

# The CONNECTOR

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



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From the office of JAMES COLBERT, JR. – SUPERINTENDENT

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## OF NOTE

I begin by thanking those of you who were able to attend Wednesday's Board Budget Workshop. As you are already aware, a great deal of energy and effort has been put into the planning of financial resources for the next fiscal year. Over the last few months, we have performed our due diligence to ensure that a fiscally conservative budget was designed based on meeting the needs of the students of Harris County as well as our client school districts. I am pleased with the outcome of the budget that we are proposing to the Board of Trustees and I appreciate your support as we work to forward the advancement of teaching and learning across Harris County.

I started this week with a meeting of my Executive Leadership Team. As mentioned previously, we are in the process of recalibrating for the next academic year. Our campuses, programs, and service-providing divisions are in the midst of regrouping after an accomplished year of varied successes. We look forward to improving and tweaking our approaches as we continue to evolve to help students achieve. We are meeting with our client districts to assess their needs for the next year, and we are also reflecting on how we can modify services to better meet the needs of our client districts.

In accordance with improving teaching and learning, this week was a very busy one for us in the area of professional development as we offered a plethora of trainings and workshops for Harris County educators and other professionals. Our Teaching and Learning Center hosts a large volume of sessions during the summer months as educators and education paraprofessionals attend numerous trainings and workshops in advance of the next school year. We hosted a plethora of such opportunities this week including the following, just to name a few: Grade 5 Science STAAR: A Closer Look at Matter and Energy; How to Create an Unquenchable Thirst for Education in Young People/How to Reach "Unreachable" Youth Today; Grade 8 Science STAAR: A Closer Look at Matter and Energy; Text Comprehension for Grades 6-8; Formative Assessment in ELA Using Digital Tools; Lead4ward: Prioritizing for Learning: Data 411; Teaching Citizenship through the Election Process; CASE for Kids- CPR/First Aid; Understanding Dialects and Variations that Affect Students' Writing, Speaking and Reading Skills, and Mentor Texts and How to Use Them in Secondary ELA. HCDE continues to lead in the area of teaching and learning as we help students achieve by training the trainer.

Also, this week, I continued fortifying relationships between HCDE and Harris County area school districts by meeting with the superintendent of Aldine ISD. Along those lines, I am also preparing for the next meeting with the Focal Point participants.

Next week, I will be attending two conferences in Austin: The Association of Recovery Schools and the University of Texas/Texas Association of School Administrators (TASA) Summer Conference. I will depart Houston Tuesday evening to attend these conferences for the remainder of the week.

Please be reminded that the regularly scheduled June Board Meeting is next Tuesday, June 21, 2016. Immediately prior to the June Board Meeting, the last Board Budget Workshop will take place.

In closing, I hope you enjoy this issue of **The Connector**. As always, thanks for all you do for HCDE and I hope you have a relaxing weekend as we celebrate Father's Day.

# Opportunity

## PROGRAM CONNECTIONS



### Teaching and Learning Center Hosts “What Successful Writers and Readers Do”

During last week’s “What Successful Writers and Readers Do” workshop led by the Teaching and Learning Center, area educators took a journey through classic middle and high school texts to help students make

the reading

and writing connection both inside and out of the classroom. Participants learned new techniques for frontloading texts in both reading and writing instruction, creating a plan for stronger classroom engagement.



### Advancing Teaching and Learning by Training the Trainer

*Trainings hosted at HCDE this week*

#### **JUNE 13, 2016**

Grade 5 Science STAAR: A Closer Look at Matter and Energy

How to Create an Unquenchable Thirst for Education in Young People/How to Reach “Unreachable” Youth Today

Grade 8 Science STAAR: A Closer Look at Matter and Energy

#### **JUNE 14, 2016**

Text Comprehension (6-8)

Grade 5 Science STAAR: A Closer Look at Force, Motion and Energy

Grade 8 Science STAAR: A Closer Look at Force, Motion and Energy

Formative Assessment in ELA Using Digital Tools

#### **JUNE 15, 2016**

Grade 5 Science STAAR: A Closer Look at Earth and Space

Grade 8 Science STAAR: A Closer Look at Earth and Space

Text Comprehension (9-12)

