

From the office of JAMES COLBERT, JR. – SUPERINTENDENT

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## OF NOTE

I trust you had a pleasant 4th of July holiday weekend. As you know, the Department was closed Monday in observance of the holiday. We are open today due to the Department being closed on July 4. Next week, we will resume our Summer Flex Schedule.

This week, I met with my Executive Leadership Team as we continue planning for the next academic year. Across the Department, divisions and programs are in the midst of professional development, short and long range planning, shoring up curriculum and instructional objectives, and planning for the 2016-2017 academic year.

As we prepare for the new school year, please plan to attend this year's Annual Staff Meeting. The event will be held on Thursday, August 18, 2016, from 10:00 a.m. to noon. It will be held at the Kingdom Builders' venue located just off of the Beltway in southwest Houston. This meeting of all staff provides an opportunity for me to motivate and rejuvenate our employees as we embark on yet another year of success here at HCDE. I look forward to this convening of nearly all employees of the various divisions and programs. Last year's event was a great success, and I look forward to facilitating the 2016 Annual Staff Meeting event.

We helped students achieve this week by enhancing teaching and learning for Harris County educators through a Restorative Justice Boot Camp held July 5-7. The camp empowered educators who attended to teach students to resolve conflicts on their own through restorative practices.

Additionally, we supported area school finance personnel through our School Finance Council meeting on July 7. Guest speakers presented topics which included the state funding template, the Texas Open Meeting Act, e-rates, and investments.

Next week, I will be meeting with a county official to collaborate on projects that will support student learning in Harris County. Also, I look forward to attending the Education Foundation of Harris County Board Meeting as we continue to firm up plans to support students throughout the 2016-2017 school year.

Please be reminded that this month's Board Meeting will take place on July 26, 2016. As mentioned in the past couple of issues of **The Connector**, please note that the Senate Education Committee has set a date for the hearing for the Interim Study as it relates to the Department. It will be held Wednesday, August 3 in Austin, Texas.

In closing, thanks again for your service to HCDE. I hope you have a relaxing weekend and I hope you enjoy this issue of **The Connector**.

# Opportunity

## PROGRAM CONNECTIONS



### New HCDE Special Populations Director Featured on Houston Public Media

What is the meaning of the term special populations? HCDE's Teaching and Learning Center Director Darlene Breaux answered this question and more on June 30 on Houston Matters, a news talk program on 88.7 FM, Houston Public Media. Reporter

Edel Howlin asked Breaux pointed questions about teacher challenges in today's public schools. View and hear the story: <http://www.houstonmatters.org/segments/segment-c/2016/06/30/teaching-harris-countys-special-populations>

### Advancing Teaching and Learning by Training the Trainer

*Trainings hosted at HCDE this week*

**JULY 5-7, 2016**

Restorative Discipline Practices Boot Camp

**JULY 7, 2016**

School Finance Council

### Center for Grants Development Hosts District Grants Network Meeting



The Center for Grants Development hosted the District Grants Network meeting last week. The Network is comprised of representatives from area school districts who work in grants acquisition and/or grants management and meets quarterly to share information related to grant awards, processes, and grants submitted.

Participants of the Network have access to customized training, knowledge as to how other districts coordinate their grant offices, grant opportunities, and more. During last week's meeting, HCDE Manager of Innovation David McGeary shared a presentation on technology tools and tips.



### CASE for Kids Gains Preliminary Notice of 21st Century Community Learning Center Grant



CASE for Kids has received preliminary notification of a Texas Education Agency 21st Century Community Learning Center grant of \$1.8 million annually for the next three years, with total funding equaling \$5.4 million. With the new funding, which is pending negotiations, CASE for Kids will manage 10 afterschool centers, serving over 800 students and 400 parents with activities for academic skill mastery, social-emotional learning, youth leadership, college exploration, and family engagement. Collaborating districts are Aldine, Alief, Clear Creek, Galena Park, Humble, Pasadena, Sheldon, Spring, and Southwest Charter Schools. CASE for Kids staff Dr. Lisa Caruthers, Avice Chambers, and Michelle Amos worked closely with Center for

Grants Development staff Joyce Akins and Sharvon Pipkins to submit the application.

# Opportunity

## PROGRAM CONNECTIONS



### HCDE Spotlight: Employee Kuskos Says Family Engagement Philosophy of Head Start Mirrors Her Own

Patricia Kuskos' commitment to being a 15-year, stay-at-home mom to her three sons helped her realize that early childhood education was a great career calling. Each spring the Kuskos family traveled to a different national park to give their sons natural science experiences. There they would earn junior park ranger badges by completing specific education tasks, she said. Through those experiences, she realized she wanted to become an early childhood professional.

