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FROM THE OFFICE OF JAMES COLBERT, JR.—SUPERINTENDENT

## Of Note...

I am pleased to report that this year's Raymond T. Garcia Early Childhood Winter Conference was yet, again, a success. The event, held at Kingdom Builders' Center, was well-attended by hundreds of teachers and administrators in education. I had the honor of welcoming the attendees, along with former HCDE Board President Ray T. Garcia. The keynote speaker was very engaging and offered varying perspectives and alternatives that have been proven successful when employed in the early childhood environment. Hats off to the Teaching and Learning Center staff for a job well done!

Last Friday, I was invited to attend a meeting with an impressive core group of individuals who have formed an initiative, Good Reason Houston, an offspring of Early Matters. I was asked to serve as a member of its 2018 Leadership Council. While still in its infancy stages, I was asked to be at the table, representing HCDE, to help fulfill the mission and guide the work of this group.

The primary goal of this entity is to improve early education, K-12 instruction, workforce preparation, and higher education options for every child to ensure that Houston is a world-class city and a national model for equity. Other council leaders include Judge Ed Emmett and his wife Mrs. Gwen Emmett. The Board of Directors providing oversight to the entity include Nancy Kinder (Kinder Foundation President); Scott McClelland (HEB President); and Lisa Hall (Houston Endowment Vice-President) among other successful, notable Houstonians. I am excited to have been selected to serve with these individuals who have a passion for early education, and I will keep you posted on our progress.

Over the weekend, I traveled to Austin for the 2018 TASA/TASB Mid-Winter Conference. The conference was certainly worthwhile and HCDE was well-represented by various divisions. It was

another opportunity to increase our visibility within the education landscape. The conference concluded Wednesday, and I returned to the office yesterday. Today, I attended the Education Foundation's regularly-scheduled Board Meeting.

Looking ahead into next week, it will be an eventful one. I will begin with a meeting of my Executive Leadership Team followed by the regularly-scheduled IMPACT Meeting, which will be held at HCDE. I will meet with the Leadership Team on Tuesday as well. Meanwhile, our Area I Head Start division will begin its Federal Review process next week, so that division, and the divisions that offer support to Head Start, will be diligently working in symphony with the Federal Review team. I also look forward to continuing my service as a SuperMENTor on Thursday.

Additionally, all week long, HCDE will be hosting a State Department Media Consultant, along with a group of journalists from Estonia. The purpose of the visit is to produce a series of stories for Estonia's ETV and Radio4 on the topic—"Out of Many, One"—related to integrating immigrants into U.S. society. I will be interviewed, along with a group of other HCDE representatives and other leaders in education across the city.

In closing, and as always, I appreciate your service to HCDE. I hope you enjoy this issue of **The Connector**. Have a relaxing weekend.

### UPCOMING EVENTS:

**Wednesday, February 28, 2018**

- Board Meeting

# Opportunity

## PROGRAM CONNECTIONS

### Hundreds of Educators Benefit from Early Childhood Winter Conference

More than 800 early childhood educators gathered at the Kingdom Builders' Center on Saturday, Jan. 27 to learn from experts in the early education field at the 31st Annual R.T. Garcia Early Childhood Winter Conference.

In addition to hearing keynote speaker Becky Bailey and choosing from more than 80 engaging breakout sessions, attendees were welcomed by HCDE Superintendent James Colbert, Jr. and conference namesake and retired HCDE Board President Raymond T. Garcia. During his opening remarks, Garcia said he continues to learn more about the value of early childhood education each time he attends the conference.

Traditionally, the conference serves teachers of grades pre-k through second grade, but this year a new birth-to-age 3 learning track benefited teachers of the earliest learners.

Sandra Sandoval, a retired teacher from Galena Park ISD, has been attending and presenting at the Early Childhood Winter Conference since it began more than 30 years ago. She created a training program for early childhood educators in Galena Park ISD through the knowledge and skills she gained at the conference, and still finds it to be engaging and helpful for educators.

To view photos from the Early Childhood Winter Conference, visit <https://goo.gl/h8Hmw8> (download: [hcde1889](https://goo.gl/h8Hmw8)).



# Opportunity

## PROGRAM CONNECTIONS

### Teaching and Learning Center Hosts Online Science Workshops



Lisa Felske, science curriculum director with the Teaching and Learning Center, is hosting an online science workshop series called “Science Fiction,” for educators who want professional development without leaving their classroom. The Science Fiction workshops are self-paced, video-based workshops teachers can access on their desktops, tablets or even phones. The two courses currently available are Teaching Chemistry with Children’s Literature and Teaching Physics with Children’s Literature.