Lead4ward: Prioritizing for Learning: Data 411

Teaching Citizenship through the Election Process

#### **JUNE 16, 2016**

CASE for Kids - CPR/1st Aid

Understanding Dialects and Variations that Affect Students’ Writing, Speaking and Reading Skills

Grade 5 Science STAAR: A Closer Look at Organisms and Environments

Grade 8 Science STAAR: A Closer Look at Organisms and Environments

Mentor Texts and How to Use Them in Secondary ELA



### Classroom Management Workshop Aims to Create Engaging Learning Environments

HCDE held a Classroom Management workshop led by Kimberly Smith-Carroll last week that provided participants with classroom management techniques that promote a highly

engaging learning environment. Classroom management is one of the leading stressors for teachers on top of meeting daily academic requirements for students. Teachers walked away from this session with tools and techniques to organize, discipline and manage their classrooms, producing a high culture of academic achievement and strong relationships.



# Opportunity

## PROGRAM CONNECTIONS

### Sugar Land Resident, CASE for Kids Director Lisa Thompson-Caruthers Gains National Fellowship as Afterschool Leader



Lisa Thompson-Caruthers, director of the Center for Afterschool, Summer and Enrichment for Kids, or CASE for Kids, has been selected for the White-Riley-Peterson Policy Fellowship. Thompson-Caruthers, a Sugarland resident, will join an elite group of 15 afterschool leaders throughout the nation to advance afterschool programs.

As an afterschool leader, Thompson-Caruthers will work to build networks with afterschool professionals and gain a working knowledge of pertinent issues in the state. The fellowship requires her to develop an afterschool policy with action projects to share at the end of 10 months.

“Fellows will participate in a year-long process, including an intensive weeklong fall workshop in Greenville, S.C. that will create a cohort of entrepreneurial, networked leaders capable of strengthening policy in support of afterschool and expanded learning opportunities,” said Cathy Stevens, program director of the White-Riley-Peterson Policy Fellowship. CASE for Kids, a division of Harris County Department of Education, provides resources, trainings, and funding for students in grades pre-k through 12 in afterschool programs in schools, child care facilities, and community centers throughout Harris County.

Thompson-Caruthers has led CASE for Kids for 14 years and has dedicated a total of 20 years to out-of-school programming. This year, she was named “Most Influential in State and Local Government” through an award issued by the National AfterSchool Association.

**About the Center for Afterschool, Summer and Enrichment (CASE) for Kids:** CASE for Kids, formerly the Cooperative for After-School Enrichment, was launched by Harris County Department of Education in 1999. CASE for Kids is an after-school intermediary which leverages community resources and strengthens the capacity of the out-of-school time field. Services benefit approximately 12,000 kids in greater Harris County. CASE for Kids programs happen before and after school, on weekends and during the summer. Go to [www.afterschoolzone.org](http://www.afterschoolzone.org) for information.



### Principal Certification Academy Class of 2015-2016 Completes Preparation for State Principal Certification

Principal Certification Academy cohort students completed the final week of 2015-2016 seminars this month. The 10-month program readies principal candidates for leadership positions and for the required state certification process. Thirty-five candidates attended the academy which meets monthly for Saturday and Sunday seminars. The candidates also completed two semesters of practicum leadership activities and action research projects. Dr. Deirdre Sharkey, the division’s curriculum and compliance officer, oversees the program.

### Math Sessions Help Aspiring Teachers with Teaching Models

Math curriculum director Nicole Shanahan led a math manipulatives session for the Educator Certification and Professional Advancement’s Teacher Alternative Certification Program. The class gave first-year and pre-service teachers experience engaging in hands-on activities to teach math using concrete objects. Using the manipulatives in math lessons supports learning theory and educational exploration as it allows students to construct their own models for abstract, higher-order thinking skills. It also helps them grasp concepts with greater ease. More subject-area training is planned this summer.



# Opportunity

## PROGRAM CONNECTIONS

### Teacher 'Rookie of Year' Ridgeway Recognized for Achievements by Colleagues



HCDE Teacher Alternative Certification intern Faamao Ridgeway, a second-grade reading teacher at HISD's Hilliard Elementary School, was recently named "Rookie Teacher of the Year." Ridgeway was nominated and earned the most votes for the award by her fellow teachers at the school. She was recognized as the first year teacher who made the greatest contribution to student achievement, instructional excellence, community involvement and student, parent, and staff relations.