Kuskos joined HCDE Head Start in 2002 and found that its philosophy mirrored her own. Family engagement is a foundation cornerstone to student success. When parents are engaged in their children's education, those children are more successful in school, a fact validated through research.

The kitchen table was a study place for Kuskos and her sons as they progressed through school and she made her way through San Jacinto College for her associate's degree with honors. After being named class valedictorian, she moved on to receive a bachelor's degree from University of Houston-Downtown and a master's from Walden University in instructional design and technology. Today she is putting the finishing touches on her education doctorate as she writes her dissertation.

"I wanted to be an example for my sons," said the longtime Galena Park resident.

All three sons will have graduated from college this year.

In her 14 years with HCDE, she has served as teacher, assistant center manager, center manager, and is now Head Start education and special services coordinator. As coordinator, she trains and mentors assistant center managers and teaching staff to make sure developmentally appropriate teaching practices are used in classrooms. She ensures disability, mental wellness, and education services are provided to students. Finally, she analyzes student assessment data and provides feedback.

Even though she misses teaching 3- to 4-year olds, she has a treasure chest of good memories and often observes classrooms in her current position. One fond memory stands apart.

"Students will demonstrate skills you teach once they become familiar with them," she said.

A little girl, 3, announced that she wanted to hold a class meeting to resolve a problem in the center filled with colored, wooden blocks. With conflict resolution skills and their teacher at the helm, the problem was resolved.

"Most of these students were only 3, yet they knew exactly how to solve their own problems," Kuskos recalled.

Patricia and husband Jimmy continue to travel to expand their horizons, having moved on from traveling to national parks with their young boys to following the Mediterranean coastlines. These days that means learning more about their Greek heritage. They are particularly proud of their official designation to date as the only Kuskos family in the state of Texas.

# Opportunity

## PROGRAM CONNECTIONS

### HCDE Communicators Earn 15 Media Awards for Excellence in Communications from 2016 National School Public Relations Association



Harris County Department of Education communicators gained 15 national awards from the 2016 National School Public Relations Association. The awards include branding, blogs, videos, writing, newsletters, and special publication.

HCDE's entries of publications and electronic media competed with 965 national entries, including 581 publications entries and 264 videos. HCDE Client Engagement and Communication division staff members are honored for the awards which acknowledge excellence in communications.

A top award includes the Award of Excellence for branding package for the Choice Partners Vendor Exhibit and Food Expo. This Award of Excellence created by Client Engagement will be recognized and on display at the national conference in July in Chicago.

#### **Awards and the communicators collaborating on the awards are as follows:**

- Award of Excellence (branding package): Choice Partners Vendor Exhibit and Food Expo, Louise Henry, Juan Lopez
- Award of Merit (blog): Library Collaboration Checks Out, Justin Jannise, Louise Henry
- Award of Merit (branding package): Choice Partners Branding Package, Juan Lopez, Louise Henry
- Award of Merit (branding package): Safe and Secure Schools Branding Package, Juan Lopez, Louise Henry, Justin Jannise
- Award of Merit (print newsletter): Leader's Choice, Louise Henry, Justin Jannise, Juan Lopez
- Award of Merit (video): 2015 All-Earth Ecobot Challenge, Daniel Villarreal
- Honorable Mention (special publication): Scholastic Art & Writing Poster, Angela Hider, Carol Vaughn
- Honorable Mention (blog): School Bell Blog, Carol Vaughn, Angela Hider
- Honorable Mention (video): Why HCDE? Louise Henry, Justin Jannise, Daniel Villarreal
- Honorable Mention (video): HCDE: How Many Lunches Do We Provide? Joe Perez, Louise Henry, Justin Jannise
- Honorable Mention (video): 85 Million Lunches, Louise Henry, Justin Jannise, Joe Perez
- Honorable Mention (video): Special Schools, Joe Perez
- Honorable Mention (video): Scholastic Art & Writing, Daniel Villarreal
- Honorable Mention (writing): Refusing to Give Up on Afterschool, Carol Vaughn
- Honorable Mention (writing): Student Overcomes Emotional, Learning Obstacles to Gain Diploma, Carol Vaughn



