Hallmark features of the school include the sensory room, a playground for children with disabilities and rounded-corner rooms for safety and accessibility.)

1. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/05/20200519_sensory_027.jpg
2. <https://hcdetexas.photoshelter.com/gallery/20200519-Sensory/G00008yoEnm5a1M8/C0000MPWE5jMwo.0>
3. https://youtu.be/JGqeNgso_f0
4. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/05/20200519_sensory_002.jpg
5. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/05/20200519_sensory_047.jpg

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when will the new building open

1.6 June

HCDE Learning Expert Says Summer Academic Loss Heightened by COVID-19 Learning Lag (2020-06-04 10:10) - hcdetx





Summer learning expert Dr. Lisa Caruthers concedes that traditional summer learning loss experienced by students will be amplified by COVID-19 learning lag. Other family issues come into play as summer 2020 approaches and the coronavirus continues to be a threat.

“Families are returning to work, and many cannot find summer care for their kids,” Caruthers said. “Kids are stressed from being at home with virtual learning duties without opportunities to play and engage with other children.”

Caruthers heads the Center for Afterschool, Summer and Enrichment for Kids, or CASE for Kids, a division of Harris County Department of Education. CASE for Kids provides resources, trainings and funding for afterschool programs, serving students in grades pre-k through 12 in afterschool programs in schools, childcare facilities and community centers throughout Harris County. As director, Caruthers is also a national presenter and proponent for out-of-school time and summer enrichment for children.



Dr. Lisa Caruthers

Summer learning loss, or “brain drain,” requires at least three weeks of reteaching last year’s lessons. However, learning loss due to COVID-19 adds more sludge into the learning loss equation.

During summer months, research supports that most students lose two months of math skills, and low-income students lose another two-to-three months in reading progress.

“This summer parents are anxious about enrolling their kids in enrichment camps due to concerns about the spread of the virus,” Caruthers said. “If they are staying at

home, there is the issue of finding the right virtual camps and activities.”

[3]



Caruthers says it’s possible to find the right combination so that parents and children feel comfortable this summer.

“It’s a balance of using project-based learning such as hobbies like art and music in combination with virtual learning to maintain a balance while being home-bound,” she said. “During summer it’s important to pair academics with activities which help students create hobbies and potential career interests,” Caruthers said.

A recent study by Big Brothers Big Sisters reveals that the social and emotional well-being of children is critical to consider. Four in 10 youth polled reported depressive symptoms that health experts regard as moderate (27 percent) or severe (13 percent). Such feelings are especially common for girls, with one in two meeting one of these thresholds. Depressive symptoms are significantly less common when youth report a

relatively high degree of support from a special person in their life.

Parents, too, are taxed both emotionally, mentally and physically as they create a balance between work and home. Caruthers, a mother of two children under age 10, fully understands the challenges.

There are several things she says parents can do to support learning during summer and slow the learning loss, Caruthers says:

- Identify your child's interest in books and find books to feed it.
- Prime the mental pump. Museums are offering online options. Mix educational apps in with games your kids play. Create a list of educational YouTube videos. Talk about the videos later.
- Add incentives to your child's learning with quality family time. After academic assignments, play a game as a family. Cook a favorite meal together. Make a wish list of places your child wants to visit this summer.

For summer learning resources, visit the CASE for Kids website and resource list:

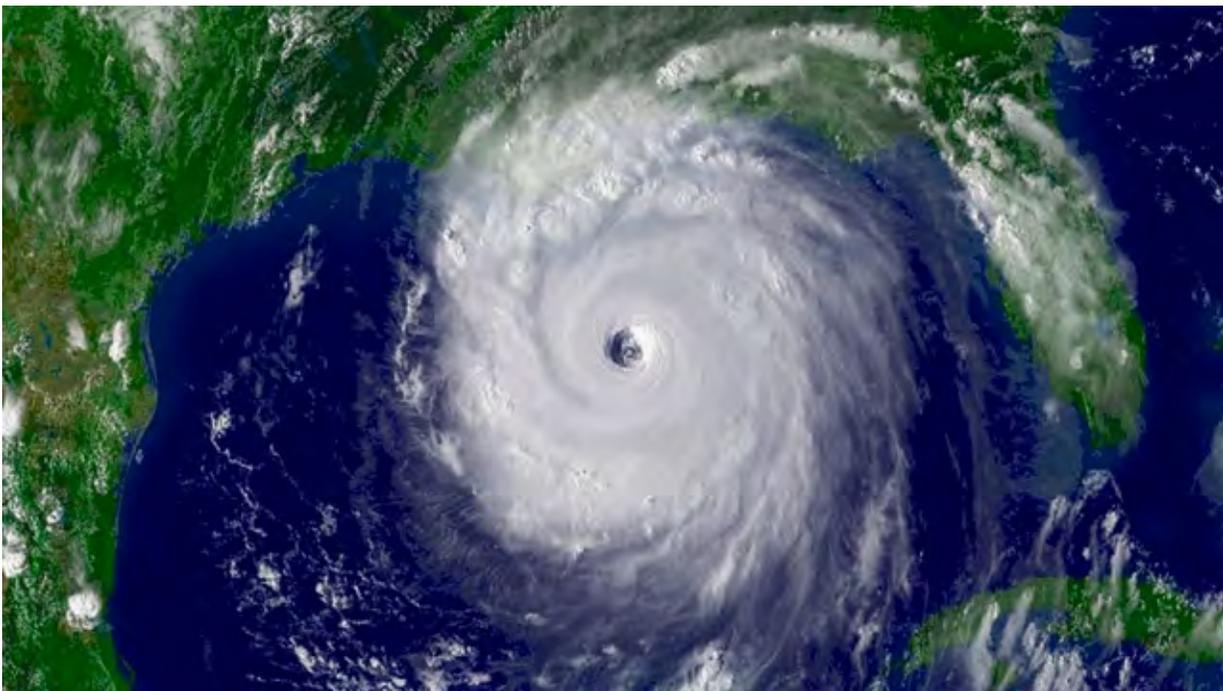
[4]<http://hcde-texas.org/after-school> and [5]<http://hcde-texas.org/media/uploads/2020/04/COVID-19-Resource-List-1.pdf>

1. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/06/img_0782.jpg
 2. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/06/20180124_elt_0095_pp.jpg
 3. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/06/img_0968.jpg
 4. <http://hcde-texas.org/after-school>
 5. <http://hcde-texas.org/media/uploads/2020/04/CC-COVID-19-Resource-List-1.pdf>
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Be Prepared for Predicted Active Hurricane Season Ahead: Center for Safe and Secure Schools (2020-06-04 10:22) - hcdetx



[1]



Weather experts predict an active 2020 hurricane season, and the Center for Safe and Secure Schools urges the community to be prepared with an emergency kit and family communications plan.

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association, the statistics support a 60 percent chance of an above-normal season, a 30 percent chance of a near-normal season and only a 10 percent chance of a below-normal season. Hurricane season runs from June 1-Nov. 30.

“With families still following precautions for COVID-19, it’s hard to think about preparing for the possibility of a major tropical storm or hurricane in our area,” CSSS Director Julia Andrews said. “But we can be prepared with the resources already available to us.”

Andrews recommends making plans to secure property and being ready with hurricane evacuation routes.

“Also, it’s a good time to check your insurance for flood coverage,” she said.

Below is a list of resources to rely upon when planning for the 2020 hurricane season:

1. Build a hurricane kit: [2]<https://www.ready.gov/kit>
2. Make a family communications plan: [3]<https://www.ready.gov/plan>
3. Red Cross safety checklists: [4]<https://rdcrss.org/3ctb2XW>
4. Red Cross emergency app: [5]<https://bit.ly/3dxYVdj>
5. Protection from coronavirus (CDC): [6]<https://bit.ly/2MtLgbg> and the Red Cross at [7]redcross.org/coronavirus.

(The Center was created in 1999 at the request of Harris County superintendents and is tasked with the mission of supporting school districts’ efforts to have safe and secure learning environments. For more school safety resources, go to [8]www.hcde-texas.org/safe-and-secure .)

1. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/06/20200424_153829-003.jpg
2. <https://www.ready.gov/kit>
3. <https://www.ready.gov/plan>
4. <https://rdcrss.org/3ctb2XW>
5. <https://bit.ly/3dxYVdj>
6. <https://bit.ly/2MtLgbg>
7. <https://nam04.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.redcross.org%2Fget-help%2Fhow-to-prepare-for-emergencies%2Ftypes-of-emergencies%2Fcoronavi>
8. <http://www.hcde-texas.org/safe-and-secure>

Webinar to Focus on Psychological Aspects of School Re-entry After COVID-19 (2020-06-04 10:39) - hcdetx





As schools reopen, both children and adults may confront coronavirus anxieties. The Center for Safe and Secure Schools at Harris County Department of Education invites you to virtually attend a free webinar with national partner Scott Poland, Ed.D.: “School Re-entry After Covid-19: A Trauma-Informed Approach to Managing Anxiety and Promoting Social and Emotional Wellness.”

Poland is a national school crisis team leader and president of the National Association of School Psychologists. The webinar is set for June 10, 1 p.m. CST through Facebook: [2]www.facebook.com/NSUPsychology.



Poland

The session focuses on helping school staff with potential anxieties about school resuming. It provides action steps for school administrators as they plan for reopening schools.

Social distancing, face masks, school cleanliness and testing are important practices, but Poland's presentation centers on helping staff and students face psychological challenges.

For more information about school safety practices, contact the center's director, Julia Andrews at jandrews@hcde-texas.org or [4]www.hcde-texas.org/safe-and-secure-

schools.

1. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/06/shutterstock_63875383.jpg
 2. <http://www.facebook.com/NSUPsychology>
 3. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/06/soland.jpg>
 4. <http://www.hcde-texas.org/safe-and-secure-schools>.
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Business Services, Purchasing Divisions Fulfill Financial Duties Electronically, Remotely During Pandemic (2020-06-04 11:57) - hcdetx





Issuing paychecks and paying bills are two critical functions performed in business offices. Harris County Department of Education Assistant Superintendent of Finance Dr. Jesus Amezcua planned for the challenges of the pandemic early-on to make sure his staff could accomplish both of those fiscal responsibilities—and more.

“A very important part of the process is the work our staff contributes daily to the successes of HCDE’s business office,” Amezcua said.

Amezcua is beholden to his division’s unsung heroes for accomplishing the financial tasks which keep an organization running smoothly. One of those 22 employees is Marcia Leia. Her spring break holiday took a sudden twist after a visit to her husband on assignment there.

While visiting during spring break in March, the pandemic spread, and Leia couldn’t leave Ecuador. She and her daughters stayed and are still there. Leia uses her HCDE laptop and internet access to accomplish daily journal entries, financial reports and budget items for her client Head Start.

Teleworking for Business Services and Purchasing employees has meant securing the additional equipment needed to do business: laptops, printers, scanners, computer monitors and office supplies. Connectivity was another issue, Amezcua said. Some employees didn’t have internet access so hot spots were purchased. Zoom and Microsoft Teams accounts were set up for support meetings. Technology employee Andre Jumonville has been particularly helpful, said Amezcua.

“We transitioned 98 percent of our work offsite by using our system and imple-
198

menting various software packages such as Adobe Link, Teams and Zoom,” Amezcua said. “We identified a number of essential personnel who would come to work each Friday to process payroll and accounts payable checks. We started with eight staff out of 21 initially and then reduced it to four—two in accounting, one in payroll and one in accounts payable.”

Staff working onsite are required to socially distance and wear masks. Sanitizers are used routinely. In addition, Facilities Division staff clean areas daily with approved, industrial disinfectant processes. Facilities also helps with routine mail delivery so that payments may be processed.

Another huge project falling under the Business Services umbrella is the HCDE yearly budget and Financial Operation Guidelines training. Those meetings have been accomplished online.

“Documents were shared, and the entire process was converted to an electronic platform, and time and money was saved by this implementation,” Amezcua said. “This process as well as the electronic signatures of various documents will be maintained moving forward.”

In fact, electronic files are now standard fare for Business Services. The pandemic has changed the way the Business Services and Purchasing divisions now conduct business, Amezcua explained.

Operations within the Purchasing Division have changed as well. Adobe Link allows staff to submit credit card reports (P-Card) electronically. Credit limits have been stretched to allow for emergency purchasing for divisions needing to purchase additional telework equipment and other supplies.

“I am very proud on my staff,” Amezcua said. “They have adapted, and they have risen to the challenge. We continue to produce checks, payroll, contracts, purchase orders, financial statements, budget amendments, investment reports and agenda items as routine. Except now, they are all done electronically.”

1. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/06/20200424_153829-003-1.jpg

Facilities Remains On Call 24-7 and Responsive to Employee Needs During Pandemic (2020-06-11 09:56) - hcdetx





The workplace window view from Facilities Executive Director Rich Vela's office changes moment-by-moment as he travels from meetings to the 24 facilities his division manages for Harris County Department of Education. His Ford F-150 truck sees many miles and is privy to countless conference calls.

Like many HCDE employees, he and his 150 employees are teleworking during the pandemic. Many Facilities employees have offices on wheels.

Facilities Support Services supports HCDE by maintaining and improving campuses, offices and other learning and working environments. During the pandemic, the division is proactive and is an umbrella for many essential services: building maintenance, grounds upkeep, records management, custodial services, Choice Partners co-op services and coordinating the reopening of HCDE buildings and schools.

"The biggest challenge we face is that we're living in unprecedented times," Vela said. "We must work virtually, maintain social distancing, schedule essential services and keep everyone safe in the mix."



Richard Vela

As HCDE closed in March, his division maintained limited access to 6005 Westview and 6300 Irvington offices for essential services like mail and package intake, payroll and accounts payable services and human resources matters. Each time buildings are opened, they are cleaned and disinfected by custodial staff.

Because of immediate access to Choice Partners vendor products, HCDE didn't experience as many product shortages like some organizations. COVID-19 product essentials purchased through the co-op range from paper products to cleaning supplies to hand sanitizers to disinfectant misting machines to face masks.

“As we see the pandemic easing up, the products are more readily available,” Vela said.

[3]



Facilities staff tries to be reactive and considerate to each request when employees require access to buildings. Teachers and students needed laptops. Directors and staff retrieved office essentials. Building doors are opened, disinfected and then closed again.

“Every director in my division—from Choice Partners to Maintenance to Construction to Records Management—I lean on,” he said. “Whatever is needed is what we are doing. We are always on call.”

At the onset, Head Start was proactive with the “Because We Care” food distribution which required multiple teams to help with purchasing, boxing and delivering the 1,000-plus care boxes over a three-month span.

“We had never done anything like that before,” Vela said. “It was logistically challenging—storing food, building boxes and communicating throughout the process.

“Yet everyone on my staff is willing to do what it takes to get the job done.”

Another significant change is moving to electronic billing and payment, he said.

“The whole business practice of continuity of operations has been challenging, but we have gotten better over the months,” Vela said.

[4]



The planned opening for the new Academic and Behavior School West also came in the middle of the pandemic. Furniture and fixtures arrived so staff was on hand for delivery and installation. Offices and classrooms were moved. Last minute phone calls come from contractors who need building access. Emergencies occur when burglar alarms go off in the middle of the night or a fire alarm malfunctions. Staff is usually onsite within 15 minutes, he says.

“No one has ever balked at any of it,” Vela said. “I couldn’t be more blessed than having the staff I have right now.”

Facilities is working with Human Resources and the Executive Team for the re-entry

plan next month. That means retraining custodial staff in workplace safety practices for COVID-19. Employees will also get new directives in workplace safety.

“The weeks ahead will be labor intensive,” Vela said. “The weeks to come will be more hectic than they have been in the past, but we have been planning for this.

1. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/06/20200612_facilities_041.jpg
 2. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2018/07/20180711_vela_0005.jpg
 3. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/06/20200612_facilities_014.jpg
 4. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/06/20200612_facilities_073.jpg
-

Food Distribution No. 3 for HCDE Head Start Families Supplies Average 20 Meals Per Box (2020-06-11 09:59) - hcdetx

[1]



Twenty meals will save a family of four approximately \$200. In a third round of food distributions, Harris County Department of Education Head Start and Early Head Start families receive food boxes at designated Head Start Center locations in northeast Harris County.

The 20 meals of peanut butter, bread, beans, soup, rice, vegetables, fruit, mashed potatoes and grits inside “Because We Care” food boxes are making a difference for 1,350 the HCDE Head Start families.

“We had an estimated 10-plus meals per box in the first round and 20-plus meals per box for a family of four for our second and third distributions,” HCDE Head Start Nutrition Services Manager Sandra Pearson said.

The HCDE Board approved the care package program through an emergency board meeting in March, appropriating \$250,000 in funding for food for Head Start

206

families. After distribution No. 3, approximately 17,600 meals have been provided to the families.

[2]



Head Start staffs the distribution, and families drive through to receive the care boxes. Students are also given books and summer activities to help with at-home learning.

“We continue to thank the HCDE Board as we complete our third food distribution,” HCDE Head Start Senior Director Venetia Peacock said.

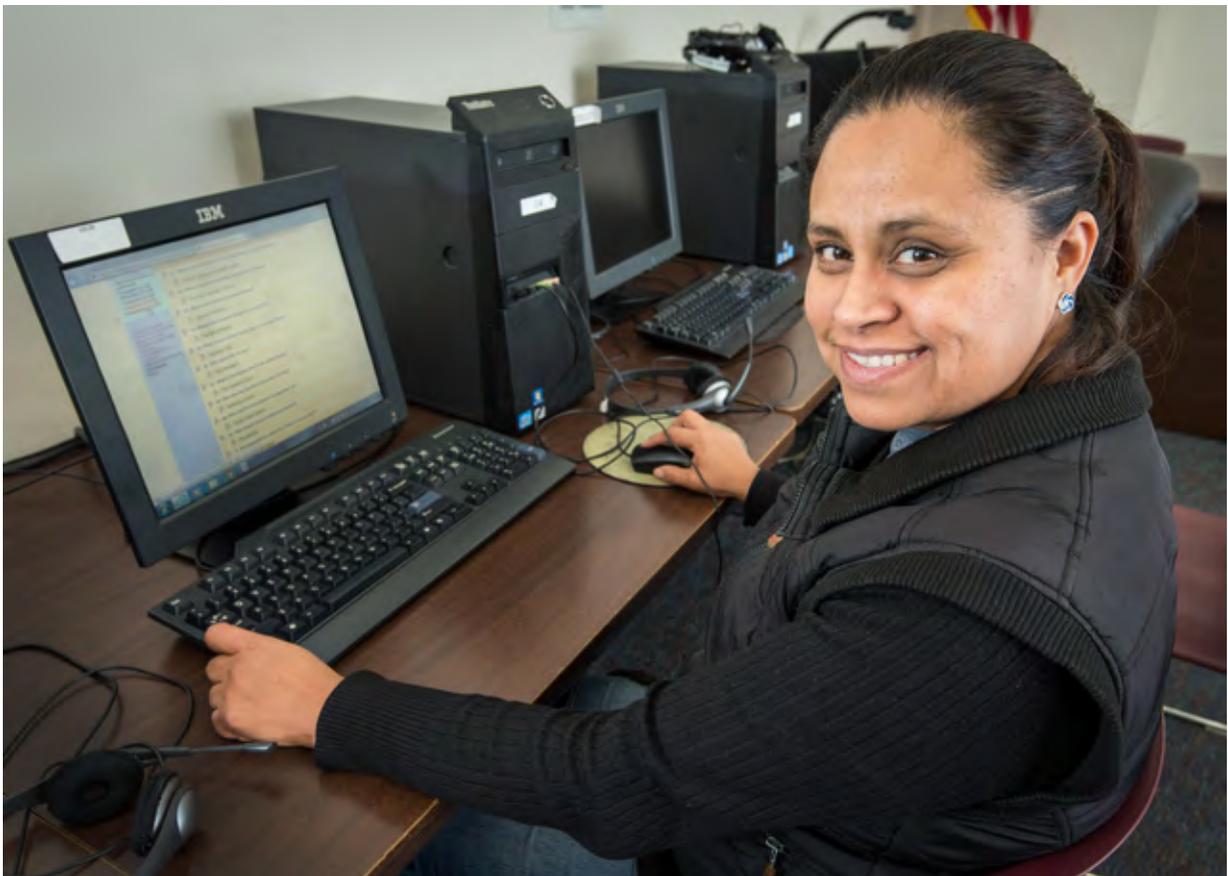
Head Start is currently recruiting Head Start and Early Head Start students for the 2020-2021 school year. Families interested in the no-cost program may call 713-672-9343. For more information, go to [3]www.hcde-texas.org/Head-Start .

1. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/06/tidwell-1.jpg>
2. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/06/tidwell-3.jpg>
3. <http://www.hcde-texas.org/Head-Start>

Amanda Molina - Araujo (2020-06-18 11:37:02)

I have been trying to get ahold of someone for weeks... none of the phone numbers work.
Please call me at +12818389482 to discuss enrollment for my 3 year old.

Enroll in Virtual ESL, GED Summer Classes Offered Free Via Harris County Department of Education (2020-06-18 11:13) - hcdetx





More than 40 Harris County Department of Education Adult Education teachers are preparing for their summer English as a second language (ESL) and GED virtual classes which will begin in July. The no-cost classes feature teacher and classmates meeting online several times a week, combined with online learning programs.

Registration for free classes ends June 24. Students are assessed for learning levels beginning with an intake questionnaire and will be contacted by HCDE Adult Education staff: [2]<https://tinyurl.com/HCDEadulted>.

“Now more than ever, it’s evident that technology should be a part of the learning process as a critical skill set,” HCDE Adult Education Director Stephanie Ross said.

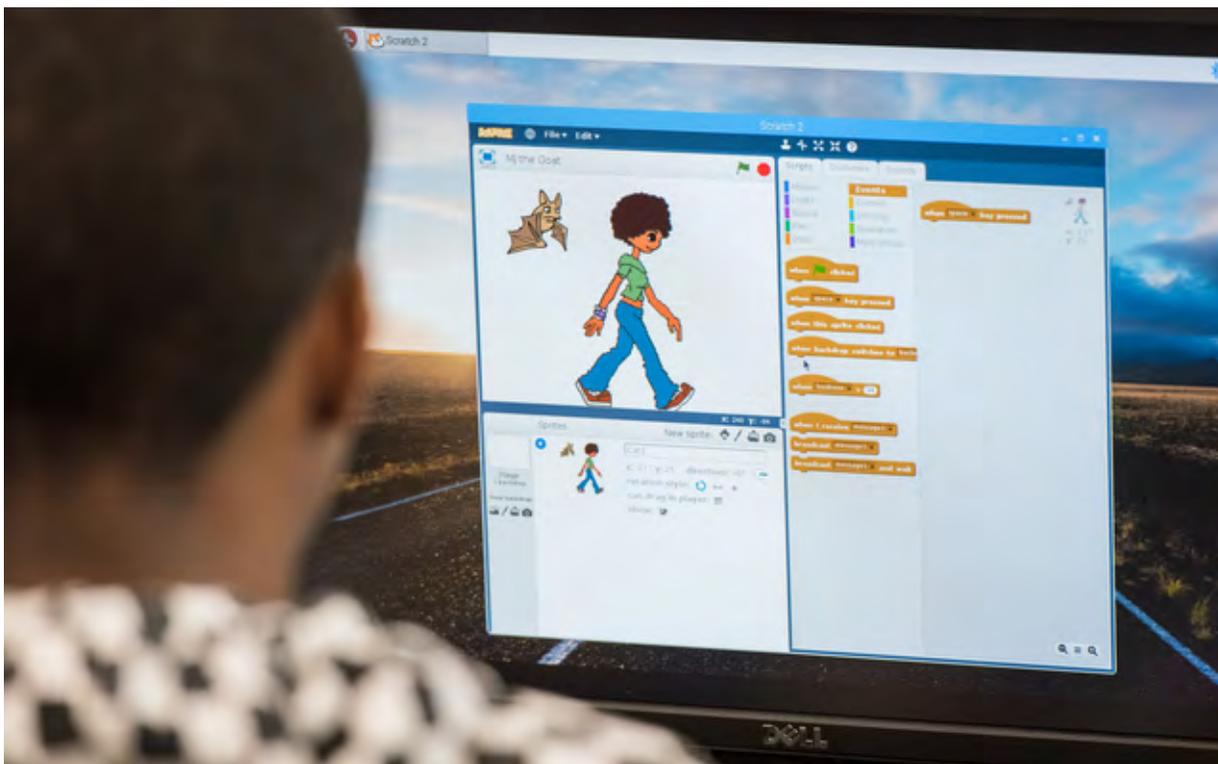
“Engaging adult learners with technology skills with the assistance of their teacher during the pandemic helps prepare them for lifelong learning while also keeping them safe through social distancing.”

With 35 years of experience, HCDE Adult Education is the largest adult education
210

program in the state. Adult learners are empowered by highly qualified teachers with the academic and workforce skills they need for lifelong learning success.

Classes include GED, adult basic education, adult secondary education, English as a second language, and English language civics (to prepare for citizenship exams).

[3]



Students will visit a central learning platform to gain assignments and assistance. Curriculum and online learning platforms used are proven, established systems. An information form must be completed to be considered for classes. Intake testing and orientation to online learning are part of the program.

“It’s never too late for learning, and we are very excited to launch our virtual learning platform this summer to help adult learners in a dual approach to education to combine technology with classroom learning,” Ross said.

To enroll, go to [4]<https://tinyurl.com/HCDEadulted>. Visit [5]<http://www.hcde-texas.org/adult-education> for more information.

1. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/06/adult-ed-computer.jpg>
2. <https://tinyurl.com/HCDEadulted>
3. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/06/20190724_cyber_0087.jpg
4. <https://tinyurl.com/HCDEadulted>

5. <http://www.hcde-texas.org/adult-education>

Brenda millan (2020-06-19 12:06:28)

I want to take ged class .

HCDE Expands Head Start Services from Infancy to Preschool through \$11.7 Million Grant; Families Urged to Enroll
(2020-06-24 15:03) - hcdetx





Harris County Department of Education has been awarded a \$11.7 million federal Head Start grant for the 2020-2021 school year. The new grant allows HCDE to expand comprehensive childcare and school readiness services to families in its northeast Harris County service area. HCDE Head Start will serve 1,000 preschoolers ages 3-5 and 64 children ages 6 weeks to 3.

“As we recruit families for the 2020-2021 school year, we shift to offering comprehensive services to families beginning at infancy, supplying low-income families or families of children with disabilities the support they need to raise healthy children who are successful throughout their school years,” HCDE Head Start Senior Director Venetia Peacock said.

The grant provides Early Head Start services expansion for children ages 6 weeks to 3 years within the Tidwell and La Porte Head Start communities. HCDE already serves 100 Baytown-area infants and toddlers through a separate Early Head Start grant.

HCDE’s Head Start service area covers approximately 600 miles of the northeast and southeast sections of Harris County, including downtown Houston. Twelve school districts fall within HCDE’s service borders, including Channelview, Clear Creek, Crosby, Deer Park, Galena Park, Goose Creek Consolidated, Houston, Huffman, Humble, La Porte, Pasadena and Sheldon.

“The importance of serving low-income children and their families in Harris County has never been more critical,” said Peacock. “More than 15 percent of uninsured Texas children live in Harris County.

“In addition, Harris County has approximately 350,000 children under age 5, but only six percent are enrolled in preschool programs.”

The grant provides \$10.4 million for Head Start services and \$1.3 million for Early Head Start services and goes into effect July 1, 2020.

Head Start ensures future success for students both academically and socially and provides comprehensive health, education, nutrition and financial services to families. Healthy meals and snacks are provided for students during the day.

[2]



Parent involvement opportunities are provided along with service referrals to meet family needs. Family engagement activities are hallmark to the program. Eligible children are those from low-income families and with disabilities between ages 6 weeks to 5 years of age.

Applicants will need to present the following at registration:

- **Proof of age:** child's state birth certificate, state birth facts or passport
- **Proof of address:** lease contract, current utility bill, state ID, benefits letter or paycheck stub
- **Proof of income:** current tax form (W-2 or 1040), 12 months of check stubs, child support payment record, verification of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families or Supplemental Security Income.

To get information about enrolling your child in HCDE Head Start in 2020-2021, call 713-672-9343 or go to [3]www.hcde-texas.org/head-start .

1. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/06/20190418_earlyhs_0322.jpg
2. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/06/20190523_baytown_0204.jpg
3. <http://www.hcde-texas.org/head-start>

From HCDE Head Start Student to High School Valedictorian
(2020-06-25 08:58) - hcdetx





To prove that the Harris County Department of Education Head Start program helps prepare students for their future academic studies, just ask former HCDE Coolwood Center student Zoe Miles. She is the 2020 valedictorian of her class at Sage Academy in Brooklyn Park, MN.

Her mother, Joanna Beale, served as an HCDE Head Start teacher at the Coolwood Center in northeast Houston from 2006 to 2008. Miles attended the same center from January to May 2008.

As a former Head Start student in the 1960s, Beale is an advocate for Head Start because of how it can help kids succeed, especially those from low-income families.

