

# THE CONNECTOR

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

WEEK OF April 5, 2021

VOLUME 6 ISSUE 26

## COMMUNITY OUTREACH

### TOP STORIES

**HCDE Awareness  
Campaign Updates**  
*p.2*



**Leaders Share Lessons  
Learned During Pandemic**  
*p.3*

**CHAT WITH CHIEFS:**  
Moving School Forward Safely

Wednesday, April 7 | 10 – 11 a.m.

**Parent Engagement Liaison  
is a Resource for Parents**  
*p.4*



## Of Note...



Community engagement and outreach is critical to the success of any educational organization. As a superintendent you quickly learn that community partners enhance the success and resources of a school district and enable you to support your students and teachers in ways that you simply could not do alone.

I personally saw community relations in action this week as I met with a long-time advocate of the Barrett Station community. On Wednesday, I met with Mr. Judge, who has lived in Barrett Station for many years and has extensive experience with equine-related functions around the state. We discussed our proposed Equine Enrichment Center and associated community expectations and perspectives. This conversation was not only enlightening but extremely beneficial, as it gives me insight into the thoughts of our stakeholders and will help inform our search for a consultant to develop the program. This engagement also shows that HCDE is a valued partner for local communities that not only enhances current offerings for residents but increases the quality of life as well. I am excited to continue these types of discussions as we develop and refine our plans for the Equine Enrichment Center.

I started the week with my Executive Leadership Team and as well as several board member quarterly meetings. I am on schedule to wrap up this quarter's meetings next week and look forward to meeting with you individually again in late summer.

On Tuesday I met with the Leadership Team to discuss ongoing projects and initiatives and also had a Zoom meeting with TASB to review our salary structure.

I met with the board hiring committee on Wednesday regarding the Board Secretary position and am hopeful we will have a great pool of candidates for you to choose from. Yesterday we held agenda review for the April board meeting and I finished out the week with several internal and standing meetings on Friday.

Have a relaxing weekend.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James Collier". The signature is stylized with a large, looping initial "J".

# PROGRAM

## CONNECTIONS

### Awareness Campaign: February and March metrics

HCDE's awareness campaign, *See the Impact*, continues to make an impression upon our community. In February and March, the campaign garnered more than 9.1 million impressions across all channels.

Social media ads on Facebook garnered 522,000 impressions in February, an 83% increase in total impressions compared to last year, which resulted in a 290% increase in total page engagements (likes, shares, reposts, etc.) year-over-year. Google ads yielded 653,032 impressions. Facebook and Google ads generated a combined 1.1 million digital impressions.

The five-second TV ad running on ABC 13 (KTRK) remains a successful branding tool with 5.1 million impressions during February.

Billboards in three locations – Highway 290 at 34th Street, FM 1960 at Wilson Road, and Highway 249 at McKinley Street – resulted in 2.8 million impressions.

The April inserts for Community Impact newspapers have already started to circulate. Below are the distribution dates (“In-Home Date”) for the newspaper broken down by community. This insert will target more than 600,000 households in Harris County with an 8-page publication featuring information about Adult Education, our AB Schools, and Fortis Academy. ■

**7,928,325**  
**FEBRUARY ACHIEVED IMPRESSIONS**



Location	Edition	In-Home Date
Bellaire/Meyerland/West University	BMW Paper	3/31-4/2
Cy-Fair	CYF Paper	3/31-4/2
Heights/River Oaks/Montrose	HRM Paper	4/2-4/5
Pearland/Friendswood	PLF Paper	4/9-4/12
The Woodlands	WDL Paper	4/14-4/16
Spring/Klein	SKL Paper	4/17-4/20
Katy	KTY Paper	4/21-4/23
Bay Area	BAY Paper	4/23-4/26
Lake Houston/Humble/Kingwood	LHK Paper	4/26-only
Tomball/Magnolia	Tom Paper	4/24-4/27

# PROGRAM

## CONNECTIONS

### Leaders from Far-Flung School Districts Share Lessons Learned During Coronavirus Pandemic

As educators and school districts prepare for the 2021-2022 school year, Harris County Department of Education's Center for Safe and Secure Schools held its second "Chat with the Chiefs" event. Leaders from four outlying Harris County school districts participated in the virtual discussion panel to discuss how to move schools forward safely after a year of teaching during a global pandemic.

