

THE CONNECTOR

A weekly publication of Harris County Department of Education for the HCDE Board of Trustees

WEEK OF MARCH 22, 2021

VOLUME 6 ISSUE 24

CONTINUOUSLY LEARNING

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LinkedIn Learning has arrived

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Of Note...



It appears society is starting to move back towards life as we knew it before the pandemic. Traffic in the area is picking up, restaurants are filling up, theaters are planning to show blockbuster movies this summer and some local school districts are making plans for all students to return to the classroom in the fall.

At HCDE we see signs of this return this week as we hosted one of our first in-person professional development workshops at the Irvington building for educators from local school districts. This socially distanced event was a great success with many attendees remarking that they felt safe with the many safety protocols in place and enjoyed being around other educators.

I am also reviving the quarterly meetings I had with board members prior to COVID. I am happy to meet with you whenever and wherever you want, but these meetings are typically held over breakfast or lunch. This is an opportunity for me to give you information about where HCDE is and where we are going as well as answer any questions you may have. These conversations are a highly effective way for me to disseminate information to you as well as ensure we are aligned in our perspectives. Ms. Cantu will be reaching out to each of you to schedule these meetings and I look forward to meeting with you in the coming weeks.

But the pandemic has shifted many of our regular business practices and that can be seen in the premier online learning platform HCDE has adopted for our employees. LinkedIn Learning affords all HCDE employees access to more than 12,000 courses on various professional development topics ranging from organizational skills to technology, software use and time management. This is part of our efforts to evolve and innovate while ensuring HCDE staff are constantly learning so we can continue to improve our services and support to local school districts.

I started the week with ELT on Monday followed by standing meetings. I met with a mentee on Wednesday and on Thursday I attended the Northwest Assistance Ministries board meeting followed by our special called board meeting. I appreciated the dialogue and questions at the meeting and look forward to keeping you updated on the progress of the Equine Enrichment program. I am excited to see how this new program takes shape and propels HCDE to the next level of educational services for our students and the community. Today I met with several staff members at my NPO office to discuss ongoing projects and upcoming initiatives.

Next Friday HCDE will be closed in observance of Good Friday, so The Connector will be sent on Thursday. Have a relaxing weekend.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James Collier". The signature is stylized and cursive.

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Teaching and Learning Center offers in-person event amid increase in vaccination rates

This week, The Learning and Teaching Center held an in-person workshop, “Capturing Kids’ Hearts,” led by instructor Anna Beth Garrison.

The 2-day immersive seminar focused on improving student performance by teaching culture-building behaviors that transform classrooms into high-achieving centers of learning where kids feel a sense of belonging.

“What we teach is a process, not a program,” said Garrison. “It’s a process designed to create high-performing teams in classrooms, campuses, and school districts. It’s a teaching model, but it’s also a relationship-building and leadership model based on the EXCEL model: engage, excel, communicate, empower, and launch. Social and emotional learning is a big component of this.”

Garrison kicked off the workshop by applying the first step of the EXCEL model, ‘engage,’ on the seventeen Cypress-Fairbanks and Katy ISD educators in attendance, addressing their anxieties about attending an in-person event and engaging them in a positive welcome exercise for a successful rest of the day.

“I know many of you had anxieties about attending today,” said Garrison to the socially distanced room of teachers. “What, if anything, have I done to make you feel better to ease your anxieties about attending today?”



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Attendees took turns expressing concern over leaving their classrooms unattended, leaving their partners by themselves to care for their own kids, and attending the workshop in person.

“I’m eight months pregnant, and I’m terrified,” said Emery Elementary School teacher Jalisa Jenkins. “I haven’t been this close to anybody in a long time. I have chronic asthma and bronchitis. My doctor told me if I get [Covid], the likelihood of me making it, even without being pregnant, is low. My fiancée’s asthma is worse than mine, and we have a six-year-old, so my anxiety throughout the entire pandemic has been elevated. I personally know four people who have passed away from Covid. It’s nerve-wracking because I don’t want to die.”

Despite her concerns, Jenkins said attending in-person is invigorating.

“I’m a type-A person. I’m going to show up and do my job,” said Jenkins. “Even though it’s fear-inducing, it feels nice. I miss being in-person. I am a very social person – I’m the happy hour queen. It’s refreshing to be this close to people and see their facial expressions – even with masks on.”

Additional opportunities to take upcoming workshops of “Capturing Kids’ Hearts” will be offered both online and in-person.

“We do offer this seminar virtually right now,” said Garrison. “The virtual training is very good. I just don’t think it’s as good as the in-person training because there is less interaction. It’s harder to build trust in a group. Many people are opting to take it online, and we want to meet their needs however we can, but we started offering these trainings in person again as soon as we could. We know a lot of people will choose to take them in person starting in the summer.”

