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FROM THE OFFICE OF JAMES COLBERT, JR.—SUPERINTENDENT

## Of Note...

I am pleased to report that we have concluded the budget hearing phase of our budget planning process for the 2017-2018 fiscal year. Leaders from each of our divisions and programs presented to the Budget Committee a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analyses, as well as respective budget projections for next fiscal year. Our annual budget hearing process proves to be effective and it ensures an efficient budget model. I look forward to presenting to the Board a fully-vetted budget, consistent with our priorities, mission, and goals.

I began this week with a meeting of my Executive Leadership Team followed by the series of final budget hearing sessions as well as the regularly scheduled meeting of the Board of Trustees. I am both pleased and excited about the Board's passing of the item related to the Department moving forward with the Recovery School project. This endeavor will transform the lives of students struggling with addictions and we look forward to excelling in this life-changing academic program to even better serve learners in Harris County. To that end, an article regarding this milestone in public education appeared on the front page of yesterday's Houston Chronicle newspaper.

As mentioned in the last two issues of **The Connector**, I am joining my Superintendent colleagues for this year's Focal Point professional development opportunity at the United States Army War College at Antietam. I will be providing you with a summary of the training we received, and moreover, I look forward to utilizing the new leadership skills as I advance the leadership of the Department.

Tomorrow and next Saturday, April 29, 2017, we expect about 1,000 young robotics enthusiasts in grades 4-8 throughout greater

Harris County for the All-Earth Ecobot Challenge. Tomorrow's event will be held at the Berry Center from 8:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. and next week's event will take place at the Humble Civic Center during the same time. While your attendance is not required, you are certainly invited to attend.

This week in the area of teaching and learning, the Department hosted the following trainings, meetings, and workshops for educators, therapists, and other education professionals in Harris County: Music Therapy Leadership Group Meeting; Educator Certification and Professional Advancement Career Choice Recruitment Seminar; Youth Mental Health First Aid; TExES BTLPT Exam Test Prep Series; Great Explorations in Math and Science (GEMS): Treasure Boxes/Hide A Butterfly; Math Institute—Aligning the New Pre-k Guidelines to the TEKS for Grades Pre-k and kindergarten; Cyberbullying; Charter School Roundtable; and finally, STAAR: A Vertical Alignment Look at RC3 for Grades 3-4, and 6-7. Harris County Department of Education continues to be one source for all learners in Harris County.

Looking ahead, next week I will continue my meetings with education leaders of Harris County as we work to keep HCDE in the forefront of public education in our ongoing charge to equalize opportunities and continue the advancement of teaching and learning.

In closing, I hope you enjoy this issue of **The Connector** and I hope you have a relaxing weekend.

**Upcoming Event:**  
**Board Meeting**  
Tuesday, May 16, 2017

# Opportunity

## PROGRAM CONNECTIONS

### HCDE Director Joins Deborah Duncan's Televised Education Panel, Sits Next to Fonzie



Darlene Breaux, curriculum director for special populations at HCDE's Teaching and Learning Center, appeared on KHOU-Channel 11's Great Day Houston program on April 28. The popular morning show is hosted by Deborah Duncan.

Breaux joined guest Henry Winkler, actor and children's book author, to talk about dyslexia and other learning differences. Winkler is best known for playing Arthur "The Fonz" Fonzarelli on the 1970s sitcom Happy Days, but since 2003 he has co-authored a series of children's books that feature a main character with dyslexia – a fourth-grader named Hank Zipzer.



Both Breaux and Winkler shared stories about growing up with dyslexia and how many of their teachers misunderstood them. They both managed to overcome isolation and stigma to achieve both academic and professional success.

"I was a tube of toothpaste in the school play, and I had one line that I couldn't remember," Winkler said of his early difficulties with dyslexia, adding that he learned to improvise to get around his challenges with reading.

"Dyslexia is hereditary," Breaux said, explaining that her father's dyslexia prevented him from advancing beyond the third grade. On air, she told a story about how her father took an active role in helping her achieve her goal of going to college. Breaux now has a Master's degree and is pursuing doctorate studies of dyslexia.

### ADVANCED TEACHING AND LEARNING BY TRAINING THE TRAINER

*Trainings hosted at HCDE this week*

**APRIL 18, 2017**

Music Therapy Leadership Group (MTLG)

Educator Certification and Professional Advancement Career Choice Recruitment Seminar

Youth Mental Health First Aid

TEXES BTLPT Exam Test Prep Series

**APRIL 19, 2017**

Great Explorations in Math and Science (GEMS): Treasure Boxes/ Hide A Butterfly (6 hours G/T update)

Math Institute - Aligning the New Pre-K Guidelines to the TEKS (Gr Pre-K and K)

Cyberbullying

**APRIL 20, 2017**

Charter Roundtable

**APRIL 20, 2017**

STAAR: A Vertical Alignment Look at RC3 (Grades 3-4, 6-7)

# Opportunity

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### HCDE Spotlight: Employee Ross Daniel Collaborates with Community to Benefit Head Start Students



As a mother of four daughters, grandmother of two and manager of the Head Start Compton Center, Mervonna Ross-Daniel is no stranger to a busy schedule. Since the Compton Head Start program is housed in the Compton Community Center in northeast Houston, Ross-Daniel has the unique experience

of collaborating with city employees and local seniors who attend programs at the community center, in addition to managing her 25 employees and 131 students.