“This was a blessing to Zoe as we qualified for her to go to help with her aca-
218

demic and social skills,” said Beale. “I noticed she began talking better and more (frequently), along with learning how to write her name.

“Center personnel also discovered she had a hearing problem thanks to the testing they did, so she was able to have surgery to fix the problem.”

Her mother appreciates how Head Start also deals with the medical aspects. Many families are unable to pay for or find the health services their children need. Head Start staff helped identify medical issues early on.

Zoe remembers times with her best friend she made in pre-k and was close with through elementary school. They enjoyed holiday celebrations and events like hat day.

Beale and her family moved to Minnesota in 2009.

“We value her time with Head Start because it gave Zoe her foundation to live by during her school career and helped her step out of her comfort zone,” Beale said. “She took advanced courses while in junior high and high school.”

During her last semester, Zoe was a dual-credit student and took classes at North Hennepin Community College along with her classes at Sage Academy.

Due to COVID-19, her graduation date was rescheduled to Aug. 27. She finished her high school coursework with a 3.81 GPA.

Zoe has been accepted into two colleges, so far—Metropolitan State University and Winona State University. She is still waiting to hear back from the University of Minnesota, the university of her choice.

She intends to major in human services with plans for a career in social work after graduating from college.

1. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/06/zoe-grad.jpg>

1.7 July

Technology Employee Kracht Follows HAM Radio Hobby During Pandemic (2020-07-01 16:18) - hcdetx



[1]



While some HCDE employees spend free time during the pandemic gardening or catching up on reading, Technology Division employee John Kracht is beefing up his amateur radio operator skills.

Being an amateur radio operator can be expensive or inexpensive, depending on one's desire or ability to invest in the hobby, he said. Kracht bought his first hand-held, tri-band radio for \$65 and another VHF/UHF 10 and six-meter band mobile for \$250. However, cost of a high-end rig and antenna can rival the purchase of a large-screen, LED TV.

Talking to fellow operators in faraway locations can be tricky, depending on factors like antenna height, wattage, radio-frequency time of year and day and weather conditions. He communicates with operators from Alaska to Connecticut to the United Kingdom.

“A big factor is the sun’s radiation and sunspots altering the ionosphere or space weather,” he said.

According to Kracht, HAM radio origins go back to the early 1900s. The acronym stems from the initials of three wireless operators from the Harvard Radio Club in 1908.

“To some people it feels like old technology with radios using vacuum tubes and using Morse code to make contact,” the 20-year HCDE employee said. “Those technologies are still used and aren’t going away anytime soon, but there are new digital modes of radio communication that use computers, computer protocols and data packets to communicate at very low power.”

Getting your license to become a HAM operator requires an interest in electronics and passing a series of exams. Kracht began his journey four years ago when a part-time security officer at HCDE was studying for his technician’s exam. Sparking his interest, Kracht did a bit of research and took the dive.

[2]



“Being a part of our (HCDE) disaster, planning and recovery, I knew from my past the HAM radio played a big part in post-disaster communications,” he said.

Although he has never used his abilities during an actual disaster, he monitored local radio activity during Harvey recovery. Today he notes reports as operators discuss the pandemic in various regions of the country.

“Some HAM operators take part in a message service, relaying messages from station to station all over the world,” he said.

To prepare for licensing, HAM enthusiasts do need a basic understanding of algebra and must study two months to prepare for a 35-question exam. Radio operator permissions expand as certifications and licenses are acquired.

Just how popular is amateur radio operating? Kracht says some astronauts hold licenses and communicate from the International Space Station. Satellites are also dedicated to amateur radio operations.

Although he didn't reveal any specifics, he says amateur radio operators can be an interesting lot.

“There are some characters on the airwaves,” Kracht said.

For more information about becoming an amateur radio operator, contact the American Radio Relay League: [3]<http://www.arrl.org/licensing-education-training>.

(Do you have a hobby you have been investing time in during the pandemic? To be considered for a Hub feature, email communications@hcde-texas.org.)

1. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/07/20200630_181922_resized-1.jpg
2. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/07/20200630_155923_resized.jpg
3. <http://www.arrl.org/licensing-education-training>

July 4th Fun Factors in Safety with Fireworks, Swimming, Grilling (2020-07-02 07:43) - hcdetx





As small groups of family and friends remain COVID-19 cautious this July 4th holiday, they turn to barbeque, fireworks and pools for summer entertainment.

Firework stands are doing a landslide business in 2020, even though fireworks are illegal through regions of Harris County. Backyard barbeque gatherings and swim parties may be in the works through small gatherings.

Here are some safety factors to consider as we celebrate the birth of our nation:

Fireworks: For a daily average nationwide, 243 people visit the emergency room for firework-related injuries during weeks surrounding July 4th. The age group most likely to get hurt around fireworks isn't children; it's adults ages 25-44 (34 percent). Check the ordinances in your neighborhood in order to avoid fines or enjoy community-sanctioned fireworks displays. Read these safety tips from the [2]Consumer Products Safety Commission.[3] View poster.

[4]

Fireworks Injuries

243 people on average go to the emergency room every day with fireworks-related injuries in the month around the July 4th holiday.



Fireworks Safety Tips

- ★ Never allow **children** to play with or ignite fireworks.
- ★ Make sure fireworks are **legal** in your area before buying or using them.
- ★ Keep a **bucket of water** or a **garden hose** handy in case of fire or other mishap.
- ★ Light fireworks **one at a time**, then **move back** quickly.
- ★ **Never** try to **re-light** or **pick up** fireworks that have not ignited fully.
- ★ More Fireworks Safety Tips – www.cpsc.gov/fireworks

Source: U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission 2019 Fireworks Annual Report
 *ED treated injuries during the Special Study period June 21 - July 21, 2019

Injuries by Fireworks Type*



Injuries by Age



Swimming: Swimming is a great form of exercise, but parents/caregivers always need to remember to watch children around the water. Drowning is a leading cause of death in children under age 5. Follow these precautions for open and enclosed bodies of water offered by the [5]American Academy of Pediatrics.

Grilling: Three out of five households own a gas grill, which means a lot of great food and family times. However, July is the peak month for grill fires as more homeowners turn off their ovens. With cooking safety in mind, we share these safety tips from the [6]National Fire Protection Association.

1. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/07/shutterstock_141669865.jpg
 2. <https://www.cpsc.gov/Newsroom/News-Releases/2020/Fourth-of-July-Celebrations-May-Look-a-Little-Different-this-Year-but-CPSC-Reminds-Consumers-Safety-Still-Rules>
 3. <http://hcde-texas.org/media/uploads/2020/07/Fireworks-Poster-2020.pdf>
 4. <http://hcde-texas.org/media/uploads/2020/07/Fireworks-Poster-2020.pdf>
 5. <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/safety-prevention/at-play/Pages/Summer-Safety-Tips-Sun-and-Water-Safety.aspx>
 6. https://www.nfpa.org/-/media/Files/Public-Education/Resources/Safety-tip-sheets/Grilling_safety_Tips.pdf
-

HCDE Communicators Gain 2020 Top National Public Relations Association Award (2020-07-09 10:42) - hcdetx



[1]



Harris County Department of Education has been awarded the 2020 Gold Medallion Award from the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA). The top honor was awarded to eight school districts and education organizations across the nation in a competitive entry process.

The award recognizes the comprehensive, strategic communications campaign HCDE launched in 2019 called [2]“See the Impact.”

The campaign is the brainchild of HCDE communicators and includes video, billboards, social media advertisements and print messaging which explains HCDE programs and services and their impact on the education in the region and the community as a whole. It was designed to raise awareness of HCDE in the region and help taxpayers and residents understand what the organization does and how it positively impacts not only the greater Houston area, but Texas and the country as well.

“We are extremely proud to provide services such as special schools, school-based therapy, the largest adult education program in Texas, Head Start and afterschool programs to school districts and the general public in greater Harris County,” HCDE Superintendent James Colbert Jr. said. “This campaign helps us spread the word about our valued services so that we can increase our reach and improve the quality of life for residents, educators and students alike.”

A virtual celebration of achievement will be hosted by NSPRA in early July to display the winning campaigns. Several winners, including HCDE, will present during a virtual breakout session, discussing their winning campaigns and giving tips to other districts for how to create and implement strategic communications efforts. The winners are typically awarded at the national convention, which is cancelled due to the pandemic.



[3]

NSPRA is a national nonprofit organization which provides school communication support, training and services to several thousand school leaders throughout the United States and Canada. It is one of a handful of internationally recognized public relations associations.

About Harris County Department of Education: HCDE is a unique, educational hybrid serving school districts, governmental agencies, nonprofits and the public in the third-largest county in the U.S. HCDE annually serves a quarter-million students and educators through schools for students with profound special needs; the largest adult education program in Texas; Head Start early childhood education; school-based therapy services; and afterschool programs. Educator professional development and certification, school safety, records management, and a purchasing cooperative are also provided. #SeeTheImpact at [4]www.hcde-texas.org.

[youtube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JEF_a2uus5Q &w=560 &h=315]

1. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/07/see-the-impact-cover.jpg>
2. https://youtu.be/JEF_a2uus5Q
3. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/07/gold-medallion-gold-186x186-1.gif>
4. <https://nam04.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.hcde-texas.org&data=02%7C01%7Ccvaughn%40hcde-texas.org%7C0c924b19e1bc4123d76208d784d33849%7>

Pearl Spa (2020-07-15 03:09:18)
Congratulations HCDE!!

2 New HCDE Podcast Series Help Public Navigate COVID-19 School Issues, Mental Health, Racial Equity (2020-07-09 11:03)

- hcdetx



[1]



Two new, free podcast series launched this summer and fall by Harris County Department of Education address social-emotional issues; wellness and safety needs of the education community; and racial equity in schools.

“The Wellness Space,” hosted by Errica Dotson-Hooper of HCDE’s Teaching and Learning Center (TLC) and “Take Care Tuesdays” provided by the HCDE’s Center for Safe and Secure Schools (CSSS) tackle education issues related to COVID-19 and other topics impacting education.

“We provide feedback from experts on a wide variety of social-emotional and mental health issues through varied stakeholders, including superintendents, principals, teachers, students and parents,” Dotson-Hooper said.

Physical and emotional safety in school communities is the focus of “Take Care Tuesdays” as licensed professionals share dialogue regarding safe culture and climate that promotes deeper learning for students.

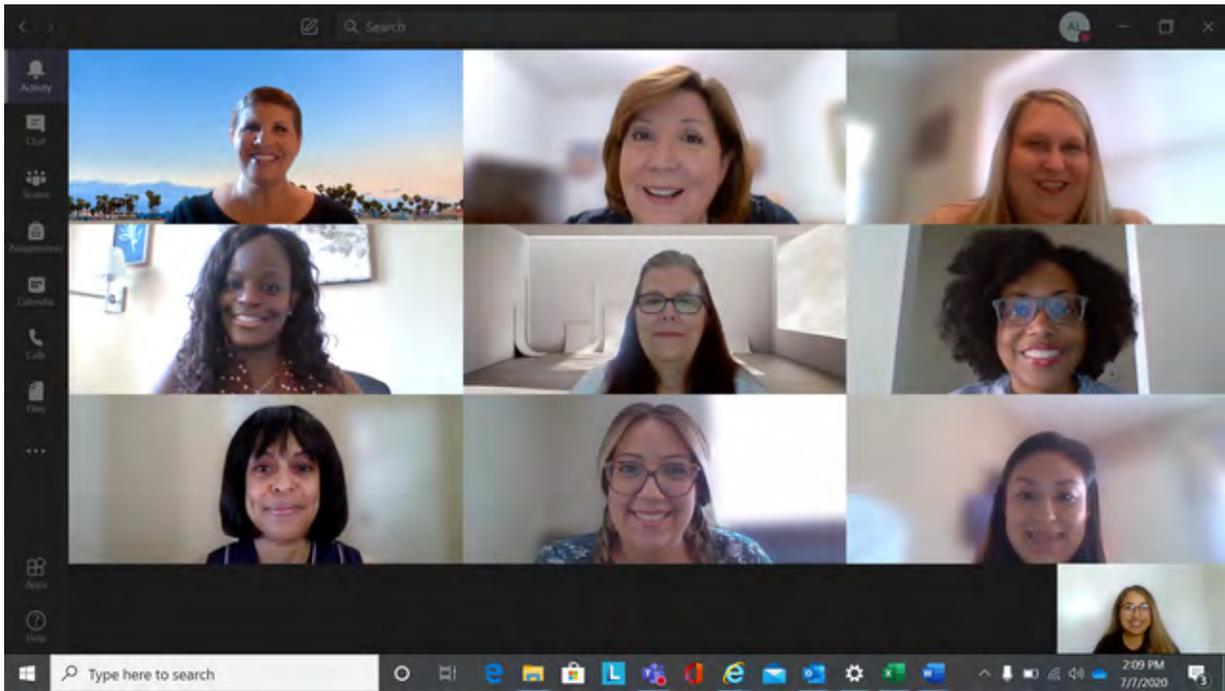
“We realize that many people are struggling now and feel that these conversations can help both educators and community members,” CSSS Director Julia Andrews said.

Examples of upcoming podcasts include national presenter Michael Dorn on Tuesday, July 14: “Re-Entry into Schools: School Policy Changes Post COVID-19.” “Helping Children Navigate Grief” is the topic July 17. Scott Poland brings “Campus Safety Strategies for Staff and Students” Aug. 11. “Threat Assessment Management: In the Virtual School Setting” is provided by Melissa Reeves Sept. 8 and “Mindfulness Practices for Educators” is Sept. 15 with Ann Friedman.

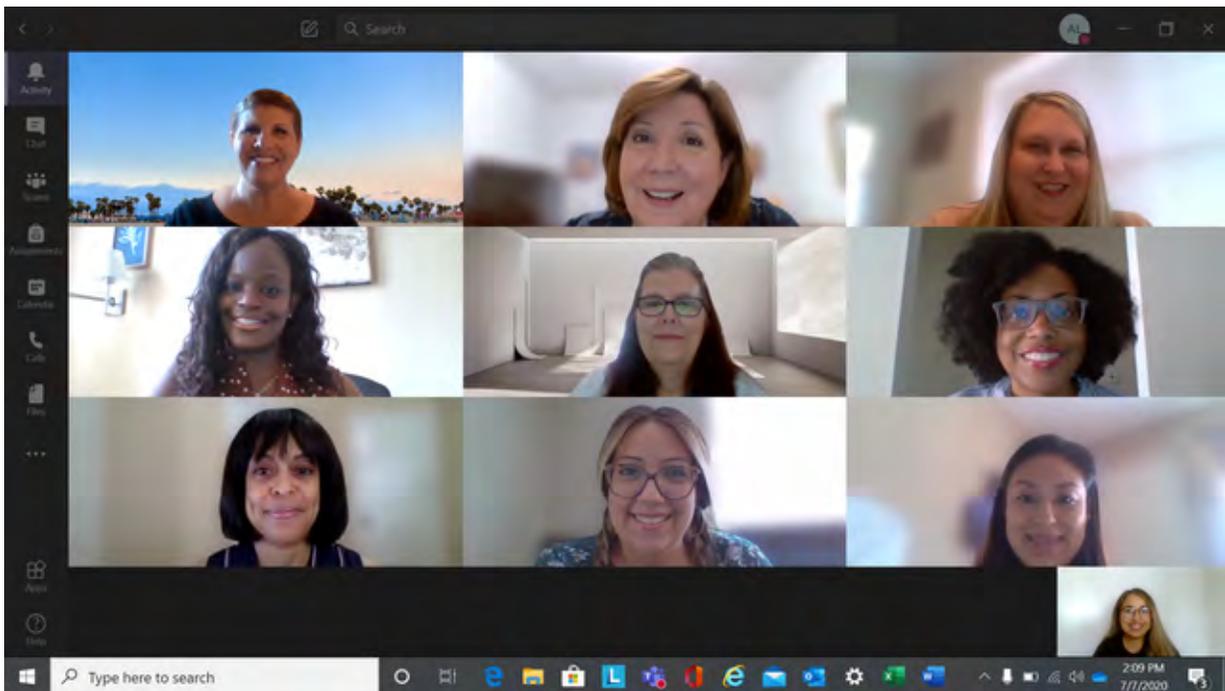
The podcasts are available through Apple Music, Google Play or Spotify. For more information, email edotson-hooper@hcde-texas.org or jowolabi@hcde-texas.org .

1. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/07/podcasts.png>

HCDE Human Resources Depends on Virtual Resources to Serve Current, Future Employees (2020-07-09 11:44) - hcdetx



[1]



COVID-19 will have a lasting impact on the human resource landscape. Status quo processes like in-person hiring are a thing of the past. Shared technologies have streamlined HR processes.

Platforms like Indeed, LinkedIn and Facebook are used instead of in-person recruitment fairs. HR recruiters meet candidates virtually through online platforms like Zoom.

“Virtual recruiting has enlarged or changed the applicant pool to extend beyond the Texas borders,” recruitment coordinator Roxanne Torres said.

Online trainings are expanding as school districts protect employees and make HR services more efficient.

All staff will have the opportunity to view returning staff orientation at their leisure through a new learning management system being implemented by HCDE.

“We will be using Blackboard as the platform to provide HCDE Returning Staff Orientation and future new employee orientation sessions,” Patty Menard, assistant director said. “This learning management system will allow us to track who has completed the survey without the employee having to submit proof to us.”

HCDE employees are now receiving and signing documents electronically. Instead of sending mounds of papers, new employees get a general benefits overview list. HR benefits representatives Regina Johnson and Candy Sosa send back the employee’s check-listed documents.

“We are creative and continue to learn new things for efficiency,” Menard said.

The traditional HR communications pipeline has been the physical human resources office, says HCDE Human Resources Executive Director Natasha Truitt. The pandemic and social distancing has changed that practice to protect employee health.

For example, questions about the switch from insurance company Aetna to Blue Cross Blue Shield will be handled this year through email and phone. Employees may request appointments with benefits staff through Zoom or Teams.

Menard said HR continues to assist HCDE staff with individual needs during the pandemic, providing documents such as service records and employment verifications. HR personnel provide scheduled, on-premises services at Irvington. As the new school year approaches, safety and security for the approximate 1,200 employees is nonnegotiable.

“We have been working with Facilities on our pandemic re-entry plan and look forward to another productive year serving the districts and our education public as we make a positive impact on education,” Truitt said.

2020-2021 Human Resources Contacts for Employee Services:

Executive Director: Natasha Truitt, ntruitt@hcde-texas.org

Workers' Compensation issues: Patty Menard, assistant director, pmenard@hcde-texas.org

Benefits, health and wellness: Regina Johnson, rjohnson@hcde-texas.org and Candy Sosa, csosa@hcde-texas.org

Employee recruitment: Kris Duke, kduke@hcde-texas.org, Laura Nilon-Williams, lnilon@hcde-texas.org, and Roxanne Torres, rtorres@hcde-texas.org

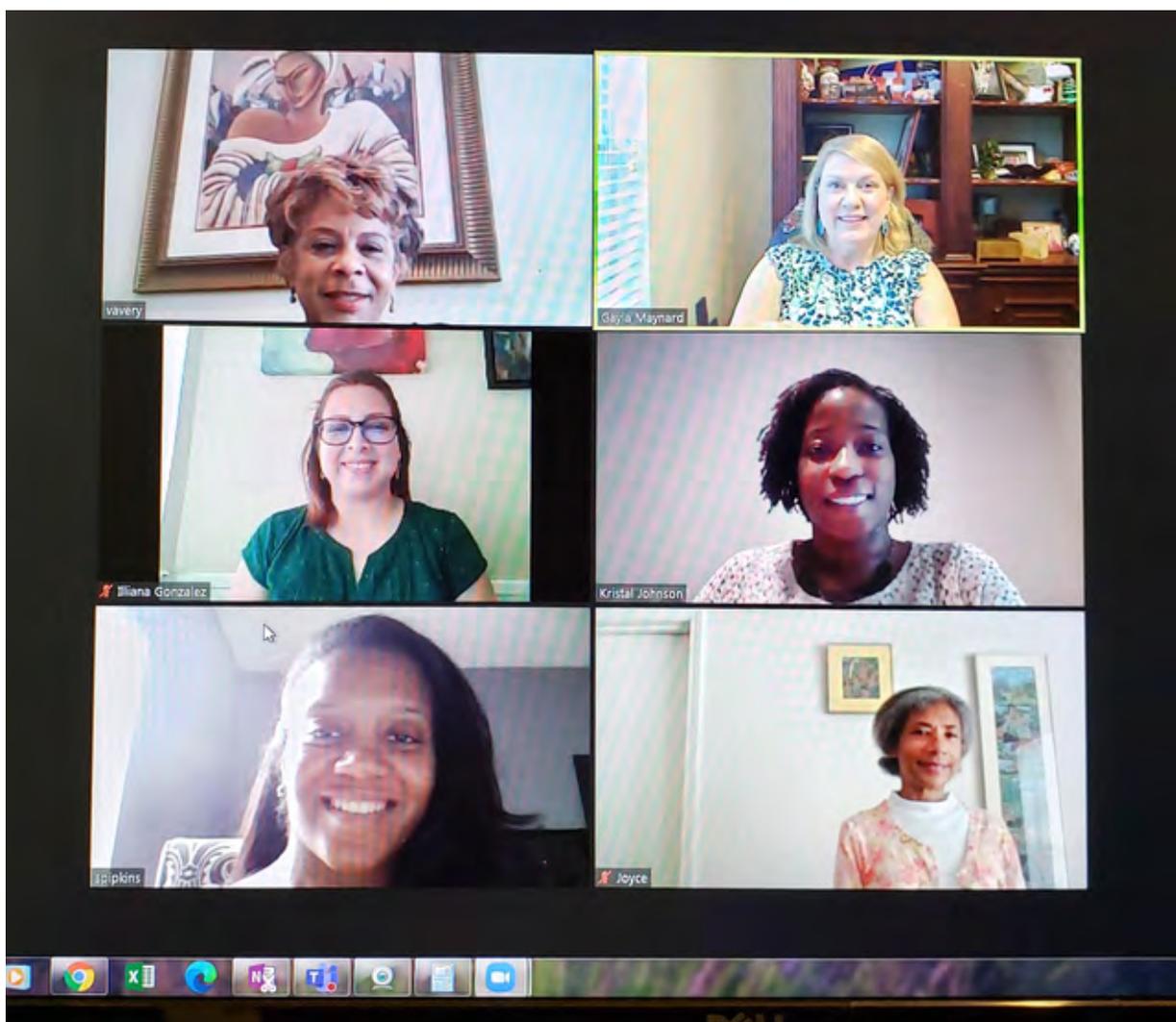
Service records and employment verification: Ashley Barker, abarker@hcde-texas.org

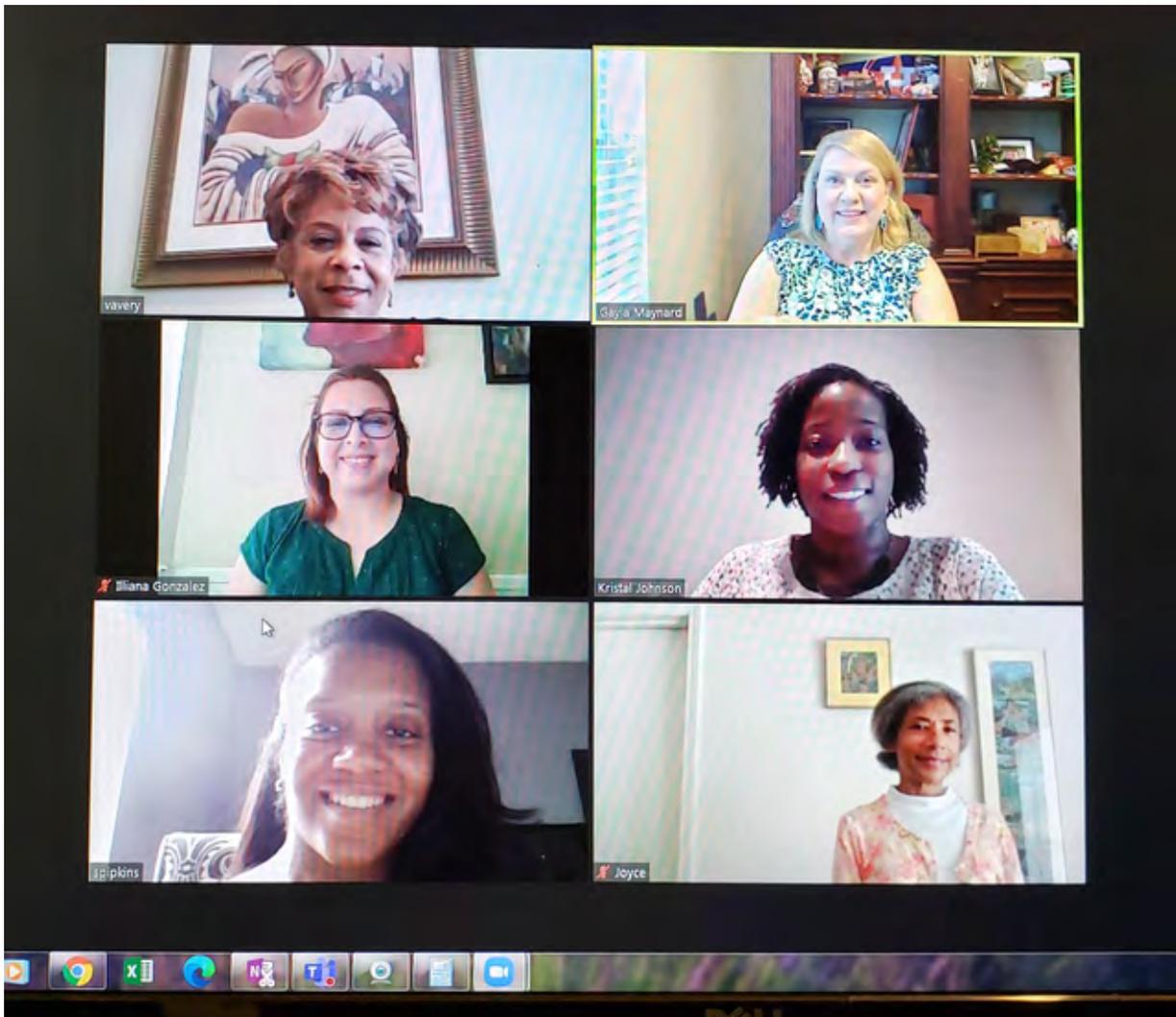
General questions: Monse Witine, mwitine@hcde-texas.org and Aleyda Lopez, alopez@hcde-texas.org

1. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/07/hr-picture.png>

HCDE's Center for Grants Development Team Acquires Funding for New, Current Programs During Pandemic (2020-07-16 10:40)

- hcdetx





With a staff of six, HCDE’s Center for Grants Development (CGD) team prepares proposals to create new HCDE programs and expand existing ones. Since the pandemic’s March arrival in Houston, the center’s work has not slowed, and the team continues to meet deadlines. Staff members prepared 20 grant and bid proposals totaling \$14.6 million. While many are still pending, a half million in funding has been awarded for proposals submitted during trying times.

“It’s been an intense time for everyone, including the grants office,” CGD Manager Joyce Akins said.

A bulk of CGD proposals help continue services critical to Houston-area families such as federal funding for Head Start/Early Head Start, adult education and afterschool. Headed by CGD Director Gayla Rawlinson Maynard, three other grant professionals, a funding researcher and a support staff apply their expertise. Their knowledge also benefits area school districts and their respective grant specialists.

“We host a District Grants Network which is comprised of grant specialists and others assigned to work on grants,” Maynard said. “This network offers

the districts opportunities to share best practices and grant opportunities.”

Innovative services are made reality because of partnerships between community stakeholders. New programs come to fruition as grants provide funding. An example is the CASE for Kids grant from Houston Endowment. The \$500,000 grant funds a new 2020-2021 online program for youth in afterschool as students investigate new hobbies and careers. In the process, students will earn badges in collaboration with local companies, nonprofits or foundations.

The SuperMENTors Read program will receive funding this school year from a \$7,020 Bank of Texas grant as male mentors adopt a pre-k class for the year and share books with the children.

[2]



Center for Grants Development

More than just your money source.

“We partnered with Educator Certification and Advancement and two school districts on a proposal to the U.S. Department of Education Teacher and School Leader

Incentive Grant,” Maynard said. “We also worked with Center for Safe and Secure Schools and the Teaching and Learning Center to prepare bid proposals to area districts.”

Staff also connects with funders and assists with sponsorships like the upcoming virtual School Safety Summit and Scholastic Art & Writing Receptions.

Maynard would like HCDE employees to benefit from CGD services too.

An e-newsletter called “Funding Opportunities” published weekly helps divisions find grants and opportunities to collaborate with other organizations. “Grants for Educators” provides opportunities to school districts and teachers.

What are the qualities it takes to make a top-notch grants team?

Director Maynard says excellent verbal and written communication skills are essential, along with top-shelf research skills and impeccable organizational abilities. It’s essential to understand the agency needing the funding and the organization offering the money. A good grant specialist also understands and executes complex instructions with fine-turned attention to detail.

