

THE CONNECTOR

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

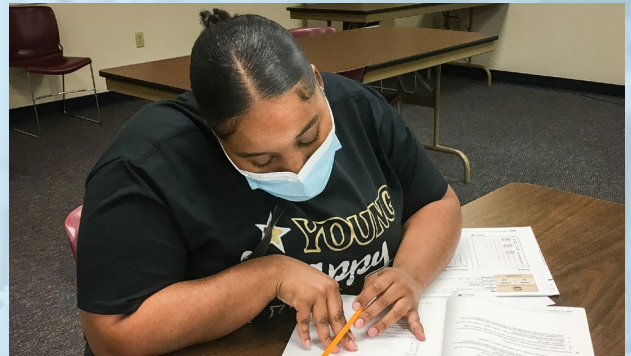
WEEK OF May 10, 2021

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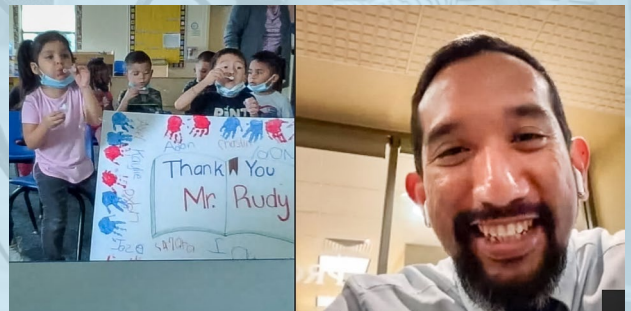
CELEBRATING EXCELLENCE

TOP STORIES

**Adult Education Registration
Drive for Certificate Programs**
p.2



**Head Start Centers Celebrate
SuperMENTors**
p.3



**Therapy Services
Hosts Staff Appreciation
End-of-Year Event**
p.4



Of Note...



While the majority of my week was spent in budget hearings, yesterday's announcement by the CDC allowing vaccinated citizens to stop wearing masks certainly sent the end of the week spinning.

This decision was a complete turnabout from their prior statements, and even though I believed this decision was coming in August or September, I was caught off guard. I am sure my fellow superintendents were also taken aback as prior to the announcement, almost all local districts, including HCDE, were requiring masks through the end of the school year.

I spent today meeting with several ELT members to discuss the appropriate path forward. We had great discussion about staff safety, protecting our students and the idea of the unvaccinated being shamed.

Throughout the pandemic, we have followed CDC guidelines and TEA expectations. And while I am ready to adjust our safety protocols accordingly, we have a few procedural issues that need to be ironed out first including the fact that TEA has not made an official statement about its expectations regarding masks.

As such, I will be amending Wednesday's board agenda to include an item requesting board approval to end the mask mandate in HCDE, consistent with CDC guidelines.

Until such time as TEA rules that masks are not necessary or the board approves removing our mask mandate, we will stay the course and maintain our current safety protocols.

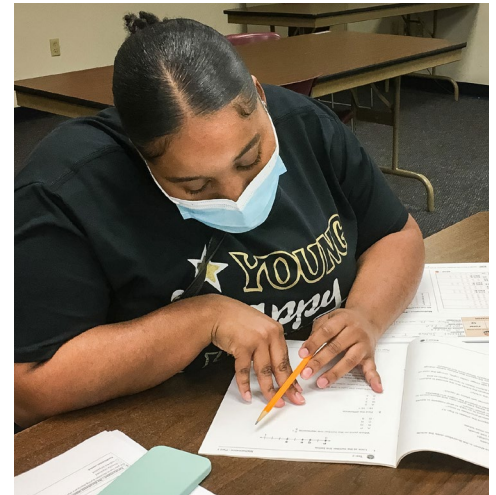
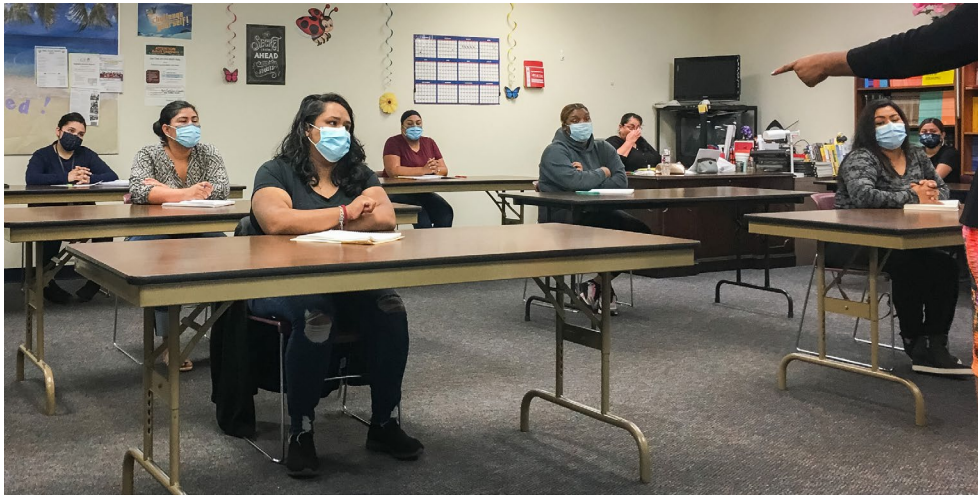
I look forward to seeing you at the board meeting next week and talking more about this issue.

