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FROM THE OFFICE OF JAMES COLBERT, JR.—SUPERINTENDENT

Of Note...

It's been a busy week at HCDE! First off, in recognition of Teacher Appreciation Week, I extend sincere appreciation to teachers, not only at Harris County Department of Education, but also across Harris County, as they educate learners of all ages to become the leaders of tomorrow.

This past Monday, I began with a meeting of my Executive Leadership Team followed by a visit to the Highpoint North campus. Campus operations were smooth and in order. Students at most of our campuses were in testing this week and administrators and faculty alike, on all of our campuses are bringing this school year to a close.

I facilitated our monthly Leadership Team this past Tuesday with the leaders of all of our divisions as well as our campus principals. Our division directors reported pertinent information to the whole and they, too, are deeply engrossed in the close-out of both the academic and fiscal years. Agenda Review for the May Board Meeting took place yesterday in preparation for the meeting set for May 16.

Today, HCDE's Area I Head Start division is co-hosting the Healthy Minds Healthy Families Conference where nearly 300 attendees are participating in this annual event in partnership with the HOGG Foundation. This event provides training to parents, educators, and other professionals working with children who exhibit challenging behaviors, and increases awareness of mental health issues in early childhood.

This evening, at 6:30 p.m., I will serve as the keynote speaker for the graduation ceremony for the Lonestar College-Kingwood campus/University of Houston-Downtown (UHD) Joint Admissions Program for Teachers. This year's event marks the program's 8th annual graduation. I am honored to have been asked by HCDE

Board President Louis Evans, III, to be part of this occasion.

Next week, the Academic and Behavior Schools will host their first Chess Tournament. I look forward to participating in the tournament with our students, and as a result, I've been brushing up on my chess strategy skills. This event is the first of its kind within our Schools division and we are excited to bring this experience to the students on the AB campuses.

Also, next week, I will continue my SuperMENTor volunteer efforts as part of Head Start's initiative to involve strong male role models in the lives of young learners. I encourage support of this worthwhile program.

I am pleased to report that I have completed the year-long Fellows program with the American Leadership Forum. As you may recall, over the last year, I have fulfilled numerous commitments towards this achievement. I was recently inducted as an official fellow of this program that promotes systemic leadership from a broad cross-section of professionals from various segments of the community. I am proud to have accomplished this significant goal within the professional development realm.

In closing, please be reminded of the regularly scheduled May Board Meeting which will take place at 9:00 a.m., Tuesday, May 16, 2017.

As always, thank you for your service to HCDE. 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

500 Fourth, Fifth Graders Arrive in Humble Civic Center for April 29 Ecobot Challenge 2017



Teams of fourth and fifth graders throughout Harris County turned out in a force of 500 at the All-Earth Ecobot Challenge April 29. The event held at the Humble Civic Center was hosted by the Harris County Department of Education's Center for Afterschool, Summer and Enrichment, or CASE for Kids, and the Education Foundation of Harris County. The annual competition gathered the pre-teens for an environmental-themed robotics challenge. Many of the teens were enrolled in CASE for Kids afterschool programs while others came from schools and community organizations throughout greater Houston.

Demonstrations and hands-on experiment stations gave the youth a closer look at potential STEM professions and local environmental and government agencies



throughout the county such as the Port of Houston. Included was a robot from the Harris County Sheriff's Office bomb unit, physics, and chemistry stations. The event culminated with awards, a celebratory dance, and a riddle challenge.



View coverage from

Fox 26: <https://youtu.be/oEfiXHJ5TjI>

View coverage from Univision 45: <https://youtu.be/RcR0yaL5At0>



Ice Cream Sandwich Social Held on April 27, 28

HCDE employees at North Post Oak and Irvington enjoyed ice cream sandwiches and conversation as the week wound down last Thursday, April 27 and Friday, April 28. The meet-and-greet socials are held monthly and are organized by Human Resources.

Opportunity

PROGRAM CONNECTIONS

Head Start Grandparent Finds Support System at La Porte Center



HCDE's Head Start program goes beyond early education and provides families with the additional health, nutrition, and financial support they need to thrive. As the grandparent and guardian to 4-year-old Rayne, Amanda Kastl is one of many whose life was changed through Head Start services.