CGD Division team members are available for advice and questions through email during the pandemic. The team includes: Gayla Rawlinson Maynard, director, [3]gawlinson@hcde-texas.org; Joyce Akins, manager, [4]jakins@hcde-texas.org; Dr. Vida L. Avery, resource development specialist, [5]vavery@hcde-texas.org; Sharvon Pipkins Kamaya, development coordinator,[6]mailto:spipkins@hcde-texas.org; Kristal Johnson, development associate [7]kjohnson@hcde-texas.org; and Illiana Gonzalez, secretary, [8]igonzalez@hcde-texas.org.

1. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/07/cgd-photo.jpeg>
2. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/07/center-for-grants-logo-2019-final-300dpi.jpg>
3. <mailto:gawlinson@hcde-texas.org>
4. <mailto:jakins@hcde-texas.org>
5. <mailto:vavery@hcde-texas.org>
6. <mailto:spipkins@hcde-texas.org>
7. <mailto:kjohnson@hcde-texas.org>
8. <mailto:igonzalez@hcde-texas.org>

James Gordon Schul (2020-07-18 08:53:52)
Terrific!

HCDE Board Approves \$174.5 Million 2020-2021 Budget

(2020-07-17 15:05) - hcdetx





The Harris County Department of Education Board of Trustees approved a \$174.5 million budget for the 2020-2021 school year Wednesday, continuing programs and services that effectively support students, educators and school districts in Harris County.

With this budget, HCDE maintains its business model, which preserves the integrity of its services to school districts. The budget also provides for ongoing support for HCDE employees through competitive compensation and benefits.

“We’ve worked for a fiscally responsible budget we can be proud of which is balanced, focused and appropriate,” HCDE Superintendent James Colbert Jr. said.

Property tax revenue, which amounts to less than \$9 for the average Harris County homeowner annually, generates \$22.6 million of the overall budget. The rest of the budget is funded by grants, fees, and revenues from HCDE’s business endeavors including its purchasing cooperative, according to Dr. Jesus Amezcua, assistant superintendent of business services.

The HCDE budget, which is adopted yearly in July, is designed to allow the agency to be responsive to the needs of area school districts and the communities it serves.

“We are proud of the budget we are presenting today,” Colbert said. “We believe it meets the needs of our organization while allowing us to continue to find and fill the gaps of educational services in Harris County.”

The budget also accounts for support HCDE provided to districts, families and staff during the COVID-19 crisis.

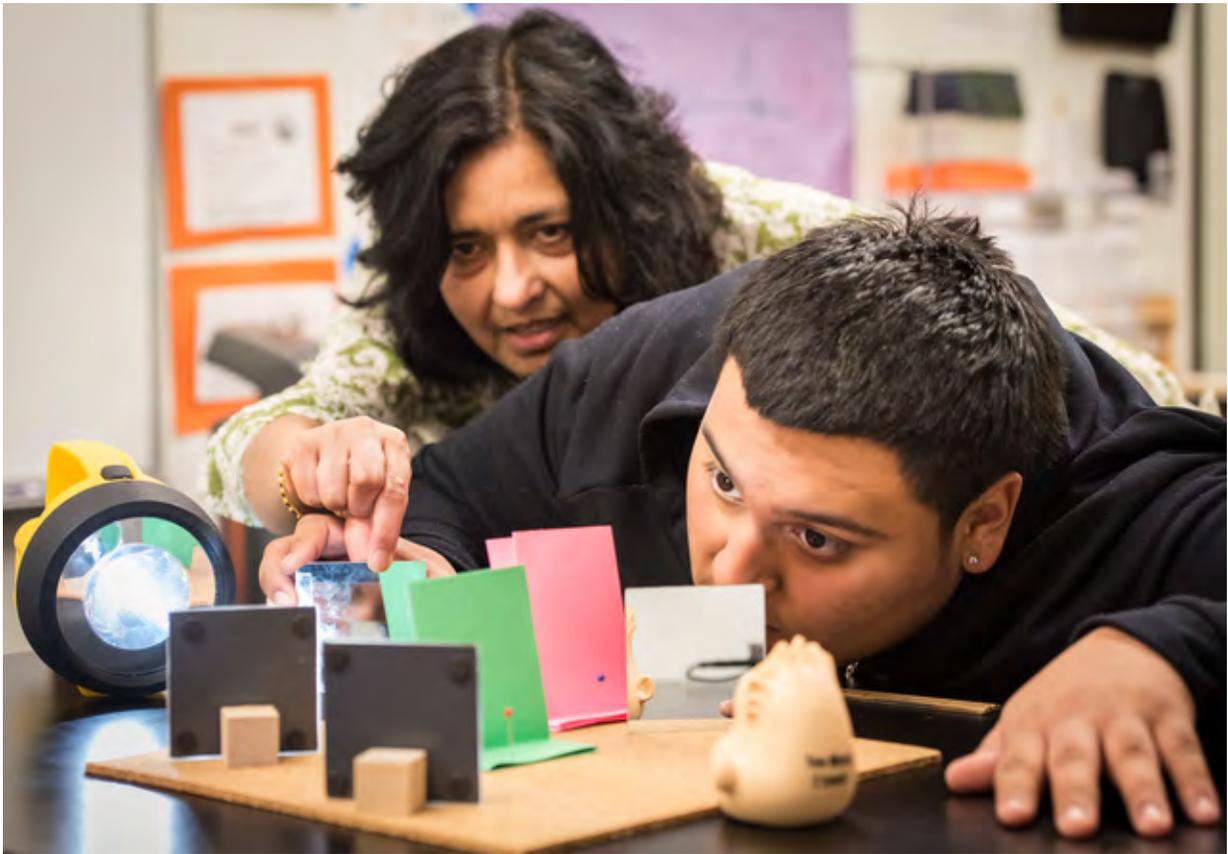
[2]



This spring, board trustees approved up to \$250,000 to provide more than 25,000 meals to its Head Start families during the coronavirus lockdowns. “Because we Care” boxes contained non-perishable food items families need. During the second round of distribution, boxes also included books for students as well as personal protection equipment including masks, gloves and hand sanitizer. Head Start staff worked for more than eight weeks to distribute the boxes in three rounds, ensuring those who needed food over several months could take advantage of the program.

“Our primary focus during the pandemic has been being responsive to the needs of our students and their families, our employees and the school districts we serve,” Colbert said.

[3]



Earlier this year, HCDE trustees also appropriated \$500,000 in funding for the Education Foundation of Harris County to provide grants to area school districts for pandemic-related projects. Approximately 53 proposals from 17 area school districts were submitted to fund items like iPads for students, instructional materials for teachers, student supplies, technology for students and staff, thermometers for health screenings and sanitation stations. Grant awardees will be announced next month.

“HCDE stepped up to the plate to support our ISDs and help them through these unprecedented times,” Colbert said. “Superintendents had to make real-time decisions due to COVID that were not anticipated. These grants will enhance support for area districts’ students and staff.”

[4]



Through contracts with area school districts, HCDE provides four special schools for students with emotional and intellectual disabilities and serves troubled youth and students recovering from addictions. Other educational services include school-based therapy for students in area school districts; afterschool services; adult education; and Head Start programs for infants through age 4. The organization also provides services for educators, schools and government entities including professional development, school safety audits, teacher certification, records management and a national purchasing cooperative.

1. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/07/20200506_humblehs_003.jpg
2. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/07/20200506_humblehs_009.jpg
3. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/07/20190410_fortis_0074.jpg
4. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/07/20190424_therapy_0146.jpg

Comprehensive Afterschool Programs Urged to Apply for \$550,787 in Funding through CASE for Kids Partnership Project
(2020-07-22 12:46) - hcdetx





An afterschool visit from two master gardeners transforms an elementary school outdoor garden into a science experiment. Through an afterschool drum practice session, students learn emotional safety. In an online afterschool chess program, young players gain social skills and self-confidence.

Comprehensive afterschool programs which provide five-day, full care of students once school is over until parents pick them up are being bolstered by \$550,787 in funding from the Partnership Project. Partnership Project supplies matching afterschool funding provided by Harris County Department of Education's Center for Afterschool, Summer and Enrichment for Kids, or CASE for Kids, the Houston-Galveston Area Council, and the Texas Workforce Commission.

Afterschool programs located in schools or other community sites may submit a [2]request for proposal for the program which fills afterschool funding gaps through a
248

unique collaborative between local, state and federal partners.

“We are so glad to have the ability to support school districts and not-for profit organizations that are committed to providing afterschool programming during these challenging times,” CASE for Kids Director Dr. Lisa Thompson Caruthers said.

Afterschool sites applying for funding must provide a 25 percent match for funding provided by the grant award. Grants range from \$10,000- \$30,000 per site. Because of the pandemic, CASE for Kids is considering in-kind support as acceptable for matching fund contributions. Applicants using public dollars as their match contribution receive priority points on their application.

[3]





The Partnership Project is a 20-year-old program which provides funding for comprehensive afterschool programs from Oct. 1, 2020, through July 31, 2021. Historically, programs providing direct care for youth from Monday through Friday with at least a two-year history of offering out-of-school time services to the community have been eligible for funding. Due to COVID-19, local education agencies and nonprofit programs offering direct service, virtual or hybrid afterschool activities will be considered for funding. Comprehensive afterschool programs offering direct service for 12-plus hours receive priority points on their application.

CASE for Kids supplies resources, training and funding for students in afterschool programs in schools, childcare families and community centers. In 2019-2020, CASE for Kids served 6,028 students and supported 2,632 educators.

The goal of Partnership Project is to provide supplemental funding to comprehensive afterschool programs for disadvantaged students ages 4-12, or children with disabilities up to age 19. The program promotes social and emotional learning skills and increases support for academic programs which promote math and reading.

The Partnership Project fills funding gaps with a variety of resources, including the CASE for Kids lending library which provides curricula, educational games, sporting equipment and STEM-based materials like robotics kits. Afterschool vendors affiliated with CASE for Kids specialize in academic focus areas that highlight math and language and social and emotional learning.

“Youth, more than ever before in their lifetimes, need the ability to engage

with mentoring adults and peers through activities that spark their interest, build on school day learning and provide connections with others," Caruthers said.

Deadline to apply for the Partnership Project RFP is Aug. 7 at 4 p.m. Visit [5]<https://hcde-texas.org/afterschool-zone> for information and to apply.

1. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/07/20190522_chess_0228.jpg
 2. <https://hcde-texas.org/afterschool-zone>
 3. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/07/20190620_hobby_0193.jpg
 4. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/07/20190620_hobby_0186.jpg
 5. <https://hcde-texas.org/afterschool-zone>
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Teacher Training Program at HCDE Includes Preparing Teachers to Be Virtual Educators (2020-07-22 20:21) - hcdetx





Preparing teachers to be virtual educators is a relatively new task for the team of education professionals who staff the Educator Certification and Advancement Division at Harris County Department of Education.

Recent college graduates or second career seekers enrolling in the longstanding teacher preparation program can expect to be greeted through Zoom meetings by an assortment of veteran educators who will help them prepare to become in-person and virtual teachers.

In the coming weeks, millions of students will go back to the classroom, but most of those classrooms will be in their own homes. ECA teachers-in-training will work virtually with the class of 2020-2021 until meeting their students in person.

“It’s a challenge as an educator preparation program,” ECA Director Lidia Zatopek said. “We are tasked with teaching our teachers how to be traditional educators but at the same time with COVID-19, we’re providing them with tools and strategies to use in a virtual setting. Those learning platforms vary district to district.”

ECA’s teacher alternative certification is a program designed for college graduates who decide to become teachers by gaining certification credentials. During the first five to 10 months, students train in small cohorts with veteran teachers who are also content experts in areas like math, science, bilingual education and language arts.

Afterwards, the aspiring teachers gain positions in area school districts where they are paid while teaching. They continue to be mentored and trained.

[2]



The division also provides personalized principal training and certification preparation. A superintendent training program attracts approximately a dozen students statewide each year.

“Things are changing, and we have to adapt,” Zatopek said. As director, she brings several decades of leadership as a teacher, administrator and alternative teacher certification program veteran.

Teaching educators to teach virtually is now embedded into the curriculum of the teacher alternative certification program provided by ECA. Zoom is used for face-to-face, virtual teaching. Moodle and Power School are used for asynchronous or module-based teaching which may be accomplished at any time. Integration of technology into instruction is taught throughout the pre-service and internship phases using smart boards, mobile devices and Web 2.0 tools such as Kahoot, Padlet, Nearpod, Quizlet, and Google Docs.

Educators gain the technology competencies along with skills like classroom management and curriculum planning. Another important element of teacher training is social-emotional learning, the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions; set and achieve positive goals; and make responsible decisions.

Social-emotional learning is a critical component in education as students, their families and teachers navigate COVID-19, Zatopek explained.

[3]



She uses this social-emotional analogy to tell new teachers about selfcare in the profession:

“When the plane experiences turbulence, the oxygen mask drops. You must put the mask on yourself before you can help your students,” she said. “Self-care is extremely important for teachers.”

Zatopek urges teachers to keep a pulse on their emotional and mental health as they embark on this new school year.

“It’s just as important for teachers to find places where they can get that support,” she said.

Classes for prospective teachers, principals or superintendents begin in September and information sessions are currently being held through ECA staff. For information about ECA's alternative teacher certification program email hcdeacp@hcde-texas.org. For principal or superintendent certification or leadership training, go to [\[4\]leadnow@hcde-texas.org](mailto:leadnow@hcde-texas.org).

1. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/07/shutterstock_1722455332.jpg
 2. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/07/shutterstock_1735799981.jpg
 3. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/07/shutterstock_1675256440.jpg
 4. <mailto:leadnow@hcde-texas.org>
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Choice Partners Food Co-op to Supply Prepackaged Food Items to Meet District Needs During Pandemic (2020-07-30 12:38) - hcdetx





In late spring as school districts shut down from the pandemic, Choice Partners food co-op assistant director Trisha Prestigiacomio began to worry about how the districts would be able to feed hungry kids.

Food is purchased through the co-op annually by school districts in the Harris County area for more than 85 million student lunches through contracts available through Harris County Department of Education's Choice Partners cooperative.

Although those food contracts were not interrupted by COVID-19, the needs of the districts changed as food service options went mobile.

District co-op members needed easy to prepare and deliver food products so students might continue to be fed in their communities through federally funded programs. Curbside feeding was established at many districts. Demand for individually wrapped, thaw-and-serve and heat-and-serve items continued to increase.

“School districts could use bulk products, but individually wrapped and easy to serve products were scarce and on short supply as manufacturers tried to meet demands nationally,” Prestigiacomo said.

[2]



The phone calls and emails continued as some companies had problems keeping up with demand. Some manufacturing plants had to shut down due to COVID-19 outbreaks. Districts also continued to call, looking for prepackaged goods.

As Prestigiacomo embarked on new territory via the school lunch frontier, she had an idea she thought might work.

Her team created a survey which was sent to area school district clients. Based on need, the co-op put together a request for proposal (RFP) for the type of products needed by the districts, including individually wrapped items and meal kits created by food vendors for breakfast and lunch. Included in the RFP are personal protective equipment like gloves, face masks and sanitizer. The RFP products should be available after Aug. 19.

An example of the meal kits includes a breakfast packaged with juice box, wrapped wholegrain muffin and raisins. A lunch might include a calzone, milk and a fruit bar.

As early as August, many school districts begin the school year with virtual instruction. The conventional school cafeteria may no longer be an option for most districts due to COVID-19 risks. Students will continue to be fed, but many of those meals may be accomplished curbside or outside the school building, Prestigiacomo explained.

On the flip side, some districts will have options for in-person instruction but will limit access to the cafeteria, opting to serve students in the classrooms or through restricted access to the cafeteria.

Contracts will be in place so that school districts may order the products they need quickly from 29 vendors who were awarded based on their products and the needs of Choice Partners members. Delivery can be made directly to the district. Even though districts will still buy in bulk, meals will be portioned so they can be distributed on the go.

“No one really knows what the big picture is, but everyone is problem-solving as we go,” she said.

To date, co-op officials believe they are one of the first co-ops in the state to be proactive to attend to the COVID-19 specific needs of districts and municipalities seeking food service options on the go and coronavirus supply solutions, all in one RFP.

The contracts can also mean measurable, fixed cost-savings for districts over food distributors, who typically mark-up pricing.

[3]



“Even though this emergency feeding RFP was built based on COVID-19, the need could go on longer than expected with natural disasters that can occur,” Prestigiacomio said.

Prestigiacomio predicts she will hear from some districts inside and outside of Harris County and perhaps in other states as they look for prepackaged goods to meet the unique needs of districts during COVID-19.

“Our districts can find the products they need now and later easily and buy them through legally bid contracts in order to feed their kids,” she said.

Choice Partners purchasing cooperative offers quality, legal procurement and contract solutions to meet government purchasing requirements. Food products are a vital part of the co-op as school districts and municipalities look for convenience and buying power.

Jeff Drury, director for Choice Partners, oversees the full gamut of operations for the co-op, which includes construction job order contracting to consulting services. He is impressed by his staff’s ingenuity in the food co-op area of Choice.

"These times and circumstances are unprecedented for everyone," Drury said. "Trisha and her team are doing the things necessary to accommodate our members’

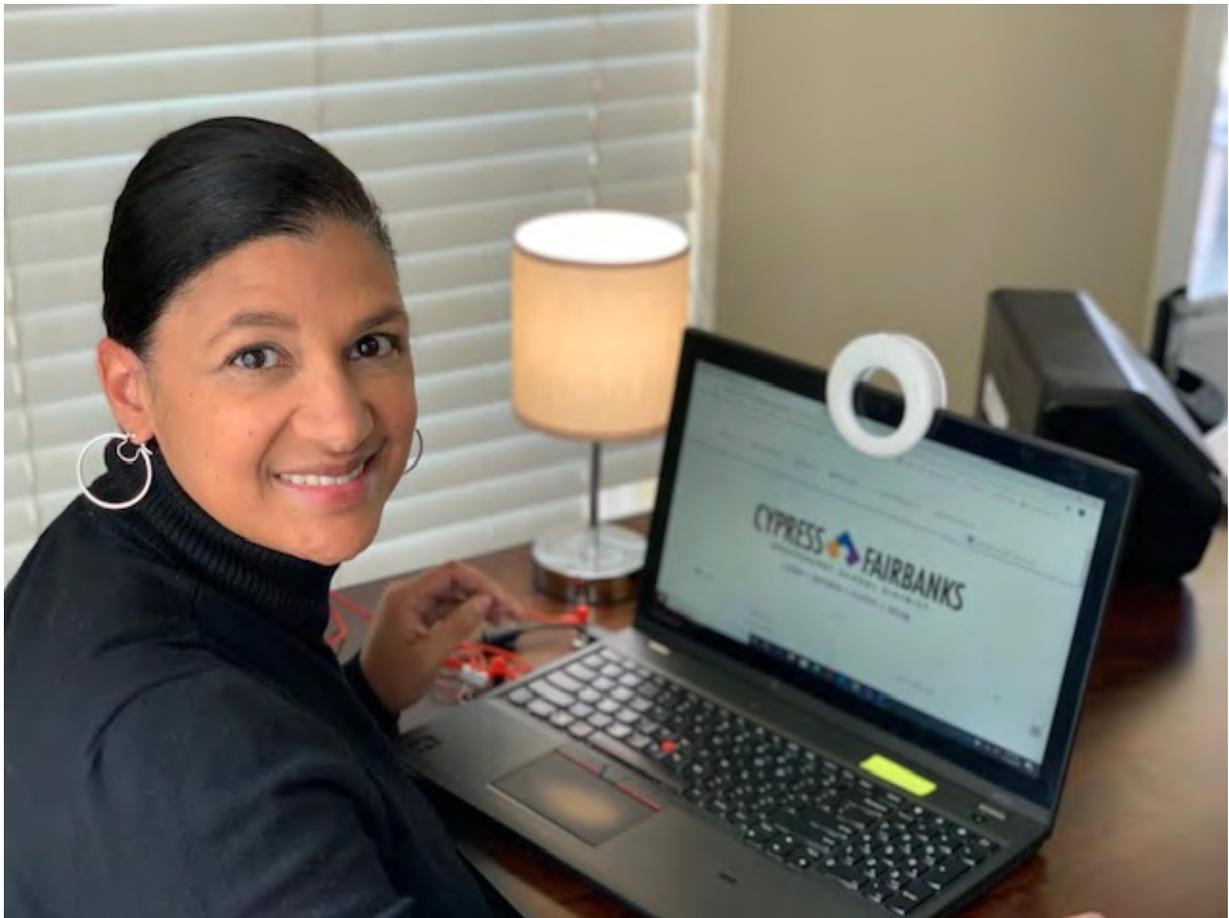
returning students and child nutrition staff to provide safe and nutritional meals."

(The 700-plus vendors in Choice Partners co-op offer services ranging from food supplies and equipment to construction job order contracting to consulting services. An approximate 1,500 members benefit from time and money saved, plus legally bid contracts. For more information about Choice Partners and the buying power through the co-op, go to [4]www.choicepartners.org or [5]www.hcde-texas.org.)

1. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/07/img_0464.jpg
 2. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/07/malcolmx_kippbayview2_082019.jpg
 3. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/07/packaged-meals_group_web2.jpg
 4. <http://www.choicepartners.org/>
 5. <http://www.hcde-texas.org/>
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1.8 August

Online Learning Director at HCDE Helps Train Teachers to Be ‘Virtual Best’ (2020-08-06 14:44) - hcdetx



As virtual learning director Dr. Colina Poullard trains teachers at Harris County Department of Education's Schools Division in upcoming weeks, she offers these tips. Three best practices can be applied by any teacher who is teaching virtually this school year:

[1]



1. **Set Virtual Classroom Norms/Expectations:** Being taught through a virtual classroom can feel isolating for students. A good way to introduce structure and a sense of togetherness is to set norms. These include having a daily log-in time; only using the chat box for questions; and expecting students to have needed materials near their computer.
2. **Model Use of Tech Tools:** Before expecting students to use tech tools, teachers should familiarize students with their location, function and use for each lesson.
3. **Chunk Lessons:** It's important that learners don't feel overwhelmed during lessons without teacher support. Prevent this by introducing the overarching lesson, then splice the learning components into small bites.

(Dr. Colina Poullard is HCDE's Teaching and Learning Center curriculum director for Digital Education and Innovation. She oversees HCDE's online instruction program, an asynchronous, self-paced program offered for teachers who want to enhance their virtual teaching skills. A certificate is gained at the end of each of three courses. Her email is [2]cpoullard@hcde-texas.)

1. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/08/img_3632.jpg
 2. <http://cpoullard@hcde-texas/>
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HCDE Schools Begin Back-to-School Virtually First, In-person Later to Serve Multiple Districts' Needs (2020-08-07 08:50) - hcdetx





Beginning Aug. 24, teachers and staff at Harris County Department of Education's four special schools welcome students back from 39 client school districts and charter schools in greater Harris County. Instruction is virtual in the beginning. Later, in-person classes will be offered.

As an estimated 100 teachers drive by respective schools to get their computers next week, each receives a Lenovo laptop think pad with camera enabled for Microsoft Teams and Zoom.

"We are very focused on the school year," HCDE Schools Senior Director Dr. Anthony Mays said. "We are delivering a high level of instruction in a virtual environment to meet students' needs."

Virtual learning will be both synchronous and asynchronous. Synchronous learning is online learning where students are engaged with the teacher at the same time. Asynchronous learning allows each student to log on and work on assignments as teachers and aides assist them independently.

“A teacher could be doing both, teaching synchronously but having the assignments asynchronously,” Mays said.

As with all Texas ISDs, HCDE’s Schools Division is governed by Texas Education Agency guidelines for hourly requirements for instruction, varying by grade level. For grades 3-5, 180 minutes of synchronous instruction are required. For grades 6-12, 240 minutes of instruction are standard.

HCDE’s Schools will meet the instruction model prescribed by each client school district. For example, if a district has the option to meet in-person or virtually, the parent may decide and HCDE will supply that preference. As staff engages with students, it will be essential for teachers and counselors to maintain personal contact with students’ parents and caregivers.

Mays said HCDE is following both CDC and TEA health regulations. Sneeze guards will be provided for nurses and school administrative assistants. A minimum of three sanitation stations are set up at each school. Once in-person school is in session, trifold desk screens will be used in each classroom. Safety protocol is outlined and strictly followed at each campus.

This week, Schools Division leaders met for professional development in preparation for return to school as teachers return Aug. 11 to get online professional development.

Staff have been collecting student data and information to use in benchmark assessments for academics and behavior. Two of HCDE’s schools—Academic and Behavior School East and West—are for student populations which include children with autism spectrum disorder, emotional disabilities and developmental disabilities. Each student enters the new school year with targeted behavior and academic outcomes.

At Fortis Academy, HCDE’s school for recovering youth, students will be engaged virtually through synchronous learning by teachers guiding them through content-specific lessons (math, English, science). Students at Highpoint, a school for adjudicated or troubled teens, will gain that same type of instruction.

HCDE’s Teaching and Learning Center Curriculum Director for Digital Education and Innovation Dr. Colina Poullard will be assisting new and existing teachers for Microsoft Teams and Zoom platforms for instruction. She will be working with teachers on methods to engage special populations of students through virtual instruction.

As teachers drop by their respective schools to receive their new laptops, Mays repeats a commitment to support them in the a very unconventional school year:

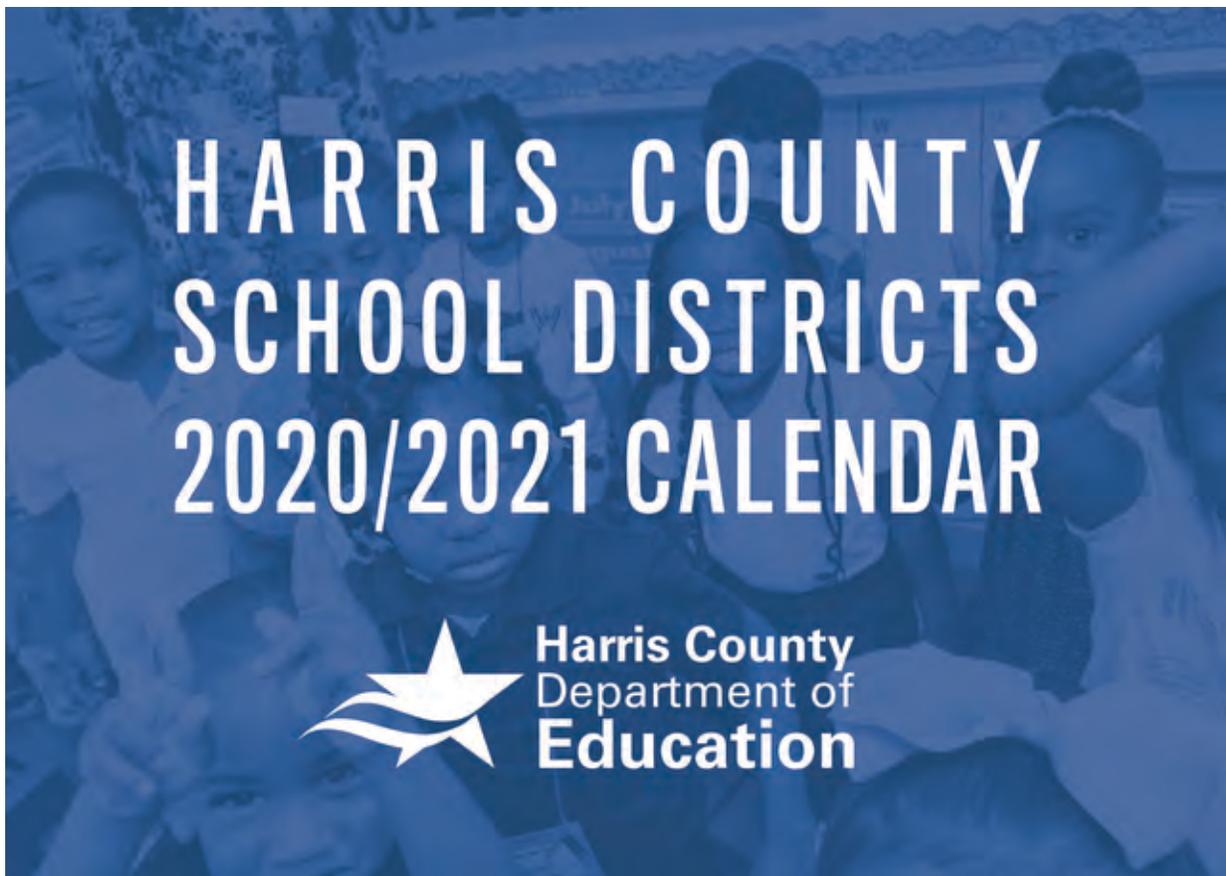
“It’s a huge learning curve for our teachers,” said Mays. “We are meeting with our teachers next week and they will have our full support. We have been teaching through virtual learning platforms since the spring of last school year, but we continue to grow our skills.”