Have a great weekend.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James Collier".

PROGRAM

CONNECTIONS



Adult Education Registration Drive for Certificate Programs

This week, Harris County Department of Education's Adult Education division held concurrent in-person registration events for four of its certification programs, supported by Workforce Solutions.

Candidates had the opportunity to register for four programs that will be held in June, before the end of the 2020-2021 Adult Education school year. Each certificate program can serve up to 60 and are for adults who do not have a bachelor's degree.

"We are really trying to connect our Adult Education students to a career so they can advance in life," explained Adult Education Manager Denise R. Johnson. "We're trying to help them go from several part-time jobs to having a sustainable full-time job."

The certificates offered include Entry-Level Management Essentials, Front Office Specialist, Customer Service & Sales, and Phlebotomy.

"It doesn't matter what level of academics you come to us with," says Johnson. "These programs serve the majority of our students. Everyone needs customer service and leadership skills. Additionally, phlebotomy is one of the quickest ways that you can get into an allied health profession because it requires the least amount of training."

Claudia Magallan, a Career Pathways Transition Specialist with the Adult Education division, adds that students receive support beyond the scope of their certificate program.

"Most of the students that we serve come from challenging backgrounds," said Magallan. "They are either GED or ESL students, and so they likely will have challenges learning with vocabulary or math skills. We provide them with the support they need to be successful."

Each class is lead by a trainer who is a subject matter expert and an adult education literacy teacher who provides wraparound support.

"This is the time to make a career change or obtain more skills," said Magallan. "This is the perfect opportunity for individuals to get free training in industries or roles that will offer them a livable wage. Our funding comes from Workforce Solutions, meaning the Texas Workforce Commission, and so every certificate we offer has to be in high-demand or provide a livable wage."

For more information about the certificate programs offered by HCDE's Adult Education division, visit www.hcde-texas.org/adult-education/workforce. ■

PROGRAM

CONNECTIONS

Head Start Centers Celebrate SuperMENTors

This week, Harris County Department of Education Head Start centers held their annual Real SuperMENTors Read Celebration to recognize men from the Houston community who have committed one hour, once a month, to read to Head Start students.

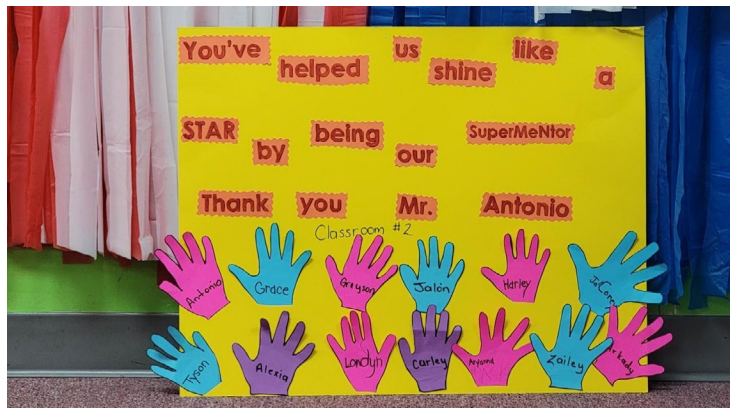
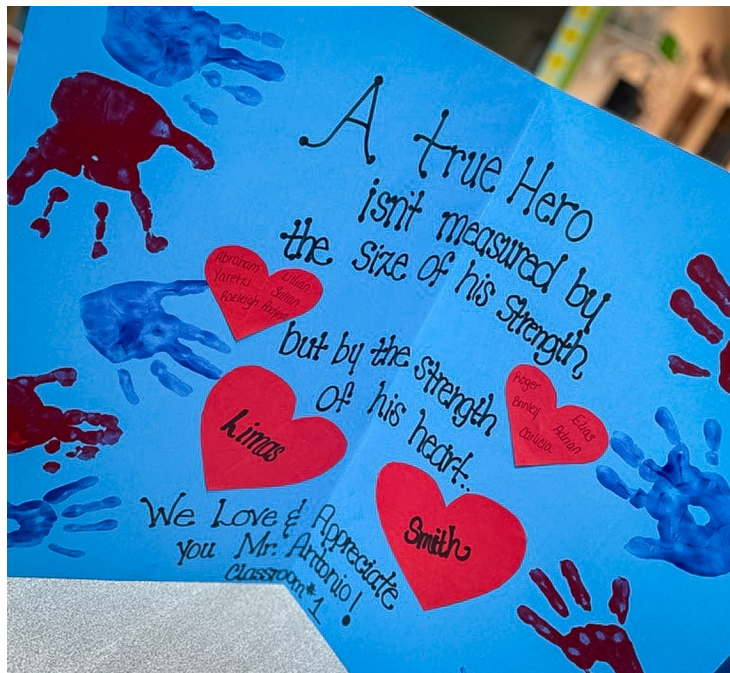
Because of ongoing social distancing guidelines, this year's celebrations were held virtually. Head Start students decorated posters, sang songs, and presented awards to their SuperMENTors during a video call. Additional celebrations will be held next week.

