

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release



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\$10,750 in Scholarships Announced, Teens Earn HCDE Regional Scholastic Art & Writing Awards

March 5, 2019 - Student and teacher scholarships totaling \$10,750 were awarded to Harris County students in public and private schools as Harris County Department of Education announces regional affiliate recipients of the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards. The Scholastic Awards are the largest, most prestigious awards program in the country for creative teens in grades 7-12.

Including in the recognitions are students from Klein, Deer Park, Cy-Fair, Pasadena, Clear Creek, Galena Park, Spring, Aldine, Houston, Humble, Crosby, Spring Branch, Katy and Crosby independent school districts. Private school awardees are from St. John's School and the Village School. A meritorious teacher award is delivered to Pearland Independent School District. Student works now advance for judging at the national level in New York City.

"We are grateful to our corporate sponsors as well as Harris County Department of Education administration and trustees for providing these monetary awards for our students," said Andrea Segraves, coordinator for HCDE's Scholastic Art & Writing Awards. "Their support validates the significance of these students' fine arts achievements."

Corporate donors this year included Texas Art Supply, Glassell School of Art and an anonymous donor.

The following students have been awarded scholarships:

ART:

American Vision Nominees (\$250 each, donated by HCDE):

- Carolina Colon, Clear Lake Intermediate School, Clear Creek ISD, teacher Terri Nicolosi
- Julia Espino, Cypress Woods High School, Cy-Fair ISD, teacher Charlotte Stuart
- Axel Maldonado, Sam Rayburn High School, Pasadena ISD, teacher Victor Raygoza
- Anthony Vega, Sam Rayburn High School, Pasadena ISD, teacher Gabriel Flores
- Annie Zhu, Home School, teacher Ping Zhao

Superintendent's Award (\$250 donated by HCDE): Maria Cortes, Galena Park High School, Galena Park ISD, teacher Antonio Hurtado

HCDE Trustees' Incentive Award (\$500 donated by HCDE): An Nguyen, Spring High School, Spring ISD, teacher Amanda Beisert

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HCDE Trustees' Exemplary Award (\$1,000 donated by HCDE): Evieh'bi Jan Nia Braddy, Chester W Nimitz High School, Aldine ISD, teacher Jorge Vazquez

Texas Art Supply Award Winners (\$500 each, donated by Texas Art Supply)

- Chloe Cornor, Langham Creek High School, Cy-Fair ISD, teacher Bohye Na
- Josue Hernandez-Navarro, Spring High School, Spring ISD, teacher Amanda Beisert
- Ashley Monroe, Meyerland Performing & Visual Arts Middle School, Houston ISD, teacher Christina Gonzalez
- Swapna Ramchandra, Clear Springs High School, Clear Creek ISD, teacher Lisette McClung
- Daniela Soto Borboa, Summer Creek High School, Humble ISD, teacher Lynnette Gilbert
- Marco Sosa, Sam Rayburn High School, Pasadena ISD, teachers Daniel Reyna & Victor Raygoza
- Ruby Zhou, Memorial High School, Spring Branch ISD, teacher Marilyn Guerinot
- Charles Danna, Klein Oak High School, Klein ISD, teachers Richard Cornall and Jennifer Schiebel
- Angel Luo, Cinco Ranch High School, Katy ISD, teacher Patricia Kuhn
- Issak Haffelfinger, Crosby High School, Crosby ISD, teacher Tyra Baxter

WRITING:

American Voice Nominees (\$250 each, donated by HCDE):

- Nyla Hartigan, St. John's School, Private, teacher Kemberly Kemp
- Kahani Malhotra, Village School, Private, teacher Diane Fanning
- Luke Stein, Klein Collins High School, Klein ISD, teacher Amber Wallace
- Jack Trent, St. John's School, Private, teacher Warren Rawson
- Elizabeth Willms, Deer Park High School, Deer Park ISD, teacher Joshua Nebrida

Superintendent's Award (\$250 donated by HCDE): Khanh Dang, Albright Middle School, Alief ISD, teacher Adriana Hernandez

HCDE Trustees' Incentive Award (\$500 donated by HCDE): Ahnia Leary, Lamar High School, Houston ISD, teacher Yi-Shan Chen

HCDE Trustees' Exemplary Award (\$1,000 donated by HCDE): Rodrigo Milan, Klein Cain High School, Klein ISD, teacher Eric Cloninger

Susan O'Conner Educator of Excellence Teacher Award (\$500 anonymous donation): Teacher Susan Henson, Pearland ISD

For more information about the Awards receptions and awardees, go to <https://hcde-texas.org/scholastic-awards/awardees/> . View our blog posts for more information about awardees and receptions: <https://wp.me/p4QJFI-U1> and <https://wp.me/p4QJFI-T9> .

Photo: Superintendent's Award (\$250 donated by HCDE): Art by Maria Cortes, Galena Park High School, Galena Park ISD, teacher Antonio Hurtado

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‘Financial Math’ to Help Houston-Area Teens Make Sound Financial Decisions

June 27, 2019 - Harris County Department of Education is providing teacher training and materials for “Financial Mathematics,” a high school course about money management. The course will help students apply critical-thinking skills to analyze personal financial decisions.

HCDE Curriculum Director Nicole Shanahan teamed with curriculum writer, presenter and “Mathematics of Money” author Arthur Howard to offer the training. Shanahan also worked on the state curriculum with the Texas Education Agency through scope-and-sequence committee.

The Texas Financial Education Endowment provided HCDE’s Teaching and Learning Center with a \$19,000 grant to fund the training for high school math, social studies and career and technical educators. For more information, email nshanahan@hcde-texas.org.

Consultant Howard offers these sage, tried-and-true financial tips to teens (and their adults).

5 tips of financial advice:

1. **Train for success:** Get a part-time job. If you plan to go to college, apply for scholarships and grants and get an associate degree and transfer. Get an education that gets you a job.
2. **Be the employee everybody wants:** Be willing to take an internship. Show up early every day and be willing to stay late. Three requests from employers—take time to study how your company works; learn to work well with others; and be a pioneer.
3. **Live within your means:** Don’t finance your lifestyle on credit. Buy what you need, not what you want. Build up an emergency fund. Start saving now for your home down-payment.
4. **Spend like this “is” a tomorrow.** Budget, making savings a priority. Pay as little withholding as you can. Use IRAs and take advantage of employer matching.
5. **Protect your love ones:** Buy a burial policy when young, and term-life later. Save to replace you. Plan for your children’s education.

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2 in 5,000: Pasadena ISD's Sam Rayburn High School Artists Earn American Visions Nominations

March 7, 2019 - It is an incredible honor to be named an American Visions nominee, especially with over 5,000 Harris County Department of Education Scholastic Art entries this year. However, Sam Rayburn High School in Pasadena Independent School District is honored to have two students who were nominated for this prestigious art award.

Senior Axel Maldonado and junior Anthony Vega are two of the five American Visions nominations from our region.

Five works of art from each region are selected by HCDE's regional judges as American Voices & Visions nominees. Each receives a cash award of \$250 from HCDE. From the pool of five, a panel of jurors in New York City selects one artist from each region to receive an American Visions Medal. These Medalists from throughout the nation are celebrated during national events and exhibits in New York City in June.

"Five works, from across all categories and grades, are selected from those earning Gold Keys as the 'Best of Show' for each local program as nominees for the American Visions & Voices Medals," HCDE Scholastic Art & Writing Awards Regional Coordinator Andrea Seagraves said. "To have two from one campus is a reflection of both student talent and powerful art instruction."

SRHS has had students nominated for the American Visions award in the past, but never two at the same time.

"It's a great honor," SRHS Art teacher Victor Raygoza said. "I think it hits the educators a little bit more than the students because we feel that we are doing something right, and the students are appreciating what we are teaching them more."

"The students are seeing that it's just not a picture, it has to tell a story and have some emotion behind it," SRHS Art teacher Gabriel Flores said. "They are learning to portray that within their images to get a story across."

In his first year of entering the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards, Maldonado also received a Gold Key for his painting, Push Through. His inspiration for the painting came from a picture of a friend's brother touching a brick wall and taking a moment to think.

"You can see how he is trying to overcome certain obstacles in life, and I like the colors in the painting to bring it to life," he said.

From days of taking paper and placing it on the TV screen to trace objects that were being shown, Maldonado plans to pursue his love of art by attending an art school in the fall. He hopes to become a graphic designer/painter in the future and wants people to recognize him as an artist.

Vega's drawing and illustration, *Salvaged Possessions*, also received a Gold Key award. His drawing is of people walking through a flooded neighborhood after Hurricane Harvey hit the Houston-area in 2017.

"I chose to do this piece because it was a dark moment for us all and many friends and family were affected by the flooding," he said. "Seeing people struggling and losing their homes was emotional. I was able to capture their emotion in my artwork from a picture my teacher took after the storm."

Art gives Vega the chance to express his feelings and emotions into a piece for someone else to see.

He plans to continue creating art and make people feel great when they see his pieces.

The five nominees will find out the identity of the American Visions Medalist at the Scholastic Art & Writing Regional Gold and Silver Key Ceremony on March 26 and 27 at The Ballroom at Bayou Place. Gold and Silver Key art pieces from high school students are on display until March 17 at Spring Street Studios, 1824 Spring St., Houston, TX 77007.

Axel Maldonado Photo: American Visions Nominee (\$250 donated by HCDE): Art by Axel Maldonado, Sam Rayburn High School, Pasadena ISD, teacher Victor Raygoza.

Anthony Vega Photo: American Visions Nominee (\$250 donated by HCDE): Art by Anthony Vega, Sam Rayburn High School, Pasadena ISD, teacher Gabriel Flores.

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3,263 Talented Teens in Harris County Earn Regional Scholastic Art & Writing Awards through HCDE

Feb. 4, 2019 - Harris County Department of Education recognizes the art and writing talents of teens throughout Harris County as regional sponsors of the celebrated 2019 Scholastic Art & Writing Awards. Artist award ceremonies, receptions and scholarships are announced as 3,263 Harris County students from public, private and home schools receive awards.

View the student awardees: <https://hcde-texas.org/scholastic-awards/awardees> .

Twenty-two school districts, 26 private 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 12 and awarded on June 6 through a ceremony at Carnegie Hall in New York City.

Awardees find common ground with alumni Scholastic Art & Writing honorees and famous writers and artists such as Stephen King, Dan Fogelberg, Sylvia Plath, Robert Redford, Truman Capote, Andy Warhol, Joyce Carol Oates, Marc Brown and Jaida Jones.

The Scholastic Art & Writing Awards, founded in 1923, provides young artists and writers in grades 7-12 with the opportunity to showcase their art and writing talents. The competition's mission is to bring outstanding visual art and writing created by teens to a national audience by showcasing the work and encouraging creative and career development.

"Judges who are writing and art professionals volunteered to judge an amazing record number of 7,742 entries of art and writing this year ranging from photography to poetry to mixed media to short stories," said Andrea Segraves, regional coordinator for Scholastic Art & Writing at HCDE. "In addition to being beholden to our judges, we recognize the dedication of teachers who help these young artists cultivate their talents and assist them in entering their work."

Students submitted their work through the 759 teachers who support and participate in HCDE's regional competition. Several hundred volunteer art and writing professionals judge the submittals. "We are grateful for the supporters of Scholastic Art & Writing in Harris County—from the community supporters who offer space to showcase art and writing to the companies who offer student scholarships to the hundreds of judges who volunteer their time," said HCDE Superintendent James Colbert Jr. "There is a deep well of artistic talent represented, and we are proud to host, showcase and support this iconic program."

The following area school districts are represented: Aldine, Alief, Alvin, Clear Creek, Crosby, Cy-Fair, Deer Park, Galena Park, Goose Creek, Houston, Huffman, Humble, Katy, Klein, New Caney, Pasadena, Pearland, Spring Branch, Spring, Tomball and Waller.

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Private school students with awards include: British International School of Houston, Concordia Lutheran High School, Duchesne Academy Of Sacred Heart, Emery Weiner School, Episcopal High School, Houston Christian High School, Incarnate Word Academy, Kinkaid School, River Oaks Baptist School, St Agnes Academy, St Francis Episcopal Day School, St. John's School, Veritas Christian Academy, the Village School, Awty International School, Incarnate Word Academy, Kinkaid School, Presbyterian School, River Oaks Baptist School, St. Agnes Academy, St John XXIII Preparatory High School and St. Thomas Episcopal School.

Through the art categories, students gain 321 Gold Keys, 423 Silver Keys, and 374 honorable mentions. In the writing categories, students earn 95 Gold Keys, 143 Silver Keys, and 340 honorable mentions.

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

American Visions (art) awardees: Carolina Colon, Clear Lake Intermediate School, Clear Creek ISD; Julia Espino, Cypress Woods High School, Cy-Fair ISD; Axel Maldonado, Sam Rayburn High School, Pasadena ISD; Anthony Vega, Sam Rayburn High School, Pasadena ISD; and Annie Zhu (individual entry).

American Voices (writing) awardees: Nyla Hartigan, St. John's School, private; Kahani Malhotra, Village School, private; Luke Stein, Klein Collins High School, Klein ISD; Jack Trent, St. John's School, private; and Elizabeth Willms, Deer Park High School-North Campus, Deer Park ISD.

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

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5 Ways Families Can Reduce Summer Learning Loss for Back to School

Aug. 20, 2019 – Post-summer “brain drain” or summer learning loss for students is real, according to Harris County Department of Education Center for Afterschool, Summer and Enrichment for Kids (CASE for Kids) Director Lisa Thompson-Caruthers. Most teachers spend at least three weeks re-teaching last year’s lessons at the beginning of each school year, she said.

Research outlined by the National Summer Learning Association reveals that most students lose two months of math skills every summer, and low-income students lose another two-to-three months in reading.

“Summer camps and activities for children are important for a number of reasons,” said Caruthers. “During the summer it’s important to keep kids engaged, maintain regular sleep routines, provide social interaction with other kids and practice following rules.”

Regardless, gaining a healthy transition back to school can be achieved, Caruthers said.

Here are some tips for getting kids back into their academic routines:

1. Jumpstart a healthy family routine. Get back to normal sleeping schedules.
2. Identify a child’s interests in books. While school ramps up the academics, it’s important for kids to access books based on their interest areas. Visit the library to check out books that compliment school-day learning.
3. Prime the mental pump. Museums are abundant in the greater Houston area, and many have free or discounted hours or days. Mix in educational apps to the games your kids play. along with their favorites. Have them watch educational YouTube videos and report back what they learn.
4. Get homework help and enroll in afterschool. When homework is completed inside an afterschool program, family stress is reduced, leaving more quality time at home for family time. Afterschool provides a variety of activities that reinforce school-day learning, encourage social interaction and help youth develop skills.
5. Add incentives to your child’s learning with quality family time. After homework is over, play a family game. After six weeks of school, let your child plan a weekend excursion. Make a wish list of places your child wanted to visit this summer, but time ran out.

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. For more information go to www.hcde-texas.org/after-school. For research about summer learning loss, go to www.summerlearning.org/at-a-glance.

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.

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6 Scholastic Students Receive Glassell Junior School Summer Scholarships

March 29, 2019 - Six students who received a Gold Key or Silver Key in the 2019 Scholastic Art & Writing Awards were selected by the Glassell Junior School to receive a summer scholarship. The Awards are the largest, most prestigious awards program in the country for creative teens in grades 7-12. Harris County Department of Education is the regional affiliate for the Awards.

Six students chosen for this summer's art camp, valued at \$165, are:

- Sophia Fu, Pearland ISD- Pearland Junior High West, 8th grade
- Adriana Landin-Seneriz, Katy ISD- Tays Junior High, 8th grade
- Emily Rosales, Pasadena ISD- Southmore Intermediate School, 8th grade
- Megan Margraves, Episcopal High School, 10th grade
- Isabella Concepcion, Katy ISD- Obra D. Tompkins High School, 11th grade
- Alaina Sibley, Clear Creek ISD- Clear Springs High School, 11th grade

Glassell summer camp art classes include a choice of drawing, painting, ceramics, fashion, digital and other art genres. The weeklong camps run from June-early August.

The Glassell Junior School of Art is the teaching wing of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Glassell has supported the HCDE regional Scholastic Art & Writing Awards for many years by sponsoring the scholarships and hosting art receptions. Glassell Junior School faculty judged the art selections this year and awarded the scholarships.

"A distinguishing feature of the Glassell School is ready access to the museum's encyclopedia collection of incredible works of art," said Pam Perez, Glassell Junior School administrative dean.

