

# The CONNECTOR

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



WEEK OF NOVEMBER 14, 2016

VOLUME 3/ISSUE 14



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FROM THE OFFICE OF JAMES COLBERT, JR.—SUPERINTENDENT

## Of Note...

Let me begin by thanking each of you for your attendance at this week's Board Meeting. I appreciate the time that each of you devote to the business of the Department. I had the opportunity to meet our two incoming board members—Mr. Eric Dick and Mr. George Moore—both of whom attended this past Tuesday's meeting.

It's hard to believe that Thanksgiving is less than a week away and that we're nearing the end of the first semester of this academic year. To that end, the Department will be closed next Thursday and Friday for Thanksgiving, and will resume normal operations on Monday, November 28, 2016. After today's issue, **The Connector** will resume its regular schedule during the week of November 28, 2016.

I began this week in Beaumont as I addressed the Principal Academy at Lamar University. The Lamar University Principal Academy is nationally known for its advanced leadership development program for experienced principals. Its goal is to assist successful principals to achieve even higher levels of leadership and proficiency by offering additional tools and insights to better lead their campuses. It was an honor for me to serve as one of their presenters.

On Wednesday of this week, I served as the keynote speaker for the Touchdown Club of Houston's Scholar Athletes' Luncheon. The Touchdown Club is the Houston chapter of the National Football Foundation. It was founded in 1947 under the leadership of General Douglas MacArthur, legendary Army coach Earl "Red" Blaik, and journalist Grantland Rice. It operates programs designed to use the power of amateur football in developing scholarship, citizenship, and athletic achievement in young people. Students, from some of our client school districts including Cy-Fair, Goose

Creek, Houston, Alief, Deer Park, Fort Bend, and Klein, were recognized at this distinguished event. Given the audience—composed of district superintendents and administrators, along with other high profile guests—this event allowed me to bring additional visibility to HCDE, resulting in a great opportunity for both the Department and me. It was a pleasure to serve as HCDE's ambassador as the Touchdown Club recognized Houston's very impressive premier scholar athletes.

Yesterday, I attended the Northwest Area Ministries (NAM) Board Meeting, fulfilling my responsibility as a recently-appointed board member. NAM is a great asset to the community it serves and the meeting was a productive one.

This week in the area of teaching and learning, we hosted the following workshops, trainings, and meetings: HCDE's Principal Certification Academy Information Meeting; Online Instructor's Training, Part II; Planning Digital Learning for Special Populations; Workstation Make and Take for Comparing Numbers for Grades 1 and 2; Tony Frontier's Prioritizing for Powerful Results: Five Levers to Improve Learning; Biology EOC: A Closer Look at the Mechanisms of Genetics; and the Charter School Roundtable.

Next week, I will continue my regular meeting schedule with leaders within Harris County to keep HCDE at the forefront of public education. To that end, I will be in the office Monday through Wednesday. I will return to the office Monday, November 28, 2016, at the conclusion of the Thanksgiving Break.

In closing, I wish each of you a wonderful Thanksgiving holiday season. I hope you enjoy this issue of **The Connector**, and as we enter this season of thanks, please know that I remain grateful for your undying service to Harris County Department of Education.

# Opportunity

## PROGRAM CONNECTIONS

### Children's Songwriter, Recording-Artist Don Monopoli to Entertain 1,000 Educators at HCDE Early Childhood Winter Conference January 28



Early childhood educators learn to connect literacy through movement and song through famed children's songwriter and keynote Don Monopoli at the 31st Annual R.T. Garcia Early Childhood Winter Conference Jan. 28, from 8:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m. The conference

is held at the Kingdom Builders' Center in southeast Houston, 6011 West Orem.

Monopoli's interactive songs promote early childhood learning through song and movement. He is the founder of the Learning Station, an award-winning children's recording and performing company. The entertainer has published over 400 children's songs and accomplished over 4,000 performances.

Bilingual keynote is Gilberto Soto, music educator and accomplished guitarist who is a professor at Texas A&M International University.