The Real SuperMENTors Read program is a part of HCDE's Head Start Significant Male Initiative formed in 2002 to encourage male involvement throughout the HCDE Head Start centers. The program works by recruiting, selecting, and assigning mentors to each school. Mentors commit to at least one hour, once a month between October and May, to read to students.

Looking ahead, Head Start enrollment for the 2021-2022 school year has begun. Enrollment in Early Head Start centers will begin on May 24, 2021.

For more information or to participate in the Head Start Real SuperMENTors Read program, visit www.hcde-texas.org/head-start/volunteer.

For more information about Head Start enrollment, visit www.hcde-texas.org/head-start. ■



PROGRAM

CONNECTIONS



Therapy Services Hosts Staff Appreciation End-of-Year Event

Nearly 150 Harris County Department of Education Therapy Services staff members gathered on the Houston Arboretum's lawn on Thursday to celebrate the division's annual staff appreciation event.

Staff recognized four retiring team members, took care of pending business items, and enjoyed the arboretum's grounds. Assistant Superintendent of Academic Support Jonathan Parker gave brief remarks, thanking the Department's therapists for their tireless work during the 2020-2021 school year.

Carie Crabb, senior director for Therapy Services, spoke about this year's theme, resilience, exemplified by her staff.

"When you think about resilience and all the adversity, barriers, and difficulties that [our therapists] have encountered over this last school year, you know they have definitely risen above and beyond to make it work as best as they possibly could for their kids, and it's all out of the love that they have for the children they serve," said Crabb.

HCDE's occupational, physical, and music therapists work in 33 different school districts and charter schools in and around Harris County and provide 100% of the therapy services offered at Houston ISD, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD, Dayton ISD, Katy ISD, Spring ISD and Stafford MSD. ■



SYSTEMIC

ACHIEVEMENT...WITH PURPOSEFUL INTENT

This week the following Board expectations were met:

Superintendent Objective C: Personnel Management

- Encourages, oversees, and participates in staff recognition activities



Yesterday our Therapy Services division held their annual staff appreciation in person at the Houston Arboretum. The theme of the day was Resilience. It was the first time since the pandemic began that they have all come together face-to-face. The weather was perfect and the joy of fellowship was clearly in the air.

Our Adult Education division has been hard at work building programs that change lives for adults across the metropolitan area. This week they held a series of in-person registrations for workforce related certifications in Entry-Level Management Essentials, Front Office Specialist, Customer Service & Sales, and Phlebotomy. These programs give individuals that may have had tough breaks in life an opportunity to obtain sustainable jobs with living wages.

Finally, this week our Head Start division celebrated a program near and dear to my heart, SuperMENTors. This year the program has been held entirely online, as was the celebration. As a SuperMENTor myself, I truly miss the personal interaction with young readers but am proud of the progress they have made during a challenging year. My hat's off to all of the volunteers that are committed as I am to helping these eager kids get a jump start on a successful academic journey.

By promoting the recognition of the great work of our staff, I am meeting the expectation to establish a culture of excellence at HCDE.

HCDE BOARD

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Eric Dick

Vice President

Danny Norris

Board Members

David W. Brown

Richard Cantu

Erica Davis

Andrea Duhon

Amy Hinojosa

UPCOMING EVENTS

May 19 Board Meeting 1 p.m.