#### **The story below highlights Ridgeway's personal story, including her triumphs and challenges:**

Rookie teacher Faamao Ridgeway spent her 34th birthday in her summer school classroom wearing a big smile and fielding questions about the storybook characters in a popular tale her students refer to as the "big bad wolf." The past month was a whirlwind in her banner school year.

The petite, soft-spoken woman from Samoa, an island in the South Pacific, is a first-year teacher who enrolled in the Harris County Department of Education Teacher Alternative Certification program in 2014. Last year she took evening and Saturday courses through classroom settings along with online courses. Veteran educators who are experts in teaching pedagogy and curriculum provided training and mentoring. A grant scholarship helped pay her tuition. She also observed other practicing classroom teachers before her own paid internship of teaching reading to second graders.

"I would say that teaching is not as easy as one believes," Ridgeway said. "There's a whole level of skills you need, but if you find the right program it can be rewarding."

Ridgeway, a former diplomat who holds a bachelor's degree in political science from her home country and a master's in business administration, decided that teaching would be her new career when she moved to the U.S. in 2013. (She had married a Houstonian and they have a boy, now 4). Learning about child development, she said, would help her own parenting skills.

HCDE Teacher Alternative Certification director Lidia Zatopek says it has taken about 21 months for Ridgeway to complete the certification process. The process includes one full year of teaching as a teacher of record in the candidate's certification field. A content exam is completed prior to being hired as a teacher intern. Passage of a pedagogy exam is required before a teacher is recommended for a standard teaching certificate.

Houston Independent School District's Hilliard Elementary principal Mokysa Benford is proud of the progress of her teacher intern Ridgeway. The student population at the school is 95 percent economically disadvantaged and 80 percent at risk. At first she had her reservations about the soft-spoken Ridgeway, but that quickly changed after she saw her interaction with her students.

"We have a rough population," said principal Benford. "But she has been excellent for our kids because she has a loving spirit about her."

Ridgeway is patient and tender with her second graders. In return, they treat her with respect and show off an amazing vocabulary they acquired this year. The eight-year olds talk about inferences, context clues, and character traits, words they never came across before.

"Parents shouldn't build a house out of straw or wood," says an eager little girl named Brooklyn, clad in pigtails and summer shorts. "You need nails to hold the house down."

Ridgeway smiles and congratulates Brooklyn for applying book knowledge to the "real world."

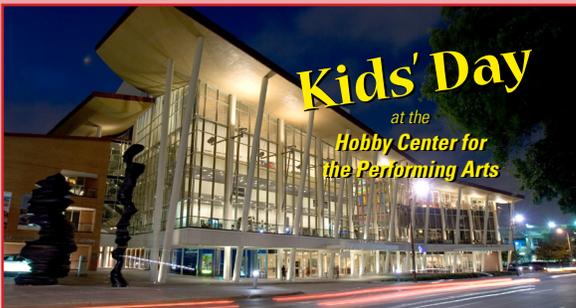
Good news arrived last month, and the victory was no small feat. Most of Ridgeway's students had raised their reading levels significantly. One student's scores were raised 10 levels. More good news was delivered when her colleagues named her "Rookie Teacher of the Year" for her enthusiasm and perseverance.

The new teacher is most proud about building a kinship with her students who each day face issues like poverty, violence, and sometimes prejudice. She is sharing a global prospective through the power of reading—and through her own experiences from an island 6,000 miles away.

# Service

## COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

### CASE for Kids Hosts Kids' Day at the Hobby Center June 23



CASE for Kids hosts Kids' Day at the Hobby Center for the Performing Arts on Thursday, June 23 from 6-8 p.m. at 800 Bagby St. Students will perform and/or display artistic works created as part of the CASE for Kids Collaborative Arts Program summer curriculum. Local artists were contracted to provide instruction and guidance for students enrolled in CASE for Kids Texas ACE 21st Century afterschool programs.