For more information about Glassell, go to <https://www.mfah.org/visit/glassell-junior-school/>. Visit www.hcde-texas.org/scholastic-awards for information about entering, judging or sponsoring Scholastic Art & Writing at HCDE.

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20th Anniversary Unites CASE for Kids, City Council Members, Nonprofit Afterschool Service Providers

Feb. 19, 2019 - The Center for Afterschool, Summer and Enrichment for Kids, or CASE for Kids, celebrates its 20th anniversary this year and continues to partner with the City of Houston to bring afterschool activities to each of the 11 city council districts. These unique learning opportunities cater to the individual out-of-school time needs of each district and help keep children in communities engaged and safe. Nonprofit afterschool service providers met with council members and CASE for Kids this month for a photo opportunity.

Photos:

https://hcdetexas.photoshelter.com/gallery/2019-City-Connections/G0000PY_9ODsG34k/C0000qrqo_Uk4jLo

Password: hcde1889

MEDIA ALERT

For Immediate Release



YouTube Celebrity Steve Spangler Opens Early Childhood Conference Jan. 26 with Science Magic

What: Don't miss [YouTube celebrity Steve Spangler](#) as he brings his science magic to the stage. Over 1,000 Early Childhood educators will network at the 33rd Annual R.T. Garcia Early Childhood Winter Conference on Saturday, Jan. 26 at the Kingdom Builders' Center. Topics of interest include classroom safety and security and developing social emotional intelligence.

The Harris County Department of Education conference - a tradition for generations of educators of pre-k through second grade since 1986 - features over 60 breakout sessions for educators.

Keynote speakers is Emmy award-winning, YouTube celebrity and best-selling author Steve Spangler, who will do just about anything to get people excited about science, and bilingual specialist Laurie Weaver, who will focus on differences between English and Spanish and how those differences affect early literacy instruction through her presentation: "Development of Literacy in Spanish."

When/Where: **Jan. 26**, 8:30 a.m. – 3:30 p.m. at the Kingdom Builders' Center (6011 W. Orem Dr., Houston, TX 77085). Steve Spangler's appearance is from 8:30 – 10 a.m.

Who: Texas educators of children in pre-k through second grade, presenters and exhibitors of educational materials and supplies.

Media contact: **Contact Jeri Martinez, communications coordinator at 281-748-1623.**

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96 HCDE Scholastic Art & Writing Teens Earn National Bragging Rights at Carnegie Hall 2 Seniors Gain Top Honors with \$10,000 Scholarships

March 20, 2019 - Harris County teen artists and writers in grades 7-12 received a record-breaking 96 national Scholastic Art & Writing Medals and two of the 16 top, national \$10,000 scholarship honors from the nonprofit Alliance for Young Artist & Writers. View the list: <https://bit.ly/2TOhoMj> .

“As the regional sponsor of Scholastic Art & Writing, Harris County Department of Education is proud of the students and teachers who share their talent and passion through this national platform,” said Andrea Segraves, HCDE’s Scholastic Art & Writing Regional Affiliate coordinator. “It’s an incredible level of talent and dedication as we report a 57 percent increase in national Medals this year and two, \$10,000 high school senior scholarship recipients.”

The two seniors named by the Alliance to each receive \$10,000 scholarships are artist Taylor Powers of Cypress Woods High School in Cy-Fair Independent School District and writer Divjot Walia of Glenda Dawson High School in Pearland Independent School District. The Gold Medal Portfolio is the Alliance’s highest honor. Powers’ sponsoring teacher is Tina Fox and Walia’s sponsoring teacher is Susan Henson.

Two students gained American Visions and Voices awards, two best of class, Gold Medal distinctions for the region. They are student Axel Maldonado (sponsoring teacher Victor Raygoza), American Visions awardee from Sam Rayburn High School in Pasadena Independent School District, and student Kahani Malhotra (sponsoring teacher Diane Fanning), American Voices Medalist from the Village School.

This year, 2,700 teens received national recognition from the Alliance and earned the opportunity to attend the national ceremony at Carnegie Hall in New York City on June 6. In 2019, 340,000 art and writing entries in 29 categories were judged which were submitted by students through their teachers in every state in the nation.

“We celebrate the creativity of our Harris County students and the dedication of their mentoring teachers,” said HCDE Superintendent James Colbert Jr.

Since 1923, the Awards have recognized the creative promise of artists like Andy Warhol, Kay WalkingStick, Sylvia Plath, Stephen King, Richard Avedon and Zac Posen.

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

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Private school recipients are from St. John's School, the Village School, Episcopal High School, Duchesne Academy, River Oaks Baptist, St. Francis Episcopal Day School, Awty International, Kinkaid School, St. Agnes Academy and Emery Weiner School.

About Scholastic Art & Writing: Founded in 1923, the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards are 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 .

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Through the art categories, students gain 361 Gold Keys, 514 Silver Keys, and 835 honorable mentions. In the writing categories, students earn 359 Gold Keys, 579 Silver Keys, and 615 honorable mentions.

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

American Visions (art) nominees: Carolina Colon, Clear Lake Intermediate School, Clear Creek ISD; Julia Espino, Cypress Woods High School, Cy-Fair ISD; Axel Maldonado, Sam Rayburn High School, Pasadena ISD; Anthony Vega, Sam Rayburn High School, Pasadena ISD; and Annie Zhu (individual entry).

American Voices (writing) nominees: Nyla Hartigan, St. John's School, private; Kahani Malhotra, Village School, private; Luke Stein, Klein Collins High School, Klein ISD; Jack Trent, St. John's School, private; and Elizabeth Willms, Deer Park High School-North Campus, Deer Park ISD.

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

Photo: Art work from American Vision nominees Caroline Colon, Clear Lake Intermediate School, Clear Creek ISD; Annie Zhu, individual entry; Axel Maldonado, Pasadena ISD; Anthony Vega, Pasadena ISD; and Julia Espino, Cy-Fair ISD

About Harris County Department of Education: 33 facilities, including 15 Head Start centers. More info at www.hcde-texas.org .

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PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release



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Afterschool Infused by City Connections Funding to Promote Youth Safety, Crime Prevention Via CASE for Kids

Sept. 26, 2019 - Afterschool in Houston this school year receives a \$770,000 funding infusion through City Connections, monies from the city of Houston. The program is administered by the Center for Afterschool, Summer and Environment for Kids, or CASE for Kids, a division of Harris County Department of Education.

For a sixth consecutive year, families in 11 Houston City Council districts benefit from the city funding. Nonprofit organizations in each of the council districts receive \$22,250 from Oct. 14-Dec. 31. The city and CASE for Kids encourage nonprofits like arts organizations, faith-based organizations and civic groups to apply through a request for proposal.

In January, new funding opportunities of \$22,250 will be available through a request for proposal in each council district as the new city council is sworn into office. Those afterschool funds will be used from March 9-May 15.

“City Connections gives Houston youth opportunity to grow, develop skills and discover hobbies,” said Lisa Thompson-Caruthers, director of CASE for Kids. “Besides promoting child safety, afterschool supports social and emotional learning. We are grateful for the continued support of afterschool by city of Houston leaders, including the mayor and the council members.”

As an afterschool intermediary, CASE for Kids provides resources, trainings and funding for students in grades pre-k through 12 in afterschool programs in schools, childcare facilities and community centers. As a branch of Harris County Department of Education, the division was founded in 1999 with a goal to keep kids safe, help working families and improve academic achievement.

According to the national nonprofit Afterschool Alliance, more than 15 million students—including approximately 3.7 million middle schoolers—are alone and unsupervised between 3 to 6 p.m., the peak hours for juvenile crime and experimentation with drugs, alcohol, cigarettes and sex.

HCDE Superintendent James Colbert Jr. said CASE for Kids City Connections is critically needed as one or both parents or guardians work in many families, leaving unwatched children vulnerable during out-of-school time.

“We are thankful the city continues to invest in our children and their families, especially as afterschool funding is being cut through other sources,” Colbert said.

To find out about the organizations in each council district that will provide services or to contact CASE for Kids about new opportunities in January 2020, visit www.hcde-texas.org/after-school.

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.

MEDIA ALERT

For Immediate Release



All-Earth Ecobot Challenge 2019 Tasks Students with Robotics, Mission to Mars April 27 at Berry Center

- What:** With a mission to land on Mars, the All-Earth Ecobot Challenge 2019 combines robotics and problem-solving in outer space and the colonization of the red planet in ***“Space: The Next Giant Leap.”***
- When/Where:** Saturday, April 27 at Berry Center, 8877 Barker Cypress Road, Cypress, Texas with **media opportunity from 10-11:30 a.m.**
- Who:** 250 elementary students who are robotics enthusiasts and creative problem-solvers gather for a competition hosted by Harris County Department of Education’s Center for Afterschool, Summer and Enrichment for Kids, or CASE for Kids, and the Education Foundation of Harris County, a nonprofit which benefits HCDE programs and services for greater Houston-area students. CenterPoint Energy is the corporate sponsor.
- Etc.:** **All-Earth Ecobot Challenge 2019 is an innovative engineering competition that engages elementary students in complex, problem-solving skills using a themed challenge.** Teams build, program and compete with their space-minded, Lego Mindstorms robotics kit. The result engages students in critical thinking skills and elevating their confidence in formulating solutions to real-world missions.
- The event features **49 elementary teams of approximately 250 students**. Teams travel from Houston and surrounding areas such as New Caney, Spring, Huffman, Spring Branch, Seguin, Cy-Fair, Galena Park and Cleveland.
- The challenge includes the **Eco-Genius Lab** staffed by CASE for Kids afterschool vendors, including Mad Science, Nutty Scientist of Houston, BotShop and Maku, LLC. Lab volunteers include Wood, Oceaneering, and Junior League of Houston. Professionals will demonstrate real-world examples of science, technology, engineering and math at the hands-on Genius Lab.
- Media contact:** HCDE Communications, Carol Vaughn, 281-660-9205, cvaughn@hcde-texas.org or Jeri Martinez, 281-748-1623, jmmartinez@hcde-texas.org

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Andrews to Lead as Director for HCDE's Center for Safe and Secure Schools

Aug. 6, 2019 - Julia Andrews is the new director of the Center for Safe and Secure Schools, a division of Harris County Department of Education.

Andrews has served since early 2018 as the school culture and climate specialist for the center. She has been responsible for conducting numerous school safety audits; leading and facilitating restorative practices training; and developing threat assessments for schools and districts.

Prior to coming to HCDE, she was a teacher and assistant principal in Cypress Fairbanks and Houston ISDs. She received her bachelor's degree from the University of Northern Iowa, master's degree from Prairie View A&M University and is actively pursuing her doctorate in organizational leadership at Abilene Christian University.

The center partners with federal, state and local entities and is a nationally recognized leader in the development of increased safety and security strategies, standards and best practices in school security.

Andrews said her goals for the center include meeting the needs of area school districts and charter schools by providing exclusive, relevant trainings to support legislative-related mandates in youth mental health, school safety and social emotional learning.

About Harris County Department of Education (HCDE): HCDE is a unique, educational hybrid serving school districts, governmental agencies and nonprofits 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.

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Artistic Talent of Harris County Teens Demonstrated through Local Exhibits, Receptions for Scholastic Art & Writing Awards

Feb. 14, 2019 - Art and writing created by Harris County teens in grades 7-12 is showcased from Feb. 18 through March 17 at Spring Street Studios and Texas Art Supply. Harris County Department of Education supports The Scholastic Art & Writing Awards as the regional affiliate and celebrates the talents of awardees through two artists exhibits and receptions.

Spring Street Studios, 1824 Spring St., Houston, Texas, 77007, opens its doors to the public with several hundred student works on view from Gold Key and Silver Key recipients in grades 9-12 from public and private high schools. A reception is planned from 4:30-6 p.m. on Feb. 28. For studio hours, go to <http://www.springstreetstudios.info>.

Texas Art Supply, 2001 Montrose Blvd., Houston, Texas 77006, hosts art from students in grades 7-8 from public and private schools and provides a reception Feb. 21 from 4:30-6 p.m. Go to <http://www.texasart.com> for store hours to view the exhibit.

Since 1923, Scholastic Art & Writing has showcased the artistic vision, ingenuity and talent of youth and includes notable alumni like Andy Warhol and Joyce Carol Oates. Students this year submitted nearly 350,000 original works in 29 different categories of art and writing. HCDE, the regional affiliate, judged over 7,000 entries in 2019.

View the invite for the 2019 receptions and exhibits: <https://bit.ly/2SE4fVx>. Access our student list of awardees: <https://wp.me/p4QJFI-T9>. For more information about The Scholastic Art & Writing Awards, go to <https://hcde-texas.org/scholastic-awards/awardees/>.

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Photo: Drawing and illustration by Giselle Rubio, grade 11, Nimitz High School, Aldine ISD

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Autism Summit Set for April 9-10 at HCDE during Autism Awareness Month

March 29, 2019 - A two-day Autism Summit will be provided for teachers, special education counselors and administrators by Harris County Department of Education on April 9-10 from 8:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m. at 6300 Irvington Blvd. in Houston, Texas.

Presenting is education consultant Paula Kluth, expert in differentiated instruction, or tailoring instruction to meet needs of individual students.

Kluth provides two presentations for the two-day summit: “You’re Going to Love This Kid: Educating Students with Autism in Inclusive Schools” and “Text Maps to Memory Caps: Differentiating Instruction in K-12 Classrooms.”

April is National Autism Awareness Month, and the Autism Society says autism is the fastest-growing developmental disability. Prevalence of autism in the United States is estimated at one in 59 births. The summit is supported through the Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities. Cost is \$150 for in-county registrants (Harris County) and \$165 for out-of-county. Register: <https://bit.ly/2Fk1JL9>

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Students with Autism Nurtured in Small Classes with Behavioral Curriculum in HCDE Special Schools

(April is National Autism Awareness Month. Autism now affects one in 59 children and greatly varies from person to person. Children with autism do progress; early intervention is key according to the National Autism Association.)

View YouTube video: <https://youtu.be/qOtdHmbExk>

When John Clark learned that his son with autism would be placed in a special school to deal with his behavior issues, he was dumbfounded, then upset. The father of 9-year-old Hunter hired an advocate to represent his son. By the time he toured Academic and Behavior School East, a special school for children with behavior and intellectual challenges, he was already looking into private schools for his son.

Upon meeting principal Keith Oliphant and his staff and walking the hallways, he began to issue apologies.

“If every school could be run like this one, they would be in a lot better shape,” said Clark.

Since Hunter was placed in Harris County Department of Education’s AB School East this year by his home school district, the Clarks have seen a transformation in the independence of their third-grader. He engages in conversation in restaurants and talks to neighbors.

Instead of banging a water bottle on the table to show he’s disgruntled, he says: “Daddy, I’m not happy.”

Autism is a bio-neurological developmental disability that generally appears before age 3, when Hunter was diagnosed. Children with autism usually have difficulties in verbal and non-verbal communication, social interactions and leisure or planned activities. It is diagnosed four times more often in boys than girls.

Harris County Department of Education has two specialty schools called AB School West and East to serve children with autism, behavioral disorders and other significant physical and emotional needs. The schools use Boy’s Town curriculum to promote positive behavior and dismiss the negative.

Each of the 104 students currently attending AB School East is assigned an individualized education plan and benefits from small classrooms with a low, student-to-teacher ratio. Children are sent to the special schools through a district contractual agreement with a goal of returning to the home school district.

-more-

“We like having Hunter here, but our job is to get him to be independent and equipped with the skills he needs to be successful to return to his home school,” said AB East Principal Oliphant. When Hunter goes back to his school in La Porte Independent School District next September, he will be equipped with improved social and academic skills or habits.

“I’ve seen his academics improve,” said Clark. “Hunter still struggles and will resist homework like any kids, but before he would throw a fit. He sighs but has learned that this is what we have to do. Homework is first.”

Parent Flobert Tiam, father to Kyle, says his son was diagnosed with autism and ADHD and has severe mood swings. He came to AB School West in 2016. He is thankful for the basic things his son has learned to do now like eat at the table, help dress himself and listen to instructions. He has this advice for parents:

“I would tell parents to get involved with a forum for parents of autism in order to have support,” Tiam said. “Consider a specialized school. These children need special attention.

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“When they feel that love, I think these children are able to do more.”

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"When they feel that love, I think these children are able to do more."

Photo: Teacher Tabori Grayson works with student Hunter Clark. Parent Flobert Tiam visits son Kyle at Academic and Behavior School East.