For information about upcoming HCDE workshops, visit <https://b2j.short.gy/hcdeworkshops>. ■



PROGRAM

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A DAY OF EDUCATIONAL INNOVATION

FEATURING RON CLARK



“America’s Educator” will be keynote speaker at HCDE’s second annual “A Day of Educational Innovation”

“America’s Educator,” two-time New York Times Bestselling author, friend to Oprah, and subject of a film about his unique and acclaimed approach to education, Ron Clark will be the keynote speaker at “A Day of Educational Innovation,” a one-day virtual conference on April 10 hosted by Harris County Department of Education’s Teaching and Learning Center.

The event will shine a light on innovative educational practices during Covid by offering out-of-the-box ideas to keep kids engaged and help teachers maneuver between in-person and virtual instruction.

“I hope that attendees walk away with practices they can implement the following Monday that will help to engage students in unique ways as well as connect with families and parents,” said event organizer Errica Dotson-Hooper.

Clark brings charisma, energy, and devotion to the education profession. He has worked with disadvantaged students in rural North Carolina and Harlem and founded the Ron Clark Academy in Atlanta, Georgia.

Clark started his teaching career at a challenging school. To engage its disaffected students, he rapped his lessons, dressed in costumes, and stood on his head, doing everything he could to make learning exciting. He brought joy to the classroom, and test scores soared. After five years at this school, during which time he was invited to the White House

three times, Ron saw a TV show about challenges in New York City’s school system. He was compelled to move there and soon began teaching in Harlem. Within a year, all his students were at or above grade level.

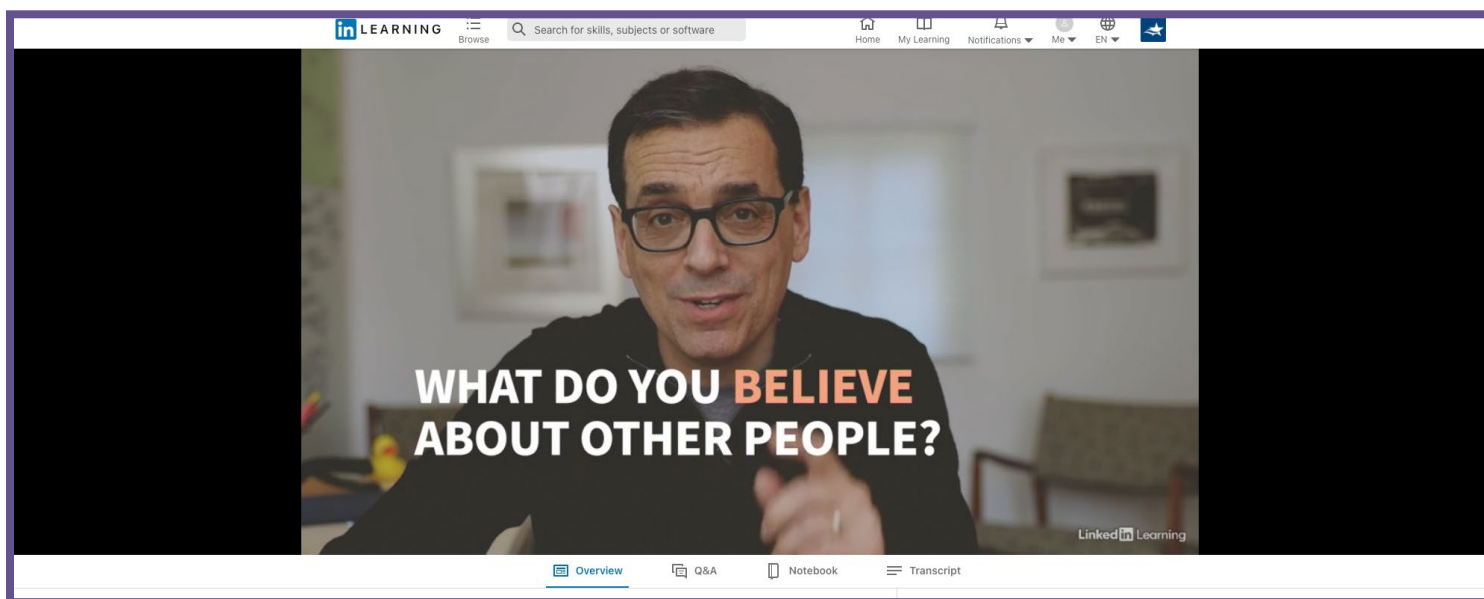
“Ron Clark is out-of-the-box with all of his ideas and strategies for reaching students, and he has been able to transition that to virtual learning seamlessly,” said Dotson-Hooper. “I want teachers to hear from an expert who has been doing this work for a long time. Everyone became new teachers this year. Even the most veteran educator had to start from scratch doing things they had never done before. With that experience in mind, as we prepare for the next school year, I want to make educational innovators accessible to educators. I hope that this will re-energize them at a time when they are beginning to think about next school year.”