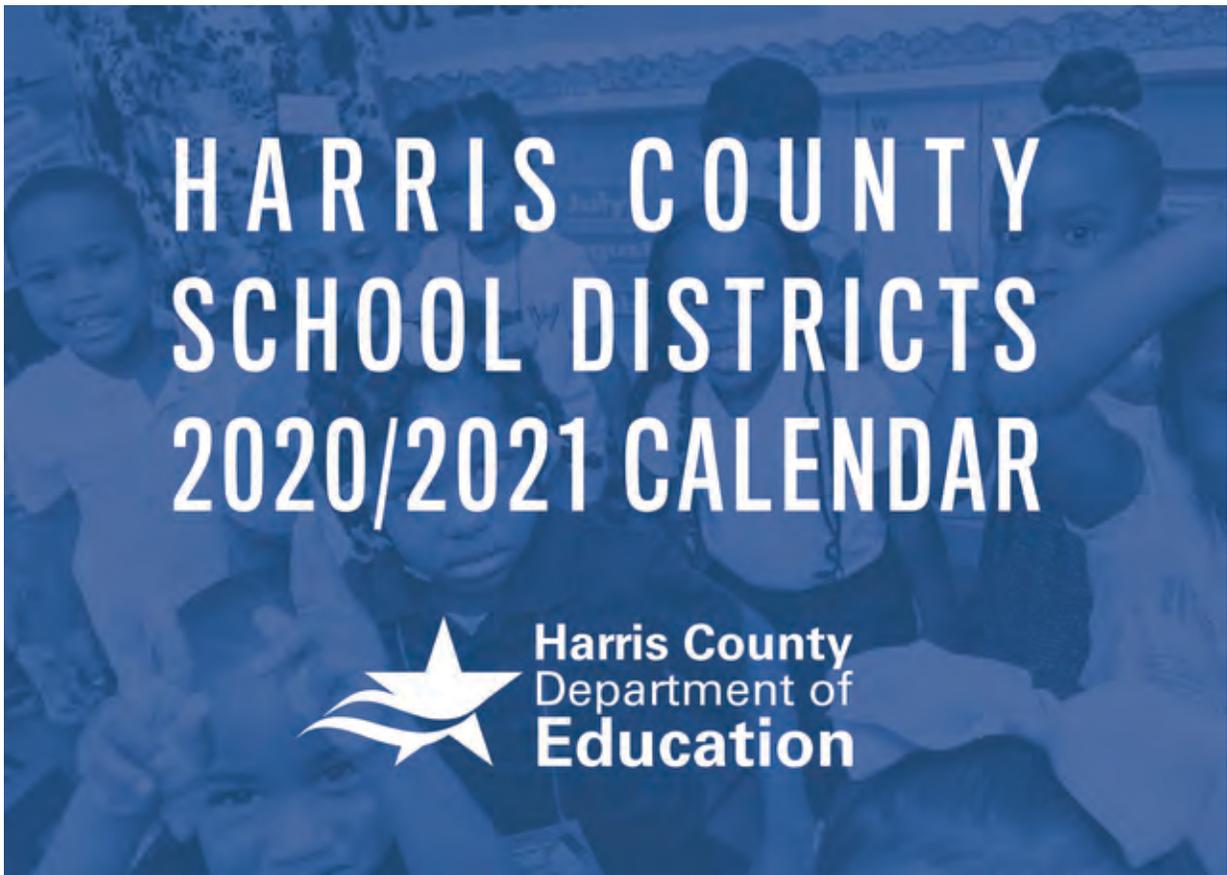
1. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/08/schools.jpeg>



Harris County Department of Education Releases Comprehensive 2020-2021 Calendar for 25 School Districts (2020-08-13 08:50)

- hcdetx





Key dates for the 2020-2021 school year for all 25 school districts in Harris County are available through the Harris County Department of Education comprehensive school district calendar.

Due to COVID-19, dates may be subject to change throughout the year, district to district. Actual calendars from each district may be downloaded by clicking on the district name in the calendar.

Many districts begin virtually or are adopting a hybrid model of in-person and virtual learning. Check with each district for details.

[2]View the calendar for the 25 school districts:

[3]<https://tinyurl.com/hcdecalendar>

(HCDE provides the compilation of district calendars as a public service. We are not responsible for changes in district calendars. Please consult your local school district for additional details concerning holidays/staff work days, etc.)

[4]



Harris County School District Calendars 2020-2021 Semester Dates and Holiday Schedules

District	Classes Begin	Thanksgiving	Winter Break	Spring Break	Easter	Other Holidays	Classes End
Aldine	Aug. 17	Nov. 23-27	Dec. 18 - Jan. 5	March 15-19	April 2	9/7, 10/19, 1/18, 2/15, 4/2	May 27
Alief	Aug. 8	Nov. 23-27	Dec. 21 - Jan. 1	March 15-19	April 2	9/7, 11/3, 1/18, 4/2, 4/26, 5/31	June 3
Channelview	Sept. 8	Nov. 23-27	Dec. 21 - Jan. 1	March 15-19	April 2	1/18, 5/31	June 11
Clear Creek	Aug. 24	Nov. 23-27	Dec. 21 - Jan. 1	March 15-19	April 2	9/7, 10/12, 5/31	May 27
Crosby	Aug. 13	Nov. 23-27	Dec. 21 - Jan. 1	March 15-19	April 2	9/7, 1/18, 5/31	May 27
Cy-Fair	Sept. 8	Nov. 23-27	Dec. 21 - Jan. 1	March 15-19	April 2	9/7, 1/18, 5/31	June 3
Dayton	Aug. 20	Nov. 23-27	Dec. 21 - Jan. 5	March 15-19	April 2	9/7, 10/16 - 10/19, 1/18, 2/12 - 2/15, 5/14, 5/31	May 28
Deer Park	Aug. 19	Nov. 23-27	Dec. 21 - Jan. 4	March 15-19	April 2-5	9/7, 5/31	May 27
Galena Park	Sept. 8	Nov. 23-27	Dec. 21 - Jan. 1	March 15-19	April 2	9/7, 10/12, 1/18, 2/15, 5/31	June 10
Goose Creek	Sept. 8	Nov. 23-27	Dec. 21 - Jan. 1	March 8-12	April 2	1/18, 5/31	June 11
Houston	Sept. 8	Nov. 23-27	Dec. 21 - Jan. 1	March 15-19	April 2	1/18, 3/29, 5/31	June 11
Huffman	Aug. 25	Nov. 23-27	Dec. 21 - Jan. 1	March 15-19	April 2	9/7, 1/18, 2/15, 5/31	June 3
Humble	Aug. 11	Nov. 23-27	Dec. 21 - Jan. 1	March 15-19	April 2	9/7, 10/5 - 10/9, 1/18, 2/10 - 2/12, 5/31	May 28
Katy	Aug. 19	Nov. 23-27	Dec. 21 - Jan. 1	March 15-19	April 2	9/7, 10/12, 1/18, 5/31	May 27
Klein	Sept. 8	Nov. 23-27	Dec. 21 - Jan. 1	March 15-19	April 2	10/12, 1/18, 2/15, 5/31	May 26
La Porte	Aug. 19	Nov. 23-27	Dec. 21 - Jan. 5	March 15-19	April 2	9/7, 10/12, 11/3, 1/18, 2/15, 5/28	May 27
New Caney	Aug. 10	Nov. 23-27	Dec. 21 - Jan. 1	April 12-16	April 2	9/7, 10/12 - 10/16, 1/18, 2/15 - 2/19, 5/31	May 21
Pasadena	Aug. 18	Nov. 23-27	Dec. 21 - Jan. 1	March 15-19	April 2	9/7, 1/18, 5/31	May 26
Pearland	Aug. 31	Nov. 23-27	Dec. 21 - Jan. 1	March 15-19	April 2	9/7, 1/18, 2/15, 5/31	May 27
Sheldon	Sept. 8	Nov. 23-27	Dec. 21 - Jan. 1	March 15-19	April 2	9/7, 1/18, 5/31	June 10
Spring	Aug. 17	Nov. 23-27	Dec. 21 - Jan. 1	March 15-19	April 2	9/7, 1/18, 5/31	June 25
Spring Branch	Aug. 24	Nov. 23-27	Dec. 21 - Jan. 1	March 15-19	April 2	9/7, 1/18, 4/30, 5/31	May 27
Stafford	Aug. 19	Nov. 23-27	Dec. 18 - Jan. 1	March 15-19	April 2	9/7, 9/25, 10/12, 1/18, 2/15, 5/31	June 11
Tomball	Sept. 8	Nov. 23-27	Dec. 21 - Jan. 1	March 15-19	April 2	5/31	May 27
Waller	Aug. 24	Nov. 23-27	Dec. 21 - Jan. 1	March 15-19	April 2	9/7, 1/18, 5/31	May 27

Districts may change due to COVID-19. Please open calendar link by district name for updates.

About Harris County Department of Education: HCDE is a unique, educational hybrid serving school districts, governmental agencies, nonprofits and the public in the third-largest county in the U.S. HCDE annually serves a quarter-million students and educators through schools for students with profound special needs; the largest adult education program in Texas; Head Start early childhood education; school-based therapy services; and afterschool programs. Educator professional development and certification, school safety, records management, and a purchasing cooperative are also provided. #SeeTheImpact at [5]www.hcde-texas.org.

1. <http://hcde-texas.org/media/uploads/2020/08/School-District-Calendars-20-21.pdf>
2. <http://hcde-texas.org/media/uploads/2020/08/School-District-Calendars-20-21.pdf>
3. <https://tinyurl.com/hcdecalendar>
4. <http://hcde-texas.org/media/uploads/2020/08/School-District-Calendars-20-21.pdf>
5. <https://nam04.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.hcde-texas.org&data=02%7C01%7Ccvauhn%40hcde-texas.org%7C0c924b19e1bc4123d76208d784d33849%7>

1,000 Harris County Department of Education Head Start Preschoolers Begin School Virtually (2020-08-13 10:14) - hcdetx





Lois Rose

Harris County Department of Education Head Start teacher Lois Rose has one hard-and-fast rule in her pre-k classroom, be it virtual or in-person.

“We take care of each other,” Rose said.

As 145 HCDE Head Start teachers and teacher assistants start school virtually Sept. 8 with their students, they begin the year getting to know each other.

A slate of class rules follows. No running or hitting. Take care of others. Rose expects challenges, but she has big plans for the students in her virtual classroom.

HCDE operates 14 Head Start sites and has Early Head Start programs at three of those sites, as well as four additional childcare partnership sites. In total, the program provides comprehensive services for 1,060 families of children ages 6 weeks to 5 years in northeast Harris County. Plans are for in-person classes to resume as COVID-19 numbers decline, HCDE Head Start Senior Director Venetia Peacock said.

Manager Pamela Jones-Lee oversees education and disability services within HCDE Head Start. Teachers use Frog Street pre-k curriculum for both Head Start and Early Head Start. Curriculum is aligned to Texas pre-k guidelines and Head Start early learning outcomes. Teachers are using the Microsoft Teams to meet virtually with students and parents.

“We know that many of our families have other children, so we don’t want to overwhelm them,” Jones-Lee said. “Family service providers see the challenges families are facing and they relate those back to us. Coping with COVID-19 is enough. We want to do what is best for their families.”



Pamela Jones-Lee

Two synchronous or live sessions will be held twice a week for 45 minutes each with the pre-k learners and their parents.

“On a virtual day, parents pick a time frame for class which fits their schedule best, and students attend live sessions,” Jones-Lee said. Outdoor time, music and movement time and art projects are sent to parents as supplemental activities.

Homework packets are picked up Mondays through a drive-through system along with meals made available three days a week. Teachers connect through a wave and a smile.

“Mondays are very important because they enable teachers to touch based and greet students and parents to maintain human contact through safe, social distancing,” Peacock said.

At Early Head Start centers with the infants and toddlers, sessions are one-on-

278

one with families and allow for modeling learning activities with parents first. Later, students join in the sessions and feedback is given by teachers and their assistants.

Home visits allow parents to see what virtual learning will look like. Teachers can tour student home life virtually and get to know the family.

“Home visits allow parents and teachers to set goals,” Jones-Lee said.

Families have generally been very supportive of virtual instruction, she explained. Collectively, virtual learning is important for families because they want their preschoolers to have the social and academic skills to be ready for kindergarten.

Lessons for the pre-k students include a social-emotional component along with literacy and math. A class on friendship allows children to learn about themselves and their family relationships.

During the pandemic, Head Start staff are especially attuned to the social-emotional needs of students.

“So, if a parent relates any kind of learning or social-emotional challenge to the teacher or family service provider, there may be a referral of the child to a specialist or mental health professional,” Jones-Lee said.

Back in the classroom, Rose sees her virtual classroom as an open house of sorts. Last spring, parents would join into Zoom sessions to see what their children were learning and view classroom structure.

When her 4-year-olds get fidgety in the virtual classroom, the tactics are much the same as the regular class.

“We stop and do something fun that they like and then get them back on track again,” Rose said.

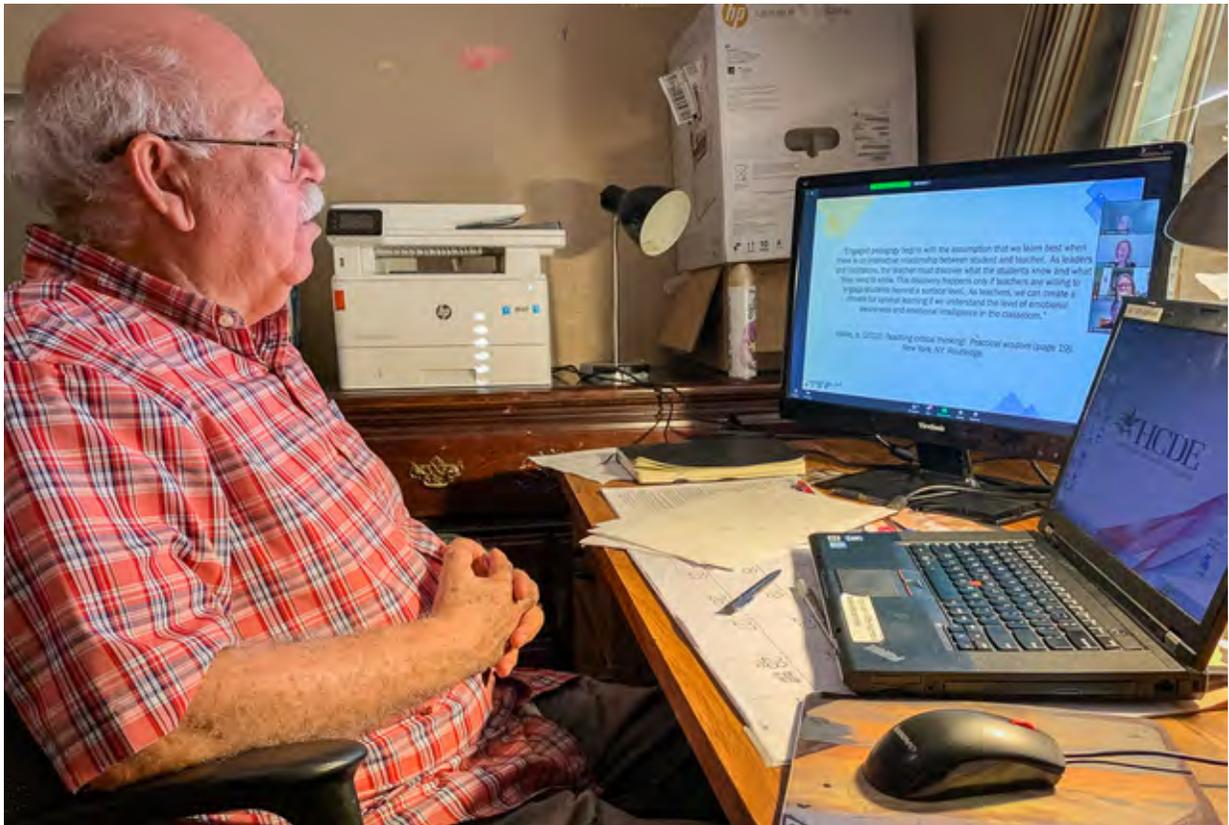
Calling it “a blessing” to have a new class of students, the Head Start teacher at the HCDE Fifth Ward Head Start Center is eager to get to know her students and set expectations.

“It will be different,” Rose jests. “We will need to do thumbs up instead of high fives.”

To find out more about enrollment opportunities in HCDE Head Start or Early Head Start, go to [3]www.hcde-texas.org/head-start

1. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/08/words.jpg>
 2. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/08/unknown-2-copy-3.jpg>
 3. <http://www.hcde-texas.org/head-start>
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Harris County Department of Education Partners with Union for Workplace ESL for Hospitality Industry (2020-08-20 09:38) - hcdetx





Sara Gonzalez

Housekeeper Sara Gonzalez tired of not being able to communicate with her boss. Two years ago, her relative told her about an English as a second language (ESL) and workforce development partnership between Harris County Department of Education and Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Texas.

Today she converses with her employer and is readying to begin GED classes so she can advance to become a medical assistant. Although COVID-19 required HCDE Adult Education to make a move to virtual teaching, she is patient with her progress.

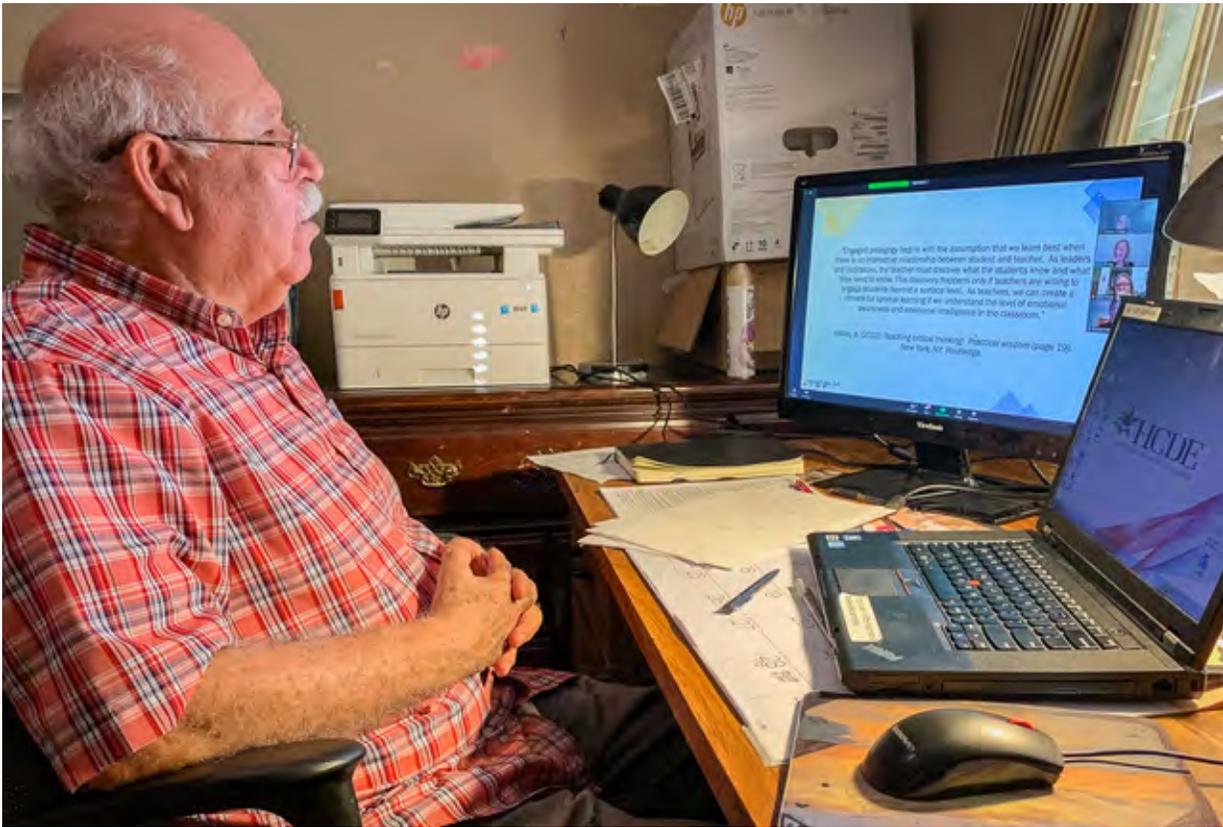
“I understand that COVID-19 makes it hard to be in the in-person classes,” the 55-year-old student said. “I learned to study my lessons on my computer for two hours a day.”

HCDE’s Adult Education provides classes in ESL, GED, adult basic education and workforce development and partners with nonprofits and companies for specialized classes which serve up curriculum specific to occupations. The programs are promoted through Workforce Solutions.

Partner SEIU is a Gulf Coast union serving approximately 3,000 workers in hospitality, janitorial and medical support staff. During the pandemic, the hospitality industry has been especially hard-hit by the virus. Many industry workers were laid off and are readjusting to new jobs or different careers.

“With this pandemic, a lot of people lost their jobs in this industry,” HCDE Adult Education teacher Antonio Fuentes said.

As teacher of the classes, Fuentes works through customer relations topics with his adult learners, offering help through various scenarios. Throughout the week, his students practice lessons in vocabulary and pronunciation through distance learning and completed assignments. On weekday mornings, they go online to virtual learning sessions with their teacher.



Antonio Fuentes, ESL workplace teacher

The former middle school teacher of 24 years retired two years ago and began working for HCDE Adult Education.

“I love this job,” he said. “It makes my day working with struggling students who work all day and come directly from their jobs, and they are dedicated to learning.”

Twenty-one janitors and housekeepers were on his student roll last spring.



Fuentes with last year's students

"SEIU is a great organization because they are truly helping out their members," he said.

SEIU union organizer and ESL coordinator Ricardo Martinez made it a habit to drop by the in-person classes. The experience filled him with inspiration, joy and pride as SEIU members practiced their second language.

"During the last two years, our collaboration with the HCDE program has cultivated an incomparable enthusiasm and hope for SEIU Texas members that wasn't there before," he said. "For many of them, it was like a dream to have a very well-structured ESL program dedicated exclusively to them. The two teachers took the time to understand that most of the students have two jobs and families to provide for."

As tradition would have it, on the last day of class students would proudly serve food from each of their countries to celebrate the end of the semester. Martinez loved to experience the celebration.

Student Gonzalez and teacher Fuentes knows there will come a day when they can return to the classroom for those celebrations.

“The students are so dedicated to learning,” Fuentes said. “They know by learning this language that it’s going to change their lives. They will be better for it.”

For information about the free adult education classes beginning this fall semester, go to [4]www.hcde-texas.org/adult-education.

1. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/08/3685.jpg>
 2. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/08/unknown-3-copy-3.jpg>
 3. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/08/unknown-2-copy-4.jpg>
 4. <http://www.hcde-texas.org/adult-education>
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3 Families Share Beginning of Virtual Semester at HCDE School for Students with Learning Disabilities (2020-08-26 10:37) - hcdetx





Clovis and Ndikumana Ali

Clovis Ali, 11 and his father Ndikumana arrive at school to pick up a computer for the beginning of an online school experience. The vibe is positive as Clovis greets the principal and waits for his father to complete his registration packet.

Clovis attends Harris County Department of Education's Academic and Behavior School West, a school for children with intellectual and behavioral disabilities. His father feels positive about the 2020-2021 school year, even though there are plenty unknowns.

"I see him moving in the right direction here," his father said. "A lot of stuff—his writing, his speech, his behavior and his attitude. He has really grown academically."

ABS West Principal Dr. Victor Keys says only 35-40 percent of students are going to be in-person learners as school kicks off virtually Aug. 24 and in-person on Sept. 8. Seventeen school districts contract with HCDE, sending students with autism and other disabilities to the brand-new campus in southwest Houston this year.

“It’s changing constantly, but we are using the learning model that each district has implemented,” Keys said. “These are challenging times, but I want to say that we use every tool in our toolbox to help our students.”

Next in the line of drive-by student registrants is Dayshun Pickett, 13 and Dennis, his father. Pickett had a sample of virtual learning last spring as the pandemic hit.

“Routine is really hard,” his father said. “That is what he misses most about this school. When his behavior is under control, he can do almost anything you ask him to do.



Dennis Pickett

At home, the Pickett family had six family members sharing two computers for the past four months. Four of them were students. Routine, Dennis said, is important. The family wakes at 6:30 a.m., and kids are ready for virtual school by 7:30 a.m.

“The only thing missing is the bus coming by,” Dayshun’s father said.

A little after noon, mom Claudia Alvarez comes by with son Yusef Perez, 18. Perez has attended ABS West for four years and is treating the occasion like a socially distanced family reunion.

Yusef waves to a teacher assistant who is handing out the computers and takes a quick tour of the new school's sensory room.

[3]



Yusef Perez and Claudia Alvarez

Virtual learning will be hard for her son because he travels to work with her and learns from her office. His attention span is limited, Alvarez says.

“He does understand what is going on with the pandemic,” Alvarez said. “He’s washing his hands and wearing masks all the time. The school staff calls me all the time to see how we are doing.”

In addition to teachers and teacher aides, a cadre of counselors, and a behavior specialist work with the Alvarezes and other families.

“We are going to try it (virtual learning),” Mom said. “We will see.”

Principal Keys says his staff continues to be busy in the new virtual learning world as spring turned to summer school and now the fall semester begins. The challenges will be to keep students with emotional and intellectual disabilities engaged in instruction. Frequent breaks are built in because of short attention spans. Behavior must be reinforced, and the counselors will be checking in on the welfare of the students and their families.

“Many parents are having a hard time too,” Keys acknowledged.

Staff are finding solutions for families without Internet. Work packets are being mailed to some families who don’t want to use computers.

“Like I said, these are challenging times, but we’re working as a team and making things happen,” Keys said.

1. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/08/20200821_west_107-1.jpg
 2. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/08/20200821_west_076.jpg
 3. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/08/img_35741.jpg
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1.9 September

Online Instructor's Training Builds Teacher Confidence in Virtual Classroom (2020-09-03 13:44) - hcdetx





Chase Coulter

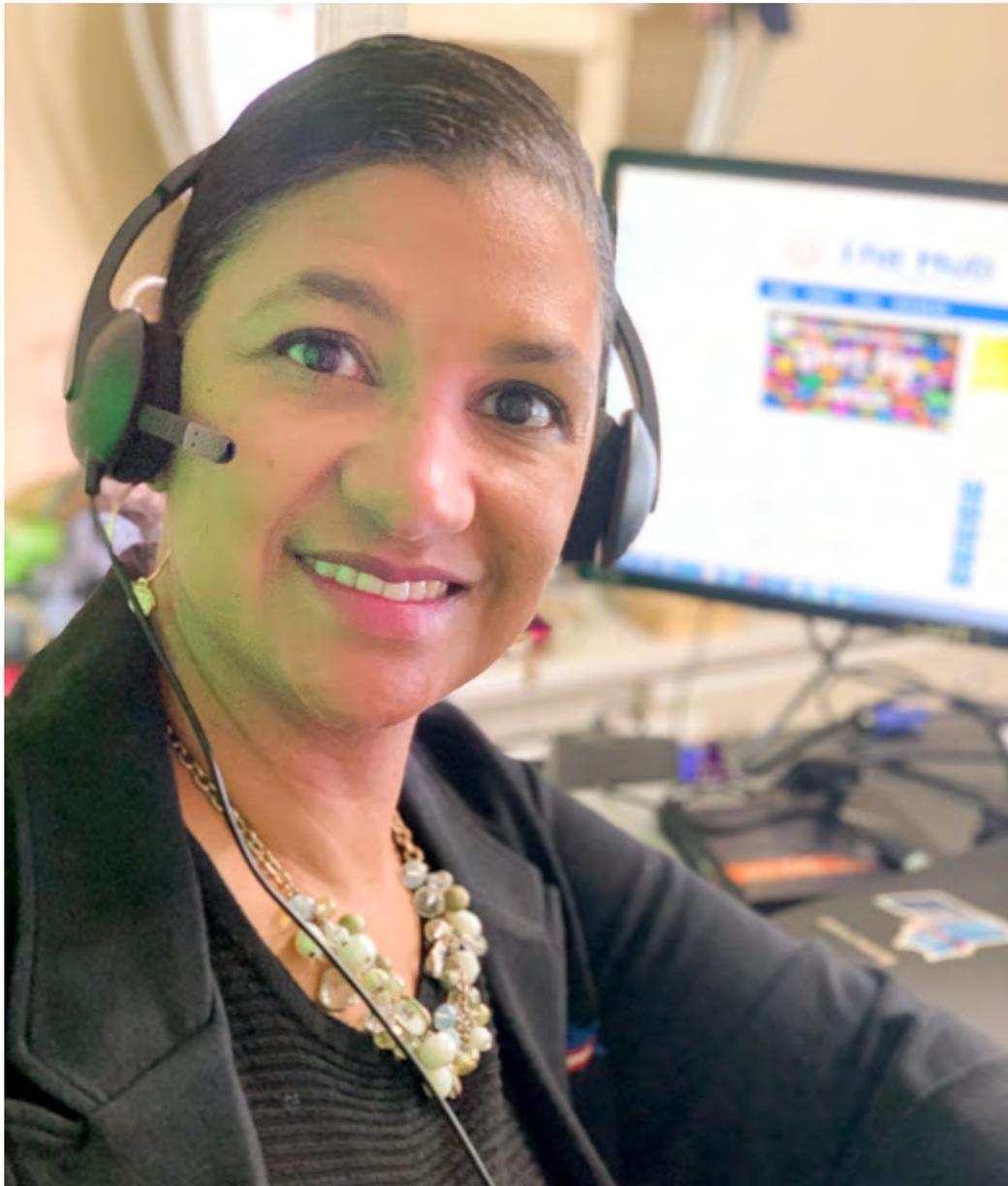
High school history teacher Chase Coulter completed a six-week, self-paced on-line instructor's course offered by Harris County Department of Education after the onset of COVID-19. During the summer he was given the opportunity to create online history curriculum for his employer, Conroe Independent School District. The course also helped him establish best practices in his virtual classes this fall.