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Avant-Garde Graduation 2019: 3 GED Adult Grads from HCDE Share Stories

Attend an avant-garde graduation as 65 adult learners ranging in age from 17-65 celebrate gaining their high school equivalency degrees with family, friends and their teachers. The ceremony takes place on Saturday, May 18 from 11 a.m.-12:30 p.m. at Harris County Department of Education Adult Learning, 6300 Irvington Blvd., Houston, Texas. **(Media interviews begin at 9 a.m.)**

Adult graduate Virginia Haracha, 56, Pasadena, Texas:

With 25 years of service in the public sector, Virginia Haracha, 56, feared she might lose her job because she had not told the truth about earning her GED. Rather than dismiss her, Haracha's employer gave the Pasadena resident three weeks to earn her high school equivalency degree. After getting her GED, she also received a promotion and raise.

Through the help of her teacher, support from her family and encouragement from the president of her place of employment, she walks the stage on May 18 at 11 a.m. at Harris County Department of Education through the Adult Education program.

"I can't believe I got it that quick, and I'd been scared of doing it forever," she said. "I did it, and I'm proud of myself."

View Virginia's story: https://youtu.be/tl_-ljFIBL0

Adult graduate Veronica Davila, Baytown, Texas:

Spanish-speaking student Veronica Davila moved to the United States two years ago. A registered nurse in Mexico, she started over to receive her credentials in the United States. Upon passing her high school equivalency diploma, she enrolled in free certified nursing assistant classes, as well as free phlebotomy classes. She is employed at a local nursing home as a CNA. She continues to take English conversation classes with HCDE to improve her conversation skills with her patients. Her future plans include enrolling in nursing classes at Lee College.

View Veronica's story: https://youtu.be/BSyn_0ROU-Y

Adult graduate Andrea Rodriguez, Alief, Texas:

Mother and wife Andrea Rodriguez tried to go back to school twice. The third time was the charm. Her inspiration was encouragement from a friend who showed her a photo of two women posing in a grad photo from HCDE.

"If they could do it, so could I," she said.

Math was hard for Andrea, but she persisted with the help of her teacher. Once she completed her GED, she enrolled in CNA classes and plans to work in the medical field with her credentials.

"I'm excited about helping other people," Rodriguez said.

View Andrea's story: <https://youtu.be/EjljvoRayAY>

About HCDE Adult Education: 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>.

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Personal Struggle for Deer Park Student Leads to Scholastic Regional Recognition and Nomination

April 24, 2019 - Elizabeth Willms struggled with an eating disorder while in junior high and wanted to address it through her writing.

"I wrote a letter to anorexia about the process of how it took over my life and how I took it out of my life," Willms, a Deer Park High School-North Campus ninth-grader, said.

Her letter was awarded a Gold Key in the 2019 Scholastic Art and Writing Awards, sponsored by Harris County Department of Education, and an American Voices Nominee. She also received a \$250 scholarship as an American Voices Nominee.

She was fortunate to have a teacher this year who let her express herself even though the topic was one that not everyone wants to talk about.

"I think a big part of Scholastic is addressing things that people don't like to think about because it could be painful, confusing or controversial," Willms said. "I think a big part of writing is expecting those things."

This journey began when she was in elementary. She feels when she is dealing with pain, writing is the best way to express herself. She started writing to express either her depression or if she was going through something.

"I know writing is what got me through the death of my grandfather, and I know he would be very proud of me today," she said. "I think it comes full circle because the things that got me into writing is the journey that is never going to start or end."

When she started paying attention to Hollywood and the modeling industry in fifth grade, it transferred to her own body image. She still struggles with her eating disorder today, but not like before.

"I am not sure how long it will affect me or if it will stop affecting me, but I know that I will stop letting it have such an impact on me," Willms said. "I know that one day it won't be something that we can see anymore, it will be something that empowers me. Until that day, I will just have to keep staying strong."

With this personal experience and having gone through it recently, it took her only eight minutes to write the Scholastic entry. She had her mother, a former English teacher, and English teacher friends of her mother look over her work.

"They didn't have much to say, as far as critiquing it, because when you have something so important to talk about there's not much editing that can be done," she said. "It should be broad and come right from the heart."

She believes she got recognized for her letter because the emotions are real, and they all occur in the heart, not the brain.

Her first Scholastic entry was in seventh grade as a mandatory assignment, which led to national recognition and a goal to submit entries each year. She was awarded a national gold key medal for her topic on the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community.

When she grows up, she would like to be a published author by either writing a novel or have a collection of poetry or short stories.

“I want to be able to speak to people and let them know that it’s OK to not be OK, and they are not alone,” Willms said. “All I really want to do in life is to help people find writing because that’s what I am best at, and I think that’s the best job I have to make the world a better place.”

About Scholastic Art & Writing: Founded in 1923, the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards are 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.

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About Good News You Can Use: “Good News You Can Use” showcases the partnerships between Harris County Department of Education and school districts and organizations.

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PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release



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Promise of Support, Mentors Convinces Award-Winning Teacher to Train with HCDE

July 29, 2019 - Bilingual teacher Maria Camila Escobar Fuller doesn't mince words when she gives advice to aspiring teachers.

"Think twice about it," she said. "It is not just a job. Teaching is a responsibility and a vocation."

Post-college, Fuller was a behavior therapist for children with autism. When pursuing alternative certification programs to become a certified teacher, the college grad did extensive research and chose Harris County

Department of Education. Reasons included a stellar customer service reputation; face-to-face classes combined with online offerings; and teacher support.

The native Spanish speaker from Columbia now teaches kindergartners at Love Elementary in the Houston Independent School District. She was recently honored as one of the top three winners of Texas Alternative Certification Association's Intern of the Year Award. She will be presented with a \$1,000 check and trophy at the Consortium of State Organizations for Texas Teacher Education annual conference in Dallas in October.

Fuller is also nominated for the National Association for Alternative Certification's 2020 Outstanding New Teacher Award to be announced in December.

The first-year teacher benefitted from veteran teacher mentors within HCDE's Educator Certification and Advancement Academy (ECA) Division. Ongoing professional networking and support are cornerstones of the program.

"Ms. Ellie, my field supervisor, literally adopted me and provided me feedback when I was desperate at the beginning of the school year," Fuller said. "At first I felt like teaching was the most overwhelming thing I encountered and now I am at peace and really enjoy being with my students every day. (Now) I am starting to love teaching."

For 12 years, HCDE's teacher educator program has provided teacher training to college grads and second-career seekers. The ECA division also trains and prepares principals and superintendents for certification.

"For the past seven years, our program has reported a 99 percent pass rate for students completing course and taking the certification exams," said Lidia Zatopek, a veteran teacher and administrator who leads the program as division director.

Through the teacher prep program, Fuller gained theories of education which helped in laying a foundation for her career, especially as a bilingual educator. She said the veteran educators leading it delivered a treasure-trove of resources, including graphic organizers and templates.

“It’s funny, but I use them every day during my (lesson) planning,” said Fuller.

Still, it’s the support, she said, which is the most asset of the teacher alternative certification program.

“I am genuinely grateful for the community I have in this program and the incredible role models,” she said.

HCDE is recruiting teachers for its Teacher Alternative Certification Program. For more information, go to www.hcde-texas.org/teach-and-lead .

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School Safety Summit Enlists 3 Dynamic Safety Experts in Dialogue with Education Community Oct. 15

Oct. 8, 2019 - School Safety is the topic as three international and local safety experts talk about school violence and solutions at Harris County Department of Education Oct. 15, from 8 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Psychologist Scott Poland, emergency preparedness expert Michael Dorn and Harris County Sheriff Ed Gonzalez lead the discussions.

Learn to recognize, respond to and prevent acts of violence at the School Safety Forum Oct. 15, from 8:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m. The Center for Safe and Secure Schools, a division of HCDE, and the Harris County Sheriff's Office (HCSO) partner to present the School Safety Forum 2019. The workshop equips parents, teachers, students and the community with an empowerment toolkit. Cost for the workshop is \$85. Register at <https://bit.ly/30QTPSP>.

Presenters:

Scott Poland, Ph.D., is a licensed psychologist and international recognized school safety expert. His presentations include youth suicide, self-injury, bullying, school crisis prevention/intervention, threat assessment and parenting during challenging times. He co-authored Suicide Safety School Plans for the state of Texas and was the former psychological services director for Cypress-Fairbanks ISD.

Michael Dorn is executive director for Safe Havens International where he shares his expertise in safety, security, culture, climate and emergency preparedness assessments. Dorn is an established school safety expert who works internationally; he has authored or co-authored 27 books on school safety and emergency preparedness. As a renowned public speaker, he known to speak on topics ranging from bullying prevention to student supervision.

Harris County Sheriff Ed Gonzalez, keynote speaker, served 18 years in the Houston Police Department before joining the Harris County Sheriff's Office. He served on the HCSO hostage negotiation team and was assigned to homicide as an investigator prior to becoming sheriff. As chair of City Council's Public Safety & Homeland Security Committee, Gonzalez broke new ground with initiatives to protect vulnerable seniors from elder abuse. He has also expanded the HCSO's fight against human trafficking, His law enforcement background strengthens his ability to improve public safety and protect area neighborhoods.

(This project was supported by Grant No. 2018-YS-BX-0153 awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. The Bureau of Justice Assistance is a component of the Department of Justice's Office of Justice Program, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the Office for Victims of Crime, and the SMART Office. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U. S. Department of Justice.)

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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.

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‘School Threat Assessment Training’ Jan. 22 Features Former U.S. Secret Service Psychologist Randazzo to Help Campuses Strategize

Jan. 10, 2019 - Demands for threat management trainings increased in the aftermath of the active shooter tragedy in Santa Fe, Texas. On Jan. 22 from 8 a.m.-4:30 p.m., Target Restoration Services and Harris County Department of Education’s Center for Safe and Secure Schools present “School Threat Assessment Training: Creating a Safe Environment for Students.” Sigma Threat Management Associates’ Dr. Marisa R. Randazzo--an expert on threat assessment, target violence and violence prevention--leads the training. Joining her are members of the first responder team from Texas City as they discuss lessons learned from the tragedy.

“Districts need tools to work through threat scenarios,” said Center for Safe and Secure Schools Director Ecomet Burley. “This workshop provides practice by working through threat scenarios. Educators walk away with the know-how to develop a case management plan for their district/campus through an expert whose threat assessment best practices are depended on by national security agencies and major media outlets.”

School Threat Assessment Training expert Randazzo served for 10 years with the U.S. Secret Services and as the agency’s chief research psychologist. An accomplished presenter, she has trained over 10,000 professionals in law enforcement, management, administration, mental health and the intelligence community. She has been featured in interviews through 60 Minutes, the Today Show, 48 Hours, Dateline NBC and Good Morning America.

During the presentation, Randazzo talks to school leaders about identifying and investigating potential campus threats. She also demonstrates how to build an effective threat assessment management program.

Cost for the training is \$35 and includes breakfast and snacks courtesy of Sprouts and lunch courtesy of Target Restoration Services. To register, go to www.hcde-texas.org and enter workshop number 12201 or date. Parking is free. The workshop is conveniently located in a central area of Houston. Texas Commission on Law Enforcement credits are available for attendees.

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School Threat Assessment Training' Galvanizes Campuses Through Safety Strategies on Jan. 22

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The workshop held at 6300 Irvington Blvd. has limited seating and will begin with lessons learned from Santa Fe High School via a panel of first responders from Texas City Emergency Management and Texas City Independent School District leaders.

"Districts need tools to work through threat scenarios," said Center for Safe and Secure Schools Director Ecomet Burley. "This workshop provides practice by working through threat scenarios. Educators walk away with the know-how to develop a case management plan for their district/campus through an expert whose threat assessment best practices are depended on by national security agencies and major media outlets."

Sigma consultants train clients how to build and operate threat assessment teams and programs, helping them develop their own ability to assess and manage threatening situations in accordance with best practices. SIGMA experts have assessed and managed thousands of threats in their careers in federal, state, and local law enforcement, education, criminal justice, mental health, and the law. The company's threat assessment work is referenced in U.S. national standards and federal guides and has helped define best practices in behavioral threat assessment violence prevention.

During the presentation, Sigma experts discuss how to identify and investigate potential campus threats and demonstrate how to build an effective threat assessment management program.

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Show Your Colors to Build Teamwork, Leadership through HCDE, E-Colors in Education

Jan. 30, 2019 - Understanding your peers' personalities is providing a new frontier in education leadership and team communications. Classes offered through E-Colors in Education are available through a collaboration with Harris County Department of Education's Teaching and Learning Center.

The workshops begin in February and continue through June with various teamwork themes which focus on a personality profile and personal intervention. Customized campus workshops are also available.

Discovering your E-Colors is as simple as going to the Equilibria website and completing the free inventory at www.equilibria.com/PDI-home. Once discovered, the collaboration begins.

E-Colors in Education CEO Rosalinda Mercado created the educational arm of the company after experiencing the power of human performance coaching through professional development in education six years ago.

Her ah-ha moment came as the 17-year veteran in education applied E-colors as a principal at a charter school in a gang-riddled area of Houston. Knowing how to have conversations with students and staff based on differing character traits helped her to create a safe zone in the school populated with rival gangs: the MS-13 and Cholos.

"As a result, we were able to decrease gang violence," she said.

HCDE Curriculum Director for Special Populations Brenda Arteaga was an administrative colleague and friend to Mercado at the time. She too saw the impact.

"It enhanced relationships across the board, from student-to-student, teacher-to-student, teacher-to-teacher and between schools and the central office," she said. "It worked all the way around, and we saw a drastic reduction in bullying among students."

E-colors in Education works with eight characteristics of high-performing teams through the series of workshops at HCDE. They are self-and-team awareness; shared visions and values; clarity of roles and processes; trust; diversity and inclusion; commitment; accountability and learning; and continuous improvement.

Personalities are expressed as a combination of two of the total four colors: blue, yellow, red and green. Red is a doer. Green is a thinker. Yellow is a socializer, and blue is a relator or people-oriented personality.

E-Colors has been used in the corporate world through the work environment arm for years. In addition to E-Colors in Education, Equilibria also has a sports component arm to promote teamwork.

“We are finding tremendous demand for E-colors in Education because people see that it works to help build teamwork and leadership skills,” said Arteaga.

For information about workshops offered at HCDE, email Arteaga at barteaga@hcde-texas.org or call 713-696-1304.

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Stephanie Wright Chosen as Chief Accounting Officer for Harris County Department of Education

Sept. 3, 2019 - Stephanie Wright is the new chief accounting officer for Business Services at Harris County Department of Education.

The Texas certified public accountant formerly served as executive director at Lone Star College for seven years where she provided leadership and strategic direction within the accounting and financial reporting divisions. In addition to preparing monthly financial statements and board reports for the college, she facilitated the annual external audit and prepared the comprehensive annual financial report.

The Woodlands resident earned her Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Houston-Clear Lake and Master of Science from Texas A&M University-Commerce. Her broad financial experience spans both private and public sectors.

“My goal at HCDE is to continue a legacy of financial transparency and fiscal diligence with the Department’s financial matters while also supporting and collaborating with not only the Department’s internal divisions but also among area school finance professionals from our greater Harris County school districts,” said Wright.

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Superintendent Certification Program Launches at HCDE with Optimistic Job/Pay Forecasts

April 8, 2019 - The employment outlook is positive for aspiring school superintendents as an increase in jobs and pay is forecasted. Harris County Department of Education launches its 11-month, accelerated Superintendent Certification Institute on Aug. 10, 2019 to meet demands for the growing profession and an expanding, ethnically diverse student population in Texas.

The program features onsite, weekend seminars and weekday forums, each held once-a-month in small-group settings. Heading the leadership initiative is Educator Certification and Advancement, a HCDE division currently offering alternative teacher certification and principal certification programs with average test pass rates of 99.7 percent for the past seven years.

Staffed with experienced school leaders, the superintendent prep institute is personalized with one-on-one feedback, coaching and mentorship before, during, and after the certification process.

“There is never a better time if you are considering being a school district leader,” said ECA Director Lidia Zatopek. “With a projected 25 percent growth in education administrators and an average pay increase maintained at three percent for the past six years, it’s a burgeoning profession.”