### HCDE Employees Cool Off with Ice Cream Social

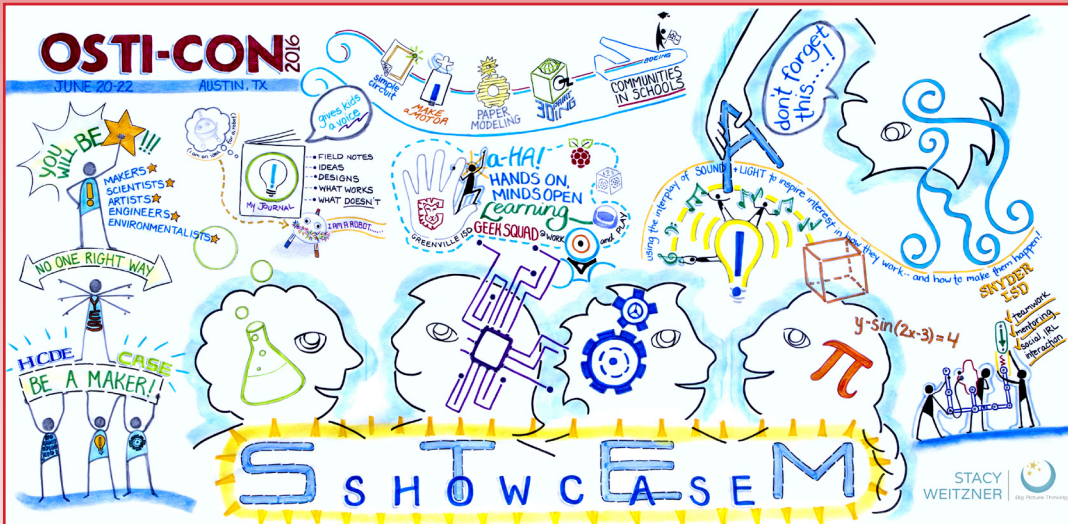
On Thursday, June 30, Human Resources hosted an ice cream social for employees in the lobby of the Irvington building. Staff enjoyed the refreshing afternoon treat while networking between divisions. Another social is planned for late July to support employee camaraderie.



# Service

## COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

### Graphic Recording Represents Area Schools Presenting at State Out-of-School Time Initiative Conference



"Graphic recording" from two Harris County schools which participated in the Out-of-School Time State Conference (upper and lower left corner)

This summer several CASE for Kids schools which are part of the Texas Afterschool Centers on Education (ACE) 21st Century administered by the Texas Education Agency presented in the Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) Showcase at a state afterschool conference. Their presentations are

represented in a graphic recording (conversations translated into images and text during meetings). The schools were South Houston Elementary from Pasadena ISD and Sharpstown International School from Houston ISD. The schools presented robotics presentations as part of their STEM activities at the Out-of-School Time Initiatives Conference on June 20-22.

### Area School Leaders Attend Restorative Justice Boot Camp at HCDE



The Center for Safe and Secure Schools held a Restorative Justice Boot Camp for area educators this week aimed at empowering students to resolve conflicts on their own through restorative practices. During the three-day workshop, leading spokesperson and trainer Sherwynn Patton provided more than 40 participants with in-depth training and strategies for

school-wide implementation of restorative justice practices. These practices are used to prevent bullying, decrease suspension and expulsion rates on campus, and reduce student disagreements.



# Systemic Achievement

*...with purposeful intent*

## Organizational Morale Organizational Improvement

In keeping with the Board's expectations of me to

- Create an open and positive environment for sharing resources and exchanging ideas to improve organizational climate;
- Seek systemically to improve the climate by obtaining and utilizing feedback from employees of the Department; and
- Ensure that key planning activities within the Department are coordinated and consistent with Board policy and applicable law, and that goals and results are communicated as appropriate.

The Research and Evaluation division recently released HCDE's new objectives for accountability for the 2016-2017 school year. The document contains objectives for the 22 divisions and associated programs. They are distributed annually to the leadership of the Department.



**By the division completing this project, I am ensuring that the Board's goals for me to direct administrators to accomplish the mission, goals, and objectives of the Department, monitor progress, evaluate staff performance, and hold staff accountable, as appropriate, are being achieved.**

**I am also managing the day-to-day business of the Department to ensure that objectives are achieved as well as assessing risks, and ensuring judgment to provide programs and resources that support educational opportunities.**

## HCDE BOARD

*Board President*  
*Position 2, Precinct 4*  
Angie Chesnut

*Vice President*  
Louis Evans, III  
*Position 4, Precinct 3*

Erica Lee Carter  
*Position 6, Precinct 1*

Marvin W. Morris  
*Position 1, Precinct 2*

Don Sumners  
*Position 7, At Large*

Diane Trautman  
*Position 3, At Large*

Michael Wolfe  
*Position 5, At Large*

## UPCOMING BOARD EVENTS:

**July Board Meeting**  
Tuesday, July 26, 2016  
1:00 p.m.  
Room 400

**Senate Education Committee Hearing**  
Wednesday, August 3, 2016  
3:00 p.m.  
Capitol Extension  
Room E1.028  
Austin, Texas