The conference is hosted by Harris County Department of Education and is expected to attract 1,000-plus attendees throughout greater Houston.

"This year we promote 60 breakout sessions for teachers grades pre-k through second to attend to gain practical classroom lessons and innovative teaching techniques," said Andrea Segraves, director of the Teaching and Learning Center at Harris County Department of Education. The sessions include topics like bilingual education, math, reading, science, special populations, socialization, and more. An extensive vendor marketplace is also featured.

"Teachers and curriculum specialists attend the conference solo and in teams, and we build in time for them to network and share ideas," said Segraves.

Parking is free at the conference. The daylong event is early-bird priced at \$85 before Dec. 1, 2016 and \$100 before January 28, 2017. The fee onsite is \$125 (by check). Register at [www.hcde-texas.org/register](http://www.hcde-texas.org/register) by workshop date or call 713-696-1308 with questions.

### Head Start Staff Give Thanks to Center Managers, Staff

Head Start management Staff created baskets of Thanksgiving goodies for managers and staff at both Irvington and the 15 Head Start centers. The baskets are being delivered this week and are filled with fruit and classroom supplies.



### HCDE Schools Division Hosts Thanksgiving Lunch Celebration

Superintendent Colbert Joins Employees in Celebration of the Season

# Opportunity

## PROGRAM CONNECTIONS

### Turning from Anger to Success: Amari Harrison Shares Her HCDE Highpoint East Story



*Highpoint East student Amari Harrison gives her farewell thanks to staff. (left) Mercedes Love, assistant principal, Marion Cooksey, principal and Garland Greene, transition specialist are the mentors who have made her a successful person, she says.*

Amari Harrison's favorite colors are pink and blue, but there were days when the 17-year-old only saw red. Temper outbursts brought on by her brother's death plagued her school history.

"I had built up anger released towards everyday strangers," she said, remembering the former Amari.

Harrison is all smiles two days before she returns to her home school in Humble, and "excited" is her new favorite word. Her graduation date in May is etched in her checks-and-balances along with the credits she has gained from Highpoint East, her eight-month, transitional school.

Highpoint East is Harris County Department of Education's alternative school for troubled youth. Highpoint East uses a multi-pronged approach to helping students get back on track and return to their home districts to graduate. A low student-to-teacher ratio along with a personalized plan for social and academic reform helps students become successful.

"What makes it different here are the teachers," she said. "They put a lot of effort and work into you so you can be a better person."

At Highpoint, strict rules and regulations are enforced with a point system that rewards good behavior and adherence to academics. Acquiring the social skills that many youth lack is just as important.

Each morning, buses from neighboring school districts drop off students from their middle and high schools as the school services students in grades 6-12. Districts contract to send students to this special school. Students have a history of unruliness when they arrive, but a sweep of the classrooms with 15 to 1 student-to-teacher ratios show focused students working to achieve their goals.

Harrison is a student that Highpoint transition specialist Garland Greene calls: "receptive to those whom she believes cares."

"She's a listener and is committed to being successful—the type of person that even though she makes mistakes, she knows she can turn herself around," Greene said.

Harrison points to her grandmother, Alice Scott, as her role model in life.

"I aspire to be like her," she said. "She's a two-time cancer survivor from colon and breast cancer and she's done everything for me."

The senior who wants to be a physical therapist is admittedly a survivor herself. When she walks across the stage in May at her high school in Humble ISD, she visualizes making her family happy.

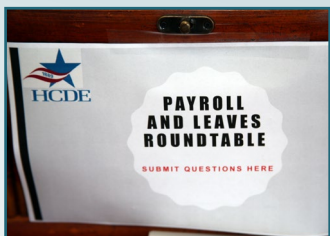
"I tell other kids to pray on it and when they have problems, go to counseling," she said. "Some things that make you mad are not worth the trouble, so just walk away."