Kastl gained custody of Rayne when she was only 5 months old. During that time, Kastl was also taking care of her sick father while her husband was undergoing chemotherapy. For much of that time, Kastl wasn't able to work and became isolated.

When Rayne turned 3, Kastl enrolled her at the La Porte Head Start Center, remembering her daughter attended the program many years ago.

"At that point, I was basically a recluse. The Head Start staff got me back on my feet and gave me the opportunity to get involved with the parent committee and Policy Council to give back where I could," said Kastl.

Through encouragement from the staff, Kastl became an active volunteer at the center and helped in classrooms, worked in the school's garden and secured donations from area businesses for family activities. She was also integral in creating a safer experience for La Porte students while at school.

After recognizing that the small, two-lane road in front of the center was unsafe for families to drop off and pick up students, she worked with city officials to install school zone and "No Parking" signs, and convert the road to

a one-way thoroughfare to decrease hazardous traffic.

After a year at the center, Kastl lost her mother, two brothers and niece. She was still involved at the center, so the La Porte staff became a support system and helped her through her most challenging times. They even guided her through the steps to get her Texas Realtor's license when she was struggling emotionally.

"I was maxed out emotionally," said Kastl, "but the family service providers at La Porte helped me set goals, stay on track, and provided support when I needed it most."

Kastl now works as a realtor full-time, but still finds time to volunteer and show how grateful she is for the center that made it all possible.

"Head Start services literally saved our lives," Kastl explained. "When Rayne came here she gained socialization skills, she's learning to read, write, and count, and she knows how to interact with others. I was also able to get involved in the community again."

Kastl added that although every family won't go through the same experiences she did, every family can benefit from the stability, nutrition, early education, and caring support Head Start provides.

"I believe if you touch a child's life at an early age like this Head Start does, it will make a difference later on."



Opportunity

PROGRAM CONNECTIONS

Teacher Appreciation: Retired Lawyer Hubacker Finds Second Career Teaching ESL to Adult Students at Harris County Department of Education



English as a second language teacher Harriet Hubacker found her second calling 20 years ago after retiring as a

lawyer. Realizing she wasn't ready for retirement, she returned to school for her linguistics degree with a goal to teach adult learners. On May 3, 2017, the Harris County Department of Education teacher received a bundle of bright flowers and a huge thank-you balloon from her 30 students.

These are the moments teachers live for and remember forever.

Homemade cards of thanks tell the story of student gratitude. Her students knew few words in English before entering her classroom in the Spring Branch Community Center. Those once-foreign words are made familiar with each lesson. Slowly the words flow and sentences are formed, with subject-verb transition still a little unpolished.

"Been best teacher," said one card crafted by an older learner. "Teach me English and been patient," said another from student Fabiola Quintanilla. Other messages included "love my teacher" and "I am learning English."

A second surprise came as Telemundo 47 reporter/anchor Antonio Hernandez visited the classroom to televise the story



about the students' appreciation for their teacher.

"I don't know where you are at right now, but I know where you can be," Hernandez said, relating a story of his struggles earlier in life.

"I don't know what your past is, but your future starts today," said Hernandez, "Come to school, learn a lot, and read everything. The more you learn, the better your life can be, and it starts right here."

Opportunity

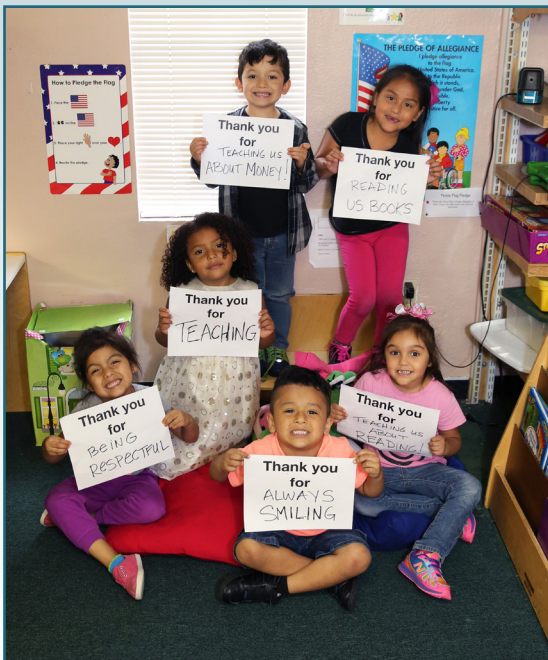
PROGRAM CONNECTIONS

Schools Celebrate Teacher Appreciation Week



Schools celebrated Teacher Appreciation Week with breakfasts, lunches, flowers, sweets, and plenty of hugs and words of appreciation for Teacher Appreciation 2017. We thank the teachers that shape the lives of students in Harris County. HCDE celebrated our teachers throughout the week through social media. The universal hashtag this year is #thankateacher.