"I'm very grateful I took the course," the nine-year teacher said. "It helped prepare me, and I believe it will open more doors in the future because I have that experience."

HCDE began offering the course half-price this summer because of a growing demand for online teaching strategies as many districts shift back and forth to virtual instruction during the pandemic.

The course is sectioned into six modules, can be completed in six weeks and is recognized as a three-year certificate from the Texas Education Agency. Through Oct. 31, HCDE is offering the course for 50 percent off at \$250 to support teachers new to the virtual classroom. Many districts are picking up the tab to help teachers with online teaching techniques.

“Everything in the course is self-paced,” Dr. Colina Poullard said. Poullard serves as curriculum director for HCDE’s Digital Education and Innovation and is one of several experienced curriculum directors who are available to help guide teachers through the online course.



Dr. Colina Poullard

The six modules span subjects like ensuring student achievement; promoting student collaboration and engagement; using best practices and strategies in online learning; teaching in an online classroom; and understanding copyright law and fair use requirements. Teachers will be introduced to online course activities like blogs, forums, wikis and discussion boards along with learning platforms and apps.

Poullard emphasizes the importance of establishing norms and structures in any virtual learning environment. That includes doing activities at a specific time like watching a video or saying the pledge.

“You should also model what you are going to be doing with your students,” she said.

When using the chat box or a new app, she suggests modeling first. Tell them the “why” and give them opportunity to practice with the device before the lesson begins.

Finally, Poullard urges teachers to provide lessons in small bites as students progress virtually. A student should be able to give feedback after each piece.

“It’s extremely important for students to feel connected to their teacher,” Poullard said.

Poullard said the course is beneficial to teachers across the country, as well as locally in Texas. For more information about enrolling in the Online Instructor’s Course through HCDE, access [3]<https://tinyurl.com/HCDEonline> or email [4]cpoullard@hcde-texas.org.

1. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/09/chase.jpg>
 2. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/09/colina-poullard.jpg>
 3. https://tinyurl.com/HCDEonline?fbclid=IwAR3BgJiv_IiAD69tEbrptpo2xU5IAA7ruq9Eic8LmNl1XkhzuyXlIcFSTSk
 4. <mailto:cpoullard@hcde-texas.org>
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The Benefit of Argument: 2 Cousins Named to Elite USA Debate Teams through CASE Debates (2020-09-11 09:48) - hcdetx



[1]



As cousins, CASE Debates team members Rodrigo Trujillo and Diego Castillo admit to being competitive, fueling one another on their Alief ISD team. After being selected this month to join the elite USA Debate and Development teams to compete in national and international arenas, the heat is officially on.

“It’s a big workload and we put a lot of hours into practice,” said Trujillo, a senior at Elsie high school. “Debate motivates me to learn more and gives me passion to improve constantly. It forces me to keep up with current events and builds this intrinsic motivation.”

The pair compete through World Schools Debate, one of two competitive debate

formats. They have earned the unique honor of being the first two CASE Debates members selected for the National Speech and Debate Association teams. Only 15 students across the nation make the USA Development Team, which grooms student debaters for the USA Debate Team, an elite team of 12.

[2]



Rodrigo Trujillo

CASE Debates is a four-year-old, afterschool debates program created by the Center for Afterschool, Summer and Enrichment for Kids (CASE for Kids). It is funded 300

with a budgeted \$238,000 in the 2020-2021 school year by Harris County Department of Education (HCDE). CASE for Kids, a division of HCDE, collaborates with local school districts and charter schools through a model provided by the Houston Urban Debate League (HUDL) a nonprofit promoting academic and advocacy skills among urban teens through debate.

Last year, 18 high schools in Harris County participated in CASE Debates, a program with no cost to the district, school, teacher or student. Stipends and training are awarded to teachers like Elsie High debate coach Ashley Freeman, who signed up to coach CASE Debates teams for the past four years and has navigated her team to several championships. Students participate in local and state debate competitions which have lately switched to virtual platforms.

“A key advantage to participating in CASE Debates is that the program provides guided lessons for both the students and teachers to train them in the fundamentals of debate,” CASE for Kids Director Dr. Lisa Thompson-Caruthers said. Toni Candis, coordinator of the HCDE CASE Debates program, credits debate as a way for students to foster skills learned in public speaking, analysis, organization, research, teamwork and critical thinking.

“Debate is also proven to improve student’s grade point average and literacy scores while increasing the likelihood of attendance, high school graduation and college matriculation,” Candis said.

Trujillo, 17, says debate opportunity might not have been possible without CASE Debates. Lower socioeconomic communities typically can’t support costly programs which are more common in affluent communities.

“CASE Debates pushes students to learn about things that they aren’t taught in the typical academic classroom,” he said. “It provides a foundation for meaningful learning, not just algebra—but also government and social affairs.”

Trujillo is thinking of going into politics and believes having experience in debate and a spot on the USA Debate Team can only help his college and scholarship applications.

To Castillo, the newfound privilege gives him access to work with national-level coaches and learn advanced debate strategies.



Diego Castillo

With four years of debate behind him, he thinks of the year his school competed against an affluent suburban school with USA Debate Team members.

“We got absolutely destroyed,” he said, remembering the significance of the loss. “I thought, I’m going to be that good someday.”

So far this school year, CASE Debates is serving the following school districts: Alief, Galena Park, Harmony Public Schools, Humble, Katy, KIPP Texas Public Schools, 302

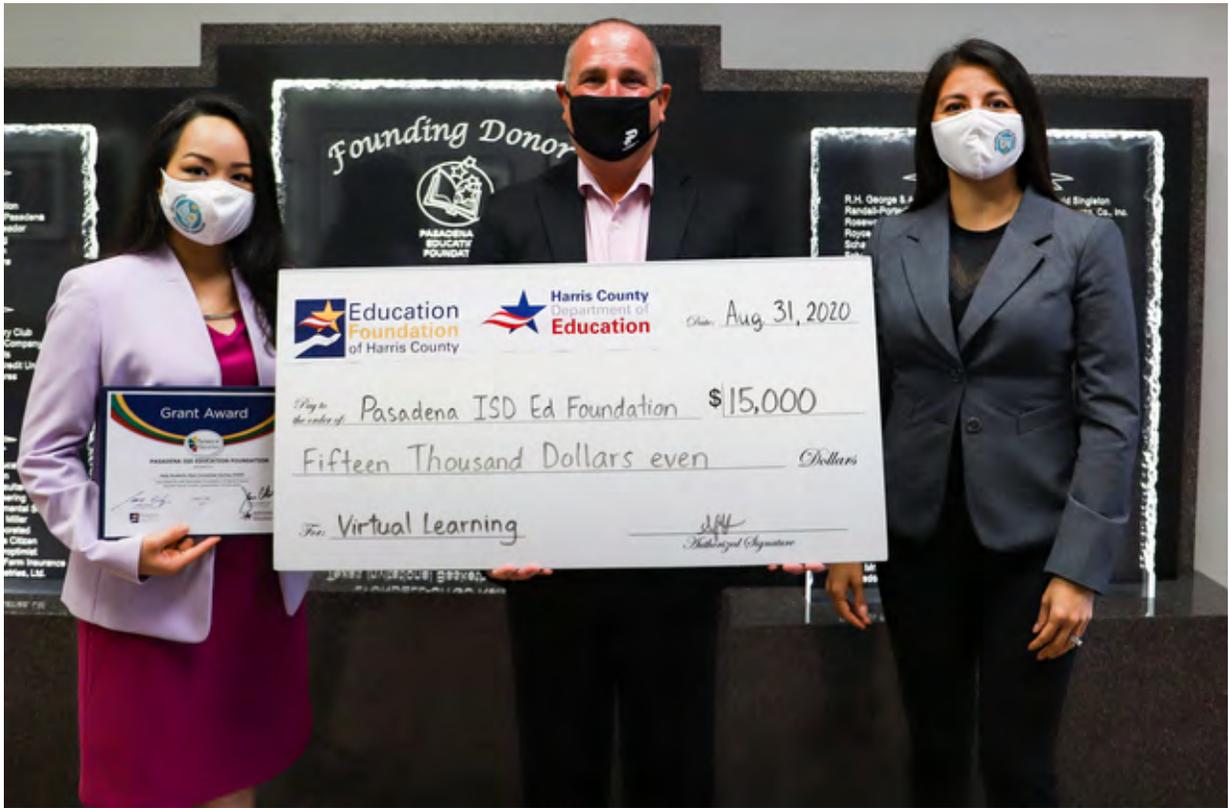
Pasadena, Sheldon, Spring Branch, Spring and YES Prep Public Schools.

Schools are urged to join CASE Debates this fall through application submittals. For information about CASE Debates, email [4]casedebates@hcde-texas.org.

1. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/09/rodrigo-trujillo1.jpg>
 2. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/09/rodrigo-trujillo.jpg>
 3. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/09/diego-castillo.jpg>
 4. <mailto:casedebates@hcde-texas.org>
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Harris County School Districts Bolstered During Pandemic with \$200,000 in Grant Funding from Education Foundation of Harris County (2020-09-11 10:25) - hcdetx





Supporting Harris County School Districts is the primary mission of the Harris County Department of Education (HCDE). In keeping with that goal, the Education Foundation of Harris County (EFHC), the philanthropic arm of HCDE, recently announced grant distributions of \$207,013 to local school districts focused on helping area districts cope with COVID-19 related resources.

The “Partners in Education Project” grant awards range from \$5,000 to \$15,000 to assist school district with needs varying from technology to pandemic health products to school supplies.

The grants were made possible by the HCDE Board of Trustees, who in April voted to appropriate \$500,000 in funding to support Harris County districts during the 2020-2021 school year.

“The Harris County Department of Education prides itself on filling the gaps in public education in our county,” said County School Superintendent James Colbert Jr. “At the beginning of COVID-19 we saw the unprecedented needs of the school districts we serve. Our board took immediate action to ask the foundation to administer grants to provide additional resources to directly support these needs.”

The 16 districts receiving the initial disbursement of grant funding are: Aldine, Alief, Channelview, Clear Creek, Crosby, Galena Park, Goose Creek, Houston, Humble, Katy

La Porte, Pasadena, Sheldon, Spring, Spring Branch and Stafford. Applications were collected from district administration or the education foundation affiliated with each district.

Pasadena Independent School District and its PISD Education Foundation was the first district to announce its Partners in Education Project grant award from HCDE through the EFHC.

“Pasadena ISD is very appreciative of Harris County for its generous support of our students,” PISD Associate Superintendent Dr. Troy McCarley said. “This grant means more than just providing resources for our virtual learners. It also means helping many students to accomplish virtual instruction.”

Pasadena’s grant project helps underserved students with MiFi devices and monthly Internet services so that students may complete virtual learning online assignments. HCDE Board of Trustee Amy Hinojosa shared the good news of the grant with PISD administrators. She supports PISD as HCDE’s Precinct 2 trustee and resident of Pasadena.

HCDE Trustees serving on the EFHC Board include Hinojosa, Andrea Duhon and Michael Wolfe.

Colbert noted the grants supplement HCDE’s other services to districts including four special schools, professional development for educators, school safety, teacher certification programs, Head Start, school-based therapy and adult education.

“HCDE serves our districts in so many ways and we are thrilled to find yet another means of partnering with districts to support students and staff,” Colbert said.

Photo: Pasadena Education Foundation’s Andrea Nguyen, PISD Assistant Superintendent Dr. Troy McCarley and HCDE Board Member Amy Hinojosa

1. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/09/img_2017.jpg

Center for Safe and Secure Schools Adds COVID-19 Checklist as it Performs School Safety Audits (2020-09-11 12:02) - hcdetx



[1]



School Safety and Security Audits are routine work for Harris County Department

of Education's Center for Safe and Secure Schools (CSSS). In addition to accessing factors like security, those audits now include COVID-19 precautionary measures.

CSSS recently released [2]a video which highlights some of the best practices put forth by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) for school districts. Those include social distancing being aware of COVID-19 symptoms. They also include personal protective equipment like masks and desk shields for students and staff.

[3]View the video to learn more or email CSSS Director Julia Andrews, jandrews@hcde-texas.org .

[4]<https://youtu.be/9iayaqrFkqc>

[youtube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9iayaqrFkqc>]

1. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/09/csss-screenshot.jpg>

2. <https://nam04.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fyoutu.be%2F9iayaqrFkqc&data=02%7C01%7Ccvaughn%40hcde-texas.org%7C14bafb79410d4f24ca4208d853f82>

3. <https://nam04.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fyoutu.be%2F9iayaqrFkqc&data=02%7C01%7Ccvaughn%40hcde-texas.org%7C14bafb79410d4f24ca4208d853f82>

4. <https://youtu.be/9iayaqrFkqc>

Harris County Department of Education Board Votes to Lower Tax Rate for 6th Consecutive Year (2020-09-16 16:11) - hcdetx



[1]



Archived Photo 2019

Through a unanimous vote, Harris County Department of Education's Board of Trustees voted to lower the tax rate for a sixth consecutive year. The board adopted the recommended rate of \$0.004993, a slight decrease from the current \$.0050 tax rate.

For a home valued at \$200,000, the adopted rate of \$0.004993 means the average Harris County homeowner would pay HCDE less than \$ 9 a year in property taxes for education services.



Archived photo

Following the vote, HCDE Board President Eric Dick praised the move and support of his fellow board members.

“This shows that we are being good stewards of the county’s money, especially during a pandemic,” he said.

HCDE provides wraparound services to both school districts and the general public through afterschool programs, school-based therapy services, adult education, Head

Start and four specialty schools. Additional services such as a national purchasing cooperative give school districts buying power. Educators also benefit from professional development and leadership training supplied by HCDE.

[3]



Archived Photo 2019

Superintendent James Colbert Jr. said creating a leaner budget allowed for the continuation of HCDE’s conservative adopted tax rate.

“Our business model has allowed us to continue to reduce the tax rate,” County School Superintendent James Colbert Jr. said. “That’s a testament to the quality of services provided to our clients.”

For more information about HCDE’s impact and local support of education, visit [4]www.hcde-texas.org .

1. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/09/20200115_board_115.jpg

2. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/09/20200115_board_117.jpg

3. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/09/20200115_board_135-1.jpg
 4. <http://www.hcde-texas.org/>
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Free Virtual School Safety Forum Oct. 16 Covers Host of Hot Topics: COVID-19, Social Justice, Child Trafficking (2020-09-21 16:19)

- hcdetx



[1]



Virtual School Safety Forum 2020 set for Oct. 16 addresses social justice, COVID-19 precautions, school safety hot topics, human trafficking, cultural awareness, mental health and more. Hosted by Harris County Department of Education's Center for Safe and Secure Schools and the Harris County Sheriff's Office, the forum features national presenters along with local experts who are hosting breakout sessions.

The free, eight-hour event is hosted on Zoom from 8 a.m.-4:45 p.m. and features vendor showcases from 8-8:30 a.m. and 4:15-4:45 p.m. Register at [2]<https://www.edelements.com/hcde-school-safety-forum-101620>.

Michael Dorn, president of Safe Havens International, is morning keynote. His presentation centers on developing trends in school emergency preparedness and recommunicating school safety. Districts take away tangible, actionable tips to bring them up to speed on emergency preparedness measures and steps to protect robust technology systems. Carly Posey, mission director for [3]I Love U Guys Foundation, talks about lessons learned from Sandy Hook and COVID-19. Her discussion includes heartfelt stories of Sandy Hook Elementary and ways to reassemble the school community and secure trust and safety. The foundation is a national advocate for school safety.

Breakout sessions include the following:

- Hot topics in school safety with Dorn, featuring a question-and-answer discussion with the presenter and school staff
 - Trauma 101 with Sharif Charles and Nicole Milton of the Center for School Behavioral Health at Mental Health of America Greater Houston as they discuss trauma classroom strategies
 - Human trafficking and keeping students safe with Christa Mayfield, director of prevention, Unbound Houston
 - Best practices for social justice in schools presented by Charles A. Barrett, psychologist, Loudoun County Public Schools. Barrett also presents on systemic racism and police violence and the implications for promoting possible outcomes for students
 - Online predators and cybersecurity for the online learning environment, a discussion with Gary Spurger, manager -Harris County Sheriff's Office High Tech Crime Division.
- The School Safety Forum, now in its third year, is a mainstay for area educators and school safety officials throughout greater Harris County, said Julia Andrews, director for the Center for Safe and Secure Schools.

"As COVID-19 joins school security as being an issue of utmost concern to school districts, this forum continues to gain support and visibility among school security experts and area educators," Andrews said.

The forum is funded through the Student, Teachers and Officers Preventing (STOP) School Violence Grant which is designed to improve school security by providing students and teachers with the tools they need to recognize, quickly responded to and help prevent acts of violence.

More details about the speakers and schedules may be found on the registration page at [4]<https://tinyurl.com/SafetyForum20>.

1. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/09/maingraphic.jpg>
2. <https://www.edelements.com/hcde-school-safety-forum-101620>
3. <http://www.iloveyouguys.org/>

4. <https://tinyurl.com/SafetyForum20>

CASE Partnership Project Makes Impact Among At-Risk Students Enrolled in 5Works Afterschool Program in Alief Apartment Complex (2020-09-24 14:55) - hcdetx



[1]



5Works photo archives

At an apartment complex in Alief, an afterschool program run by a nonprofit is being infused with \$10,000 in matching funds by the CASE for Kids Partnership Project. Supported through community partners like Harris County Department of Education's Center for Afterschool, Summer and Enrichment for Kids (CASE for Kids), children enrolled in the program are advancing academically and getting emotional help during COVID-19.

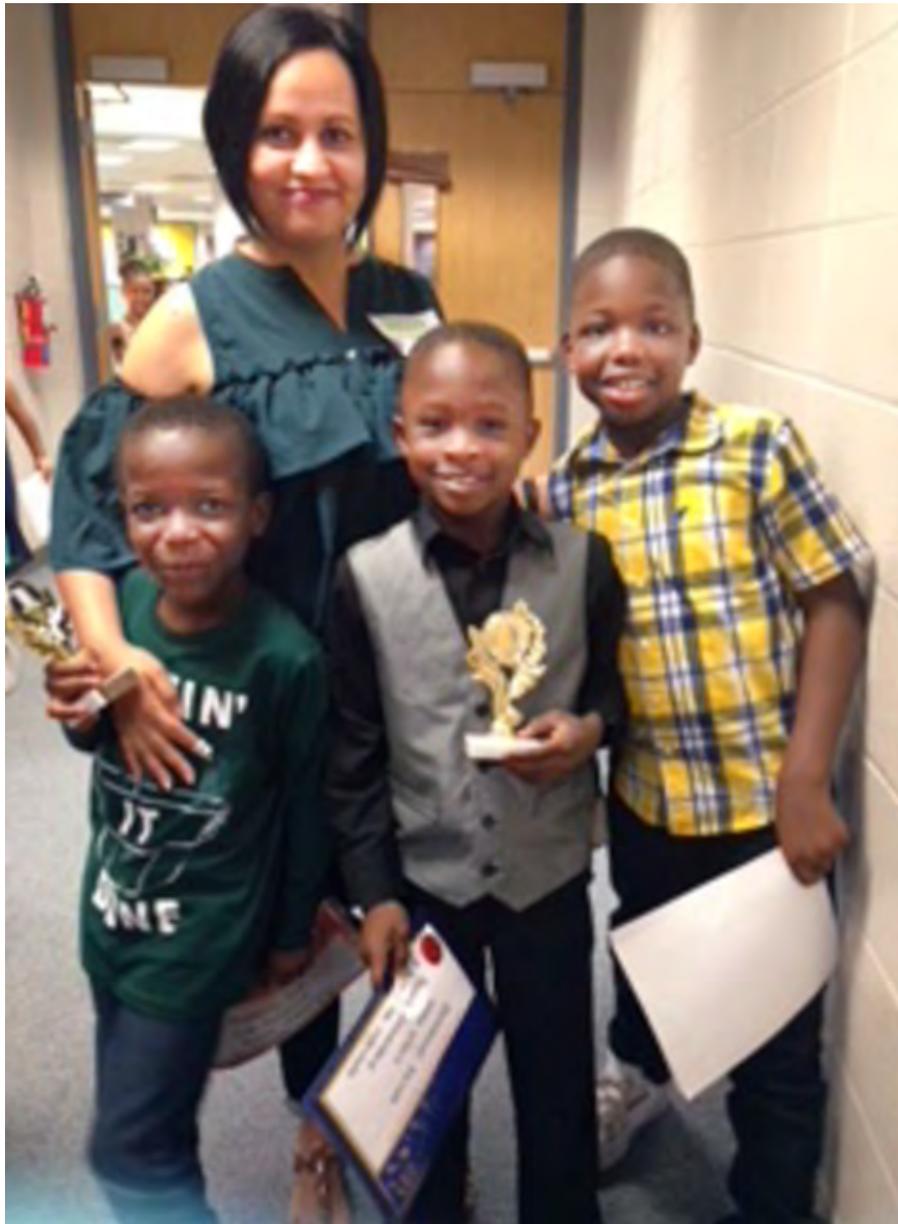
Twenty-nine nonprofits and schools with comprehensive afterschool programs gained their share of \$550,000 in funding from the Partnership Project for the 2020-2021 school year as awardees were announced by CASE for Kids. Award amounts ranged from \$10,000 to \$30,000. Awardees provide a 25 percent funding match. View the list:

[2] <https://tinyurl.com/PartProject20>

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The Partnership Project is a 21-year-old program founded by HCDE's CASE for Kids which fills afterschool funding gaps through a unique collaboration between local, state and federal partners. Partnership Project provides funding through CASE for Kids, the Houston-Galveston Area Council and the Texas Workforce Commission. Eligibility requires the program to be a comprehensive, 12-hour program which operates five days a week.

[3]



5Works photo archives

Aims of the Partnership Project are to provide supplemental funding to comprehensive afterschool programs for disadvantaged students ages 4-12 or children with disabilities up to 19. The program promotes social and emotional learning skills and increases support for academic programs promoting math and reading.

“Our goal is to support the afterschool program providers that are working

diligently to serve youth and families during this difficult timeframe,” said Dr. Lisa Thompson-Caruthers, CASE for Kids director.

Besides the Partnership Project funding, organizations such as the nonprofit 5Works benefit from staff trainings; access to supplies and materials; and general afterschool support from staff at CASE for Kids.

The 5Works Inc. program operates from a one-bedroom apartment at Catalina Apartments and serves economically disadvantaged families of children in grades K-5 from two Alief Independent School District elementary schools.

“It’s a very diverse community with over 60 different languages and dialects spoken,” 5Works Inc. Executive Director Oralia Rios-Williams said. “We currently offer in person and virtual support and engagement options for our kids and families at the Catalina Apartments focused on academic improvement, healthy lifestyles and family involvement.”

Since Alief ISD has been operating virtually, one of the program’s goals has included focusing on teaching parents and children how to connect with the school’s online instruction system. In addition to partnering with CASE for Kids, the afterschool program works in partnership with the school district and local YMCA.

“The idea was to add value to apartment complexes where Alief students resided by offering a quality afterschool program which would extend the school day for K-5 students,” Rios-Williams said.

Parents work in the program as a mandatory requirement for their child’s eligibility. Local high school students volunteer to help at the complex as well.

“The program built community, and we hope it made the complex a little safer,” she said.

Besides the social-emotional benefits of community-based afterschool, Rios-Williams says Alief ISD tracks students in the program and has found they are reading at or above their grade level.

As Alief ISD students return to school next week, 5Works shifts its focus back on supporting students and parents before and after the school day. Parents will be offered GED, ESL and parenting classes.

“This semester we will add writing for the children, beginning with journaling to help them express what they are experiencing with all the changes during this pandemic, and next semester we will do more creative writing,” Rios-Williams said.

CASE for Kids Director Caruthers says afterschool is supplying a critical function during a time when so many families feels a sense of isolation.

“Afterschool programs can offer children a chance to play, share and explore in ways that foster peer-to-peer connections through positive mentorship,” said Caruthers.

For information about CASE for Kids, go to

[4] www.hcde-texas.org/afterschool-zone.

View the list of organizations gaining funding for 2020-2021 through CASE for Kids Partnership Project:

[5] <https://tinyurl.com/PartProject20>

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1. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/09/va.kidshomewk2-002.jpg>
 2. <https://tinyurl.com/PartProject20>
 3. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/09/awards.jpg>
 4. <http://www.hcde-texas.org/afterschool-zone>.
 5. <https://tinyurl.com/PartProject20>
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Virtual Expo 2020 ‘Making it Work’ Helps Schools Find Solutions to Cafeteria Fare During Pandemic (2020-09-24 16:28) - hcdetx



[1]



Food co-ops which serve area school districts are finding innovative ways to deliver quality food items to students during the pandemic, such as small, prepackaged meals. Harris County Department of Education’s Choice Partners joins with other food co-ops throughout Texas to host an inaugural Virtual Expo 2020 “Making It Work” children’s nutrition food service expo from Sept. 29-Oct 1.

The three-day event features new presentations each day, including approximately 100 vendors that offer food, small-wares, equipment and software products and services to area school districts participating in school nutrition programs. To date, about 900 attendees from school districts, municipalities and government nonprofits have registered.

The event provided by co-ops in Texas is cosponsored by Choice Partners, Multi-Region Purchasing Cooperative, Region One, Region 5, Region 7, Region 8, West Texas

Food Service Cooperative, Texas 20 and Sodexo.

Live speaker sessions pack the expo agenda, which features new presentations daily. Special presentations from the Food Network spotlight recipes and cooking techniques with celebrity chefs like Jason Smith. Expo sessions focus on procurement; USDA waivers and community foods; and Texas Department of Agriculture updates. Meetups and chats with industry partners will be included.

The event is free. Register today: [2]<https://tinyurl.com/y2yf9lwo>

1. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/09/expo.jpg>

2. <https://tinyurl.com/y2yf9lwo>

1.10 October

Tech-Savvy School-Based Therapists Support Students with Special Needs, Teachers, Parents (2020-10-01 15:26) - hcdetx



Problem-solvers, parent-coaches, think-tankers and tech-savvy are terms which describe school-based therapists as they help students with physical and intellectual disabilities be successful through virtual learning.

Harris County Department of Education (HCDE) School-Based Therapy Services employs 157 physical, occupational and music therapists and assistant therapists who work in 32 school districts and charter schools. HCDE's team of highly trained therapists provide support for more than 7,000 students in greater Harris County with autism spectrum disorder, intellectual disabilities and other challenges.

At a Glance, School-Based Therapy Services in 2019-2020:

- 6,668 students served
- 7,228 teachers/educators served
- 24 ISDs served, 4 charter schools, 1 special education co-op, 1 nonprofit, 2 HCDE schools
- Highest percentage population served are children with autism (32.7 percent)
- Second-highest percentage population served are children with intellectual disabilities (23 percent)

“Therapy sessions are conducted in a variety of ways, depending on the individual needs of the student,” HCDE School-Based Therapy Services Director Carie Crabb said. “Sometimes therapists are attending a virtual class lesson along with the student they are supporting. At other times, the therapist is providing a virtual session with a student and their parent or caregiver.”

As therapists continue to meet a main goal of helping students succeed in the school setting, the biggest adjustment since the pandemic is with technology. Districts first struggled to get equipment to families. Therapists then had to climb a steep technology learning curve themselves.

“We are able to do things now that we never imagined possible before,” said Crabb.

A student needs help with handwriting skills or with using a pair of scissors. Distraction-free home workspaces are set up to help students with attention-deficit disorders. Parents are shown how to use writing or typing accommodations such as text-to-speech devices with their children.



Leah Alba

HCDE manager and physical therapist Leah Alba talks about the qualities needed to be an excellent “tele-therapist.”

“I think being a ‘tele-therapist,’ one needs to be patient, flexible, innovative and resourceful,” said Alba.

When students began learning from home, she recalls challenges including computer connectivity, unfamiliarity with software and learning platforms, schedules and meeting parents’ needs.

“But when you start seeing your students on the other end of the computer and how the parents participate during the session, it gave me a sense of purpose,” Alba said. “It was an opportunity for me to share my ideas with parents, problem-solve how their child can participate during instructional lessons, modify their environment, identify alternative strategies and help guide parents through the instructional routine.”

Occupational therapist and HCDE manager Traci Gault has worked in school therapy for over a decade. She agrees with Alba about the pandemic making therapists “think outside the box.”