# Opportunity

## PROGRAM CONNECTIONS

### Payroll and Leave Roundtable Discussion Sessions Give Employees Opportunities to Grow Knowledge of HCDE Procedures



HCDE administrative staff attended the Payroll and Leave Roundtable Discussion hosted by Business Services and Human Resources staff November 9. The roundtable focused on payroll, timekeeping, and leave of absences.

The workshop encouraged employees responsible for payroll and time reporting to ask questions and give input. Another workshop is set for December 5 from 9-11 a.m. for personnel who could not make the first session.



### ADVANCED TEACHING AND LEARNING BY TRAINING THE TRAINER

*Trainings hosted at HCDE this week*

#### NOVEMBER 14, 2016

HCDE Principal Certification Academy  
Information Meeting

Online Instructor's Training - Part II

Planning Digital Learning for Special  
Populations

#### NOVEMBER 15, 2016

Workstation Make and Take for Comparing  
Numbers for Grades 1 and 2

Tony Frontier's Prioritizing for Powerful  
Results: Five Levers to Improve Learning

Biology EOC: A Closer Look at the  
Mechanisms of Genetics

#### NOVEMBER 18, 2016

Charter Roundtable



# Service

## COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

### SCENES FROM THE TOUCHDOWN CLUB OF HOUSTON'S SCHOLAR ATHLETE'S LUNCHEON Superintendent Colbert, Keynote Speaker



### Tony Frontier Presents at HCDE: Improving Student Engagement and Learning



Tony Frontier, award-winning teacher, engaging presenter, and best-selling author presented for about 40 educators November 15 to help them prioritize efforts to improve student engagement and learning.

Frontier emphasizes a systems approach to build capacity to empower teachers to improve each student's school experience.

Frontier is the coauthor of "Five Levers to Improve Learning: How to Prioritize for Powerful Results in Your School. He is a frequent contributor to *Educational Leadership* and an assistant professor of doctoral leadership studies at Cardinal Stritch University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.



### Teachers "Make and Take" Workstation Activities during Math Workshop

District teachers got creative at the "Workstation Make and Take" math workshop this week. During the workshop, teachers created a variety of games and activities for students that they can take with them and place in their classroom workstations. All activities focused on comparing whole numbers using place value and number lines with comparative language.



### HCDE Opens Giving Campaign to Public, Gathers Gifts for Head Start Children

Harris County Department of Education has opened up its "Time for Toys" holiday giving campaign to community members, including individuals, companies and nonprofits. View the flier and share with friends as we begin our campaign to provide gifts for 3-5 year olds enrolled in our HCDE Head Start centers.

Flier: <http://www.hcde-texas.org/media/4346/time-for-toys-public.pdf>



# Service

## COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

### GIS Student Day at HCDE Promotes STEM Activities with Lab, Geocaching Emergency Vehicles



Students from five area high schools learned about career opportunities in geographic information systems, or GIS, through hands-on activities during Houston Area GIS Students Day on Thursday, November 17 from 10-11 a.m. at Harris County Department of Education, 6300 Irvington, Houston, Texas.

The students from DeKaney, Silsbee, Spring, Waltrip and Westfield high schools worked in a GIS lab, geocaching to find hidden objects on an outdoor treasure hunt, viewing drones, understanding how emergency vehicles use GIS, participating in a geography bee and learning about careers with GIS.

GIS is used in industries including engineering, transportation, telecommunications and business. GIS systems are used to capture, store, analyze, and manage geographical data. For instance, GIS is used to map infrastructure and transportation.

The student day, a 15-year tradition, is sponsored by Harris County Department of Education, the Houston-Galveston Area Council Geographic Data Workgroup, and TranStar. A student essay contest is also part of the annual event.



Last year a group of students from Houston Independent School District presented a project applying GIS mapping to track sex offenders within proximity to schools. Their information was fed to law enforcement.



“Applying GIS mapping to projects helps students attach the science to real-life situations and allows them to ponder career paths using GIS,” said Lisa Felske, HCDE science curriculum director.

Hosting the GIS Students Day is part of a long-term initiative to support science, technology, engineering and mathematics, or STEM activities in public schools, said Frances Watson-Hester, senior director of the Teaching and Learning Center at HCDE.