Other notable event speakers include Dr. Shaun Woodyly, Too Dope Teachers, LaVondia Menephee, and Dr. Kiana Day Williams.

To register for the event, visit <http://bit.ly/DEIFRC>. The registration fee is \$75 per person or \$1,000 for a campus team of up to 20 people. ■

PROGRAM

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HCDE employees receive access to free online professional development resources

This week, all HCDE employees received a free license to the online professional development learning platform LinkedIn Learning, previously known as Lynda.com.

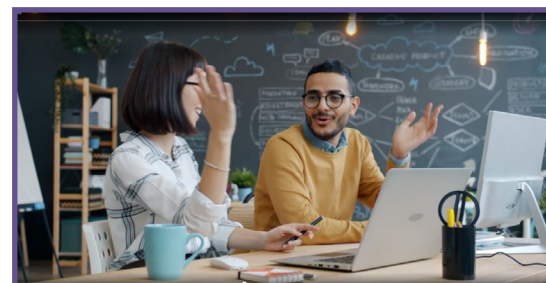
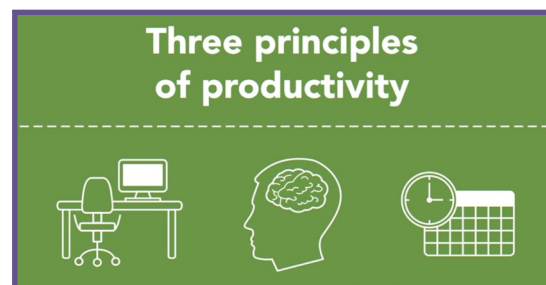
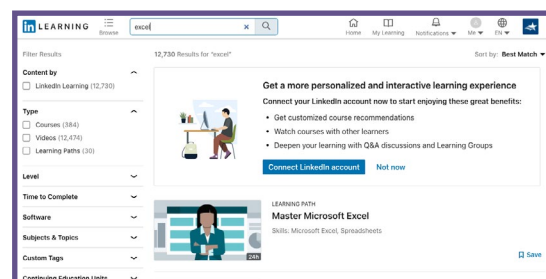
This is the latest resource to be offered to HCDE staff as the Department moves forward with professional development while observing social distancing guidelines.

During the pandemic, HCDE sought out options to continue to provide continuing education to its employees. In December, IT training coordinator Cindy Tan was hired to help the Department develop a framework for its new eLearning offerings. Since then, Tan has implemented Techie Thursdays, which are virtual, 90-minute workshops about various Microsoft products led by her and a Microsoft trainer. To date, over 500 HCDE employees have received training through Techie Thursdays.

“We want learning to mean change at HCDE,” said Tan. “We encourage individuals to set goals for themselves and seek out self-improvement.”

Through LinkedIn Learning, HCDE employees have access to over 12,000 instructional courses in business topics, creative skills, and technology. These courses can be taken in seven different languages, are accessible via desktop, tablets and mobile devices, and can be completed at the user’s pace.

Employees who have not been able to attend previous Techie Thursdays workshops can contact Cindy Tan via email at cindy.tan@hcde-texas.org to request video recordings of past sessions. ■



SYSTEMIC

ACHIEVEMENT...WITH PURPOSEFUL INTENT

This week, the following Board expectations were met:

Superintendent Objective G: Professional Growth and Development

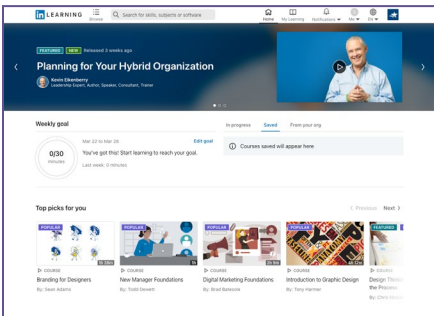
- Ensures that appropriate staff development is available and monitors staff development for effectiveness.



This week the Teaching and Learning Center conducted the first in-person workshop of the year. Fittingly, the topic was “Capturing Kids’ Hearts” a session devoted to relationship building and leadership in the classroom. The training gives teaches tools to help reacclimate students to the in-class environment. This is an encouraging move to get back to more normal operations and interactions with the educators we serve.



Next month HCDE will be hosting Ron Clark, America’s Educator, as the keynote for a dynamic day of educational innovation. Clark has been able to seamlessly transition his out-of-the-box strategies to the virtual learning environment. Making educational innovators accessible to teachers in Harris County is just one way HCDE impacts education.



Finally, professional development is not just something we provide to educators in the area. It is important for our staff to continue learning as well. This week, all HCDE staff have been given access to LinkedIn Learning, formerly Lynda.com, a platform with more than 12,000 instructional courses that staff can follow at their own pace from any location. Coupled with our ongoing Techie Thursday trainings from Microsoft, this gives all HCDE employees the opportunity to learn new skills and be more productive.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

April 2

Good Friday

All HCDE offices closed

April 21

Board Meeting
1 p.m.