Currently, Texas ISD.com, which lists superintendent employment opportunities, has 40 superintendent vacancies posted. Of the 99 districts with new superintendents this year, 62 districts hired a novice superintendent with no previous experience. The average superintendent salary in 2018-2019 is \$148,854. In large Texas districts with more than 50,000 students, average based pay is \$321,253. Aspiring candidates for the superintendent program must have a master’s degree, hold a principal certification, or equivalent, or have three years of managerial experience in a public-school district. A hallmark feature of the new superintendent program is its focus on bridging the cultural equity gap through culturally responsive leadership and emphasis on social justice issues.

“The role of the 21st century superintendent is immensely complex and challenging,” said HCDE Superintendent James Colbert Jr. “Our curriculum mirrors the complexities of this one-of-a-kind job. We want to equip candidates with tools to be effective district leaders who can set strategic priorities to improve the performance of disadvantaged students.”

The program features TExES exam intensive preparation support. Participants engage in common practicum experiences with extensive support and feedback from program personnel. Candidates for the program will become part of an alumni network.

“Our faculty are sitting and former superintendents with extensive expertise in superintendency, coaching and executive-level leadership development,” said Zatopek.

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Upcoming free, live information webinars are set for April 10 and 23 and May 9 where benefits, requirements and payment options are discussed. Register for information sessions:

April 10 <https://bit.ly/2WxfwoO>

April 23 <https://bit.ly/2FPy2Dt>

May 9 <https://bit.ly/2TR5Gw4>

Deadline to apply for the superintendent program is June 20, 2019. Go to <https://hcde-texas.org/teach-and-lead/superintendent-certification> for information or contact Lidia Zatopek, lzatopek@hcde-texas.org.

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Threat Assessment Training Shares Lessons Learned, Facts from School Violence Study

Jan. 23, 2019 - School Threat Assessment, a training for delivering school safety strategies, provided opportunity for conversations between 75 teachers, administrators and school security officers on Jan. 22 at Harris County Department of Education through its Center for Safe and Secure Schools and Sigma Threat Management Associates.

"I encourage you to look at how we are going to work together--police departments, communications and parents," said Thomas Munoz, emergency manager and homeland security director with the city of Texas City. Munoz is a 24-year veteran with the Houston Fire Department and became the assistant chief of homeland security and planning with HFD. Munoz stressed the importance of teamwork between different agencies, including the district.

Mike Matranga, executive director of security and safety at Texas City ISD, stressed how the school landscape has changed, especially with students using social media throughout the school day. He said Texas City is taking a proactive approach to threat assessment and urged other districts to follow.

"We're at a place in our society when our kids need professional help in our schools in terms of security," Matranga said. Matranga is a former special agent for the U.S. Secret Service.

Keynote Marisa Randazzo served 10 years with the Secret Service as chief research psychologist. She shared the presentation: "Best Practices in Threat Assessment: Building a Program and a Process."

In the largest federal study of school shootings in the United States, the U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education collaborated by studying 37 incidents through 41 attackers. Focus was on operational information: What could be detectable and usable from the incidents?

Randazzo supplied these major facts about findings of school-based attacks:

1. School-based attacks are rarely sudden, impulsive acts.
2. Prior to the attacks, others usually knew of the attacker's idea/plan.
3. Most attackers did not threaten their targets directly prior to the attack.
4. There is no accurate or useful profile of the "school shooter."
5. Most attackers had seriously concerned others in their lives prior to the attack.
6. Most attackers had significant difficulties with losses or failures. Most were suicidal.
7. Many felt bullied, persecuted, or injured by others prior to the attack.
8. Most attackers had access to weapons—and had used weapons—prior to the attack.
9. In many cases, other students were involved in some capacity.
10. Despite prompt law enforcement response, most incidents were stopped by means other than law enforcement intervention. Most were very brief in duration.

-more-

Practical application was provided as tabletop exercises with threat assessment scenarios helped attendees make observations and suggestions about school security. For additional information about upcoming Center for Safe and Secure workshops at HCDE, go to www.hcde-texas.org/register.

View news coverage of event:

Fox: <https://youtu.be/UmF46l-T1A0>

Univision: <https://youtu.be/xl6H5t4pEpA>

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Fox: <https://youtu.be/UmF46l-T1A0>

Univision: <https://youtu.be/xl6H5t4pEpA>

About Harris County Department of Education: HCDE provides special education, therapy services, early education, adult education and after-school programming. Services are funded by government grants, fees and a local property tax of less than \$9 per homeowner. For every dollar in local property tax collected, HCDE provides \$4.70 in services to the 25 Harris County school districts. We operate four campuses for students with profound special education needs and adjudicated or recovering youth who require a low, student-teacher ratio and highly structured environment. One-hundred percent of students served on HCDE campuses are at-risk. We are governed by an elected board of seven trustees and have 1,076 employees and 33 facilities, including 15 Head Start centers. More info at www.hcde-texas.org.

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release



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Trevino-Jones Named Principal at Harris County Department of Education Academic and Behavior School East

June 24, 2019 - Donna Trevino-Jones is the new principal of Academic and Behavior School East (ABS East) at Harris County Department of Education. As mother to two college graduates, the Conroe resident believes in the power of education in supplying opportunity.

"All students should have choices to pursue their passion, and education provides that access," she said.

In joining Academic and Behavior School East, Trevino-Jones said she is eager to be part of the school's progressive, dedicated team. ABS East is a school in southeast Houston for students with emotional and intellectual challenges, including autism. Students are served through contracts with their school district. Classes are small, with a low, student-to-teacher ratio. A behavior specialist and academic team implement a growth plan for each ABS student, with the goal for students to return to their home school districts to be successful in their school environment.

Trevino-Jones earned a Bachelor of Arts from Southern Methodist University, a Master of Science from Texas A&M-Commerce and is currently pursuing a doctorate degree. Most recently she served as principal of Beth Anderson Elementary in Arlington ISD. Throughout her school leadership career, she has inspired both students and staff through her roles as principal, assistant principal and dean in Spring, Dallas and Pflugerville ISDs.

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Bank of Texas Execs Deliver \$7,020 Check, Books to Support Literacy Across HCDE Head Start Centers

April 24, 2019 - Bank of Texas delivered approximately 150 children's books to Harris County Department of Education Head Start centers along with a \$7,020 check as continued support for the HCDE Head Start "Read-Excel-Achieve-Lead" (REAL) SuperMENTors literacy program.

REAL SuperMENTors is a volunteer program that encourages male mentors to read aloud to children in HCDE's 15 Head Start centers and four Early Head Start Partnerships. Children receive books from each SuperMENTor visit to build home libraries. Bank of Texas has provided support and volunteers since 2014. To date, the company has pledged and delivered \$42,000 to the literacy program.

A recent Child Trends research brief found that young people who participate in mentoring programs have better attendance, are more likely to pursue higher education and have positive attitudes toward school than those without mentors. More information about volunteering is available at <https://bit.ly/2Gw4mm>.

"We appreciate and revere Bank of Texas' commitment and support for child literacy early-on," said Venetia Peacock, senior director for HCDE Head Start. "We also recognize the community commitment several officers provide as they volunteer their personal time to read and mentor students in our centers."

Funds donated by Bank of Texas and gifted to HCDE Head Start were acquired through the Education Foundation of Harris County, a nonprofit which supports HCDE programs and services.

Photo: Bank of Texas donates check and books to Harris County Department of Education Head Start. **(left)** Chris Frey, assistant vice president, commercial banking, Bank of Texas; Gary Whitt, senior vice president, commercial banking, Bank of Texas; Venetia Peacock, senior director, Harris County Department of Education Head Start; Steve Bradshaw, CEO, BOK Financial; Armando Rodriguez, community partnerships manager, HCDE Head Start; and Randy Miller, market CEO, Bank of Texas

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MEDIA ALERT

For Immediate Release



Baytown Early Head Start/Head Start Officially Open New Location Under One Roof

What: Harris County Department of Education Head Start celebrates the opening of its new 20,000-square-foot facility on about 3 acres in Baytown with a ribbon cutting. The facility will house Early Head Start and Head Start under one roof.

HCDE Head Start is an educational program providing students and their families with the skills they need to be ready for the demands of school.

When: Thursday, May 23, 2019 from 12:30 – 1:30 p.m.

Where: 323 Massey Tompkins Rd., Baytown, Texas 77521

Who: HCDE Board of Trustees are joined by Superintendent James Colbert Jr. and other HCDE administrators along with City of Baytown Mayor Brandon Capetillo. Baytown Head Start students are scheduled for a special performance for those in attendance. Parents and community members are also attending.

Etc.: Special features of the Head Start center include: seven Head Start classrooms, five Early Head Start classrooms, training room, offices and two playgrounds – one for Head Start and another for Early Head Start. The facility has a capacity of 180 students – 140 Head Start students and 40 Early Head Start students. About 45 staff members will be assigned to this location, including Early Head Start Child Care Partnerships staff.

The facility opens this summer to Early Head Start students and welcomes Head Start students this fall.

The build-to-suit lease project was funded by KQC Investors, LLC and took two years to complete.

Media contact: HCDE Communications, Carol Vaughn, 281-660-9205, cvaughn@hcde-texas.org or Jeri Martinez, 281-748-1623, jmmartinez@hcde-texas.org

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release



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Baytown Head Start Officially Opens New Location

May 31, 2019 - Students and staff will start occupying the new 20,000-square-foot Baytown Early Head Start/Head Start, located at 323 Massey Tompkins Rd., this summer and fall.

Harris County Department of Education Superintendent James Colbert, Board of Trustees President Josh Flynn, trustees Richard Cantu and Danny Norris and Head Start Director Venetia Peacock were joined by City of Baytown officials, Head Start staff, community partners and parents Thursday, May 23 for a ribbon-cutting and tours of the new center.

“Today marks a really important day for us as we celebrate not only our Head Start program, but a school that is going to house over 40 little ones in Early Head Start,” Colbert said. “This facility is consistent with the caliber of the staff we have; and more important, it is consistent with the potential of the students inside it.”

Special features of the Head Start center include: seven Head Start classrooms, five Early Head Start classroom, a training room, offices and two playgrounds – one for Head Start and another for Early Head Start. The facility has a capacity of 180 students – 140 Head Start students and 40 Early Head Start students. About 45 staff members will be assigned to this location.

“This is the realization of a project that has been over five years long,” Peacock said. “We have a standard and want to provide high-quality facilities, instruction and services to our families to help them move to the goal they desire and meet the goals they have for their lives. Having an awesome facility is a part of that because it can support you in services you are trying to provide.”

HCDE Head Start is an educational program providing students and their families with the skills they need to be ready for the demands of school. For more about Head Start, visit: www.hcde-texas.org/head-start/.

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Beating Breast Cancer Twice Strengthens HCDE Therapist's Empathy

Oct. 23, 2019 - After being diagnosed with breast cancer a second time, school-based occupational therapist Meredith Miller considers herself a "thrivor" versus a survivor.

Like many of the students with disabilities she serves, Miller knows how difficult it can be to navigate the medical or therapy world to get the services you need.

She feels the pith of anxiety that goes with tending to family, work and fighting cancer--twice.

"My journey has taught me the importance of extending grace to others, and how to do it," said the HCDE therapist, who works in the Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District.

As a school-based occupational therapist, the 12-year HCDE employee supports students' academic achievement and social participation in all school routines, including recess, classroom, and cafeteria time.

Her boss, Amy Collins, calls Miller a "tremendous asset to Cy-Fair ISD and HCDE." She is talented as a therapist and committed to students and schools she serves, says her manager.

The Scary Ride:

In 2012 at age 34, Miller was diagnosed with stage 0 breast cancer. It had not spread to other cells in the breast or to other organs.

Similar to actress Angelina Jolie who has the BRCA1 mutation gene, Miller had the BRCA2 mutation gene, causing an increased risk of breast and ovarian cancer. She opted for a double mastectomy followed by immediate reconstruction of the tissue.

As she neared her five-year mark of being cancer-free, Miller was doing a self-check exam and felt a lump as small as a grain of rice during a self-check exam.

"And so begins the whirlwind of tests," said the wife and mother.

An ultrasound followed, then a mammogram and biopsy. The phone call from the doctor came next.

“Are you sitting down?” the doctor asked. “It’s cancer. I’m so sorry.”

Two weeks later, there was a plan to do a lumpectomy followed by four-to-six rounds of chemo. Results looked good, but tests showed her silicone implants were leaking.

“We go back to surgery, but this time I opt to have both implants removed and will not undergo reconstruction,” she said. “The medical community considers this a second double mastectomy.”

Summer of 2017, Miller underwent more chemo and returned during the fall to do daily radiation.

On Thanksgiving week, she rang the bell to signify she was cancer-free.

Life After Cancer:

Cancer is a nasty voice in Miller’s head which is always there. She tries to live in the now and not focus on the trivial. Faith, she says, carries her forward each day.

“After all of this, I don’t think I will ever feel like cancer is behind me,” she said. “It raises its ugly head every time I have a new pain, or something is off in the way I feel. I battle this every day to try to stay positive and focused on the joy in my life.”

It’s important to pull strength from the people who support you, she says, and from God.

“I recalled many days I could barely get out of bed and I would call out to God,” she said.

Her advice to others includes doing self-exams and yearly mammograms.

“Be cognizant of your body and listen to that little voice inside your head,” she said. “I thank God every day that I listened.”

About HCDE’s School-Based Therapy Services: We support children with disabilities and their families in the areas of occupational (OT), physical (PT) and music therapy (MT) since 1978. Support comes through assessment, intervention, consultation, training and direct service in the student’s classroom at their neighborhood school and district. We serve more than 7,000 students yearly, providing more than half of OT, PT and MT services to districts/charters in the county.

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.

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HCDE Behavioral Specialist James Reshapes Young Lives

Jan. 9, 2019 - While it's a challenge to understand and redirect the behavior of multiple special needs students, Harris County Department of Education behavioral specialist Melissa James considers it the perfect job.

James exudes calm and smiles as she routinely greets students by name on her journey through school hallways. Students are referred to HCDE's four special schools on a contractual basis by client school districts in greater Harris County. Two schools serve students ages 5-22 with emotional and academic special needs. One school helps high school students who are recovering from addiction while a fourth serves adjudicated and troubled youth.

"Each and every student at HCDE is different and has his or her own individualized education program within our small classroom settings," said HCDE Schools Senior Director Anthony Mays. "Ms. James observes student behavior and works one-on-one with students and teachers to identify solutions and to support and eliminate inappropriate student behavior."

James has extensive experience as a counselor and holds master's degrees in psychology and education administration. She is a certified special education administrator and spent numerous years educating children with behavioral challenges at public, private and nonprofit institutions, including Avondale House, which specializes in autism services and resources.

When evaluating each student in meetings called the admission, review and dismissal (ARD) process, James looks for triggers or antecedents that will lead to inappropriate behavior. What works with one student won't work with another. Student Julia came to Academic and Behavior School West from her home district in Fort Bend Independent School District. Her future looks starkly different today than it did when she came to her new special school several months back.

The 15-year-old's aggression is put in check as the teen gets frustrated. She holds up an orange card to her classroom teacher as a coping strategy, signaling she needs quick help. James will take Julia for a cool-down walk, reassuring her and discussing behavior solutions. In the beginning, James rode the bus home with the young girl who had repeatedly fought and been in trouble with the law. Today, Julia is working on returning to her home campus so she can become a cosmetologist.

By coaching teachers like Stephanie Stamps, sharing behavior strategies with teachers also becomes part of James' daily routine. Stamps, a veteran, 20-year teacher, leads a class of five adolescents with severe behavioral challenges and varying degrees of autism. Bad behaviors are redirected, not punished.

"We have to provide coping skills and ways to handle frustration because students can lose control very quickly sometimes," Stamps said. "When Ms. James is here, it gives me a break from the behavior. Sometimes the student needs to hear it from someone else besides me."

-more-

The goal at HCDE's special schools is for students to return to their home campuses, but sometimes the behavioral school becomes the home school, especially in the case of life skills students with intellectual as well as behavioral challenges.

"My goal is to help students learn to assess their own behaviors and understand how their actions affect their own learning and safety, as well as the safety of those around them," James said. In shaping student behavior, the behavior specialist knows that young futures are charted as well.

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Bomb Prevention Awareness School Safety Series Hosted by HCDE and FEMA

March 19, 2019 - School bomb threats cause anxiety and disrupt learning within the school community, especially since they are reoccurring more often.

Harris County Department of Education's Center for Safe and Secure Schools (CSSS) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) are hosting a free series of trainings with a 2019 Safety Series: An Ounce of Prevention is Worth a Pound of Cure. The workshops dealing with the awareness, prevention and planning for potential campus threats are presented by Transportation Security Administration (TSA) Explosives Specialist Bill Shockley.