Schools Celebrate Teacher Appreciation Week



In celebration of Teacher Appreciation Week, students at HCDE's Coolwood Head Start Center participated in a writing project to show their gratitude their teachers, Ms. Jackson and Ms. Madrigal.

After learning the word "appreciation," the students shared ideas for how to fill in the blank, "Thank you for _____." Answers included: "Thank you for being respectful," "Thank you for reading us books," and "Thank you for always smiling."

With some assistance with the writing, the students then posed for pictures. Photos will be shared on HCDE's Facebook and Twitter pages.

Service

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

CASE for Kids Celebrates End-of-Year with Spirit of Excellence Awards



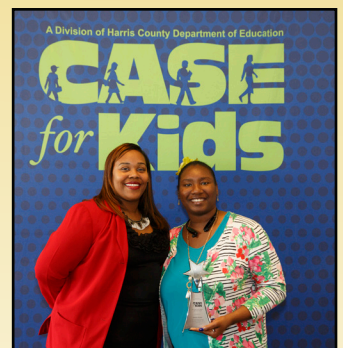
Nearly 100 afterschool professionals attended the end-of-year celebration hosted by HCDE's CASE for Kids division on May 3. The Spirit of

Excellence Afterschool Awards and Recognition Luncheon recognized the outstanding programs, site coordinators, and community partners who strive to provide quality out-of-school time activities for students.



During the event, participants heard

afterschool highlights from CASE for Kids Director Dr. Lisa Thompson-Caruthers and saw an exciting performance from the Bayou City Fencing Academy. Selected programs and individuals also received Spirit of Excellence Awards for their afterschool work. The HCDE CASE for Kids division received the Afterschool Champion Award presented by the Education Foundation of Harris County.



Nearly 300 Attend Head Start Healthy Minds Healthy Families Conference

Nearly 300 parents, caretakers, educators, and others involved in early childhood education attended the Healthy Minds Healthy Families Conference on May 5 presented by HCDE Head Start and the HOGG Foundation of Mental Health. The conference provided training to parents, educators, and other professionals working with children with challenging behaviors, and increased the awareness of mental health issues in early childhood.

Training sessions with health professionals and others who work with children with mental health issues covered subjects like growing up with autism, domestic violence, transforming the challenging child, mental health, and suicide prevention for children and teens.

Service

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

HCDE Ecobot Challenge Inspires Next Generation of Female Engineers



Each year, more than 1,000 Harris County students participate in the HCDE All-Earth Ecobot Challenge to show off their STEM skills in an environmental-themed robotics

challenge. Noticeable this year was the number of all-female engineering teams in the competition. At a time when women are still underrepresented in the science and engineering workforce, programs like the Ecobot Challenge seek to inspire all students to explore STEM fields.

For many of the girls at this year's event, the challenge was their first taste of engineering. Many were already interested in math and science, but through this challenge they were able to develop their skills in engineering, programming, and leadership. Humble ISD 4th grader Courtney Daniel explained how she and her team honed a variety of skills during the challenge.

"For engineering, you need to have great math and science skills, and for Ecobot you need to have time management skills, be confident in yourself, and be creative," said Daniel.

The challenge also requires teams to be flexible and find different ways of solving problems. This is important for students to learn early on because encountering obstacles and challenging problems is in the nature of work in STEM fields. Daniel appreciates that through the Ecobot Challenge, girls can experiment with their skills in a fun, safe environment.

"This is an event for children that is really fun, so if you make a mistake, it's okay," said Daniel.

Baylor College of Medicine Academy (BCMA) Robotics Teacher and long-time Ecobot volunteer, Misty Kirkland, believes in addition to inspiring young girls to continue in STEM fields, the annual challenge shows students what they're capable of and strengthens their skills.

In her Computer Science Concepts course, she watched one of her female Ecobot teams, the Dream Girls, figure out their strengths and use them to their advantage.