The hourlong roundtable featured Bennie Mayes, Secondary Chief of Schools for Waller ISD; Hector Herrera, Assistant Superintendent of Support Services for Dayton ISD; Steve Corry, Assistant Superintendent for Administration at Deer Park ISD; and Robert Cobb, Assistant Superintendent for Administration at Dickinson ISD.

"The benefit of bringing school leaders from different districts is that they can share their lived experiences," said Janice Owolabi from the CSSS. "All school districts are under the same coronavirus restrictions, but each school district has responded differently to them. The leaders who participated in this discussion panel represent districts in the outer rim of Harris County. They often don't get a lot of support and have to pull magic tricks out of their hat to cover a lot of territory – they make it happen. They don't have a big staff like Cy-Fair, Katy, or Houston ISD. It was important

to us to have these school districts share their perspectives on what it's been like for them so others can learn from it, but also so that HCDE can find where we can add value and give them the support they need to help them build a safe school environment."

Fifty-seven attendees from local nonprofits, Region 4, and public, private and charter schools listened as the four school leaders discussed the challenges that arose at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, the lessons learned in the year after, and what they will do to keep students and staff safe next year.

"As we look back, we learned how to be flexible and how to listen," said Cobb. "[Before the pandemic], we were very focused on physical safety – things that we could see and things that we had seen before – and what we were dealing with [last March] were things that we could not see and had not really experienced before."

Panelists expressed that not making assumptions and building trust in their relationships with parents, students, and staff was crucial.

"As a district, we felt it was important not to let anyone make assumptions about what protocols they had to follow or what their obligations were." Said Mayes. "We didn't want to have any major issues because of poor communication; we wanted to make sure everyone was on the same page. We didn't want to make assumptions that they knew what they had to do."

The most important consideration that school leaders expressed is their desire for students and staff to feel safe upon returning to campus.

"Everyone wants to be in a place where they feel safe, and it's hard to define what a feeling is," said Cobb. "But when you are there, you know it." ■



**Bennie Mayes**  
Chief of Schools -  
Secondary  
Waller ISD



**Hector Herrera**  
Assistant Superintendent  
of Support Services  
Dayton ISD



**Steve Corry**  
Assistant Superintendent  
for Administration  
Deer Park ISD



**Robert Cobb**  
Assistant Superintendent  
for Administration  
Dickinson ISD

# EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

## HCDE's Parent Engagement Liaison is an Indispensable Resource for Parents

Harris County Department of Education's sole Parent Engagement Liaison, Gabriela Hernandez-Aguilera, has been with the Department for nearly two years and has already made herself an indispensable resource for students and their families.

Hernandez-Aguilera supports students with autism, intellectual disabilities and emotional disorders, and advocates for them within the community. Specifically, she educates parents on how to reinforce what special needs students learn at school. She also helps them address non-academic issues like food and housing insecurity that may impact students' ability to learn by bringing together community partners and resources that support the whole family.

"Nothing beats getting a phone call from a parent saying, 'what you did really made a difference,'" she said. "In special education, if something works in the classroom but isn't being applied at home, it's going to be difficult behavior to change. We realized that to provide a better education, we need to support our students."

As the daughter of Mexican immigrants, Hernandez-Aguilera shares a special bond with families who struggle to obtain the support they need.



"Both my parents worked really hard for the American dream," said Hernandez-Aguilera. "I know what it's like to go from having everything to then having difficulties and not knowing where to reach out for help – whether it's because of a language barrier or because you are not aware of how the system works. We have a lot of parents right now that don't know where to look for help or what that help looks like. It takes a lot of explaining and letting them know they are not alone, that we're here to support them and be a guide for them. Parent burnout is real."

Dr. Charles Ned, HCDE's senior director schools, explains

that the key to Hernandez-Aguilera's success is her passion for helping children.

"She is a true asset to this division," said Ned. "She takes pride in her work and has a great personality. She's a people person, and that's so important when you're working with parents and members of the community."

Yet, Hernandez-Aguilera feels like to she has so much more to accomplish.

"The hardest part of my job is trying to help everyone but feeling like I didn't do enough," she said. ■

# IN THE NEWS

## Local Students Win National Scholastic Art & Writing Awards

Local online news outlets and blogs recognized the Harris County teen writers and artists who received National Scholastic Art & Writing Awards.