Immediately following Columbine, schools across the nation experienced spikes in bomb threats and related incidents.

"As schools continue to build upon safety strategies, the threat of bombs must factor into that education," said Ecomet Burley, director of the Center for Safe and Secure Schools. "These trainings are critical for district and campus personnel."

A 2015 national study of more than 800 violent school bomb threat and shooting threats took research to a higher level by collecting original data and dissecting critical trends and patterns. It was revealed that more than 70 percent of the threats involved shooting and/or bomb threats. Thirty percent of these schools were evacuated, and 10 percent closed, oftentimes unnecessarily doing so, revealing a need for school threat assessment training.

These introductory courses provide an understanding of how to identify and respond to an improvised explosive device threat and protective measures to mitigate an IED threat. Various IED devices are examined and discussed.

The first training, Bombing Prevention Awareness, is scheduled for Thursday, March 28, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. at 6005 Westview, Houston, TX 77055. Register for the workshop: <https://bit.ly/2NQdDAat> .

The second training, Protective Measures Course, will be held April 11 at 6005 Westview, Houston, TX 77055. Register for the workshop: <https://bit.ly/2SS9XPE> .

Two other advance workshop trainings will be held later in the year: Threat Management Planning and IED Search Procedures Course are planned on June 25 and July 23 respectively. For more information contact school safety and security specialist Janice Owolabi at jowolabi@hcde-texas.org .

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Chavez Honored as 2019 Next Generation of Afterschool Leaders

Feb. 6, 2019 - Harris County Department of Education's Center for Afterschool, Summer and Enrichment for Kids (CASE for Kids) Program Coordinator Jacqueline Chavez was recently honored as one of the National Afterschool Association's (NAA) 2019 Next Generation of Afterschool Leaders. The NAA chooses up and coming young afterschool leaders under age 30 for the award.

"The feeling of having all of your hard work recognized is wonderful," Chavez said. "It made me think of all the people who helped me get to this point in my career. It also motivated to keep going and continue helping kids reach their full potential."

In selecting honorees, the NAA sought to highlight emerging professionals who are active in the afterschool community—young leaders who possess passion, creativity and a commitment to youth; who embrace professional development; and who embody the NAA core competencies. Twenty-four individuals were profiled in the winter 2019 issue of NAA's Afterschool Today magazine. To view the digital edition of the magazine, go to <https://bit.ly/2R7MYz9>.

She has been in her current position for about two years and provides support and consultation to service providers and community-based, out-of-school time programs. CASE for Kids provides resources, training and afterschool services for over 14,000 students in greater Harris County.

After graduating from Katy High School and the University of Texas in Austin, she served as an AmeriCorps member with United Way of Greater Houston and Project GRAD Houston, two partners of CASE for Kids. With these programs, she started working with youth outside the classroom through reading programs and mentorships.

While working at the United Way, she would go to different elementary schools during after-school hours and facilitate a peer tutoring program in reading and math. Her ah-ha moment came at the end of the school year when an older student tutor asked if she could be involved in the program every day because she loved working with her buddy.

"I knew the older student tutor made a new friend, but also gained confidence in her math skills," she said. "It truly was a joy to work with kids in a more informal setting."

Chavez had a chance to interact with AmeriCorps members from CASE for Kids through different service projects and started to get an idea of what CASE for Kids was all about.

"When my service term ended, I knew I wanted to continue working in the afterschool field and the assistant director of Project GRAD recommended her for a job with CASE for Kids," she said.

Afterschool and CASE for Kids provides so many opportunities for kids to learn about different careers and hobbies.

“I saw politicians and activists in the making at CASE debate tournaments where they debated about climate change and education policies,” Chavez said. “Kids in afterschool are exploring and discovering their interests around Harris County, and we need to continue giving them the opportunity to learn about them in a safe space.”

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Classroom Management: Teachers Fill Their Toolboxes by Sharing Strategies

Nov. 22, 2019 - Four-year Highpoint School teacher Craig Perry considers himself an organized teacher who runs a tight ship in terms of behavior management. Yet he knows he can always use help building his classroom management toolbox.

He enrolled in Harris County Department of Education's Classroom Management class provided through Teaching and Learning Center Curriculum Director for Special Populations Brenda Arteaga. When working with teens, he believes in sharing strategies: what works and doesn't.

"It's very important to give kids the right tools to focus," said Perry, who teaches students in a self-paced computer lab where they earn high school credits online. Students transitioning to Harris County Department of Education's Highpoint, then back to their home schools, are either adjudicated teens or troubled youth.

"Kids might be coming into my classroom with some real problems," he said. "Where they are coming from can affect what is happening in the classroom."

Arteaga, who is seasoned in classroom management strategies, agrees wholeheartedly. As a former teacher, principal and superintendent, she has a stockpile of human relations experiences.

"All teachers need a refresher and new ideas for classroom management," she said. Arteaga trains teachers using the STOIC model. Structure and organize your room for success. Teaching expectations and rules/norms. Observe and monitor. Interact Positively. Correct misbehavior fluently.

She says a common complaint from teachers is disrespect from their students.

"One of the tools that we utilized in the training is a social contract or agreement which focuses on values and how you want to be treated in the classroom," she said. "After discussing those values and writing them down, everyone signs the document. It is a way to level out the playing field and make it equitable for everyone."

In addition to the social contract, Arteaga has these tips for teachers:

- Build positive relationships with your students.
- Let students know that you care about them and are interested in who they are as a person.
- Have high expectations for every student.
- Communicate in a positive way, without tone or elevated pitches and voice.
- Consistency is key. Ensure that behaviors and consequences match for all students.

For more information about upcoming workshops, go to <https://hcde-texas.org/teaching-and-learning-center>.

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Cy-Fair ISD Graduate Grabs NYC Dream at Carnegie Hall with Celebrities, \$10,000 Art Scholarship

June 20, 2019 - Within a whirlwind of 24 hours, Cy-Fair ISD graduate Taylor Powers met actors Tina Fey, Rose Byrn and designer Zac Posen. The young photographer was treated like a celebrity herself at Carnegie Hall as one of eight, \$10,000 art portfolio recipients awarded by the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards through the nonprofit Alliance for Young Artist & Writers.

The Cypress Woods High School student traveled to New York this June with her family and photography teacher Tina Fox for the prestigious national awards ceremony. This year Scholastic recognized 800 teen Gold Medalists selected from more than 340,000 national entries from young artists and writers in grades 7-12. Locally, Taylor's portfolio was chosen last winter by a panel of art professionals from Harris County Department of Education, regional affiliate of the Awards.

"New York City was like a fairytale to me," said the 18-year-old. From visiting the Today Show and seeing the Jonas Brothers to getting lost on the subway and experiencing Times Square, the experience mimicked a movie, a dream come true, she said.

Backstage at Carnegie Hall, visiting celebrities greeted the top-award students. Tina Fey posed for a personal photo with Powers, and the Saturday Night Live star even complimented the teen on her dress.

"I was smiling so hard that I could barely get out the words 'thank you'," she said.

Photography teacher Fox has been an art teacher for almost 30 years and has been involved with HCDE's regional Scholastic Art & Writing Awards for 27 years. Through the validation and recognition students gain from Scholastic, she sees student confidence rise. As Powers began working on her senior photography portfolio this year, her teacher knew it was unique and powerful as she created the body of images.

"This is the first time I've had a student receive this type of award," she said. "I know this award has opened opportunities for her that she otherwise might not have had."

HCDE Scholastic Art & Writing Coordinator Andrea Segraves sees the power of expression that Scholastic Art & Writing Awards lends to young student artists and writers as they gain notoriety for their artistic talents.

"The Awards have identified and honored so many talented writers and artists over the years like Andy Warhol, Truman Capote, Robert Redford, Lena Dunham and Ken Burns," said Segraves. "To join in those ranks is such an empowerment for these teens."

Powers' future career plans include attending community college until she hears back from the esteemed Savannah College of Art and Design, her dream college.

“I hope to be able to commission art pieces for clients one day and do photo shoots for anybody seeking a photographer with a keen eye,” she said.

She is quick to credit her teacher for encouraging and pushing her artistic endeavors while thanking Mom Letitia for influencing her creativity and buying the digital camera to help her forge her artistic pathway.

(For information about entering, judging or sponsoring the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards through Regional Affiliate Harris County Department of Education, go to <https://hcde-texas.org/scholastic-awards/> or email asegraves@hcde-texas.org.)

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Dave Einsel Named Director of Communications, Harris County Department of Education

Aug. 12, 2019 - Dave Einsel is the new director of communications at Harris County Department of Education.

The veteran journalist was named director after serving as multimedia manager at HCDE since 2017. He acted as the Department's chief photographer, created a variety of printed marketing materials and created graphics and videos for web and social media.

Before joining HCDE, Einsel was senior manager for communications and publications at Houston Independent School District. Previously he led the photography department at the Houston Chronicle, where he worked for 18 years.

The Friendswood resident is an alumnus of Texas A&M University and has won numerous photography awards throughout his career. Most recently he earned the 2018 Crystal Commendation for photography portfolio from the Texas School Public Relations Association. He was also awarded the Hearst Newspapers Eagle Award, a one-time award given for outstanding contributions, as well as the inaugural Amnesty International Media Spotlight Award.

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PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release



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Demand for Certified Nursing Assistants Fuels Enrollment in Free HCDE Adult Education Program

May 6, 2019 - Andrea Rodriguez put her family first for almost 20 years. One day a neighbor convinced her to attend a Harris County Department of Education GED class. From there, a teacher encouraged her to enter a free certified nursing assistant (CNA) program.

Nervous doesn't even begin to describe the beginning days for Rodriguez, a ninth-grade dropout with Spanish as her first language.

"I wanted to quit, but then I was always telling my girls to never give up," she said. So I put everything into God's hands and carried on."

She passed one of the five GED tests and felt a bit more confident; then she aced another and another.

HCDE Adult Education Manager May O'Brien visited Rodriguez's class as she was studying to pass the remaining two tests and told her about the CNA program.

"She said, there's a difference if you want it or wish for it," the mother of three girls said. "I knew I didn't want to waste my time. I wanted it."

Once she passed her high school equivalency exams, Rodriguez was able to join the CNA program, a free, six-week training program offered in collaboration between HCDE Adult Education, the Texas Workforce Commission and Pioneer Nursing School. Upon completion, students take the CNA certification test.

The hybrid program mixes CNA training with content-enriched adult education classes. Students switch classes every-other week. One week they learn patient care and safety procedures and eventually train in clinicals with patients with teacher Dele Jokodola. The next week students gain experience with vocabulary and cultural competencies from their HCDE adult Education teacher Lavenia Cole.

All the while, the adult students prepare to take the CNA certification test. Upon completion, salary benefits range from \$12-\$15 an hour, depending on the employer. Students may work in nursing homes, hospitals, rehab centers or home-care settings.

Student Estella Tchilendou is one of many students from Africa who are enrolled in a 20-student class. Her first language is French, and she is from Cameroon. She holds a master's degree in finance and had a 14-year career in business before moving to the United States in 2015.

"In our English class, we practice language, and I am learning vocabulary for the health care industry while improving my listening and speaking skills," she said. "I am learning how to take care of my patients and must learn bedside manner, which includes being friendly and confident."

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Adult Education teacher Cole says health care industry careers are in high demand as boomers get older, and the sky is the limit in terms of opportunity.

“You can build on your CNA,” she said. “There are other certifications you can add on like phlebotomy and CPR training.”

Cole works with students on reading comprehension strategies like finding the key words, as well as testing strategies. She has even devised an ethical bingo game to broach subjects such as religious and cultural differences in the workplace.

“She was so patient,” said Rodriguez about her teacher. “The one thing I know for sure now is that it’s never too late to learn.”

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 www.hcde-texas.org/adult-education.

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MEDIA ALERT

For Immediate Release



Kids' Day at Hobby Center Provides Venue for Exploring Fine Arts with Dancing, Acting, Music, Puppetry, Writing

What: Amateur student artists, actors, dancers and writers from 12 Houston-area summer programs supported by Harris County Department of Education perform at the famed Zilkha Hall during Kids' Day at Hobby Center for the Performing Arts June 20.

Where/When: Thursday, June 20, 3-4 p.m., Hobby Center for the Performing Arts, 800 Bagby, Houston

Who: 150 students from Alief, Spring, Clear Creek, Galena Park and Sheldon ISDs; Baker Ripley; Academy of Accelerated Learning Center; and Southwest Schools. Sponsored by the Center for Afterschool, Summer and Enrichment for Kids, or CASE for Kids, a division of Harris County Department of Education.

Professional artists are from the following performing arts nonprofits: Multicultural Education and Counseling through the Arts (MECA), Dance Houston, The Ensemble Theatre, Dinky Drum, Houston Healthy Hip Hop, Brazilian Arts, Puppet Pizzazz, FotoFest and Writers in the School.

Etc: Students are involved with fine arts projects through their fine arts afterschool provider selected through CASE for Kids. During the culminating event, the students show off their skills in hip-hop, puppetry, photography, writing, dance, theatre, Brazilian arts and drumming. The kids worked with local artists at their schools this summer in programs provided by HCDE's CASE for Kids.

CASE Kids' Day Projects are career-based projects that connect after-school students to real-world experiences.

Media Contact: Please call Jeri Martinez, 281-748-1623 or Carol Vaughn, 281-660-9205, HCDE Communications

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release



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Fore! Young CASE for Kids Golfers Showcase Afterschool Accomplishments at Kids' Day Event

Video: Sheldon ISD students talk about the game of golf: <https://youtu.be/5WqxoAzwcIM>

April 24, 2019 - Students are using the game of golf to learn math-and-science concepts and character development as Harris County Department of Education's Center for Afterschool, Summer and Enrichment for Kids (CASE for Kids) joins with Kids' Day with Little Birdies Mobile Golf Academy.

The Kids' Day event was held April 24 at F.M. Law Park, 8400 Mykawa Road. Students ages 4-12 who studied the Kids' Day curriculum in their CASE for Kids afterschool programs showed off their golfing acumen and competed with other schools.

Students attending were from Aldine ISD's Raymond Academy, Alief ISD's Liestman Elementary and Martin Elementary, Houston ISD's Benbrook Elementary, Pasadena ISD Frazier Elementary, Sheldon ISD Garrett Elementary and Sheldon Elementary and the Academy of Accelerated Learning Charter School.

Kids' Days are supported by CASE for Kids and Houston-Galveston Area Council funding.

"CASE for Kids provides Kids' Days as the culminating day where students showcase what they've learned and celebrate their accomplishments," said CASE for Kids Director Lisa Thompson-Caruthers. "Afterschool activities can reinforce social-emotional learning (SEL) so that children get to explore and understand their emotions. We also provide academic reinforcement. In addition, kids get an opportunity to sample the fine arts and hobbies such as golf, dance or even fencing."

Little Birdies' Archie Craft, owner and lead instructor, said the curriculum he uses for Kids' Day reinforces academics, character education and SEL.

"We talk about how far you hit the ball with this club versus the other club," he said. "How much force do you need to put on the putter to make a three-foot putt? How can the wind effect your ball in flight?"

Afterschool vendors such as Little Birdies Mobile Golf Academy work with CASE for Kids to supply the extracurricular expertise through afterschool contracts. Students are enrolled in afterschool programs through their schools, community centers and child care facilities benefit.

CASE for Kids is an afterschool intermediary which provides resources, training and afterschool services for over 14,000 students and 2,800 teachers in greater Harris County. Partnering vendors like Little Birdies Mobile Golf Academy teach concepts, skills and fundamentals for particular subjects and interests.

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Fortis Academy Culinary Students Certified, Ready to Cook

Jan. 22, 2019 - Fortis Academy Culinary Arts Teacher Ouindetta Thomas couldn't help but smile with excitement as her kitchen was fully operational the first week of the spring semester.

"Let's get cooking," she said, in anticipation of the first lesson.

Fortis Academy is the county's first public recovery high school. This school will help students who have completed a substance abuse or dependency rehabilitation program continue their high school education in a sober environment.

Five students were presented with their jackets, aprons and hats as they passed the ServSafe Food Protection Manager Certification Examination, which is accredited by the American National Standards Institute-Conference for Food Protection.

"This certification makes them eligible to get a manager position at a restaurant after they graduate from high school," Thomas said.

Students also benefit from internships with Gordon Foods and local restaurants.

At the beginning of the year, students prepared for the certification exam by learning basic techniques, such as proper food handling and how to handle kitchen equipment, when working in a restaurant. Students must pass the exam in order to cook in the class.