[2]



Traci Gault

“Therapists were able to successfully transition from in-person learning to virtual learning since we use a “coaching model,” Gault said. “Teachers and staff are shown and instructed in various strategies to help support students. These strategies are used by teachers and staff when providing support to their students daily.”

As many districts return to in-person instruction, therapists are careful to follow strict guidelines set forth by each of those districts, including social distancing, plexiglass barriers and face masks.

Manager Alba believes the feeling of being “connected” rings true for both in-person and virtual therapy.

“If think the most difficult part about my new role as a manager in the virtual world is making sure everyone feels connected and stays motivated,” she said. “Phone calls, emails and virtual chat are still available, but it can still be difficult to ensure everyone feels connected and supported.”

Crabb thinks of her staff of therapists as unsung heroes who have a deep sense of dedication and care for the students with disabilities whom they serve.

“These challenging times have brought to light the hard work and selfless sacrifice that they put forth every day,” she said.

1. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/10/leah-alba-photo.jpg>

2. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/10/traci.jpg>

Katy Teen Wang Makes Regional History as Harris County Department of Education's First 'National Student Poet'
(2020-10-08 13:48) - hcdetx





Poetry and prose are interwoven throughout National Student Poet Ethan Wang's life. The Katy ISD teen who learned Chinese as his first language remembers memorizing Tang poetry as a toddler, an ancient poetry revered by his scholarly grandparents.

By age 6, Wang won a school award for an essay he wrote about a book. Later that year, his mother Hong Qin recounted her son's first beach trip that prompted an in-the-moment poem which demonstrated rare sensitivity and insightfulness:

"I really like the sea; it can bring something," he said. "It also takes something."

At 9, Wang crafted a short novel as a gift to a friend.

As an 11th grader, he credits his debate coach and creative writing mentor Mary Sarver for introducing him to contemporary poets and encouraging him to continue his writing.

“I can say with confidence I would not be here without her help,” Wang said of his new status as one of the top young poets in the nation.

Sarver, who claims poetry as her wheelhouse, points to Wang’s remarkable use of imagery, metaphors and experimental language, calling the young writer “one of the most outstanding poets she has ever worked with.”

The 16-year old gained three Gold Keys from regional Scholastic Art & Writing Awards sponsored by Harris County Department of Education (HCDE) last year. His work went on to be judged nationally in New York City and he earned a Gold Medal for his poem called “Cloth Ballad, Leather Trails.”

This September, he was home eating lunch and got the call from the Awards which informed him of his new notoriety. Five National Student Poets were selected across the nation from various regions.

He garnered the award, making him the top young poet from the Southwest.

The National Student Poets Program is a partnership between the Institute of Museum and Library Services and the nonprofit Alliance for Young Artists & Writers which presents the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards. Scholastic is the longest-running and most prestigious scholarship and recognition program for the country’s young artist and writers.

The poets were selected from students in grades 10-11 who submitted more than 20,000 works. Only 35 semi-finalists were chosen by poet jurors. Finalists were asked to submit additional poetry from which the five were named. Wang gained \$5,000 and the responsibility of representing the program through numerous literary events.

“This is an incredible honor for Ethan Wang and his sponsoring teachers Karen Thompson and Mary Sarver from Cinco Ranch High School,” HCDE Scholastic Art & Writing coordinator Andrea Segraves said. “Since 1993 when we began regional sponsorship of Scholastic Art & Writing, we have never had a National Student Poet named from our region.

“Harris County Department of Education celebrates this accomplishment and wishes Ethan the best in his future creative endeavors.”

As Wang reflects on the memorized words and their cadences he gleaned while learning to talk as a toddler, he feels the imprint of the experience.

“Poetry is about feeling and it’s important because it’s one of the few art forms left to effectively communicate feelings and stories,” he said. Wang encourages his peers to enter Scholastic Art & Writing Awards, even if it’s just to write for fun.

“It helps young writers achieve recognition, and more importantly, it lets them be proud of their work,” he said.

(HCDE is a regional affiliate of Scholastic Art & Writing Awards. Writing and art submissions are currently being accepted through Dec. 4, 2020. For details, go to [2]<https://tinyurl.com/HCDEartandwriting> or email [3]asegraves@hcde-texas.org)

1. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/10/unknown-1.jpg>
 2. <https://tinyurl.com/HCDEartandwriting>
 3. <mailto:asegraves@hcde-texas.org>
-

Employee Spotlight: HCDE's Longtime Team Player Theresa Perez Shares Love of Sports (2020-10-15 13:30) - hcdetx





Employee Theresa Perez is smitten with all-things sports, especially the Houston Astros.

([\[2\]View photo gallery.](#))

The executive assistant to Harris County Department of Education's Assistant Superintendent for Academic Support Jonathan Parker began her journey with HCDE in 1992 as the front desk receptionist at Irvington.

During her 28-year career, Perez worked in staff development (now called the Teaching and Learning Center), Therapy Services (School-Based Therapy Services) and at Highpoint School North (now Fortis).

She calls her boss of two years down to earth and very supportive. They tussle
336

over sports teams as Parker likes the Cowboys, and she supports the Texans.

Baseball, she says, is the pair's true sports rivalry as former Dallas resident Parker likes the Rangers and she supports her Astros. He is warming up to the orange-and-blue, she admits.

Perez's love for the Astros led her to volunteer at 153 events last year. For that record, she earned the "Volunteer of the Year Award" from the Astros club.

[3]



"My most exciting time as volunteer was when we went to the World Series in 2017," she said, remembering Hurricane Harvey and Houstonians who held their team close to their hearts as the city's rebuilding began.

By working the games, she met players like Jose Altuve, Craig Biggio and her favorite player Jose Cruz. Through the Astros Foundation she volunteered with the Sunshine Kids Foundation. She made innumerable friendships through the 1,400 volunteers who serve the community and helped with community building project with organizations like Habitat for Humanity.

Perez grew up in a sports family and remembers attending Houston Oilers games and sporting “Luv Ya Blue” attire. To this day, light blue is her favorite color and she still has a small crush on icon Dan Pastorini.

As a little-known fact most fellow employees don’t know, Perez played on a women’s amateur baseball team as a young adult. The team earned its way to the equivalent of the World Series in Phoenix, Arizona.

Her boss says she brings that same “team spirit” to her job as executive assistant.

“She is a vital part of the Academic Support Division which includes School-Based Therapy Services, the Schools and Head Start,” he said. “We are better because she is on our team.

“She is always courteous and professional and oftentimes humorous.”

In terms of bucket lists of things she hasn’t done, Perez hopes to travel extensively with her newfound fur-baby Gunner, a bulldog she inherited from her son Joseph.

“Since COVID, I got a lot closer to him, bought him a new leash and now he’s my best buddy,” she said.

[4]





In the future, Perez says she plans to continue to live life to the fullest and keep thinking positive.

Since 1992, she has seen a lot of folks come and go, including HCDE leaders.

“HCDE is heading in the right direction in serving area students,” she said. “I have made my career here, and HCDE is my second family.”

1. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/10/screenshot_20201009-123928_gallery.jpg
2. <https://hcdetexas.photoshelter.com/gallery/Employee-Spotlight/G0000iHILBH13FNA>
3. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/10/screenshot_20201009-112352_gallery.jpg

4. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/10/screenshot_20201009-123733_gallery.jpg

5. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/10/screenshot_20201009-112012_gallery.jpg

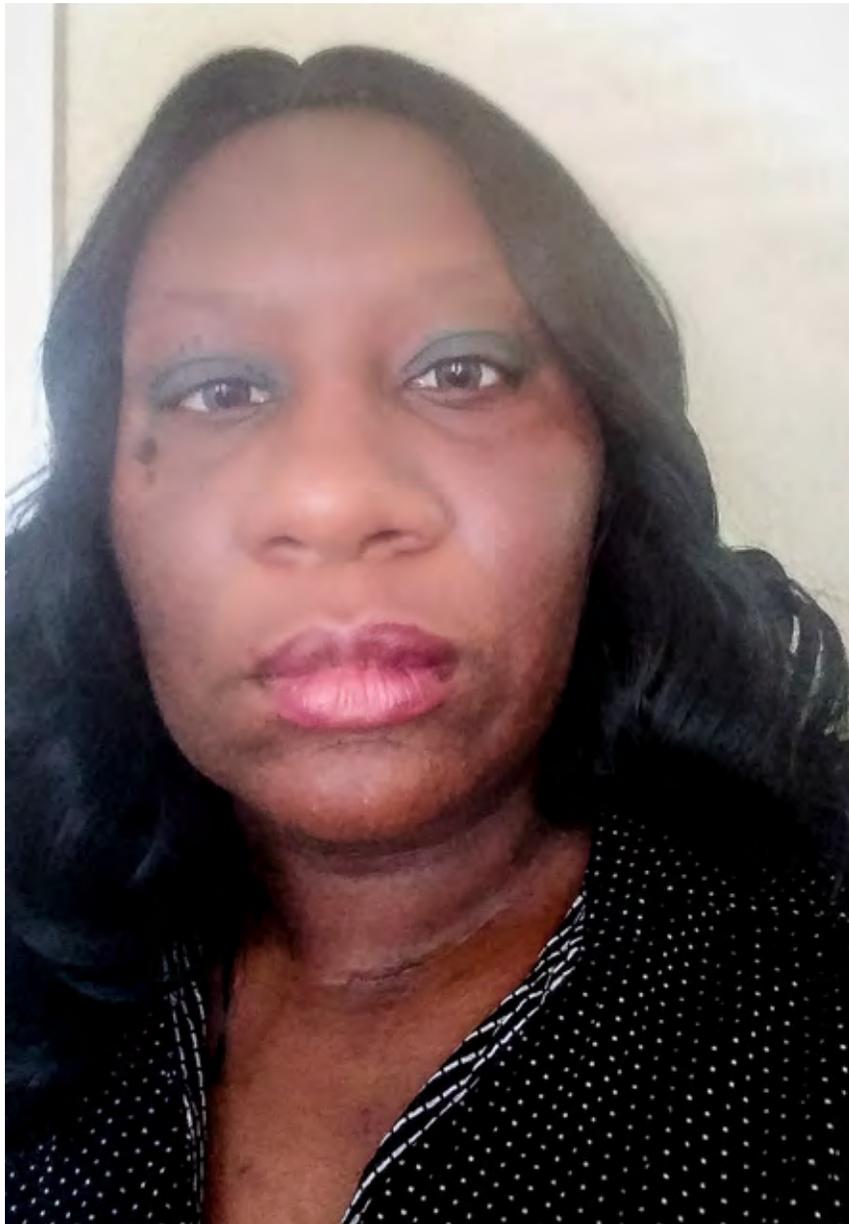
Venetia L Peacock (2020-10-19 17:31:35)

A beautiful story about Theresa. I enjoyed getting to know her even better. She is indeed a beautiful spirit and a wonderful co-worker.

Nancy Argueta (2020-10-20 10:18:39)

Thank you Theresa for your service and dedication. I am glad I got to meet you and call you my coworker. Very helpful and humorous. :)





At 47, Charissa Nealey found the long hours she worked to make ends meet at minimum wage jobs were taking time away from her children. As she applied for medical assistant positions, most employers wanted to see a certification.

She enrolled in a free, virtual, six-week medical assistant certification course which is a collaborative between Harris County Department of Education Adult Education and Dean's Professional Services. She had taken the exam and failed four times in the past. Within six weeks, Nealey gained her certification after studying for the rigorous exam.

Salary ranges for her new profession will be \$12- \$28 an hour with the certification. She can work in hospitals, doctors' offices or specialty clinics.

“As a woman who has learned a lot within these last couple of years of life, the only way for you to fail is when you don’t try,” she said. “Your children see what you do, not what you say.”

Lakisha Hunter is the HCDE Adult Education teacher who coteaches the Medical Assistant Certification course with a licensed vocational nurse. As instructor, Hunter works with students on test-taking skills, resume writing, interviewing, and reviewing the 17 modules required to pass the test.

HCDE Adult Education provides classes in GED preparation, English as a second language and other workforce development programs in construction and medical fields throughout Harris County. Programs are supported through the Texas Workforce Commission.

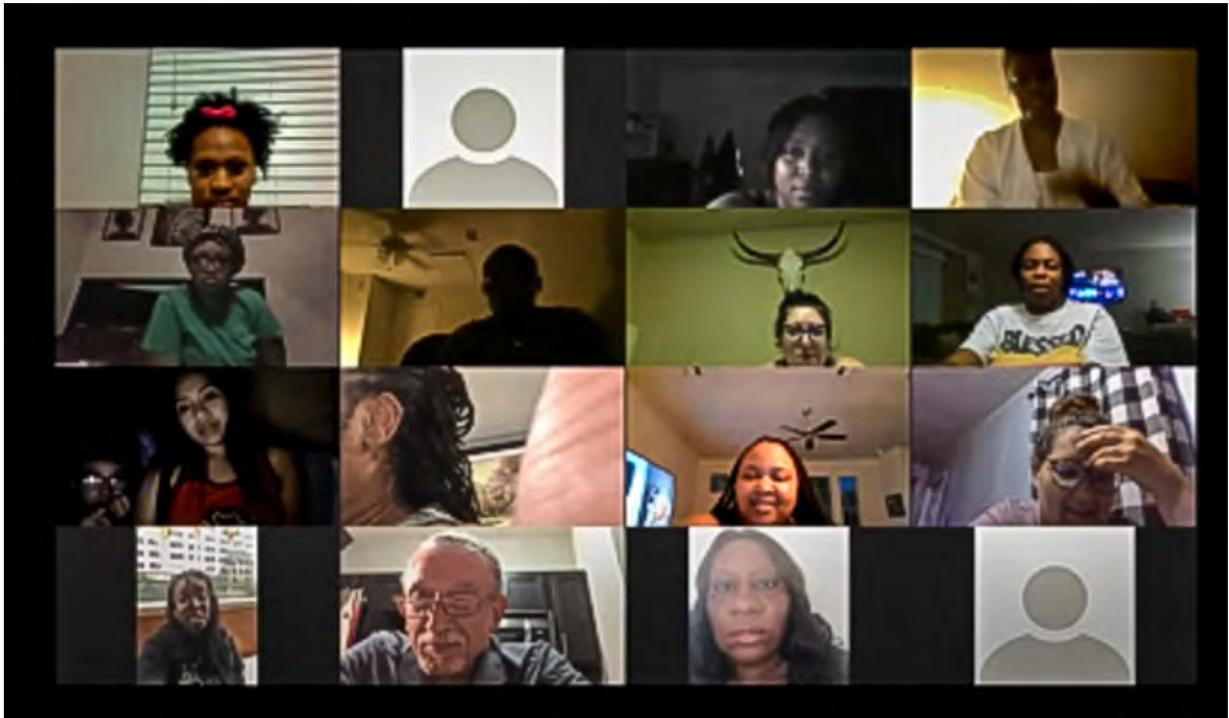
The medical assistant certification class is now virtual and is offered online in the evenings, from 6:30-8:30 p.m. Monday through Thursday so that students may still work while preparing for their certification.

“You get the flexibility of being home, but because you are in your personal environment, it’s important for students to stay focused,” Hunter said.

Projected growth in the medical assistant profession is fueled by the aging baby-boomer population. From 2019-2029, it’s estimated that there will be a 19 percent demand in growth for the profession.

Deans Staffing Education Director Josh Allen says the three-hour exam is rigorous and has an average national pass rate of 76 percent. A two-year partnership with HCDE and Dean’s has resulted in approximately 200 students passing the test, averaging an 86 percent pass rate, well above the national average, according to Allen.

Many candidates in the class already have experience in the medical field, Allen said, who has 11 years of experience in the hospital industry himself. After passing the test, his company helps students gain employment.



The pairing between HCDE Adult Education and Dean’s Staffing is a synergy of sorts as the medical instruction teacher and the adult education study skills teacher debrief each day and talk about which students need assistance with material review and learning strategies.

“We look for students who are dedicated with a sense of commitment and motivation,” Allen said. “You can have a bad day, but we really need someone with perseverance who will see this to the end.”

The medical assistant program can lead to further opportunities as many institutions such as hospitals provide career advancement for their employees. As the latest student to pass the test, Nealey looks at the opportunity as a medical assistant certification as a steppingstone.

“I’m a single parent, and with a medical assistant certification I can work in many medical jobs,” Nealey said. “It’s a great accomplishment to be able to learn something within a six-week span and earn a certification.

“This certificate has upped the ante on what I needed to do with my life—it really has.”

(To inquire about future classes in the medical assistant certification program, go to [3]www.hcde-texas.org/adulteducation .)

1. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/10/nealey.jpg>
2. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/10/ccma-class-pic-1.jpg>

3. <http://www.hcde-texas.org/adulteducation>

Books for Pugh Donated Via Assistance League of Houston's Operation School Bell Reader Program (2020-10-16 12:53) - hcdetx





Assistance League of Houston Head Start Readers Chairperson Marilyn Brooks delivered 234 children's books this week to Venetia Peacock, senior Head Start director and Armando Rodriguez, community partnership manager.

Through Operation School Bell, the League provides books and volunteers to read at the Pugh center. This year volunteers plan to read virtually to children due to COVID-19 precautionary measures.

League volunteer Brooks, a former teacher, says the League and Head Start longtime partnership is a good match because both organizations share a mission to help children in need in school.

1. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/10/img_3959.jpg

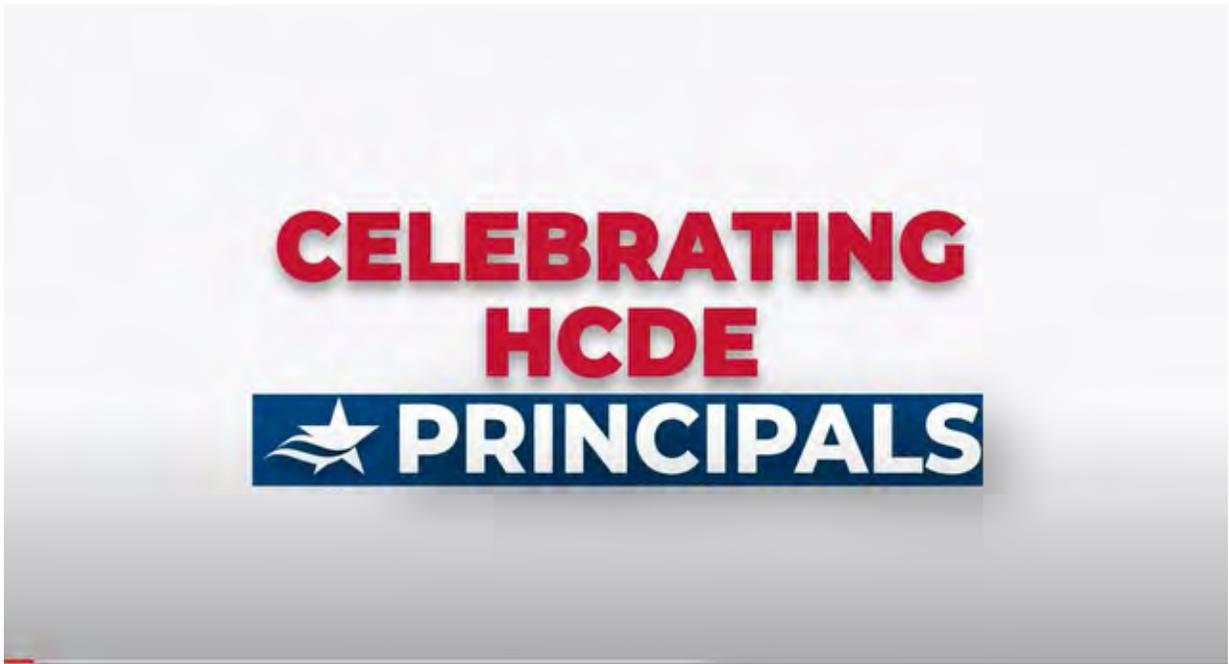
Changing Lives: Academic and Behavior School West
(2020-10-16 13:04) - hcdetx



View the new video produced about Academic and Behavior School West. The video is now available through HCDE's YouTube channel (HCDEtv) and promotes the new school through social media and the news blog. The school opened this fall and welcomes both in-person and virtual student populations.

[youtube [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sXBJQ7tR6ds &w=560 &h=315](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sXBJQ7tR6ds&w=560&h=315)]

Principals Month Video Celebrates HCDE's 4 Principals of Special Schools (2020-10-21 16:17) - hcdetx



As communities across the nation take time out to “thank a principal” this month, HCDE produced a video as testament to our four principals’ hard work, commitment and care they put into their jobs.

View video on YouTube: [1]<https://youtu.be/tZBiYEgpxVk>

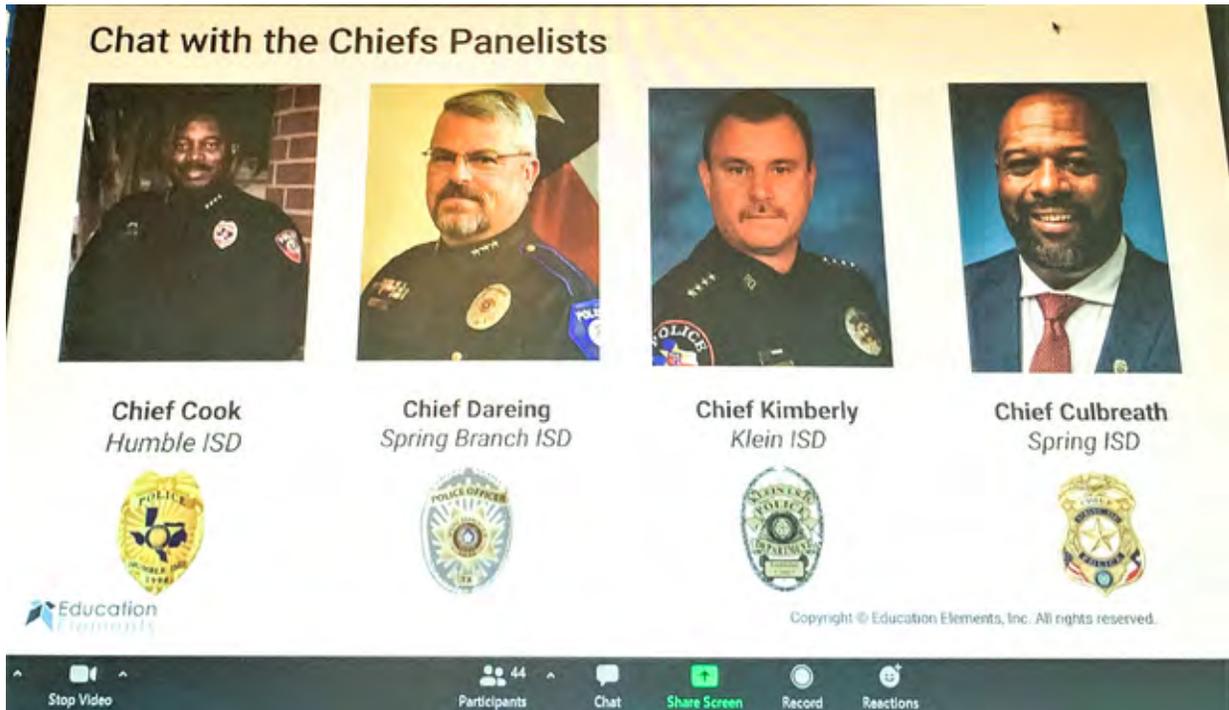
[youtube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tZBiYEgpxVk>]

Featured in the video are Dr. Anthony Moten, Fortis Academy(for recovering youth); Marion Cooksey Highpoint School (for adjudicated or troubled youth) ; Donna-Trevino Jones, Academic and Behavior School (ABS) East and Dr. Victor Keys, ABS West (schools for students with intellectual and emotional disabilities).

“Our principals are on call long after the school day is over, and they are committed and connected to the special populations of students they serve,” said Superintendent James Colbert Jr. “We are thankful; these presentations serve as a small token of our appreciation.”

1. <https://nam04.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fyoutu.be%2FtZBiYEgpxVk&data=04%7C01%7Ccvvaughn%40hcde-texas.org%7C3483537b27c743d2bc7e08d875d3b>

Virtual School Safety Forum 2020 Benefits from Local, National Interest from Educators, Law Enforcement (2020-10-23 13:40) - hcdetx



[1]



As the School Safety Forum went virtual for a first time this Oct. 16, more than 250 participants throughout the nation took advantage of the opportunity to network,

collaborate and gain new information about safety initiatives for public schools.

Sessions targeted topics ranging from racial equity to human trafficking to mental health to cybersecurity. The significance of “overcommunicating” during COVID-19 was a repeated topic of four school district police chiefs who served as panelists in a “Chat with the Chiefs” preconference session Oct. 15. Messages from the chiefs also emphasized nurturing relationships with students, staff and families and proactive steps to address community-police relations.

“Students don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care,” said Chief David Kimberly of Klein Independent School District.

The summit was hosted by Harris County Department of Education’s Center for Safe and Secure Schools and the Harris County Sheriff’s Office. Superintendent James Colbert Jr. gave a Texas welcome to virtual attendees, many of whom logged in from out-of-state locations like New Jersey and Virginia.

Colbert touched on cultural responsiveness as schools are back in session this fall.

“Race relations in our country went dormant,” he said. “We need to address them—formalize strategies through honesty for improvements in order to meet student needs.”

Popular keynote Michael Dorn of Safe Havens International discussed emerging school safety concerns which include cyber threats, increased calls for accountability and conflicting perspectives relating to the role of police in schools and restorative practices. Dorn also presented real-life school violence scenarios to help attendees brainstorm possible outcomes and solutions.

Afternoon keynote Carly Posey shared her story as the mother to two children who attended Sandy Hooks Elementary School when an armed intruder made his way into her son’s first-grade classroom, killing his teacher and a classmate. As the shooter stopped to reload, her son and with nine other students, escaped. Her daughter hid in a closet in the school art room. During the mass shooting in 2012, 28 died and two were injured. Posey is now a national advocate for school safety and travels the country to address preparedness.

Co-host Harris County Sheriff’s Office supplied the session “Online Predators” with Gary Spurger, high tech crimes manager. Spurger gave an overview of online safety for students, focusing on protecting them from predators.

Unbound Houston’s Christa Mayfield presented startling statistics on sex trafficking in teenagers in Texas as 79,000 students are victims of trafficking each year. Social media opens additional avenues for human trafficking, Mayfield explained. Large cities like Houston allow for trafficking opportunists because of our large population and ease of mobility because of multiple interstates.

For more information about upcoming workshops offered by the CSSS, go to [2]www.hcde-texas.org/safe-and-secure-schools.

1. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/10/img_7414.jpg
 2. <http://www.hcde-texas.org/safe-and-secure-schools>
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HCDE Head Start Back-to-School In Person with Small Classroom Sizes, Social Distancing, CDC Protocols (2020-10-23 13:51) - hcdetx



[1]



A detailed orientation for back-to-school made the first day of in-person school smooth-sailing for HCDE Head Start Compton Center Manager Mervonna Daniel, her 356

staff, students and their families.

“We only had one crier,” Daniel said.

View video: [2]<https://youtu.be/wBw6HAIvHRc>

Children at all the HCDE Head Start and Early Head Start centers and childcare partnerships are now attending school in person. All centers are following CDC protocols.

Students and staff are met at the door and checked for temperatures. An emailed questionnaire checks for COVID-19 symptoms prior to class. Personal protection equipment such as masks, sanitizer and gloves are used. Classrooms are split in two with a divider with two teachers to accommodate small class sizes.

“We are also practicing social distancing in the classroom,” Daniel said.

HCDE Head Start staff were working with their students and parents virtually beginning in September. Parents chose one of three daily time slots for virtual classes with their children. Families picked up student work packets along with drive-by meals for their children.

“The process for back-to-school in person was easier because they were able to see us online prior to coming into the building,” Daniel said.

Staff at Channelview Head Start provided a “soft launch” last week as several classrooms of students returned and practiced the new safety protocols. The experience provided valuable feedback as staff worked out minor kinks.

Daniel said most Compton Head Start Center parents and children are excited about returning, especially after receiving information about detailed safety procedures being used.

“We look forward to an outstanding school year and we hope everyone remains safe,” said Daniel.

Head Start is now recruiting students for enrollment. Go to [3]www.hcde-texas.org/head-start to learn more.

1. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/10/back2school1-1.jpg>

2. <https://nam04.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fyoutu.be%2FwBw6HAIvHRc&data=04%7C01%7Ccvaughn%40hcde-texas.org%7Ce0aceae715894a82acfb08d876073>

3. <http://www.hcde-texas.org/head-start>

Virtual Provider Fair Set for Oct. 29 and 30 Connects Afterschool Community Service Providers, Programs (2020-10-23 13:57) - hcdetx





The Virtual Provider Fair set for Oct. 29 and 30 from 10-11:30 a.m. will allow the afterschool community to network with 40 service providers or vendors offering activities ranging from character development to theatre to academic activities, sports and more.

[2]View the flyer.

The free event is an annual event provided by the Center for Afterschool, Summer and Enrichment for Kids, or CASE for Kids, a division of Harris County Department of Education. The event pairs vendors (service providers) with afterschool programs.