Harris County Department of Education's Center for Afterschool, Summer and Enrichment for Kids cordially invites you to

#### Kids' Day at the Hobby Center for the Performing Arts

Thursday, June 23, 2016  
6-8 p.m.

Hobby Center for the Performing Arts  
Zilkha Hall

800 Bagby St., Houston, Texas 77002

Refreshments available for purchase in the lobby.  
FREE parking in the Hobby Center garage.

Students will perform and/or display artistic works created as part of the CASE for Kids Collaborative Arts Program summer curriculum. Local artists were contracted to provide instruction and guidance for students enrolled in CASE for Kids Texas ACE 21st Century afterschool programs. Parents, families and school district staff are welcome to join us.

Please RSVP to Tracie Scales, CASE for Kids Special Events & Promotions Coordinator. Phone: 713-696-0782 Email: casekidsday@hcde-texas.org.

About the Center for Afterschool, Summer and Enrichment for Kids (CASE for Kids): Formerly the Cooperative for After-School Enrichment, CASE for Kids was launched by Harris County Department of Education in 1999. CASE for Kids is an after-school intermediary which leverages community resources and strengthens the capacity of the out-of-school time field. Services benefit approximately 12,000 kids in greater Harris County. CASE for Kids programs happen before and after school, on weekends and during the summer. Go to [www.afterschoolone.org](http://www.afterschoolone.org).



# Opportunity

## CAMPUS CONNECTIONS

### AB West Hosts STAAR Boost Camp to Boost Student Achievement

Academic and Behavior School West hosted a AB West STAAR Boost Camp for students to prepare for STAAR, the state's academic assessment. Students Shelvin Cowans (left) and Alecki Portillo exceeded the state's required scores on multiple STAAR tests.

"For those students, we celebrated their success and encouraged our all students to work hard," said Dr. Victor Keys, principal of AB West.

Counselor Shantel Rayford got the idea for the STAAR Boost Camp and with other staff helped develop the camp which included content-specialist tutorials. Students were rewarded for their hard work with certificates and incentives from the school store called the Trading Room.

"We are very excited and proud of the accomplishments our students have made," said Keys. "Hard work does pay off."



# Systemic Achievement

*...with purposeful intent*

## Instructional Management

In an effort to achieve the Board's goal of me to

- Establish effective mechanisms for communication to and from staff in instructional evaluation, planning, and decision making;
- Oversee annual planning for increased student learning and conduct periodic assessments of the effectiveness of the planning process;
- Ensure that goals and objectives form the basis of curricular decision-making and instruction, and communicates expectations for student achievement;
- Ensure that appropriate data are used in developing recommendations and making decisions regarding the instructional program and resources; and
- Establish a system for regular evaluation of instructional programs to meet student instructional needs and to attain desired student achievement.

Through HCDE's Teacher Alternative Certification Program, all of these objectives are clearly met in our process of equipping professionals with the essential tools necessary to become exceptional teachers.

A past student of this program was recently recognized as a Teacher 'Rookie of the Year' by her colleagues for her achievements in the classroom. Faamao Ridgeway was specifically recognized for the following:

1. Teacher who makes the greatest contribution in student achievement;
2. Achievement in instructional excellence;
3. Excels in community involvement; and
4. Committed to student, parent, and staff relations.

In addition to these attributes the former student of the program has exhibited, the aforementioned tasks are clearly evident throughout our Alternative Certification Program via some medium. This trickle-down effect not only improves HCDE programs, but also across Harris County and it helps students achieve.

**As a result of this accomplishment of the Teacher Alternative Certification Program, by way of our training, we are achieving the Board's expectations of us to produce teachers who are ensuring that the learning needs of students are identified and that a process is developed to ensure that each student's learning goals are either met or exceeded. Additionally, we investigate best practices for student achievement and utilize effective practices that maximize achievement of student potential within HCDE schools as well as across Harris County.**

## HCDE BOARD

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## UPCOMING BOARD EVENTS:

**Board Budget Workshop**  
**Tuesday, June 21, 2016**  
*(Immediately before the  
June Board Meeting)*

**June Board Meeting**  
**Tuesday, June 21, 2016**  
1:00 p.m.  
ROOM 400