"Once they saw what they were capable of, their team melded," said Kirkland. "One realized she was best at programming, while another became the team leader and kept the group organized and on track."

The Dream Girls, made up of eighth graders Nadia Sadler, Ja'Coria Dean, Serena Hammond, and Clareka Bailey, placed second overall during the 6-8 grade challenge.

"I think more girls should try engineering. Don't second guess yourself and underestimate your abilities," said Sadler, the team's leader. "You can do anything you put your mind to."

The annual All-Earth Ecobot Challenge is hosted by the Harris County Department of Education's Center for Afterschool, Summer and Enrichment, or CASE for Kids, and the Education Foundation of Harris County. To learn more about this event, visit <http://www.ecobotchallenge.com/>.

Opportunity

CAMPUS CONNECTIONS

TLC Director Andrea Segraves Shares Tips for Healthful Sleep



Every teacher has had the experience of leading an engaging, standards-aligned lesson only to look over and see little Johnny's eyes closing

or Jane's head flat on her desk. How can they learn if they're not getting the right amount of sleep at home? Getting a good night's sleep is important at any time of the year, but it's especially critical when students are testing. Brains need to be at optimum condition to net the best scores.

Carl Hunt and James B. Maas, of the National Center on Sleep Disorders Research (NCSDR), offer the following tips for how to get a healthful night's sleep. Principals, teachers, parents, students and all school staff should all wake up and listen!

1. Establish a reasonable bedtime. Most elementary school children should be going to bed by 9 p.m. Some children who require more sleep might need to hit the hay earlier.
2. Avoid caffeinated beverages and foods high in sugar in the late afternoon and evening. This may be obvious to some, but withholding sugar and caffeine from kids can also lead to other health benefits.
3. Allow plenty of time to wind down before bed. Children should not be bringing their smartphones or tablets to bed with them. They need about an hour of down time to prepare to fall asleep. Such relaxing activities as taking a bath or reading a story can help children fall asleep more easily.

Andrea Segraves, director, HCDE's Teaching and Learning Center, contributed this post for HCDE's news blog. To read other articles like it, go to blog.hcde-texas.org



ECPA to Partner with Spring ISD

Last month, Lidia Zatopek, director, Educator Certification and Professional Advancement (ECPA), met with Spring ISD Executive Director for Elementary Curriculum Christina Richardson to discuss partnership opportunities to help prepare Spring ISD teachers for state certification exams. The district reached out to ECPA for its assistance in developing a way to help teachers pass their certification exams and maintain employment. ECPA will provide a series of customized test prep sessions to meet Spring ISD's demands.

Systemic Achievement

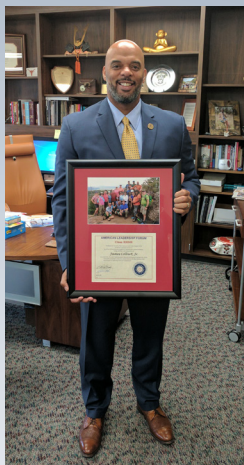
...with purposeful intent

Professional Growth and Development

In an effort to meet the Board's expectations of me to achieve the element of performance related to this goal to:

- **Stay abreast of developments in educational leadership and administration**

Over the last year, I have participated in the American Leadership Forum. I recently completed that program as one of its fellows.



The American Leadership Forum joins and strengthens diverse leaders to serve the common good. This occurs through an intense year-long program that fosters learning and trust among experienced leaders from every sector of the community. The result is a unique forum where barriers between people are removed, issues

are openly discussed, and solutions emerge that benefit the entire community.

The American Leadership Forum was founded in Houston in 1981 by Joseph Jaworski to address what he viewed as a crisis of leadership taking place throughout the country. The Houston/Gulf Coast Chapter was established as a separate entity in 1989 and is now one of nine chapters. The American Leadership Forum is a nonprofit organization with a volunteer Board. To date, ALF has graduated thirty-six Core classes and sixteen single sector Fellows classes – five in health care, four in public education, five in criminal justice, and two in community development.

Having participated in and completed the ALF professional development experience, I am striving to meet the Board's expectation of me to assess development tools available and apply the various leadership tools in my daily leadership of HCDE.

HCDE BOARD

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UPCOMING BOARD EVENT:

Board Meeting

Tuesday, May 16, 2017