# Service

## COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

### Save the Date: Holiday Reception 2016

HCDE will host two holiday receptions for staff and Board of Trustees on December 14, from 2-3:30 p.m. at Irvington, and December 15, from 2-3:30 p.m. at North Post Oak. More details will be forthcoming, but make sure to mark your calendars!

### HCDE Recognizes Dedicated Parent Volunteers on National Parental Involvement Day



*Harris County Department of Education celebrates Head Start parent volunteer Lawrence Simmons with daughter Miosotis, 3, who is enrolled at the Sheffield Head Start Center. He regularly volunteers at his daughter's school in north Houston. National Parent Involvement Day is Nov. 17.*

Every year, National Parental Involvement Day celebrates the powerful contributions parents provide at school and home to support student success. For Harris County Department of Education Head Start parent Lawrence Simmons, volunteering is part of his daily routine.

As father of five children ranging from pre-k to high school, Simmons' work as a

school volunteer borders on a full-time job. His youngest, 3-year-old Miosotis, attends Sheffield Head Start Center and is accustomed to seeing him at her school. Simmons visits the Sheffield center almost daily to help with everything from office and clerical work to monitoring the front doors and helping teachers with classroom activities.

Additionally, he was elected as this year's Head Start Policy Council chairperson and regularly leads a group of parents and guardians that act as the parents' voice in making decisions for the program.

"I volunteer because it benefits not only my individual child, but all of the children who attend Sheffield," said Simmons. "They know there is another adult on their side and it gives them a feeling of community."

Although he is most active at the Sheffield center these days, Simmons continues to volunteer at his children's elementary and high schools as well.

"It's important to stay involved in your children's education, even after they leave elementary school."

This National Parental Involvement Day, HCDE recognizes the many dedicated parents like Simmons who volunteer their time and resources to create healthy, effective school environments for their children.

# Opportunity

## CAMPUS CONNECTIONS



### AB School East Students Participate in Mock Election

On November 4, AB School East hosted a mock election for the 2016 Presidential Election. Students completed a voter's registration card and were allowed to cast their vote on an election ballot. After casting their vote, they received an "I Voted" sticker. The mock election was a wonderful and engaging experience for AB School East students. View photos from the mock election here: <https://goo.gl/9foh8K>.



# Systemic Achievement

*...with purposeful intent*

## Community Relations

In accordance with the Board's expectations for me to

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



This week, I served as the keynote speaker at the Touchdown Club of Houston's Scholar Athlete's Luncheon. This event was held at the J.W. Marriott, Liberty Hall, located on Westheimer and was featured on the Houston Chronicle's [chron.com](http://chron.com).



Photo taken by Houston Chronicle photographer as featured on [chron.com](http://chron.com) of this year's recognized scholar athletes

The Touchdown Club of Houston is the local chapter of the National Football Foundation. It was founded in 1947 under the leadership of General Douglas MacArthur, legendary Army coach Earl



"Red" Blaik, and journalist Grantland Rice. It operates programs designed to use the power of amateur football in developing scholarship, citizenship, and athletic achievement in young people.

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By participating in and representing HCDE at both of these events, I am working towards achieving the Board's goal for me to present a positive and professional image of the Department in all venues—community, political, educational, business, and Board; maintain visibility and involvement in the community with ISD superintendents, elected officials, community leaders, and the HCDE Board; and be open to ideas and needs, listen and accept criticism, and be willing to seek counsel when necessary.

Additionally, it allows me to ensure that we communicate the needs and accomplishments of the Department in a variety of formats: through written reports, communication with the media, community, school districts, political arenas, and public meetings as we represent HCDE by attendance at events and through speaking opportunities.

## HCDE BOARD

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Diane Trautman  
**Position 3, At Large**

Michael Wolfe  
**Position 5, At Large**

## UPCOMING BOARD EVENTS:

**December Board Meeting**  
**December 13, 2016**  
1:00 p.m.  
Room 400