"My main goal for when I teach a culinary class is to have the students by month two to be dressed and be ready to work on their own, and usually they are," she said.

Seventeen-year-old Roberta Vasquez chose to participate in the culinary program because it was something new and fun.

"I enjoy making caldo with my grandma," she said.

Vasquez hopes to learn new dishes to make, especially ones that are difficult to prepare and perfect.

"I've always wanted to work at a fancy restaurant and look forward to in the future," she said.

For 18-year-old Isaac Hinojosa, he said his interest in participating in the program is the certification being offered that are available outside of school.

"I like to cook, especially spaghetti, and have experience working in the food industry at various fast-food restaurants," he said.

His goal by taking this class is to be able to cook independently.

“I would like to be able to cook independently because sometimes I need help and want to learn how I can successfully do it myself,” Hinojosa said.

Students prepared po-boys and paninis during the first week. Pastries such as cake baking, decorating and fruit-dipping are also on the to-do list and would be just in time for Valentine’s Day.

“They will learn everything you would learn in a basic culinary arts class and food preparation techniques; it’s more about skill than dishes,” Thomas said.

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Game of Chess Provides Life Plays for HCDE Special Schools Students

May 31, 2019 - Chess players are constantly strategizing, making choices including how to get out of “a fork”: choosing the least impactful bad option. For students with intellectual, developmental and behavioral disorders at Harris County Department of Education’s Academic and Behavior School East and West, chess lessons are life lessons.

“One of the things we teach is you never lose, you learn,” said coach James Hudson from PerfectPlay, an instructional nonprofit chess organization. “You calculate your mistakes and move on in chess. If you win, you shake hands because you could have just as easily lost. It’s an honor to play the game.”

Students met for the third annual chess tournament this May after receiving yearlong instruction from Hudson, teachers and administrators at both schools. As a first, AB School West won the competition over two-time winning rival AB School East.

Principal Victor Keys says he introduced chess to his students several years ago after seeing the positive effects of the hobby.

Besides the obvious benefits of building math skills reinforcement and critical thinking, chess can build confidence, pride, discipline, respect and patience, said HCDE Superintendent James Colbert Jr., a longtime chess player who makes a practice out of playing the top chess player at the tournament.

This year that player was Michael Carley, 14, an avid player diagnosed with a mild form of autism spectrum disorder. Mother Brandy Carley said her son’s temper flared and stress rose when he tried sports like football and baseball.

Coach Hudson says Carley’s love for the game is obvious. He plays up to 10 matches with focus without hesitation.

“He loves chess,” Hudson said. “It’s like any other thing we do. If we’re good at it, we have to like it.”

View photos from the event: https://hcdetexas.photoshelter.com/gallery/20190522-Chess/G0000zrdH5LxHMc8/C0000n9_gZ3qT8fl (password is hcde1889)

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‘Genesis’ Delivers \$1,000 HCDE Check, New York City Dream to Aldine Teen Artist

(Harris County Department of Education is the regional sponsor of The Scholastic Art & Writing Awards. This year HCDE is proud to announce the record 96 teens from Harris County, students who advanced to become national Gold and Silver Medalists. Many will attend ceremonies at Carnegie Hall in New York City June 6. View the list of medalists: View news blog announcing national winners: <https://wp.me/p4QJFI-Vs> .

The idea for “Genesis” popped into the head of a Nimitz High School teen artist as the sun shone on her brother’s face. That defining moment led to dreams of a trip and future career in New York City for Evieh’bi Jan Nia Braddy from Aldine Independent School District.

Earlier this semester, the Aldine ISD junior was notified by Harris County Department of Education Scholastic Art & Writing Awards coordinator Andrea Segraves that she had won a regional Gold Key for her reduction print, along with \$1,000 scholarship check for the HCDE Trustees’ Incentive Award.

On March 13, the young artist heard about her Gold Medal for her artwork from the nonprofit Alliance for Young Artists & Writers. As part of the award, she may travel to New York City to get her award at Carnegie Hall.

“I want to know what New York is like,” said Braddy, eyes wide with the possibility. She has applied to attend the Pratt Institute pre-college program in New York City and would like to visit other visual art colleges in the Big Apple.

Like many artists who struggle with their piece to get it just right, Genesis became an old friend to the 17 year old.

“Hardships?” she said, referring to her print project. “I had a good amount.”

Genesis is a reduction print, which includes several hues of red and black with a pearlescent finish. In printmaking, artists must carve away or reduce portions of the printing block of linoleum, imprinting one color at a time at intervals through a baby press. Subject matter is sketched and colors are planned well in advance.

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Initially Genesis was smaller and got a perfect score at a visual scholarship competition but didn't advance to state.

"I made a lot of corrections," said the wise teen. "I think all these little mistakes added to the charm and makes Genesis more human."

Quick to acknowledge the support she received for Genesis from her art teacher Jorge Vasquez, she said she learned and benefitted from her teacher who specializes in printmaking as an artist.

"He challenged me and made suggestions that helped," said the 17 year old.

Aldine ISD Director of Visual Art Michaelann Kelley said she is proud of all the Aldine students and teachers who commit time to Scholastic and all their artistic endeavors.

"It takes a lot of extra work in class and outside of the regular school day," Kelley said. "Evieh'bi Jan Nia Braddy put in that extra time and creativity to have her voice heard through her artwork."

Braddy's dream is to be able to create art and make a living off of doing what she loves.

She challenges other teens to follow in her footsteps.

"When you have the imagination and drive and ideas, there is nothing that you really can't do," Braddy said, pointing to her print hanging in an HCDE exhibit at Houston's Spring Street Studios.

"This came from nothing--and from nothing came this great thing that is my proudest piece so far."

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About Good News You Can Use: "Good News You Can Use" showcases the partnerships between Harris County Department of Education and school districts and organizations.

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PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release



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Gift of Rehabbed Altima Provides Road to Success for HCDE Head Start Family

View photo album: <https://tinyurl.com/txsz2w9>

Harris County Department of Education Head Start Mom Jessica Bouldin and two sons Jyree, 3, and Jasious, 6, were gifted a shiny, blue, rehabbed Nissan Altima this Christmas through Bates Collision Centers.

Bicycles, gifts and car were presented by Lee and Leila Bates and employees as they volunteered their resources through the Responsible Parenting Award, a philanthropic project which has been ongoing for 20 years.

The Bouldins received car number 37. Bates employees rehab the car and community members help with resources such as insurance, gas, tires and gifts.

"I think the important thing we need to recognize is that sometimes life gets in the way for whatever reason," said HCDE Superintendent James Colbert Jr. "Someone needs a helping hand to get them back into a direction that can change their lives forever."

Bouldin is a victim of domestic abuse and is raising her sons as a single parent with the help of her aunt. She must find transportation to get herself to work and her sons to separate schools each day. Recently she was promoted on her job.

"I know that this car is going to make a big difference in your life," said Leila Bates.

Bates said she and husband Lee organize the event, but staff volunteer hours to rehab the car.

"They put cars back on the road every day," she said. "That's what they do for a living. But for this they are putting a family back on the road."

HCDE Head Start programs like the one Jyree attends in northeast Houston are free and help prepare children and their families for success in school. Bouldin looks forward to volunteering in her son's classroom now that she has wheels.

"I watched my aunt take people in that really needed help," she said. "It taught me that helping others is very important."

For more information about Head Start services and enrollment, go to www.hcde-texas.org/head-start.

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Gifted Rehabbed Car from Bates Collision Rewards HCDE Head Start Parent

View video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6mjNHU5P5VA>

Head Start mom Jessica Bouldin is a single parent who juggles three schedules without a car. **On Tuesday, Dec. 17 at 10 a.m. that all changes, courtesy of Bates Collision Centers, 15532 I-10 East in Channelview.**

Bouldin struggles with transportation on many fronts. Her two boys attend school and must be on time. She needs rides to work. Doctors' appointments are planned well in advance and sometimes must be canceled. Recreation trips to places like the park or pizza parlor are sheer luxury.

In its 21st year, Bates Collision Centers' "Responsible Parenting Award" continues to award keys to brighter futures with restored vehicles. Car number 37 is reconditioned and ready for the Bouldin family as Jessica earns the "Responsible Parenting Award."

"When you're car-less in greater Houston, transportation issues are overwhelming," said HCDE Superintendent James Colbert Jr. "The city spans a 60-mile radius, and public transportation can test your flexibility."

Bates owners Lee and Leila Bates have made the annual giveaway a priority because they recognize the sacrifices parents make in order to provide for their children.

"We're giving a helping hand up for responsible parents with a drive to succeed," said Leila Bates, vice president. "Responsible parenting is so important and it's a big job in every family. But it becomes even harder when all the pieces aren't in place, like transportation."

Bouldin, 31, was nominated for the award by the manager at the Head Start Center where her 3-year-old son Jyrie attends. In addition, she wrote an essay which was selected from a group of nominees.

Bates employees donate time to work on the cars and help fill them with gifts, and other community members and businesses donate gas, insurance and materials needed to rehab the cars.

Lee Bates says both he and Leila are proud of their employees who continue to supply time and resources to families they have yet to meet. The Bates call the work their employees do "a labor of love" as they prepare the car inside and out to look like new.

HCDE Head Start Senior Director Venetia Peacock knows that the Bouldin family desperately needs the car to reach its goals. Bouldin wants to further her career by attending college. She would like to volunteer at her sons' schools, including the northside Fonwood Head Start Center where Jyrie attends.

-more-

“We continue to be thankful for our partnership with Bates Collision Centers,” said Peacock. “These cars make a difference in the lives of families who are already committed to making the world a better place for their children.”

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 Harris County, providing 15 area centers for 1,250 children and their families.

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Groundbreaking News: New School to Meet Increased Service Demands for Area Students with Behavioral Disorders, Autism

View event photos: <https://bit.ly/2lhh3vt> (password is hcde1889)

View school renderings: <https://bit.ly/2Yy1Uvi> (password is hcde1889.)

April 5, 2019 - Harris County Department of Education kicked off construction on a new, 47,970-square-foot school to replace Academic and Behavior School West at a ceremonial groundbreaking April 3 at 12772 Medfield Drive in southwest Houston. County and city officials, school district leaders, staff and students attended the event backdropped by a bulldozer, shovels and hardhats.

HCDE Superintendent James Colbert said the new school is needed to provide additional opportunities for students who need specialized education services in the districts HCDE serves. Students attending AB West are challenged with behavioral disorders, autism spectrum disorder and other significant physical and emotional needs.

The new school, which will serve up to 150 students ages 5-22 with intellectual, developmental and behavioral needs, borders Dairy Ashford Road and Westpark Tollway.

“With the addition of our new school, we will have the best education facility to educate students who are autistic and emotionally disturbed from local school districts in greater Harris County,” said Victor Keys, principal at AB School West.

HCDE operates four special schools in Harris County which serve children from area school districts on a contractual basis. AB West and East educate children with intellectual and emotional disabilities while two other schools provide services for recovering, adjudicated or troubled teens. The goal is for students to return to their home districts and schools, with newly learned behavior tools to successfully continue their education and graduate.

“I’m really looking forward to giving these students a great facility,” said HCDE Board of Trustees President Josh Flynn, who introduced guests and gave opening remarks at the groundbreaking. “We will be placing students in this special, unique environment where they feel safe.”

The replacement school for AB West provides considerable support for students from Alief Independent School District, where it resides.

“I’m grateful for the taxpayers of Harris County, the Board, Superintendent James Colbert and HCDE staff for realizing these students need a voice,” said H.D. Chambers, Alief Independent School District superintendent. “If there is a flagship behavior for any kids coming out of AB School West, it’s the air of confidence that they probably didn’t have before.”

Features of the school include a low, student-to-instructor ratio, small classes and individualized learning. A behavior specialist provides support to students to help change or improve behaviors.

The school designed by Houston architectural firm Cre8 Architects will have a heightened security system with ballistic-rated, glass walls in the lobby and restricted passage to classroom areas. “Our board has been sensitive to school security, so we have fortified this campus externally and internally with added layers of protection inside to ensure safety,” said Colbert.

AB School West, designed by Houston architectural firm Cre8, will be elevated above the flood plain, and an emergency generator will help to serve highly impaired students in bad weather. Layout of the school provides for 28 classrooms; use of sensory-sensitive color palettes for walls; rounded-corners throughout the school’s interior construction to prevent student injury; and a domestic lab for life-skills students. Outdoors there is a gated outdoor walking trail, courtyard and basketball court.

Student Deven Wright, a fourth grader who attends AB School West from Fort Bend Independent School District, said he has high hopes for the new library and computer lab.

“I will be happy to attend this new school,” the 10-year-old said.

AB West is scheduled to be completed in early 2020. A special opening ceremony, complete with tours, is planned before the school opens.

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“I’m grateful for the taxpayers of Harris County, the Board, Superintendent James Colbert and HCDE staff for realizing these students need a voice,” said H.D. Chambers, Alief Independent School District superintendent. “If there is a flagship behavior for any kids coming out of AB School West, it’s the air of confidence that they probably didn’t have before.”

-more-

Features of the school include a low, student-to-instructor ratio, small classes and individualized learning. A behavior specialist provides support to students to help change or improve behaviors.

AB School West, designed by Houston architectural firm Cre8, will be elevated above the flood plain, and an emergency generator will help to serve highly impaired students in bad weather. Layout of the school provides for 28 classrooms; use of sensory-sensitive color palettes for walls; rounded-corners throughout the school's interior construction to prevent student injury; and a domestic lab for life-skills students. Outdoors there is a gated outdoor walking trail, courtyard and basketball court.

Student Deven Wright, a fourth grader who attends AB School West from Fort Bend Independent School District, said he has high hopes for the new library and computer lab.

"I will be happy to attend this new school," the 10-year-old said.

AB West is scheduled to be completed in early 2020. A special opening ceremony, complete with tours, is planned before the school opens.

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PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release



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Adult Learners ‘Learn in Own Space at Own Pace’ through TWC Distance Learning Grant

March 21, 2019 - Native Spanish speaker Liliana Martinez began learning English online six months before she walked into her adult learner classroom at Harris County Department of Education (HCDE) in northeast Houston. A Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) grant of \$174,798 recently awarded to HCDE Adult Education will give almost 3,000 additional students like her the opportunity and convenience of learning in their own space at their own pace.

The grant expands distance learning opportunities, virtual learning which can be accessed at home, on portable devices or through a public computer connection such as the library. Learning scenarios include using distance learning alone or combining it with traditional face-to-face classes as reinforcement.

Martinez, an immigrant from Michoacán, Mexico, came to America with a green card five years ago. Long work hours kept her from going to school. When she did go to class, she fell asleep due to exhaustion.

“I knew I wanted to study and improve my life, so I needed to learn,” she said.

After her work schedule became less hectic, Martinez contacted HCDE Adult Education and learned about the distance learning program. She decided to try it and committed to studying English online for five hours a week while she was wait-listed to begin free GED classes.

Six months later, Martinez retested for her English comprehension level and was accelerated to the ESL advanced level. Since September, she has been studying for the GED exam and will soon take the high school equivalency tests.

“Distance learning is beneficial because it reduces the obstacles many adults face when going back to school—lack of time, childcare issues, work schedule and no transportation,” said Stephanie Ross, director of HCDE Adult Education. “A great benefit is the study reinforcement it provides as homework reinforcement for all levels of learning.”

Students use online curricula for multiple levels of ESL, adult basic education for reading and writing, and advanced adult education for GED preparation. Software used includes GED Academy, USA Learns, Burlington English and Sed de Saber.

According to the TWC, students who engage in distance learning along with traditional learning outperform students who solely rely on classroom learning. In 2016-2017, 13,545 adults statewide engaged in distance learning. Of those, 60 percent completed one or more education levels, compared to 40 percent who did not participate.

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Despite the favorable statistics, only 15 percent of all adult education students were utilizing distance learning. TWC is working to introduce more adult learners to the benefits of distance learning models. “We are already seeing the benefit of our students using distance learning,” said Ross. “Our students benefit by using the hybrid model where they learn face-to-face along with distance learning. They also have the option of studying completely online.”

Martinez still likes the option of reinforcing her classroom learning with online learning. “For me, online is good for learning grammar,” she said. “I need to listen and speak too, so classroom is better for that.”

At 37, Martinez is glad she decided to take advantage of online learning before entering the classroom “You ask me why now?” she said. “I say, why not.”