“I enjoy collaborating with the community center to ensure our families are getting a positive, engaging, and effective learning environment for their students,” says Ross-Daniel.

Some of the ways the community center gets involved with Head Start is through the garden program and field day. Local seniors at the community center read to Compton students and assist with their four on-site gardens. Since staff of Tidwell Park are located in the Compton Community Center, the students participate in a field and game day with assistance from the recreation staff providing engagement and involvement from the community.

“I believe the more involvement, love, support, and guidance a child receives, the more likely they are to be successful in life,” says Ross-Daniel. “That’s what we provide at Compton.”

Ross-Daniel first found her calling for Head Start while taking classes at San Jacinto College North. Her Child

Development professor informed her of an upcoming Head Start Job Fair, and since 2001 she has been making a daily impact on children and families in the Head Start program.

Throughout her career, she has served as a teaching assistant, teacher, assistant center manager, and center manager at multiple Head Start centers. She has been center manager at Compton since July 2015.

Even though Ross-Daniel isn’t in the classroom full-time anymore, she loves being able to interact with the students on a daily basis. She considers herself blessed to see the development of students in the Head Start program and contribute to their growth. She recalls a young girl, 3, who began the 2015-16 school year unable to speak.

“When she first came to the program, she was not vocal and would only point to things in the classroom,” Ross-Daniel recalls. “With the help of our Compton teachers, she is now saying words and interacting with other children and staff.”

Collaborating with multiple organizations within the community center can be a tiresome job, but Ross-Daniel has a strong support system to lean on. As a mother and grandmother, she spends her downtime with family doing activities they enjoy such as camping, shopping, and participating in Girl Scouts.

# Opportunity

## PROGRAM CONNECTIONS

### Laura Sprehe Joins Choice Partners as Food Contract Coordinator



HCDE's purchasing cooperative recently welcomed a new member to its team. Laura Sprehe, who previously worked as a registered dietitian for Aldine ISD, joined Choice Partners as its new food contract coordinator.

Sprehe earned a bachelor's degree in nutritional science from Oklahoma State University and a master's degree in management, policy, and community health practice from the University of Texas School of Public Health.

Her new role has her working closely with Trisha Jensen, assistant director, Choice Partners. More than 85 million school lunches are served annually with the help of Choice Partners' food program.

### Supply Catalog Rollout Unveils More than 1,100 Discounted Items to Member Schools



To launch its 2017-2018 Supply Catalog, Choice Partners hosted a special rollout event on April 13, inviting vendors with awarded contracts for supplies to network with member school districts and other entities.

At HCDE's Westview location, vendors who have been awarded contracts for art supplies, athletic supplies, office supplies, and more

helped procurement professionals learn how they can purchase supplies using the catalog. The annual supply catalog, which now exists almost entirely online, offers more than 1,100 hard bid line items, providing members with best pricing and an easier-to-use procurement process.

Butler Business Products, Buckeye International, and NAO Global Health were among the vendors who exhibited at the rollout event.



# Opportunity

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### Harris County Department of Education Board Approves Plans for First Public Recovery School in Harris County



HCDE Board of Trustees voted 4-0 on April 18 to approve the budgeting and implementation of a recovery high school, the first public Harris County substance-use

prevention high school. The Texas Education Agency has reported that in a given year, there are over 11,000 Harris County students that have had drug offense issues, per TEA Disciplinary Data Products.

The school will be available to all 25 school districts in Harris County on a contractual basis, and will serve 30 students as it is opened with a target date of September 2017. HCDE will renovate a 20,000-square-foot HCDE school facility located in the Greenspoint area in north Houston at 11902 Spears Road. The HCDE Board of Trustees approved \$950,000 in start-up funding for the project.

“It’s a good thing we are doing this because it’s a chance to help students in a revolutionary way,” said HCDE Board Vice President Eric Dick. “I had a troubled youth and am glad to be a solution to the problem.”

The goal of the recovery high school is to provide support and assistance to students after successful completion of a rehabilitation program. Students continue to receive counseling and support as they attend their school.

A low student-to-teacher ratio will be implemented as the school provides an academic curriculum along with life skills and recovery coaching. Staff at the school will include teachers, recovery coaches, and counselors. The school will accept students from all areas of Harris County.