**Houston Style Magazine:**

<https://bit.ly/39ROrWg>

**The Paper:**

<https://bit.ly/39QnFxt>

**Hot in Houston Now:**

<https://bit.ly/3rUXoo8>



### Harris County teen writers, artists earn 80 National Scholastic Art & Writing Medals, Scholarships

Posted on April 5, 2021

The creative works of 70 teen writers and artists from 13 Harris County school districts and 10 private schools were recognized this month during the 98th annual National Scholastic Art & Writing Awards 2021, judged in New York City. Seventy-five national medals and five scholarships were awarded to the area youth who earned regional Gold Key Awards earlier this year during a competition sponsored by Harris County Department of Education.

### Spring ISD Students Honored for Creative Works in 2021 Scholastic Art & Writing Awards Competition

Published by The Editor on Mon, 03/15/2021 - 08:43



SPRING, TX -- March 12, 2021 -- In the 2021 Scholastic Art & Writing Awards, 21 Spring ISD middle school and high school students received more than 30 separate regional awards for works they submitted to the contest -- sponsored and overseen at the regional level by Harris County Department of Education (HCDE).

"Scholastic is a big deal, a national event with a very long and distinguished history," said Spring ISD Visual Arts Coordinator Amanda Byers. "Our students are so incredibly talented, and this program is a wonderful way to help them shine and give us a chance to recognize their commitment to creativity, even when times are tough."

Originally launched in 1923, the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards offer young visual artists and writers across the country an opportunity to compete with their work at both regional and national levels. This year, more than 100,000 U.S. students in grades 7-12 participated for a chance at having their work recognized, as well as for scholarship awards and other prizes.

A total of 8,874 works were submitted this year from students in Harris County, according to a statement from HCDE. Out of these, more than 2,400 Harris County students received regional honors, including Gold Key, Silver Key, Honorable Mention, and American Visions & Voices nominations. Submissions receiving the Gold Key recognition at the regional level are then submitted for judging at the national level, with results scheduled to be announced later in March. This year's national awards ceremony will be a live-streamed event held on June 9.

"An award signifies to parents, teachers, the community, and colleges that a student is an accomplished artist or writer and offers creative teens the opportunity to earn recognition, exhibition, publication, and up to \$10,000 in scholarships," HCDE wrote in announcing this year's regional winners.



# Scholastic Art & Writing Awards

# SYSTEMIC

## ACHIEVEMENT...WITH PURPOSEFUL INTENT

This week, the following Board expectations were met:

**Superintendent Objective B: Organizational Morale**

- Celebrates accomplishments and acknowledges excellence.

**Superintendent Objective D: Community Relations**

- Establishes and maintains a program of public relations to keep the public well informed of the activities of the Department, affecting a wholesome and cooperative working relationship between the Department and community.
- Works with other governmental entities and community organizations to meet the needs of students and the community in a coordinated way.



Programs that impact the communities we serve is a cornerstone of Harris County Department of Education. We are at our best when we fill the gaps with resources for districts, students and their parents.

This week our Center for Safe and Secure Schools held its second “Chat with the Chiefs” event that brought together leaders from smaller area districts that often don’t have the support structures of their larger counterparts but still have to address the same issues. The sharing of experiences allowed other area school leaders attending to explore strategies they could apply in their districts. The conversation also helps HCDE identify where we can add value and support to help the districts we serve build a better school environment.

Building impactful relationships between community partners and our programs and students is critical to the success of HCDE. Parent Engagement Liaison Gabriela Hernandez-Aguilera supports students with autism, intellectual disabilities and emotional disorders by connecting area organizations with resources to support our families and students. Her work not only helps ensure student success but helps families navigate other challenges like food and housing insecurity.

By recognizing the achievements of employees and actively partnering with other governmental agencies and organizations I am positioning HCDE as a valued member of our community.

### HCDE BOARD

**Board President**

Eric Dick

**Vice President**

Danny Norris

**Board Members**

David W. Brown

Richard Cantu

Erica Davis

Andrea Duhon

Amy Hinojosa

### UPCOMING EVENTS

**April 10**

A Day of Educational Innovation  
Featuring Ron Clark  
9 a.m. - 3 p.m.

**April 14**

Evidence-Based Updates in ADHD for School-Based Practitioners  
*Virtual*  
8 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

**April 21**

Board Meeting  
1 p.m.