(HCDE Adult Education provides academic and workforce learning opportunities for adults at more than 50 community locations throughout greater Houston from highly qualified teachers, including classes in ESL, adult basic education and GED test preparation. Workforce classes include study areas such as medical assistant, pipefitting and construction. Classes are free on a first-come, first-served basis. For information, go to www.hcde-texas.org/adult-education .)

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PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release



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HCDE Board Accepting Applications for Trustee Position 1, Precinct 2

Sept. 24, 2019 - Applications are currently being accepted for Harris County Department of Education Trustee Position 1, Precinct 2, formerly held by George Moore. Moore submitted his resignation for the position, May 15.

The individual appointed to fill Moore's position will serve the remainder of the current term ending December 2022. The appointee and any other qualified person may run for the position during regular elections held in November 2022. The elected individual would then serve a full six-year term beginning January 2023.

Applicants for Position 1 must complete a letter of interest; submit a resume; and include a notarized affidavit affirming the individual's eligibility qualifications. Qualifications include a requirement the appointee live in Precinct 2 for at least six months preceding the date the application is filed.

Deadline for application is Monday, Oct. 14, 2019 at 12 p.m. Additional details about eligibility and the application process are available online: <https://bit.ly/2lpwIF7> or <https://hcde-texas.org/board-trustees/>.

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PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release



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HCDE Board Lowers Property Tax Rate as ‘Good Stewards for Taxpayers’

Sept. 18, 2019 – With the welfare of taxpayers in mind, Harris County Department of Education’s Board of Trustees voted for a fifth consecutive year to adopt a tax rate below the effective tax rate.

Fiscal accountability continues to be on the minds of board members as HCDE trustees adopted the tax rate of \$0.0050 in a vote of five to two. The rate is significantly lower than the 2019 effective tax rate of \$0.005030 and the proposed tax rate of \$0.005029.

The 2018-2019 tax rate was \$.005190 per \$100 assessed property value.

“HCDE continues to be good stewards of taxpayer dollars for the citizens of Harris County,” said James Colbert Jr., Harris County school superintendent.

For a home valued at \$150,000, the adopted rate of \$0.0050 means the taxpayer will pay HCDE \$7.50. For home valued at \$250,000, the tax bill will be \$12.50.

Services from HCDE benefit school districts and the community at large, providing wraparound services which include adult education, special schools, school-based therapy services, Head Start and afterschool programming.

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HCDE Board of Trustees Appoints 2 Trustees, Elects New President and Vice President

Dec. 18, 2019 - The Harris County Department of Education Board of Trustees voted Wednesday to replace trustees George Moore, Position 1, Precinct 2 and Josh Flynn, Position 4, Precinct 3 with Amy Hinojosa and Andrea Duhon, respectively.

Both Moore, board vice president, and Flynn, president, had tendered their resignations prior to the meeting.

"I give my sincere appreciation to Dr. George Moore and Josh Flynn for their service to the students and citizens of Harris County," HCDE School Superintendent James Colbert Jr. said. "Dr. Moore is an outstanding man and has left a significant fingerprint on this organization as a fierce advocate for the underserved and as a great supporter for our 1,100 employees. Mr. Flynn was a good leader who is very well read, extremely efficient and took pride in his leadership post, and I wish him well in his new endeavors."

Hinojosa, a Pasadena resident, was sworn into office shortly after her appointment. She is a 16-year, oil-and-gas project manager. She volunteers with an education advocacy group called ProUnitas.

"I'm passionate about serving my community and about improving student outcomes," said Hinojosa. "I look forward to the work ahead, and I'm excited."

Duhon, a Katy resident, is a small business financial advisor who has a record for advocating for public education programs such as Head Start. HCDE currently serves 1,250 Head Start children and families in northeast and east Harris County.

"I look forward to serving the community on behalf of the students of Harris County," Duhon said.

At the meeting, the board also named Eric Dick as president and Danyahel "Danny" Norris as vice president. Dick called the new trustee appointments "a breath of fresh air."

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MEDIA ALERT

For Immediate Release



HCDE Breaks Ground on New School for Students with Intellectual, Developmental or Emotional Disabilities in Greater Harris County

What: Harris County Department of Education breaks ground on a 47,970-square foot school which will reside on 6.5 acres in southwest Houston. AB West is being relocated and serves students with intellectual or developmental disabilities and challenging behaviors throughout the greater Houston region.

The special school called Academic and Behavior School West (AB School West) is one of two HCDE schools in east and west Houston which provides special education services on a contractual basis to high-need students in area school districts. Features of the school include a low, student-to-instructor ratio; small classes; and individualized learning plans.

When: Wednesday, April 3, 2019 from 11 a.m.-1 p.m.

Where: 12772 Medfield Drive, Houston, TX 77082 (borders S. Dairy Ashford and Westpark Tollway)

Who: HCDE Board of Trustees are joined by Superintendent James Colbert Jr. and other HCDE administrators along with area superintendents, including special guest Alief ISD Superintendent H.D. Chambers (district where the school resides). Parents and community members are also attending.

Etc.: Special features of the school include: 28 classrooms serve to provide small classrooms for special population of 110 students (capacity 150); gated outdoor walking trail, courtyard with outdoor basketball court; domestic lab for life skills students; elevated flood plan with added retention and emergency generator to serve high health-risk students; and ballistic-rated, glass walls in lobby with strict security system.

(View school renderings: <https://bit.ly/2Yy1Uvi> ; password is hcde1889.)

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PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release



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HCDE CSSS Offers Driver Safety Tips as Students Head Back to School

Aug. 20, 2019 - Dave School is now back in session for most of the school districts around Harris County. This means children will be walking to-and-from schools in the early morning hours and late afternoon. Harris County Department of Education's Center for Safe and Secure Schools Director Julia Andrews offers tips to drivers to prevent accidents this school year.

"It is so important for drivers to slow down and pay attention when children are present- especially before and after school," Andrews said.

If you're dropping off:

- Do no double park; it blocks visibility for other children and vehicles.
- Do not load and unload children across the street from the school.
- Carpool to reduce the number of vehicles at the school.

Sharing the Road with Young Pedestrians

- Do not block the crosswalk when stopped at a red light or waiting to make a turn, forcing pedestrians to go around you; this could put them in the path of moving traffic.
- In a school zone when flashers are blinking, stop and yield to pedestrians crossing the crosswalk or intersection.
- Always stop for a school patrol officer or crossing guard holding up a stop sign.
- Take extra care to look out for children in school zones, near playgrounds and parks, and in all residential areas.
- Do not honk or rev your engine to scare a pedestrian, even if you have the right of way.
- Never pass a vehicle stopped for pedestrians wherever they may be, no matter who has the right of way.

Sharing the Road with School Buses

- Never pass a bus from behind or from either direction if you are on an undivided road- if it is stopped to load or unload children.
- If the yellow or red lights are flashing and the stop arm is extended, traffic must stop.
- The area 10 feet around a school bus is the most dangerous for children; stop far enough back to allow them space to safely enter and exit the bus.
- Be alert; children often are unpredictable, and they tend to ignore hazards and take risks.

According to the American School Bus Council, passing vehicles cause an estimated two-thirds of school bus loading and unloading fatalities.

"By exercising a little extra care and caution, drivers and pedestrians can co-exist safely in school zones," Andrews said.

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HCDE Head Start Hosting Job Fair Oct. 18

Oct. 7, 2019 –Harris County Department of Education is hosting a job interview fair to recruit teachers, teaching assistants, family service providers and cooks to join any of its 15 locations throughout northeast Harris County. The recruitment event will be held Friday, Oct. 18, 2019, from 9 a.m. to 4 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. Interested candidates can apply online at 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: <https://bit.ly/2Oqnmj5>. Visit www.hcde-texas.org/head-start for general information about HCDE Head Start and locations.

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HCDE Hosting Cybersecurity Career Connection Conference for Students, Educators May 15

May 7, 2019 - The cybersecurity profession is growing as technology evolves and becomes a fabric of society, especially with the younger generation. Harris County Department of Education is hosting the 2019 Cybersecurity Career Connection Conference for local educators and students May 15.

“When it comes to students and what’s available, we want to bring in colleges and professionals in the field so they can learn more specific skills to be successful,” Colina Poullard, HCDE Director of Digital Education and Innovation, said.

She said this field is new to the career and technical education classes in schools.

“This is a new pathway being offered in high school and teachers need additional ways to focus on in this new subject,” Poullard said.

Students will get the chance to meet with industry professionals such as an FBI agent and IT professional, colleges and universities including Houston Baptist University and University of Houston. Teachers will learn how to sharpen their craft and give their students better insight and instruction on becoming a cybersecurity professional.

Attendees will have the chance to ask questions to four industry professionals such as what is needed to get into the profession and what pathway they took in school.

The conference will be at Harris County Department of Education, 6300 Irvington Blvd., Houston, TX 77022, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. with registration beginning at 8 a.m.

Cost to attend is \$25 for teachers and \$10 for students. Teachers who bring 25 students are free. Breakfast and lunch will be provided.

Make sure to register by Tuesday, May 14. Payments will be taken at the door on Wednesday, May 15. Register online at <https://bit.ly/2KV499f>.

For more information or sponsorship opportunities, contact Colina Poullard at cpoullard@hcde-texas.org.

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Harris County Department of Education Ranks Top 25 in Houston’s 2019 Top Workplaces

Nov. 15, 2019 - Harris County Department of Education was recognized as one of Houston’s Top 25 large businesses Nov. 14, as part of the Houston Chronicle’s 2019 Top Workplaces program.

Chron.com: <https://bit.ly/2rLY3id>

HCDE received the award at a special ceremony at the Royal Sonesta Hotel. Companies recognized are awarded solely on anonymous workplace surveys completed by their employees.

“HCDE is the best of both worlds as it is a dynamic place to work which encourages excellence and fosters an entrepreneurial spirit in an ever-changing educational environment,” said Superintendent James Colbert Jr. “We also gain the personal satisfaction of serving area school districts and helping a wide array of students succeed, from pre-k students to students with special needs to adult learners.”

Top Workplaces rankings are determined by a scientific employee survey process provided by Energage, an independent research company partnering with the Chronicle for the past 10 year. This year, 150 employers earned recognition as Top Workplaces in three categories: small, medium and large. HCDE was ranked no. 24 in the large-company category.

In all, 134,258 employees from 257 companies took the survey. Questions included issues relating to workplace culture such as management, benefits, employee appreciation, workplace flexibility and more.

Longtime employee Laura McFarland nominated HCDE for the award after seeing an ad in the Houston Chronicle requesting company recommendations for Top Workplaces. McFarland is an occupational therapist and manages therapists who work with students in Houston Independent School District and several other districts through HCDE’s School-Based Therapy Services. She has been employed with HCDE for 21 years.

“Because of the culture of excellence that exists at HCDE, everyone is encouraged to show initiative and professional growth,” McFarland said. “We are constantly evolving and adapting to best meet the community’s needs.”

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HCDE Occupational Therapist Brunson Working with Katy ISD Students Honored with Horizon Award

(April is National Occupational Therapy Month. Harris County Department of Education served 7,426 students and 6,391 teachers in the 2018-2019 school year. Over 100 occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants are part of that success story.)

April 15, 2019 - Sometimes a smile from a child is all you're looking for to know you've made a difference. Harris County Department of Education occupational therapist and Horizon Award winner Adele Brunson knows that to be true daily as she works with children with physical challenges in the school environment.

Brunson, who joined HCDE's School-Based Therapy Services in 2018-2019, earned the Horizon Award from the Texas Occupational Therapy Association. The state award recognizes a new occupational therapist who has five years or less of experience in the field.

"The Horizon Award is meaningful to me in allowing me to feel that my love and passion for occupational therapy, through deed and word, is reaching and inspiring others," said Brunson. "Occupational therapy enables people to live their best life--to its fullest--by giving people of all ages back their independence."

Over 100 school-based occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants work for HCDE and provide occupational services in 28 school districts and charter schools in greater Harris County. They help children to fulfill their role as students by supporting their academic achievement and promoting positive behaviors necessary for learning. SEP 2019

Occupational therapists and occupational therapist assistants support academic and non-academic outcomes, including social skills, math, reading and writing, behavior management, recess, participation in sports, self-help skills, prevocational/vocational participation, transportation and more.

Brunson works for HCDE and services the Katy Independent School District at elementary, junior and high schools through a partnership that HCDE has with the district.

As an example of the impact she makes with children, she remembers the student with cerebral palsy she was helping with handwriting. The little girl who was right-handed was forced to learn to write left-handed because her cerebral palsy had affected the control of her right hand.

"She told me that she did not like being left-handed because it made her stand out and be different from all her other classmates," Brunson said.

Brunson is left-handed herself and told the little girl during her evaluation that left-handed people were awesome, creative and fun.

“At the end of the school day, she came up to me, smiled, giggled and told me that she felt so cool to be left-handed,” Brunson said.

“To me, seeing her smile so big was the greatest gift that day.”

After spending several years as a teacher, Brunson decided to return to school to become an occupational therapist. She wanted to make an impact through occupational therapy with children in the school setting.

“Children are honest and have a genuine thirst to grow,” she said. “I wanted to be involved in supporting their growth in accessing their education to the fullest.”

Brunson urges fellow occupational therapists to join professional organizations to keep up-to-date on research and topics that affect the profession, including legislation.

She has worked the past four years on a project with the Texas Occupational Therapy Emerging Leaders Mentoring Program. The program allows occupational therapist newcomers to become involved and assume leadership in the profession. She also serves as secretary on the board of directors for the Texas Occupational Therapy Association.

HCDE School-Based Therapy Services Director Carie Crabb says through the Horizon Award, the Texas Occupational Therapy Association recognizes several outstanding qualities in the awardee. Among those are community involvement; leadership in a professional organization; and advocating for the profession.

“It’s especially meaningful to honor Adele during National Occupational Therapist Month,” said Crabb.

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HCDE Provides Technology Safety Tips as Students Head Back to School

Sept. 11, 2019 – Technology continues to factor heavily in children’s school lives. As students go back to school, computers and cell phones are being used for research assignments and communicating with teachers and classmates. However, families should set technology boundaries for the school year.

Studies have found that one in five students is bullied each year.

Harris County Department of Education Teaching and Learning Center Curriculum Director for Digital Education and Innovation Colina Poullard reminds parents to keep an eye on their children’s use of technology.

One thing Poullard says parents can do to keep children safe is to install a form of spyware on phones.

“You can do this with your child’s knowledge or not to keep them safe from cyberbullying,” she said. “You can also use the spyware for setting timers for how long they can be on social media and as a locator to know where they are at all times.”

Other tips include keeping tabs on your child’s emotions. If there is a change, learn a child wants to be on social media apps. Follow the account to see what is going on. Also, let the teen know what is appropriate or not to post online.

People who cyberbully will hide behind different online accounts to either get attention or to be hurtful towards others. Either way, it’s harassment and includes serious ramifications.

“Cyberbullying is defined in the law, but not in people’s mind,” Poullard said.

Parents should talk to a child up front about bullying, discuss what the student can do to stop it and set consequences if their child is the bully.

“Most kids will hide and not come forward about being cyberbullied because they don’t want to make a big deal about it,” she said. “However, it can cause long-lasting damage to the child.”

If cyberbullying is taking place, make sure to keep all the evidence to get both sides of story when reporting to campus leaders to solve the issue.

“The key is safety-first while children are using technology and taking these steps,” Poullard said.

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Technology Tips Photo: HCDE Teaching and Learning Center Curriculum Director for Digital Education and Innovation Colina Poullard discusses cyber safety with a student at a recent summer camp.

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HCDE Public Recovery High School Provides Wrap-Around Approach for Addiction

March 1, 2019 - Cy Lopez, 18, found out about Harris County's first public recovery high school through his therapy group while recovering from addiction.

The bright, determined young man, who takes advanced academic courses, visited the school called Fortis Academy after trying to return to his home school in north Houston while recovering from his addiction. There, peer pressure provided too much temptation.

"He's been one of our leaders here since joining our school this year," said Anthony Moten, principal at Fortis, a Latin term associated with strength, courage and determination.

Fortis is building its student roster this year as Harris County Department of Education administrators spread the word about the campus in the 25 school districts it serves, who send students to Fortis on a contractual basis. The school represents a huge paradigm shift in treating substance abuse.

"It's moving educators to understand a punitive-discipline model versus a restorative-therapeutic model," said James Colbert Jr., superintendent of HCDE and a strong proponent of the recovery school.