“We recognize those who struggle each day in the fight against addiction—the students, parents, teachers, and community,” said Harris County School Superintendent James Colbert, Jr. “This school represents a big step in recovery for students in Harris County.”

# Opportunity

## CAMPUS CONNECTIONS



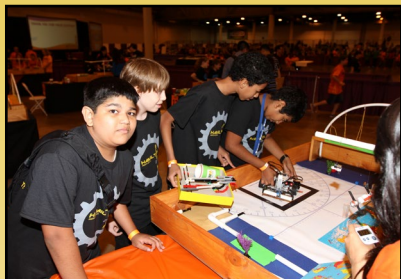
### AB School West Celebrates with Annual Spring Festival

Academic and Behavior School West students participated in the annual Spring Festival last week with an Easter egg hunt to kick off the long holiday weekend. Students carried colorful baskets in search of carefully hidden eggs. This accomplished a sense of friendly competition as well as comradery in the spirit of friendship and community as peers helped one another.

# Service

## COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

### 1,000 Robotics Enthusiasts Expected for Ecobot April 22 and 29 at Two Venues



More than 1,000 young robotics enthusiasts in grades 4-8 throughout greater Harris County come together for the 9th annual All-Earth Ecobot Challenge on two consecutive Saturdays,

April 22 and 29 from 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Their challenges include maritime missions, vaccine development, flood control, and forest firefighting.

#### What:

All Earth Ecobot Challenge supports robotics for more than 1,000 area students

#### Who/When/Where:

**April 22, 8 a.m.-noon and 1-5 p.m.**, 6th-8th graders, Berry Center, 8877 Barker Cypress Rd., Cypress, TX 77433

**April 29, 8 a.m.-noon and 1-5 p.m.**, 4th-5th graders, Humble Civic Center, 8233 Will Clayton Parkway, Humble, TX 77338

The All-Earth Ecobot Challenge is coordinated by the Education Foundation of Harris County and the Center for Afterschool, Summer and Enrichment for Kids, or CASE for Kids, a division of Harris County Department of Education.

The challenge is one of the largest robotics events for students in Texas and has touched the lives of 6,000 students since its inception.

The students work on their robotics challenges using the Lego Mindstorm kits in their afterschool programs and through community organizations.

“These children are our future programmers, scientists, and forward-thinking leaders of the next generation,” said James Colbert, Jr., HCDE superintendent. “We are teaching teamwork and higher-level thinking skills like problem-solving. Along the way, these youth meet corporate mentors who are volunteers and sponsors.”

Robotics has become a mainstay as a youth hobby, just like cheerleading, soccer, or chess. Robotics is also embedded into careers as companies look for new talent and lend support to future young engineers.

Corporate sponsors include Amec Foster Wheeler, Oceaneering, and CenterPoint Energy. Foundation sponsors include Brown Foundation, the Houston Foundation and Houston Super Bowl Host Committee & National Football League Foundation. Presenting sponsors are the Education Foundation of Harris County, CASE for Kids and HCDE.



### Early Childhood Educators Attend HCDE Math Institute

Early childhood educators attended HCDE’s two-day Math Institute this week to gain high-quality, age-appropriate math instruction. Participants explored the vertical alignment between the new pre-k guidelines and the kindergarten math TEKS, engaged in a variety of manipulative-based math lessons, experienced centers and small group lessons, and learned to incorporate instructional strategies from various leaders in early childhood mathematics.

# Systemic Achievement

*...with purposeful intent*

## Board Spotlight



This week, at the regularly scheduled April Board Meeting, the HCDE Board of Trustees made a giant leap forward in education as they passed a 4-0 vote to approve the budgeting and implementation of a recovery high school, the first public school of its kind in Harris County.

The Board is to be commended for approving such an important and life-changing action item that will save lives and benefit learners of Harris County. By taking this action, it allows the Department to continue

its original mission to equalize education opportunities.

We look forward to renovating the existing High Point School-North location to accommodate this innovative endeavor. The Board's approval of \$950,000 in start-up funding speaks to its commitment to make lives better for all students.

**It is an honor to recognize the HCDE Board of Trustees in this week's Systemic Achievement section of *The Connector* newsletter.**

## HCDE BOARD

### *Board President*

Louis Evans, III  
*Position 4, Precinct 3*

### *Vice President*

Eric Dick  
*Position 2, Precinct 4*

Erica Lee Carter  
*Position 6, Precinct 1*

George Moore  
*Position 1, Precinct 2*

Don Summers  
*Position 7, At Large*

Diane Trautman  
*Position 3, At Large*

Michael Wolfe  
*Position 5, At Large*

## **UPCOMING BOARD EVENT:**

**Board Meeting**  
Tuesday, May 16, 2017