“The fair is an opportunity for vendors to speak directly to the afterschool community,” CASE for Kids Director Dr. Lisa Thompson-Caruthers said. “Each provider has a few minutes to present and share their services through PowerPoint or video and interact with attendees through Zoom.”

The pandemic has provided opportunities for vendors to expand their services to virtual platforms, in addition to traditional in-person.

“Afterschool programs have many different needs, and this event helps match providers with various afterschool programs,” said Thompson-Caruthers. “It’s also a networking opportunity for both vendors and attendees.

Samples of vendors attending the virtual event include Mad Science of Houston, Science of Sports, Ensemble Theatre and many more.

The event has been split into two days to allow vendors and programs ample time to connect. Register for [3]Oct. 29 Day 1 and [4]Oct. 30 Day 2 for the optimal opportunity to visit with all vendors. Questions may be sent to jchavez@hcde-texas.org .

1. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/10/img_9362-1.jpg
 2. <http://hcde-texas.org/media/uploads/2020/10/Provider-Fair-2020-003.pdf>
 3. [https://zoom.us/meeting/register/tJ0oc--tqjwiEt3xHNbdiq2K0tQWrQ1L_a9I](https://zoom.us/join/zoom/register/tJ0oc--tqjwiEt3xHNbdiq2K0tQWrQ1L_a9I)
 4. [https://zoom.us/meeting/register/tJUqceysqzIvE9fWXZgxzIg0kCm1w9hRxxVf](https://zoom.us/join/zoom/register/tJUqceysqzIvE9fWXZgxzIg0kCm1w9hRxxVf)
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Conflict Resolution Being Supported in Aldine, Humble by Center for Safe and Secure Schools Via \$40,000 Grant (2020-10-29 15:15)

- hcdetx





Students in 20 elementary schools in Aldine and Humble will learn about conflict resolution early-on thanks to a \$40,000 grant provided to Harris County Department of Education’s Center for Safe and Secure Schools this fall. The yearlong grant is awarded by the JAMS Foundation, a nonprofit founded by JAMS, the largest private provider of alternative dispute resolution services worldwide.

The center’s grant proposal with Aldine and Humble was one of two selected from 130 applications. Center Director Julia Andrews said the grant officially called #RollingwithRestorative is a conflict resolution program using Restorative Practices which trains and supports teachers, counselors, school personnel, parents and students in conflict resolution.

Conflict resolution is the process by which two or more parties reach a peaceful resolution to a dispute. Teaching youth how to resolve conflict in a peaceful way can help reduce incidents of violence, criminal mischief and absenteeism.

“School climate and culture also directly influence student belonging, teacher morale, parental involvement and school safety,” Andrews said.

[2]



Center staff will provide multiple trainings to accommodate approximately 100 employees in each district. Schools included in #RollingwithRestorative are the following:

Aldine elementary schools: Anderson, Ogden, Hill, Cypresswood, Orange Grove, Eckert, Stehlik, Escamilla, Smith and Johnson.

Humble elementary schools: Humble, Jack Fields, Lakeland, North Belt, Oaks, Park Lakes, Ridge Creek, River Pines, Whispering Pines and Atascocita Springs. “The intent is to change the school climate and to build relationships inside and outside of school through engagement.”

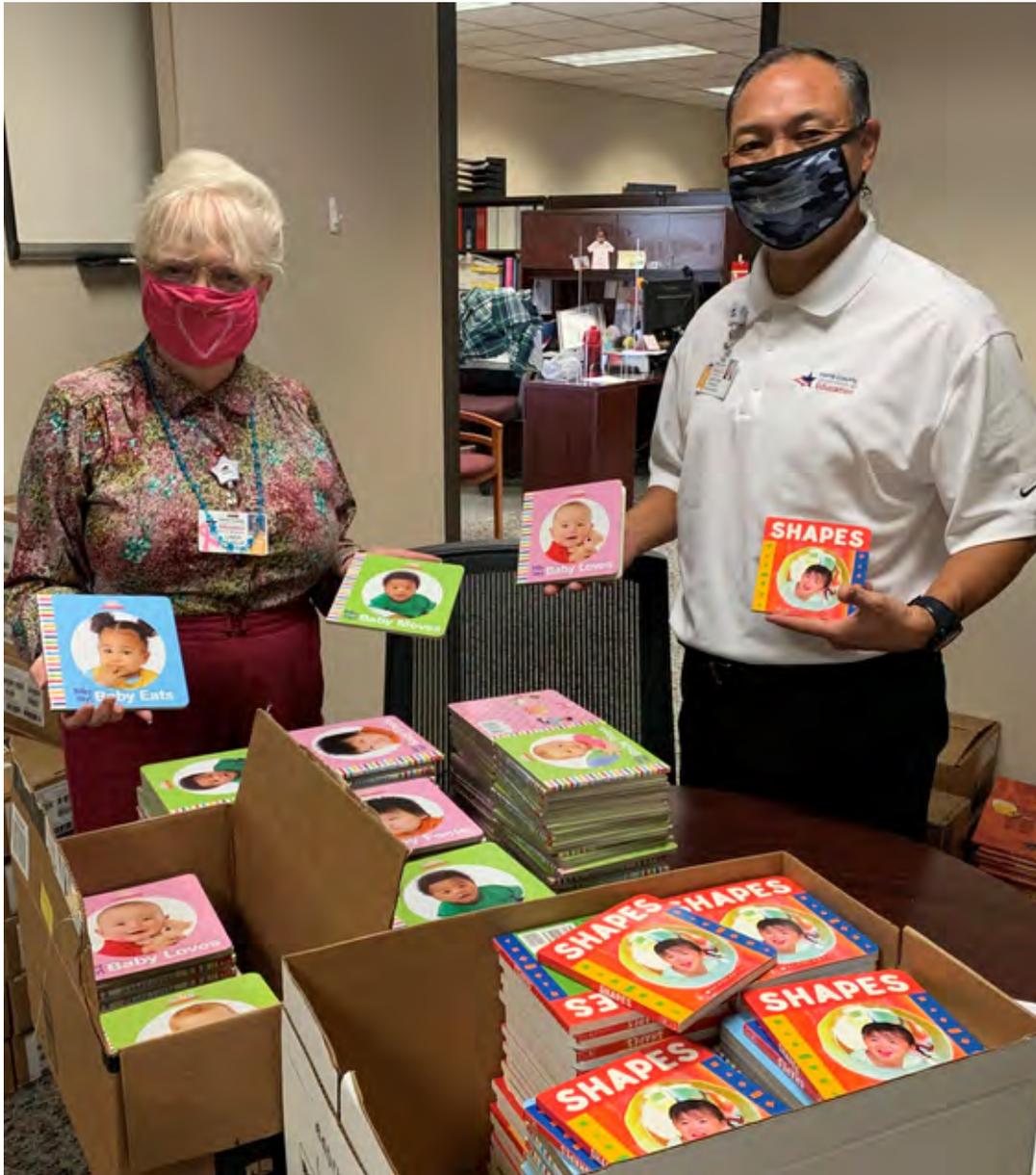
Staff from the center have trained neighboring districts in Restorative Practices, a means to reform discipline by reducing suspension and improving attendance. Through Restorative Practices, the focus is on resolving conflicts by addressing the problems which caused the at-risk students to misbehave.

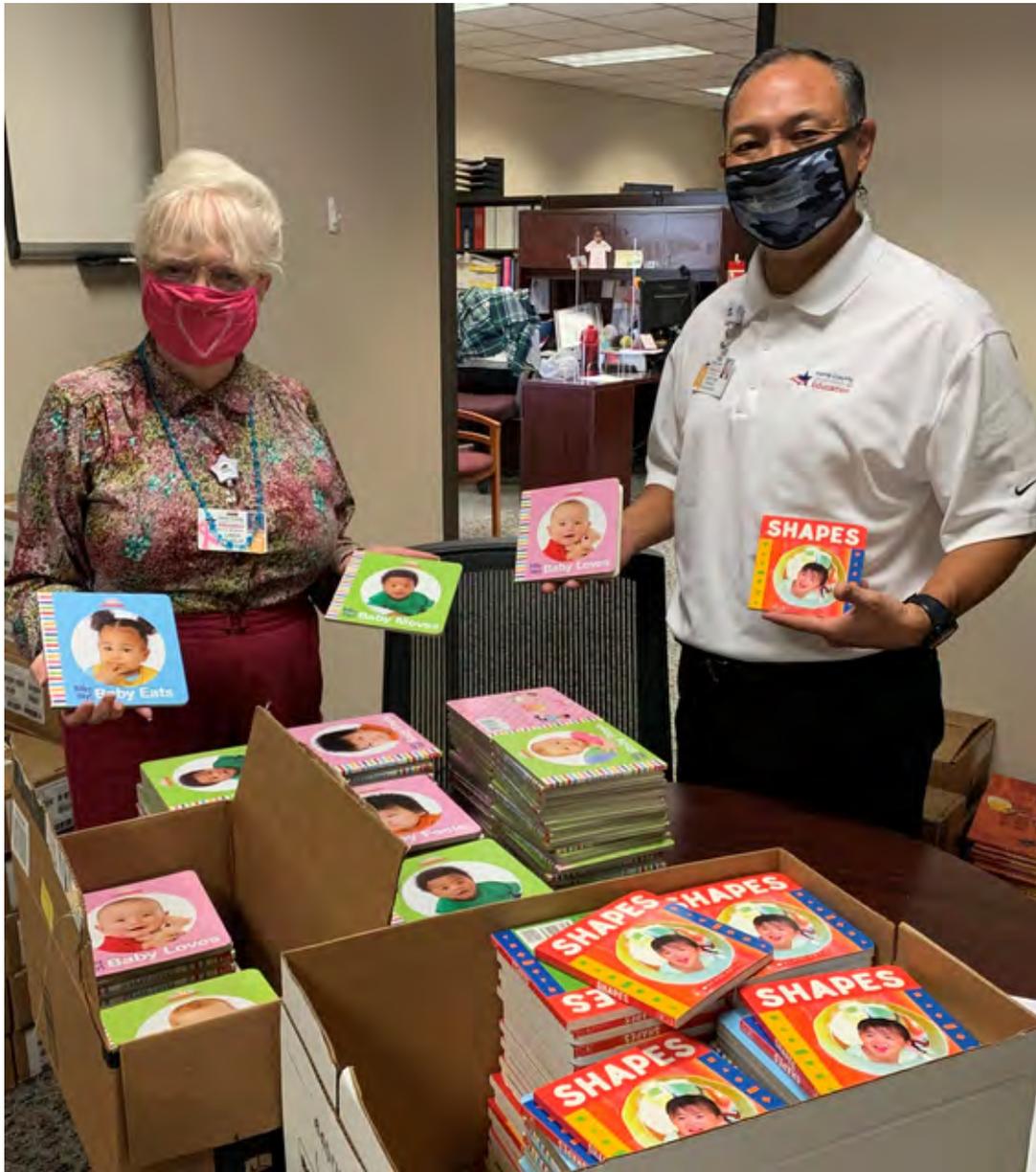
“In contrast to punishment and suspension, this approach focuses on the needs of victims and offenders as well as the community as a whole,” said Andrews. “Using the group discussion model, including talking circle, restorative justice seeks to repair broken bonds between students, or between students and teachers.”

The #RollingwithRestorative program will be evaluated for success through a third-party evaluator. The center may reapply for an additional \$20,000 in funding in 2021-2022. For more information, access [3]www.hcde-texas.org/safeand-secure-schools.

1. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/10/20180521_csss_0007.jpg
 2. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/10/20180521_csss_0090.jpg
 3. <http://www.hcde-texas.org/safeand-secure-schools>.
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Community Partner Balint Charities Donates 2,400 Books to Head Start (2020-10-29 20:14) - hcdetx





Community partners Balint Charities, Inc. has donated 2,400 books to students ages 3-5 enrolled in Harris County Department of Education Head Start programs.

Balint is a longtime supporter of HCDE's Head Start program. The foundation was created eight years ago by Kathleen Christesen to honor her parents, and it supplies books to schools and early childhood centers throughout the nation. With assistance from Steve Balint, the foundation continues to support HCDE Head Start and Early Head Start programs.

"Head Start appreciates this contribution from Balint Charities and its vital support of early childhood literacy," HCDE Head Start Senior Director Venetia Peacock said.

The donation is valued at \$2,700, and the books will be delivered to all HCDE Head Start centers in northeast Harris County.

Photo: HCDE Head Start Community Partnership Administrative Clerk Linda Hazelip sorts through books donated by Balint Charities with HCDE Assistant Superintendent for Academic Support Services Jonathan Parker.

1. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/10/balint-charities-book-distribution.jpg>

Education Foundation Grant to Stafford Municipal School District Funds Drone, STEM Education (2020-10-29 20:33) - hcdetx





Archived Photo from 2019

Education Foundation Grant to Stafford Municipal School District Funds Drone, STEM Education Students ages 11-18 enrolled at Stafford Municipal School District (SMSD) will be using drones donated through a \$7,000 grant from the Education Foundation of Harris County in their afterschool and ROTC programs.

The five new drones and backpacks being purchased from the grant will greatly enhance the district's science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) initiatives, according to Cherise Roberts, coordinator of grants and partnerships for the SMSD Education Foundation. The district has also added drones to expand its robotics program.

"The use of drones is an emerging technology that frequently stimulates a student's interest and may be used to help steer them toward careers in related disciplines," she said.

Roberts added that early interests in STEM hobbies are often the catalyst that ignite professional pursuits and lead to meaningful and productive careers in computer science, construction project management, petroleum engineering, aviation, digital

coding, agriculture and entertainment.

“SMSD is committed to preparing students to compete and excel in the advanced technology and digital space of the 21st century,” Roberts said. “The knowledge, training and skill sets obtained by SMSD students who endeavor to master the drone technology offers students a technology-rich setting to experience and explore in a small way and in the much larger universe of aerodynamics.”

1. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/10/shs.jpg>

HCDE Gains ‘Purchasing Award of Merit’ Top Honors from Texas Association of School Business Officials (2020-10-30 09:59) - hcdetx



[1] Harris County Department of Education’s Purchasing Division was awarded the “Purchasing Award of Merit” by Texas Association of School Business Officials (TASBO).

The award recognizes Texas school districts, open-enrollment charters and education service centers which are committed to following professional standards in the acquisition of goods and services.

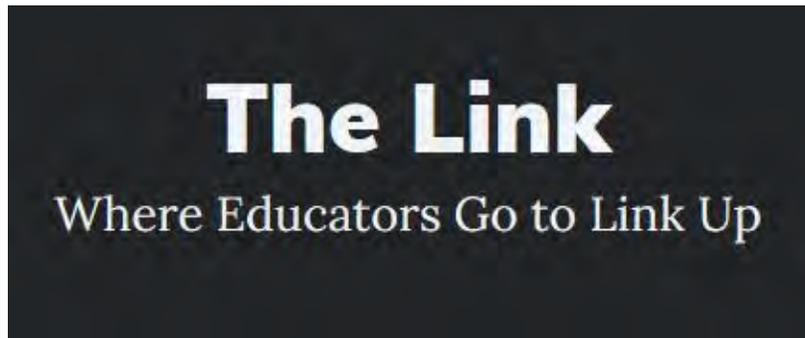
In addition, HCDE’s Purchasing Division earned the “Best in Class” designation for its procurement card system (P-Card).

“We could not be more pleased with the growing recognition of the important work all of our honorees do to streamline operations, comply with regulations and set the standard for how to utilize taxpayer dollars,” Tracy Ginsburg, TASBO executive director said.

HCDE Purchasing will be recognized for its accomplishments at the annual TASBO conference Feb. 16.

1. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/10/tasbo_t.png

'The Link' Provided by Education and Enrichment Supplies Education Best Practices, Research, Tips (2020-10-30 10:03) - hcdetx



[1]



Harris County Department of Education's Education and Enrichment is producing a news blog published through Word Press which is being shared to educators through social media and eblasts.

"The Link" allows educators the opportunity to gain tools and share information which is beneficial, from teaching tools to research to best practices.

View the social media video which is being used to spread the word about "linking up" with "The Link." [2]<https://youtu.be/WpSrFc7Yz6w>
Subscribe to The Link: [3]www.link-hcde-texas.org/

1. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/10/capture.jpg>

2. <https://youtu.be/WpSrFc7Yz6w>

3. <http://www.link-hcde-texas.org/>

HCDE Director, Alief Trustee Darlene Breaux Selected for Education Leadership Program (2020-10-30 12:11) - hcdetx





Darlene Breaux, HCDE Director of Research and Evaluation, was recently selected by the Texas Association of School Boards for the Leadership TASB class of 2021.

Breaux, who serves her community as vice president and policy committee chair for the Alief Independent School District Board of Trustees, was among 26 school board members statewide selected for the leadership program.

As she completes the required elements of study and service, she will earn the "Master Trustee" designation next year. Trustees in the group represent school districts of all sizes.

Each Leadership TASB session has a unique theme that builds on the previous session and features nationally recognized experts in the fields of leadership development and education. Members also complete extended learning assignments.

Breaux joined HCDE in 2016 and leads the research division which serves HCDE divisions and supports local school districts.

Leadership TASB has more than 900 graduates to date since its inception in 1993. TASB is a voluntary, nonprofit association established in 1949 to serve local Texas

school boards.

1. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/10/darlenes-alief-headshot-purple.jpg>
-

1.11 November

HCDE Earns Top Honors for Financial Report from Government Finance Officers Association (2020-11-06 13:19) - hcdetx





Harris County Department of Education has earned the “Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting” for its comprehensive annual financial report (CAFR) from the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) of the United States and Canada. The CAFR covers HCDE’s fiscal year ending Aug. 3, 2019.

The GFOA Certificate of Achievement is the highest form of recognition in the area of governmental accounting and financial reporting, and its attainment represents a significant accomplishment by a government and its management, according to the association.

The CAFR is judged by an impartial panel to determine if the organization demonstrates a constructive “spirit of full disclosure” to communities through its financial story and motivates users to read the CAFR.

HCDE also earned the Award of Financial Reporting Achievement this fall from GFOA for excellence in financial reporting. The certificate is presented to government agencies whose annual financial reports are judged to adhere to program standards. It represents the highest award in government financial reporting.

The Chicago-based association is a nonprofit which advances excellence in government finance by providing best practices, professional development, resources and practical research for more than 21,000 members and communities it serves.

“Our HCDE Business Services Division is proud to gain these achievement of excellence

awards which represent the bedrock for financial reporting and accountability,” HCDE Assistant Superintendent of Finance Dr. Jesus Amezcua said.

1. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/11/20201021_principals_135.jpg

Therapist Uses Music to Communicate with Students with Emotional, Intellectual Disabilities (2020-11-06 13:30) - hcdetx





Music is the voice box in Omar Reyna's life. The musician uses seven years of guitar and piano instruction to his advantage as a school-based music therapist, a licensed health professional.

He truly identifies with his students at Academic and Behavior School East because he has experienced their struggles. ABS East is a school for children with intellectual and emotional disabilities which serves area school districts through Harris County Department of Education.

At age 7, he barely spoke but turned to music to transmute his emotions. Diagnosed on the autism spectrum, he experienced pervasive development disorder, a delay in development of socialization and communication skills. Through support from his mother, he was mainstreamed into a regular classroom by third grade.

Reyna uses his skills in musical performance, lessons, songwriting, and listening as part of an integrative course of therapy in the school setting to improve children's social, emotional, physical and/or cognitive abilities. A team of nine music therapists work with 150 physical and occupational therapists to serve children through Harris County Department of Education's School-Based Therapy Services. They provide 54 percent of school-based therapy in the county to area school districts.

At ABS East, Reyna works with elementary-aged, life skills students to gain beneficial social skills, focusing on one social skill each week.

This week that skill is dealing with anger, and Reyna is working with Blake and
382

John, two fourth graders.

“You’re feeling upset?” Reyna asks the boys. “Show it to me through your playing.”

The students work their emotions on tambourine and drums, and Reyna orchestrates a pause.

The music therapist covers other coping devices for dealing with anger, sharing the tools and asking questions. Count to 10 and take a break. Tell an adult about your problem. Talk it out. What else?

“My job is to try to meet them in the middle and validate their feelings, because we don’t want those feelings to lead to a negative trajectory,” Reyna said.

Since a large sector of students at ABS East is autistic, Reyna will work on social skills like personal greetings or creating personal space.

“Having music as a motivator not only builds rapport but also keeps students more engaged so that I may instill positive ideas,” he said.

Music therapists also use elements like cadence, lyrics and melody to also solicit physical and speech outcomes with students.

For Reyna, the idea to become a music therapist clicked at a college fair. He was envisioning becoming a pianist or mariachi guitar player. Then he heard the story about how music therapy helped trauma injury patient Congresswoman Gabby Giffords.

After five years at Sam Houston State, Reyna secured an internship with HCDE’s School-Based Therapy Services and was later offered a job.

ABS East Principal Dr. Donna Trevino-Jones says her school has used music therapy for two years. She witnessed the benefits firsthand.

Recalling a student who was nonverbal, she witnessed him come out of his shell and begin communicating through music therapy.

“For our students to be able to find a different outlet to express themselves is very important,” Trevino-Jones said. “Once I saw what music therapy could do for the students, I thought: ‘We need more of that.’”

Reyna now visits ABS East for two hours, five days a week. Deeper emotional

connections are made as visits become daily versus weekly.

“It has been a gamechanger for students to be able to use their words to express their feelings rather than their actions,” Trevino-Jones said.

For Reyna, the music travels with him long after he closes his guitar case and packs up his small, percussion instruments. He carries it forward to motivate himself to work out or relax when he’s stressed out.

He knows the music will speak to his students as well.

“Music can break through barriers, and it’s universal,” he said. “Finding what drives someone music-wise can be very powerful.”

For information about HCDE’s School-Based Therapy Services or schools for children with special needs, go to [2]www.hcde-texas.org.

1. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/11/omar3.jpg>
 2. <http://www.hcde-texas.org/>
-

Head Start Families Benefit from \$5,400 School Supply Donation from Assistance League of Houston's Operation School Bell (2020-11-06 14:12) - hcdetx





Families struggling with the financial backlash of the pandemic will benefit from a \$5,400 award in school supplies donated through the Assistance League of Houston's signature philanthropic program called Operation School Bell. Students at Harris County Department of Education's Compton, Fonwood and Pugh Head Start centers gain the school supplies made available through a school supply list on Amazon.

"We want to do everything we can to help children succeed in school," said Stella Evensen, Operation School Bell co-chair. "We are so proud we could do this and come together for the community."

Pre-k teachers and center managers ordered items including reading books, games, arts and crafts, backpacks and play dough for the classroom. Funds also went to purchase face masks and shields.

Evensen said uncertainties like delayed school start dates made online ordering of supplies the perfect solution. Co-chair Aida Ledet assists Evensen as they equip 26 Houston-area schools with supplies, including the three Head Start centers.

Throughout the years, the Assistance League of Houston has donated more than 10,000 uniforms to HCDE Head Start children. This year the pandemic prompted the need for the school supplies instead.

"We are thankful for the Assistance League of Houston as they continue to sup-

port our families,” HCDE Head Start Senior Director Venetia Peacock said.

Throughout the years, the Assistance League of Houston has donated more than 10,000 uniforms to HCDE Head Start children. For more information on Operation School Bell, visit [2]www.assistanceleague.org/houston.

To enroll your child in HCDE Head Start or Early Head Start, go to [3]www.hcde-texas.org/head-start.

1. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/11/20201013_headstart_292.jpg

2. <http://www.assistanceleague.org/houston>

3. <http://www.hcde-texas.org/head-start>

Teachers WRITE! HCDE Teams with Writers in the Schools Non-profit for 4th Annual Virtual Workshop (2020-11-06 15:02) - hcdetx



4TH ANNUAL

Teachers WRITE!

DECEMBER 15TH 9A-4P

Join us for the *4th annual Teachers, WRITE!* workshop, hosted by The Harris County Department of Education on the Zoom Virtual platform. All teachers, all grades, any content are welcome. Use writing as a tool to connect and build community with students. Our workshop this year features two new authors from Writers in the Schools, Houston (WITS) who will host a virtual workshop over two incredibly timely topics - a much needed boost for teacher efficacy in our new and changing educational landscape.

- 1 DIVING IN: INCORPORATING EMPATHY IN SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL LEARNING**
Teachers will explore the use of reflection, memory, and empathetic points of view to elevate descriptive language.
- 2 THE WRITER'S WAY**
Designed to deepen the practice of teachers as writers and to offer accessible and useful ways to cultivate the habits of a writer.

COSTS STAFF DEVELOPMENT
IN-COUNTY \$75
OUT-OF-COUNTY \$88

PRESENTER: WRITERS IN THE SCHOOLS
CPE CREDITS: 6 (GT UPDATE)
REGISTRATION LINK: [HTTPS://RB.GY/IKRENZ](https://rb.gy/ikrenz)
CONTACT: ROSA MURILLO (713) 696.1308



[1]



4TH ANNUAL

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CONTACT: ROSA MURILLO (713) 696.1308



Writers in the Schools (WITS) teams with the Harris County Department of Education Teaching and Learning Center to present "Teachers, WRITE!" The 4th annual workshop will be held virtually this year on Dec. 15 and focuses on boosting teaching abili-

ties in our new and changing educational landscape. The two-part workshop begins with “Diving In: Incorporating Empathy in Social and Emotional Learning” and “The Writer’s Way,” designed to deepen the practice of teachers as writers and offer useful ways to cultivate the habits of a writer. “Teachers WRITE!” is led by two authors who work within WITS and is designed for teachers in all grade levels and content areas. The workshop uses writing as a tool to connect and build community with students. Cost is \$75 for in-county educators and \$88 for out-of-county. Registration: **<https://tinyurl.com/y4a5k9z6>**

1. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/11/el3t1xyxiaalfqh.jpg>

CARES Act Provides Funding for 90 Laptops, Personal Protective Equipment for HCDE Head Start (2020-11-10 16:39) - hcdetx





Ninety computers found their way into the laps of Head Start teachers and family service providers as families returned to Head Start classes virtually this fall. The successful transition would not have been possible without the \$1.2 million supplied by the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act 2020.

The act provided \$750 million for Head Start programs throughout the nation, and funding was distributed by formula based on each Head Start grantee's funded enrollment.

Children at HCDE's 14 Head Start/Early Head Start centers and five childcare partnerships in northeast Houston were able to return to school virtually because of the funding.

The CARES Act also funded software to support training and professional development for teachers and staff.

Finally, the funding provided personal protection equipment such as masks, gloves and cleaning supplies to 300 staff members, benefitting 1,060 children ages 6 weeks to 5 years old in northeast Harris County.

"During the pandemic, we had to go to remote learning to meet the needs of our families," HCDE Senior Head Start Director Venetia Peacock said. "When technology issues arose from having older computers which slowed by the new software, we

knew we had a problem.”

Between Zoom, Microsoft Teams, a classroom management software called Dojo and other software and application downloads, the old laptops were strained. The laptops also supplied convenience so that desktop computers didn't have to be transported to-and-from home to office.

[2]



“CARES Act funding couldn't have arrived at a better time,” Peacock said.

Now that staff and students are back in the classroom in person, the laptops still provide flexibility in the event numbers rise and its necessary to go back to virtual
392

instruction.

“The laptops allow us to move fluidly between in-person and virtual learning as classrooms or campuses are affected by COVID-19,” the senior director said.

Staff use their newfound technology skills to promote social distancing as they communicate with parents and other staff via Zoom and Teams.

“It’s a blessing to have our students and staff back, but we are now empowered to stay engaged with our families through virtual instruction if the numbers rise,” Peacock said.

1. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/11/20201013_headstart_004.jpg
 2. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/11/words.jpg>
-

**Texas' Best Early Childhood Conference Hosted by HCDE
Features Author Eric Litwin, Researcher Kenneth Wesson
(2020-11-12 15:05) - hcdetx**

[1]



Celebrating its 35th year, the R.T. Garcia Early Childhood Winter Conference is set for Jan. 30, 2021 from 8 a.m.3:30 p.m. Held virtually this year, the conference provides national presenters Eric Litwin, New York Times bestselling children's author and guitar-strumming hero. Dual keynote speaker Kenneth Wesson, consultant and child neuroscience expert, provides insight on how young brains work.

The conference attracts approximately 1,000 educators of children in grades pre-k through second and includes breakout sessions from local and national presenters. Attendees leave with lessons and ideas which may be used in the classroom immediately.

[2]



Litwin

Litwin is the author of Pete the Cat series; The Nuts; and Groovy Joe. He is also a musician-storyteller as he sings and performs on the guitar and harmonica.

[3]



Wesson

Wesson's presentation is entitled: "Early Brain Research and Dealing with Today's New Normal in Early Learning." The neuroscience researcher often poses the question: "If it's your job to develop the mind, shouldn't you know how the brain works?"

Conference breakout sessions supplied by local and national presenters include child growth and development; diversity and dual-language learners; family and community relationships; learning environments; planning framework; and curriculum and standards. A virtual vendor section provides educational materials and products.

The largest early childhood conference in Texas is named after former HCDE Board President R.T. Garcia, a longtime supporter of early childhood education. Cost of the conference is \$75.