The school combines counseling, recovery coaching and academics in a low, student-to-faculty ratio for students who have completed substance abuse or dependency rehab programs. The goal is for students to continue their high school education in a sober environment.

Omar Lopez, Cy's father, attends meetings with his son and counselors at the school. One of the school's foundational principles is that it is important for parents to be active in their children's sobriety. "The main thing about this school is the support it gives to kids to stay sober," said Omar as he visits his son at the school. "He is doing good with his grades and being sober."

Fortis has all the academic elements of a regular high school, with certified classroom teachers for core subjects. Small classes are coupled with computer electives, including physical education. Last month the school opened its culinary component, a kitchen where students get certified in safety and sanitation before learning to cook and bake. In the kitchen, students come together as a team and collaborate as they gain new skills to bolster their preparation for life after high school, as well as their self-esteem.

Senior Juan Garcia finds his cooking skills handy in winning the approval of his girlfriend, he said while learning to make crepes. Garcia will be the school's first graduate, walking the stage in May at his home school in Galena Park ISD.

-more-

Cy's father is impressed by the culinary program at Fortis and appreciative of the recovery support his son receives each day. He's a strong advocate for public recovery high schools such as Fortis, even

though they are relatively rare, with only three in the state of Texas.

“Private recovery schools are not affordable for many people,” he said. “What you don’t know, you don’t know, and more people should know about this school. Recovery education has to be shared with low-income parents too.”

He points to the benefits to taxpayers with public recovery schools tackling problems of addiction early on versus having residents go through the penal system later.

“The amount of taxpayer money we can be saving by having these kids here for four years versus 10 years in jail is amazing,” he said, circling his arms to demonstrate the greater good. “Can’t you see the difference in the money and lives saved?”

Omar insists his son Cy is learning how to live a good life without drugs or alcohol, despite the temptations of society. He credits Fortis for that change in attitude and said one of the greatest benefits of the school is Cy’s ability to have a personalized recovery coach and meetings at the school during the day.

Cy said this model allows for problems to be tackled head on.

“We share what we’re going through, and they give us feedback and help us learn to deal with issues,” he said. “They listen to me, and I listen.”

For more information about Fortis Academy, go to www.hcde-texas.org/schools/fortis-academy.

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PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release



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HCDE Summer Enrichment Programs Prevent 'Summer Slide'

(National Summer Learning Week is celebrated July 8-13 to advocate the important of keeping kids learning, safe and healthy every summer and ensuring they return to school in the fall, ready to succeed. CASE for Kids provides resources and activities to promote the weeklong awareness campaign at www.afterschoolzone.org .)

June 27, 2019 - In a break from school-year routine, 150 kids enrolled in summer enrichment programs are dancing, singing, acting, drumming and creating poetry. Little do they know while they have fun, they are preventing “summer slide” or summer learning loss.

Over the summer, students typically lose one month of school-year learning, and declines get worse the higher the grade level, according to “Review of Educational Research.”

Summer learning programs lessen the effects of summer slide and help teachers start the school year off with less reviewing.

Harris County Department of Education’s Center for Afterschool, Summer and Enrichment for Kids, or CASE for Kids, has hosted a program called Kids’ Day at Hobby Center for approximately 10 years. Students in elementary through high school are grouped with performing and visual artists, who are also known as afterschool service providers. The four-week program culminates with a performance at the Hobby Center for the Performing Arts.

“Summer learning opportunities are important because it allows students to explore interests they don’t get to pursue during the regular school day, especially fine arts curriculum,” said Lisa Thompson-Caruthers, director for CASE for Kids.

The service providers who may be professional actors, singers or dancers weave literacy and numeracy inside of their lessons. Step counts in dance provide opportunity for math sequencing. A video artist includes history in her video projects so that young videographers are doing research. Reading, discipline and memorization are interwoven in most of the fine arts projects.

“Our job is to find the providers that can ignite the passion in the kids while providing high-quality content,” Thompson-Caruthers said.

Chris Cortez, founder of Houston Healthy Hip-Hop, found his passion in afterschool as a middle-school introvert. When he found his purpose, his grades began to climb.

“It helped me break out of my shell,” Cortez said.

Thompson-Caruthers said another benefit of summer enrichment and fine arts is the social-emotional learning component. Today's school schedule provides less time for self-expression, voicing opinion or creating personal relationships to share problems and find solutions.

For fourth grader Asher Hill, who says he is growing up in a tough neighborhood, participating in a poetry writing class gave him the chance to reflect on who he is and what he can become.

"I use my poetry to explain my identity," he said.

Hip-hop performer Jackelin Miche from Baker-Ripley Charter School said her summer class in hip-hop has inspired her to take up dance as her new hobby.

"I get to make new friends, hang out with my current friends and have lots of fun," she said. "I do activities I wouldn't normally get to do when I might just be sitting around at home."

Thompson-Caruthers assures skeptics that fine arts teaches kids to focus and pay attention and gets them to think about consequences. Without knowing your lines, you might not land the lead role in the school play. Without practice steps, you can't build your dance progression.

"The key is to embed the learning into activities kids are passionate about, so they don't even know they are working on higher-order thinking," she said.

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Head Start to Host Job Fair June 20

May 31, 2019 – Harris County Department of Education is hosting a job interview fair to recruit teachers, teaching assistants, family service providers and cooks to join any of its 15 locations throughout northeast Harris County. The recruitment event will be held Thursday, June 20, 2018, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at 6300 Irvington Blvd.

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. Interested candidates can apply online at 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: <https://bit.ly/2HPXMPJ>. Visit <https://hcde-texas.org/head-start/> for general information about HCDE Head Start and locations.

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How Head Start Helps Shape Mother and Son's Futures: Enroll for 2018-2019

July 30, 2019 - When Tasha Crockett was growing up in Livingston, TX, her parents enrolled her into the Head Start program to help her get the social and academic skills she needed for school.

Fast-forward to April 2008 when her son, Christian, turned 3 years old and would be enrolled in the Harris County Department of Education Head Start Program in Humble.

"I knew I wanted him in the program because it's family-centered, it helped me grow when I was his age and I knew it would help him, too, especially with his speech impediment and dyslexia," she said.

The program continued to shape her as a parent volunteer with the policy council.

"I was going through a divorce at the time and participating with the Head Start Policy Council was life-saving by helping with the changes I was going through," Crockett said.

Being involved with decision-making through leadership in the policy council motivated her to go back to school to get a degree in social work. She graduated summa cum laude from the University of Houston-Downtown in December 2018 and will receive her master's degree in May 2020 from Stephen F. Austin State University.

As she was learning so was Christian because of the programs Head Start offered. He started speech therapy at age 2, and his therapist continued working with him during the two years he was at the Humble center.

"His academics and personality blossomed during those two years," Crockett said. "He even graduated early from speech therapy. He would have been in longer if he didn't have the help from the therapist and Head Start."

Christian is now a well-rounded middle school student and his teachers have said they would have never guessed he had a speech impediment.

HCDE Head Start is now enrolling children at its 15 Head Start centers. Visit <https://hcde-texas.org/head-start/> or call 713-679-2510 for information.

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Harris County Department of Education Ranks Top 25 in Houston’s 2019 Top Workplaces

Nov. 15, 2019 - Harris County Department of Education was recognized as one of Houston’s Top 25 large businesses Nov. 14, as part of the Houston Chronicle’s 2019 Top Workplaces program.

Chron.com: <https://bit.ly/2rLY3id>

HCDE received the award at a special ceremony at the Royal Sonesta Hotel. Companies recognized are awarded solely on anonymous workplace surveys completed by their employees.

“HCDE is the best of both worlds as it is a dynamic place to work which encourages excellence and fosters an entrepreneurial spirit in an ever-changing educational environment,” said Superintendent James Colbert Jr. “We also gain the personal satisfaction of serving area school districts and helping a wide array of students succeed, from pre-k students to students with special needs to adult learners.”

Top Workplaces rankings are determined by a scientific employee survey process provided by Energage, an independent research company partnering with the Chronicle for the past 10 year. This year, 150 employers earned recognition as Top Workplaces in three categories: small, medium and large. HCDE was ranked no. 24 in the large-company category.

In all, 134,258 employees from 257 companies took the survey. Questions included issues relating to workplace culture such as management, benefits, employee appreciation, workplace flexibility and more.

Longtime employee Laura McFarland nominated HCDE for the award after seeing an ad in the Houston Chronicle requesting company recommendations for Top Workplaces. McFarland is an occupational therapist and manages therapists who work with students in Houston Independent School District and several other districts through HCDE’s School-Based Therapy Services. She has been employed at HCDE for 21 years.

“Because of the culture of excellence that exists at HCDE, everyone is encouraged to show initiative and professional growth,” McFarland said. “We are constantly evolving and adapting to best meet the community’s needs.”

About HCDE: 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.

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Human Trafficking Summit Equips Educators, Parents with Awareness Tools Nov. 5

Educators hear about how to protect children from human trafficking at the Human Trafficking Summit Nov. 5 from 8 a.m.-2 p.m. at Harris County Department of Education, 6300 Irvington, Houston.

View video: <https://bit.ly/2MW94FG>

From thoughts from Congressman Ted Poe to stories from human trafficking survivor Sandy Storm, the collaborative between Children at Risk and HCDE's Center for Safe and Secure Schools supplies wrap-around prevention approaches to the widespread problem of human trafficking.

Human trafficking is a form of modern-day slavery in which traffickers use force, fraud, or coercion to control victims for the purpose of engaging in commercial sex acts or labor services against their will. "In order to break the cycle, we must understand the magnitude and how Houston families fall victim to human trafficking," said Julia Andrews, director for the Center for Safe and Secure Schools. The center supports school safety best practices, safety audits and restorative discipline for area schools and districts.

"The I-10 corridor is a huge hub for trafficking, and we must realize the threat and act to protect our children," said Andrews.

Cost to attend is \$20. Register: <https://bit.ly/humantraffickingsummit>

Summit Agenda:

Demand and Data, Jamey Caruthers, senior staff attorney, Children at Risk (8-9 a.m.)

What Parents Need to Know, Joe Madison, executive director, Children at Risk (9-10 a.m.)

Protecting Kids in the Porn Age, Sandy Storm, survivor, author, speaker and human trafficking abolitionist (10:15-11:15 a.m.)

Lunch and Networking (11:15 a.m.-12 p.m.)

Project 180, a wraparound approach between multiple Houston agencies, including the Harris County District Attorney's Office (Noon-1:30 p.m.)

Congressman Ted Poe discusses human trafficking initiatives (1:30-2 p.m.)

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MEDIA ALERT

For Immediate Release



Bates Collision Centers Gifts Rehabbed Car to HCDE Head Start Dad and Daughter Dec. 17

What: Bates Collision Centers provide a rehabbed car for a deserving Harris County Department of Education Head Start father and his daughter. It's the first time a father has received a car in 22 years. The car is wrapped and filled with gifts, including wheels for Journee, 4. John Rose and Journee meet Lee and Leila Bates and their staff as we kick off the holiday season.

Where/When: Bates Collision Center Baytown, 3219 Main St., Baytown
Thursday, Dec. 17 at 10 a.m.

Who: HCDE Head Start parent John Rose and daughter Journee, Bates Collision Center co-owners Lee and Leila Bates and staff

Etc: Social distancing required at this outdoors event.

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PRESS RELEASE

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Local Partnership Project Funding Helps Deliver Afterschool with 'All the Toppings'

Jan. 30, 2019 - Two years ago, 11-year-old Ilija Rivera's grandmother got sick and was hospitalized. Her mom Karen Amaya reached out to get afterschool help for babysitting. She got much more when she enrolled in a program funded by the CASE for Kids Partnership Project.

The Partnership Project is a locally funded collaboration between Harris County Department of Education's Center for Afterschool, Summer and Enrichment, or CASE for Kids, the Houston-Galveston Area Council, the Texas Workforce Commission and local afterschool sites like Ilija's school: Houston Independent School District's Park Place Elementary.

The 20-year-old program is unique because multiple partners--local, state and federal--contribute funding.

The Partnership Project fills funding gaps with a variety of resources. The CASE for Kids lending library provides curricula, educational games, sporting equipment and STEM-based materials like robotics kits. Vendors specialize in academic focus areas that highlight math and language. Social and emotional learning skills help children to understand and manage their emotions.

In Amaya's Latina culture, kids stay with family members when parents are working, so the notion of afterschool was a bit hard to accept. After Ilija's abuela (grandmother) got well, she remained in afterschool and has been busy with activities like robotics, art, tennis, choir, cooking and academic tutorials.

"I was impressed by the program," said Amaya. "I really do think CASE for Kids is an exceptional program. I work in school settings and have never seen an afterschool program like this one."

CASE for Kids is an afterschool intermediary which provides resources, training and afterschool services for over 9,000 students in greater Harris County.

"As CASE for Kids celebrates its 20th anniversary, we look to the Partnership Project as one of the ways we expand our reach to local families and the education communities we serve during times when public school budgets are lean and federal funding for afterschool is diminished," said Lisa Thompson-Caruthers, CASE for Kids director.

Ilija likes the time she gets to socialize with her friends after 3 p.m. and admits she would be on her electronic devices, otherwise. Her mother likes the community environment offered through afterschool at her neighborhood school in southeast Houston.

-more-

“The more exposed she is to different hobbies and careers, the better,” said her mom. “I am first-generation college, so college is a must for her too.”

Teacher and afterschool robotics coach Yasin Puertas took Iliia and her classmates to Ecobot Challenge last year, a large-scale CASE for Kids robotics competition funded through the Education Foundation of Harris County, a nonprofit which provides support for education initiatives.

Puertas’ team of students won first place in the competition.

“Funding for local afterschool initiatives is very important,” said Puertas. “We need support from the community, and this is the best example of how local dollars are converted into local resources.”

Last month, Puertas brought a robotics show-and-tell to parents at a local PTA meeting at Park Place.

“Parents were literally in tears because they were watching their children who are doing engineering as fourth and fifth graders,” the afterschool coordinator said. “These are future engineers, and they don’t have to have the money to study. They have the brains and the will.

“Afterschool gives them that place to wonder and get inspired.”

Iliia likes to show off her [afterschool art project, a multi-media art piece](#) with a motorized arm she engineered with a robotics kit from Puertas’ afterschool robotics class. She says she likes to build things and see them work.

Though the preteen cherishes the time she spends with her grandmother and other family members, she also craves the afterschool time she gets with classmates and teachers to build creativity.

“Think of plain vanilla ice cream,” Iliia said, illustrating her analogy by circling the air with her hands to fashion the mountain of sugary goodness.

“Even though I like ice cream, I don’t get all the toppings,” said the fifth grader. “In afterschool, I get all the toppings—all the toppings for my brain.”

To learn more about the CASE for Kids collaboratives, go to www.hcde-texas.org/after-school or call 713-696-1331.

(View Iliia Rivera’s afterschool art GIF: <https://media.giphy.com/media/1zh70l8C23xuox7Cll/giphy.gif> .)

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About Good News You Can Use: “Good News You Can Use” showcases the partnerships between Harris County Department of Education and school districts and organizations.

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PRESS RELEASE

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Partnership Project Provides \$550,000 to Fund Houston-Area Afterschool During 2019-2020 School Year

June 12, 2019 - Local afterschool funding for approximately 1,500 students is being provided for the upcoming 2019-2020 school year through \$550,787 in afterschool funding supplied through the Partnership Project. The Partnership Project is a 20-year-old program founded by Harris County Department of Education's Center for Afterschool, Summer and Enrichment for Kids, or CASE for Kids, which fills afterschool funding gaps through a unique collaborative between local, state and federal partners.

Partnership Project is a collaboration between HCDE's CASE for Kids, the Houston-Galveston Area Council, the Texas Workforce Commission and local afterschool sites in which all parties contribute funding.

Services will be provided from Oct. 1, 2019 through Aug. 31, 2020 to 25 afterschool sites located in schools throughout Harris County. Awards range from \$10,000 to \$30,000. Districts include Alief, Houston, Pasadena and Sheldon independent school districts and charter schools the Academy of Accelerated Learning Chimney Rock and Belfort.

"The Partnership Project allows us to expand our reach to local families and education communities we serve during times when public school budgets are lean and federal funding for afterschool has lessened," said CASE for Kids Director Lisa Thompson-Caruthers.

CASE for Kids supplies resources, training and funding for students in afterschool programs in schools, childcare families and community centers. In 2017-2018, CASE for Kids served 14,627 students and supported 2,814 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.

For more information, including specific schools and award amounts, visit <https://bit.ly/2XIPd5z>

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