Attend the live sessions and pose questions and comments through a virtual platform or view the sessions post-conference. Register today: [4]<https://tinyurl.com/ECWC21>.

1. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/11/ecwc-graphic.jpg>
 2. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/11/eric-litwin-107-copy.jpg>
 3. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/11/oip.jpg>
 4. <https://tinyurl.com/ECWC21>
-

4 Law Professionals Share Thoughts with HCDE Students on Struggles, Successes of Growing Up (2020-11-12 15:16) - hcdetx



Four high-profile law professionals found common ground with troubled and recovering teens as the Harris County Department of Education Schools Division sponsored “The Law Society” Nov. 6.





Barrett





Ihejirikah

Students from Highpoint Schools, HCDE's school for adjudicated and troubled youth and Fortis Academy, HCDE's school for recovering teens joined a virtual meeting with Harris County Judge Jeremy L. Brown, Harris County Sheriff Ed Gonzalez, Loudoun County Schools Certified Psychologist Dr. Charles A. Barrett and Harris County Deputy Sheriff H. Ihejirikah Jr.

During the hour-long Zoom session, guests fielded questions posed by HCDE Schools Division staff Nkechinyere Ihejirikah Washington and Gabriela Hernandez. The panel answered questions about overcoming hardships as teens, family dynamics, inequities in society, perceptions of law enforcement as youth and general advice on

getting through adolescence.

At age 6, Gonzalez realized his father couldn't read or write, and he was determined to get an education and become a lifelong learner.

"You should never stop learning and growing," the sheriff said.

Judge Brown admitted to teens that he had issues with authority figures telling him what to do as a teen.

"I have to take a step back when people talk to me and take direction from what they are saying," the judge said.

When asked to define trauma, Barrett said he sees it as any circumstance which makes one feel unsafe and affects you physically or emotional. Examples given included gang violence or living in a violent household.

"Trauma does affect you," he said. "It affects how much you pay attention in school and can have mental health and behavior effects."

In Harris County, 90,000 children each year must deal with a parent who is incarcerated, Gonzalez noted. Those children inherit the trauma and often become statistics in the criminal justice system themselves.

For advice on overcoming adversity, Ihejirikah urged teens to be patient in their youth and enjoy the moment.

"Enjoy your experiences, no matter how tumultuous and no matter how joyous those occasions are," he said. "Experiences add to your character, your life story."

Gonzalez shared his positive outlook on growing up, suggesting that teens look to mentors and friends for help.

"If you are going through depression, it's okay to talk to others," he said. "We're all vulnerable, but don't stay in that place."

HCDE Receives 'Top Workplace' as Large Employer for Second Consecutive Year (2020-11-19 12:53) - hcdetx



[1] For a second consecutive year, Harris County Department of Education gains notoriety as one of Houston's Top large workplaces through the Houston Chronicle's Top Workplaces 2020 program.

View photos: [2]<https://tinyurl.com/y5aqnolb>

The Top Workplace program is unique because employees weigh in on their employer through a survey where participants remain anonymous. Topics include

leadership, work-life balance, training, cooperation and pay/benefits. Companies are judged in three categories: small, medium and large companies.

Top Workplaces rankings are determined by a scientific employee survey provided by Energage, an independent research company partnering with the Chronicle for the past 11 years. This year, 130 employers earned recognition as Top Workplaces in the three categories as 3,000 companies applied for the award. Eight-five percent of HCDE's employees responded to the survey.

HCDE was ranked no. 13 in the large company category, a 46 percent improvement over last year's ranking of no. 24.

"This honor shows that HCDE has a family culture and spirit which is valued by our employees," HCDE Superintendent James Colbert Jr. said.

"During this past year, adversity has come our way here and there, but that has done nothing but bring our employees closer together as a family. We are proud we have been able to support our families during the pandemic as we continue to provide high-quality education services to our clients.

"HCDE is one of the best places I have worked in my career as a leader in education."

[3]



Human Resources employee Monserrat Witine delivers Top Workplace cupcake to Cecile Porche, Head Start

HCDE provides education services to school districts and the community through a wide array of programs. Five pillar programs include afterschool, Head Start, special schools, school-based therapy services and adult education.

Educator Dr. Colina Poullard works as HCDE curriculum director for digital education and innovation. As a teacher trainer, she says she likes working for HCDE because it allows her to serve a large sector of educators.

“Outside of just serving just one district, we get to serve educators in all 25 districts in Harris County, and beyond,” she said.

Employee Amy Thompson works for Educator Certification and Advancement, a HCDE division which trains professionals to become teachers, principals and superintendents.



Amy Thompson

“I value working at HCDE because everyone works as a partner here for the benefit of the students in greater Harris County, and all our hearts are into it,” Thompson said.

Head Start employee Gino Kamaya appreciates the benefits programs offered by HCDE, he said. The department contributes to both Teacher Retirement System and Social Security and observes many school holidays, a plus for working parents.

“Plus, the leadership team really cares about employees, and that’s the main reason I love working here,” Kamaya said.



Gino Kamaya

Superintendent Colbert said he is humbled that HCDE employees think so highly of the organization they work for.

“I can’t help but think they feel that way because of the trustees and administration and the valuable work in education that all our employees do which has purpose in the community,” Colbert said.

HCDE was founded in 1889 and employees approximately 1,100 employees. Other

community programs and services the department provides include a purchasing cooperative, teacher training and records management.



[6]

1. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/11/group-12.png>
2. <https://tinyurl.com/y5aqnolb>
3. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/11/421a8678-1.jpg>
4. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/11/421a8657.jpg>
5. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/11/421a8656.jpg>
6. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/11/group-12.png>

Head Start Students at Barrett Station Crosby Create Holiday Cards for Hospitalized Children (2020-11-19 13:00) - hcdetx



[1]



Messages of hand-crafted joy sealed in envelopes are on their way to young patients at Texas Children’s Hospital.

Head Start students at Harris County Department of Education’s Head Start Center at Barrett Station participated in the “Holiday Cheer Cards” project through a collaborative with community partner Triose, Inc. and the Texas Children’s Hospital Foundation.

Triose is a national healthcare solutions company which helps medical institutions. The company’s Houston regional office provided individual art kits for students to create the cards.

Several of the Triose employees mentor children at the Head Start center through a program called SuperMENTors Read, a male, role-model volunteer initiative supported through HCDE Head Start.

“Being a SuperMENTor has been extremely rewarding,” said Antonio Lozano district manager of field operations for Triose. “I enjoy being a part of something bigger than myself and giving back in a way that is meaningful to me.”

Equipped with markers, crayons and stickers the 3-year olds added personal touches to the holiday cards. Many of their older siblings created their own greetings at home to contribute to the project.

[2]



“Parents became inspired and started to bring us Christmas cards made by Head Start siblings who also wanted to be a part of the ‘spirit of giving’,” said Sylvia Davis, HCDE Head Start family services provider at the center.

“We believe that children hold the key to the future,” Davis said. “Research studies show that children who start early in childhood the spirit of giving through community service become responsible adults. This project fits in nicely within our Head Start curriculum that promotes community service.”

[3]



Lozano said he usually goes into the center once a month with a book and reads to a classroom of students at the center in Crosby, but the pandemic has put a halt on outside visitors. Sending in the holiday card kits give his mentees a little holiday spirit as they share their artwork with children in the hospital.

“I am fortunate to have the opportunity to give back to my community, and even more so to be able to partner with organizations like Head Start who we’re willing to take on this project with us while teaching the values of giving back and creating a sense of community with the students,” he said.

View the photo album from the event: [4]<https://tinyurl.com/y4hzaek5>

1. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/11/20201117_headstart_102.jpg
 2. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/11/20201117_headstart_077.jpg
 3. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/11/20201117_headstart_063.jpg
 4. <https://tinyurl.com/y4hzaek5>
-

Training with Law Specialist Allows Educators to Think Through Active Shooter Scenarios (2020-11-19 13:19) - hcdetx

[1]



Area educators gained valuable training for active shooter scenarios with Harris County Sheriff's Office Sgt. Jeff McGowen on Nov. 12. The two-hour, online training was hosted through the Center for Safe and Secure Schools. "Civilian Response to Active Shooters Events (CRASE)" was free and allowed teachers and administrators to "think through" various school crime scenarios.

Some takeaways from CRASE:

When you find yourself in an open area with active shooter:

- Seek immediate protection. Find a safe area and secure it the best you can.
- Put something between you and the shooter.
- Think it through: Is escape the option? Do you know where shooter is? Is escape immediately available.
- Know your building's floor plans.

When reporting the shooting to authorities:

- State your specific location: building name, office and classroom number.
- Report number of people at your specific location.
- Let authorities know number of people injured and type of injuries.

When law enforcement officer enters room:

- Do not present a threat to officers.
- Do not point at officers or the shooter.
- Do not make quick movements.
- Do not run towards them or attempt to hug them.
- Do not scream or yell.

1. https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/11/124064136_10158815025224510_5581433982923709065_o.png

Take a Virtual Tour: Academic and Behavior School West (2020-11-20 14:58) - hcdetx



Our Academic and Behavior School West opened this year during the pandemic. Because we couldn't have a ribbon-cutting ceremony or open house, we're sharing this virtual tour with our community.

[youtube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N7LTPIWPNIo>]

1.12 December

Customer Service Skills Fuel Work, Personal Feats for HCDE Records Management Employee Fisher (2020-12-02 15:05) - hcdetx



Managing records might be viewed as a ho-hum job to some, but Harris County Department of Education Records Management records technician Brandon Fisher knows better.

View video: [1]<https://youtu.be/PpEmStL4bJg>

[youtube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PpEmStL4bJg>]

Flashback to Hurricane Harvey in August 2017, when the division's 15 employees worked like first responders to get vulnerable records to higher ground. The city of Galveston and Galveston ISD were two examples of the numerous customers needing assistance. Records Management delivery employees were met by police escorts to navigate the floodwaters and debris to save the vulnerable, historical records.

"When people need their documents protected, these are the things we do," said Fisher, an 11-year HCDE employee who exudes energy and optimism.

As part of his daily duties, Fisher scans documents belonging to the hundreds of customers the division serves. He is on-the-go each day scanning, shredding, retrieving and delivering boxes from warehouse shelves. Nothing differentiates one document

from another, he says, as each is equally important. Its purpose could range from being a tax document to a piece of critical evidence in a crime scene.

Most Harris County and area school districts use Records' services. The business was born in 1991 after enactment of the 1989 records act which requires certified storage of government documents. City and county municipalities are also accommodated through interlocal agreements. Over 600,000 paper, microfiche and scanned/digitized documents are stored at the massive storage space at 6005 Westview.

"Brandon is a really good asset for this division," Records Management Director Curtis Davis said. "He can talk to anyone. Being the employee of the month is a wonderful thing for Brandon and this division."

Before HCDE, Fisher worked as a deliveryman in Wharton, a small town southwest of Houston where he was raised. After the recession, he looked for jobs in Houston and was hired at HCDE. While he knew the delivery business, he admitted he didn't know how to put customers first.

At Records Management, the young man grew his customer relations skills.

"Paying attention to what the customer is saying is very important," he said. "It helps because I'm a people person. I love to talk, and I love to listen so I can understand."

Records Management is a like family, and each person is dependent on the other to get the job done, he explained.

"We are all on the same playing field here, and we must do what needs to be done to get the job done," he said.

An early riser, Fisher claims breakfast as his favorite meal and admits a fondness for staples like French toast, bacon and eggs, especially on the weekends. The morning charge of energy fuels his fervor for cars.

His passion for beautiful automobiles led to the creation of a side business in auto detailing. Caring for his customers has made him no. 1 on several social media platforms.

[2]



[3]



“What I learned about customer care at HCDE took my private business to a whole new level,” he said.

Fisher services all types of cars but specializes in exotic like Porches, Ferraris and Lamborghinis. Many of his customers are billionaires, the not-so-famous wealthy who live under the radar.

His personal favorite is the Bentley, a car known for both beauty and speed, he said.

The most expensive car he serviced was a \$6 million, Puchadi Hydra. He also detailed a 1965 Ford Mustang which was the third one off the factory line, making it a collector car. Many of the cars Fisher services are not driven but shuttled by plane to showcase all over the world.

Grounded in his HCDE family, he says he loves the time spent at his job and is thankful for the people and the benefits his job offers.

“My philosophy is that you have to be a forever learner,” he said. “Records Management has taught me a lot about how to interact with customers, and I really don’t know where I would be if it wasn’t for HCDE.

[4]



1. <https://youtu.be/PpEmStL4bJg>
2. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/12/931.jpeg>

3. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/12/942.jpeg>

4. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/12/brandon-and-employees.jpg>

HCDE Awarded Best Practices in School Budgeting by Government Finance Officers Association (2020-12-02 15:51) - hcdetx



[1]



Harris County Department of Education (HCDE) Business Services has gained the “Award for Best Practices in School Budgeting” for fiscal year ending Aug. 31, 2020.

Awarded through the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA), the honor is given to organizations demonstrating a budget process aligned with GFOA’s best practice recommendations.

HCDE was also awarded the “Recognition for Implementing Best Practices in School Budgeting” for fiscal year ending in Aug. 31, 2019.

The GFOA, founded in 1906, represents public finance officials throughout the United States and Canada. The association’s more than 20,000 members are federal, state/provincial and local finance officials involved in planning, financing and implementing thousands of governmental operations.

1. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/12/logo.jpg>

Former HCDE Head Start Student ‘Discovers’ Himself on Information Pamphlet (2020-12-02 15:59) - hcdetx



[1]



Joshua Wright, 6, has so many friends in first grade that he has “lost count.”

As the new face on the cover of Harris County Department of Education’s pro-425

grams and services pamphlet, he is beaming with confidence and poise.

Thousands of the brochures were mailed to Harris County residents this past month. Joshua's mother Taylor received numerous calls from family and friends announcing his new superstar status.

"People keep calling and saying, 'there is a pamphlet in my mail with Joshua's photo on the front,'" Mom Taylor Wright said. "He is so proud of himself, and he loves the attention."

[youtube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w2sr505W1aU>]

Joshua attended school at HCDE's Fifth Ward Head Start Center. As a single mom, Taylor saw her son's newfound confidence as the 4-year old learned sight words, starred in plays and gained the social skills he would need in elementary school. She also accepted support from the family service provider as the family was assisted with counseling and other resources during hard times.

"He is definitely ahead of the curve in his school," she said. "Head Start gave us a great, close-knit community."

Joshua's two brothers, close in age, also attended Head Start and have gained the advantage with social skills and academics before entering school. As "the Wright brothers," the band of three stick together like peanut butter and jelly.



“They are a little jealous,” Joshua concedes, pointing to his photo on the pamphlet.

Armed with a dozen brochures, Joshua plans on sharing them with friends and family.

“I have lots of friends at school, and we like playing cops and robbers and hide-and-seek,” he said.

In front of the video camera, he points out that “learning is important.”

“I’m learning Spanish,” he said, counting from one to 10 in his new second language.

Shrugging his shoulders, Joshua’s ready to go because he doesn’t know what else to say.

Except yes. He will do autographs.

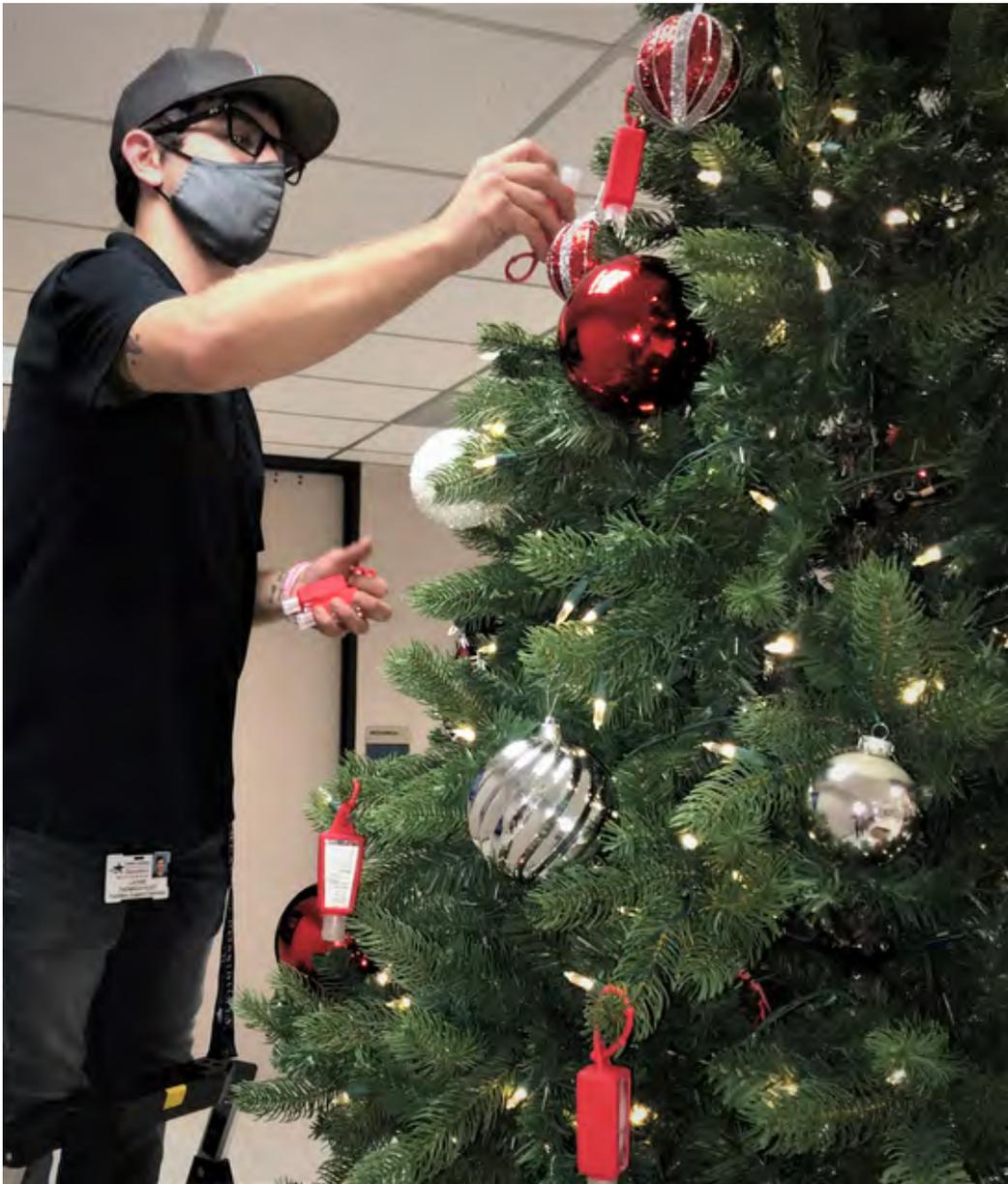
(For more information about Head Start services at HCDE, access [3]www.hcde-texas.org/head-start .)

1. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/12/joshua-still-with-pamphlet-1.jpg>
 2. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/12/joshua.jpg>
 3. <http://www.hcde-texas.org/head-start>
-

HCDE Tree-Trimming Trends for 2020 (2020-12-02 16:05) - hcdetx



[1]



Layne Thomas-Faust lives by the phrase waste not, want not. When the HCDE Facilities Division employee was tasked with decorating a lobby holiday tree at Irvington office, he decided to use a box of mini-sanitizers encased in red-rubber holders.

When asked how he came up with the idea, he said he found the box of errant sanitizers in the storeroom and decided they might make good tree-trimmers. He and co-worker Eric Schoellman got busy.

“Only in 2020,” Thomas-Faust said.

[youtube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=49FkBLM1Zjk>]

View the video: [2]<https://youtu.be/49FkBLM1Zjk>

1. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/12/layne.jpg>
 2. <https://youtu.be/49FkBLM1Zjk>
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It's a First! Dad Receives Rehabbed Car for Bates' 22nd Annual Responsible Parenting Award with HCDE Head Start (2020-12-10 12:42) - hcdetx





For the first time in 22 years of gifting rehabbed cars to needy moms, Bates Collision Centers presents keys to a young father whose daughter is enrolled in Harris County Department of Education Head Start.

The historic moment will be celebrated in person, outside the Bates Collision Center, 3219 N. Main St. in Baytown, on Thursday, Dec. 17 at 10 a.m. Dad John Rose and daughter Journee join owners Lee and Leila Bates, their staff and community to unwrap the mystery vehicle filled with gifts and equipped with insurance for six months.

[youtube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=unBldC_yY2o]

The 22nd Annual Bates Responsible Parenting Awards provides “helping out with a hand up” as the Bates and their staff spend months rehabbing a collision vehicle and gifts it to a deserving parent. The 32-year-old father works as a truck driver for Amazon. He says he has turned his life around after getting into trouble in his younger years. Daughter Journee, 4, attends the HCDE Head Start at Fifth Ward. Her dad also volunteers at the center through a leadership group called the Policy Council. [2]



“This car is going to change my life because I won’t have to take the bus anymore,” John said. “I will be able to take my daughter to school every morning. It’s important to be in my child’s education.” The Bates make the annual giveaway a priority because they recognize the sacrifices parents often make in order to provide for their children. Journee is a precocious, bright child with a big vocabulary. She is enthusiastic about learning sight words and is enamored with her father. She will be presented with her own ride, a bike with training wheels. “Most kids just want to play in school, but Journee wants to go to school to learn,” her dad said. Co-owner Lee Bates was immediately impressed by John’s application which was submitted by the center manager. John wrote an essay about his life as part of the application process. “He owned his mistakes in his life and wants to be a good father for his daughter,” Lee said. Bates co-owner Leila says both she and her husband Lee are proud of their employees who continue to supply time and resources to families they have yet to meet. “Putting cars back on the road is part of our daily grind, but this is putting families back on the road,” she said. “We have a giving staff, and this project brings our entire team together.” Leila sees the difference the project makes, from the Bates employees to the families receiving the cars. Car no. 39 will be equally as special for all parties concerned. “Seeing our team’s faces light up is a gift for us,” she said. “The gift of transportation is a game changer.” Head Start Senior Director Venetia Peacock said she is excited to kick off the holiday season with this event. [3]



“The generosity of the Bates family and their staff fills our hearts with joy each year,” she said. “This program embodies our goal at HCDE Head Start to build school readiness and success with our families.” HCDE Head Start serves families of children ages six weeks to age 5 with 14 Head Start centers located in north to northeast Harris County. Income-eligible families and children with disabilities gain free Head Start services to help equip children with academic and social skills for school readiness. Families receive support services in the school readiness program through community partners. For more information about Head Start, visit [4]www.hcde-texas.org/Head-Start.

1. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/12/john-and-journee.jpg>
2. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/12/journee-at-school.jpg>
3. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/12/jj-twirling.jpg>
4. <http://www.hcde-texas.org/Head-Start>

Virtual Dyslexia Summit 2021 on Jan. 16 Helps Provide Solutions for Houston Students, Families (2020-12-17 17:16) - hcdetx



**DYSLEXIA
SUMMIT
2021**

Innovation in
Dyslexia Services
A Virtual Event

January 16, 2021
9 a.m. - 3 p.m.

The Currency of Literacy: Ensuring Equity for Individuals with Dyslexia
Bringing innovative strategies to students identified with dyslexia and their parents in the Houston area.

[Register here](#)

 **T L C**
We Come to You

 **Harris County
Department of
Education**



As the illiteracy rate continues to grow in Houston, local experts believe that learning disabilities like dyslexia are a factor. The virtual biannual Dyslexia Summit 2021 scheduled for Jan. 16 from 9 a.m.-3 p.m. is helping to provide strategies to support Houston-area dyslexic students.

“This is an underserved area that people are just at the tip of the iceberg understanding,” Harris County Department of Education Curriculum Director of Special Populations Brenda Arteaga said. “The Mayor’s Office released a report showing that Houston’s illiterate population has increased from a quarter of the population to a third of the population in the past four years.”

Three keynote speakers from the Neuhaus Education Center serve as keynote speakers. The nonprofit educational foundation is dedicated to promoting reading success. The summit’s focus is “Innovation in Dyslexia Services: A Virtual Event.”

The purpose is to bring innovative strategies to students identified with dyslexia and to provide support to parents.

Traditionally, teachers, administrators, parents and community members attend the event.

Presenter Allison Peck leads a session called “Real Talk about Dyslexia.: The Top 10 Things I have Learned as a Parent and Educator.” Peck gives a personal journey into understanding and embracing dyslexia.



[2]
Allison Peck

“By sharing real talk about dyslexia, I believe all families can survive and thrive,” she said. Her child’s journey with dyslexia led her to become a special education teacher to help others with reading disabilities. Peck is currently the vice president of professional learning at Neuhaus.



Rebecca Tolson

Rebecca Tolson, vice president of literacy initiatives for Neuhaus, is a second presenter. Tolson specializes in using structured literacy techniques as intervention for dyslexia and dysgraphia. She has a doctorate in elementary education from University of Akron and is a certified language therapist and a certified dyslexia therapist.

[4]



Barbara Conway

Neuhaus's Barbara Conway provides a third session focusing on struggles with reading at older grade levels. The session explores what it takes to be a proficient reader at any age and examines ways to help older readers get basic skills they need for reading and meaning by using longer, more sophisticated words.

Cost for the Dyslexia Summit is \$99. Attendees get a book or online subscription from Neuhaus with registration. Register: [5]<https://tinyurl.com/DyslexiaSummit21> .

1. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/12/dyslexia-graphic.jpg>

2. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/12/allison-peck.jpg>

3. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/12/tolson-rebecca-2-1.jpg>
 4. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/12/barbara-conway.jpg>
 5. <https://tinyurl.com/DyslexiaSummit21>
-

Foreign Professionals from Houston Methodist Gain Conversation, Writing Skills in HCDE Adult Education Classes
(2020-12-17 17:23) - hcdetx





Acquah

An upbeat group of health professionals check into Norma Nieto's English as a second language Zoom class. Isaac Acquah, a Ghana native, is talking about moving to a new apartment in Houston. Nima Ahmadi, from Iran, chimes in as crime becomes the topic. The English conversation class offered as a collaboration between Harris County Department of Education's Adult Education and Houston Methodist is unique because all its students have earned their doctorate degrees and are foreign professionals. The highly educated group shares vast cultural differences but are joined by the goal to acclimate. Ahmadi is a computer analytics expert, a problem-solver who reduces computer errors for medical professionals. Acquah is a post-doctorate student working in cardiovascular research who is intent on improving his writing

skills. [2]



The project between Methodist and HCDE wraps up a first semester this month, with more classes planned in 2021. It came about as a Methodist recruiter visited with Workforce Solutions and the benefits of HCDE's ESL classes were mentioned. Methodist's academic institute employs approximately 900 employees, and a predominate portion are foreign nationals. "Sometimes communication can be an issue," said Amber Kennedy, recruitment team, Methodist Hospital human resources. "The ESL program seemed to be a perfect fit." Conversation skills and business writing are the main goals of the program. Situational conversation requires customized lesson plans that might include safety issues, American customs and traditions and idioms, sarcasm and slang. "It has been a great satisfaction to help them improve their English skills, help them understand American culture and learn about the culture from the countries they come from," said Nieto, who expresses gratitude upon teaching the inaugural class. Each student underwent an assessment test as they entered the program. In the beginning, students shared their language challenges with Nieto. "The curriculum was heavily involved by their needs," she said. "They would let me know what they wanted to learn, and I would come up with material to meet those needs." Tonight, the conversation settles on Christmas traditions and the problems of crime in a large city. In past weeks

Nieto helped students craft email greetings and worked through various communication scenarios. Ahmadi is working on informal conversation skills. During the holidays, he will take advantage of the USA Learns software, an ESL software offered by HCDE which complements classroom learning. Idioms are a source of intrigue to the 38-year-old professional. Out-of-the-box is one he now understands along with “every cloud has a silver lining.” The class gives the professionals a no judgement space to practice conversation, pronunciation and join in a sense of camaraderie. Acquah looks forward to the class advancing to the next level so he can gain more English writing skills. As a researcher, he is required to produce papers.

“I hate it when there are red marks,” he said, jesting about his intermediate English writing skills.

Nieto says she is honored to teach the researchers from Methodist. “I have enjoyed our time together getting to know about them and the great research they are doing at Methodist that will benefit our community,” she said. Kennedy stresses the benefits of the collaborative between HCDE and Methodist. Other departments in Houston Methodist are considering using the ESL professional classes.

“We’ve had a great relationship with HCDE,” Kennedy said. “We’ve put in a good amount of hours with our partnership, we’re glad we have even able to initiate this and look forward to expanding it.”

(HCDE Adult Education provides classes in GED preparation, English as a second language and other workforce development programs in construction and medical fields throughout Harris County. Programs are supported through the Texas Workforce Commission. To inquire about future classes in the medical assistant certification program, go to [3]www.hcde-texas.org/adulteducation.)

1. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/12/isaac-acquah.jpg>
2. <https://hcdetexas.files.wordpress.com/2020/12/unknown.jpg>
3. <http://www.hcde-texas.org/adulteducation>



BLOGBOOKER

BlogBook v1.2,
 $\text{\LaTeX}2_{\epsilon}$ & GNU/Linux.
<https://www.blogbooker.com>

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