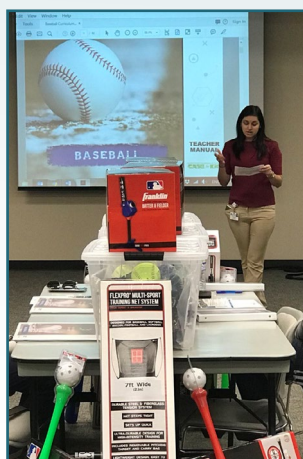
View the flyer for more information: <http://www.hcde-texas.org/media/5174/sci-fi-flyer-cmyk.pdf>



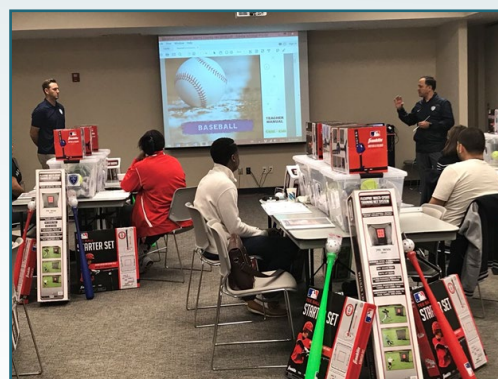
### Technology Division Launches TechBox for Employees

This week the HCDE Technology division launched TechBox, a one-stop shop for employee technology resources. The internal site is located in the employee portal and features helpful technology tips, resources, a TechBox tutorial video and more. Employees can also find training tools, a section for reporting issues and tracking current tickets, and articles on trends in technology.

### CASE for Kids Trains Teachers in Science of Sports



CASE for Kids held training on Jan. 24 to prepare teachers for the Kids’ Day Science of Sports event which is planned for April 2018. The training covered ways that teachers can integrate STEM in sports activities, such as measuring strike zones in baseball. Participants left with a full curriculum to teach students in their afterschool programs.



# Opportunity

## PROGRAM CONNECTIONS

### 2nd Annual Chess Tournament set for March 28 at Irvington



Students at both AB East and West are preparing for the 2nd Annual Chess Tournament scheduled for March 28, from 9:30 a.m.-2:00 p.m., at Harris County Department of Education in rooms 100 A-B.

Skills from chess help our students with skills in social-emotional learning, and critical thinking. Last year Superintendent Colbert joined several students in the game of strategy.



### Head Start Interview Fair Attracts More than 100 Applicants

More than 100 individuals attended the HCDE Head Start Interview Fair on Saturday, Jan. 27. Fifty applicants pre-scheduled their interviews for Saturday and 56 were walk-ins. Head Start held the fair to recruit and hire Early Head Start/Head Start teachers, teaching assistants, family services providers and cooks. Through the Interview Fair, Head Start is expected to fill a significant number of vacancies with high quality candidates.



To view photos from the Interview Fair, visit <https://goo.gl/og4NcC>.

# Service

## COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

### Regional Scholastic Art & Writing Winners Chosen as American Visions, Voices Nominees



Among the 1,696 Regional Scholastic Art & Writing Awards announced last week are 10 teen artists and writers who stood out as American Voices and American Visions Nominees.

Each year, the 10 “best of show” awardees (five artists and five writers) are chosen as American Voices and American Visions

Nominees to be judged nationally. Two of those students, one artist and one writer, will be named national medalists in late March. This year’s nominees are:

American Visions: Kara Alker, Cypress Wood High School, Cy-Fair ISD; Lillian Hogan, Kingwood Park High School, Humble ISD; Amy Vaclavik, Taylor High School, Katy ISD; Christina Zhou, Tompkins High School, Katy ISD; and Emilio Recio, Rayburn High School, Pasadena ISD.



American Voices: Emma Bennett, High School for the Performing and Visual Arts, Houston ISD; Cora Wen, Carnegie Vanguard High School, Houston ISD; William Sharpe, Krimmel Intermediate School, Klein ISD; Noah Rubinson, Kinkaid School; and Sophia Sutter, St. Agnes Academy.

For more information about the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards, visit [www.hcde-texas.org/scholastic](http://www.hcde-texas.org/scholastic).

### ADVANCED TEACHING AND LEARNING BY TRAINING THE TRAINER

**JANUARY 30, 2018**

STAAR Academy Grade 8:  
A Closer Look at STAAR  
Reporting Categories

**FEBRUARY 1, 2018**

World History for Us All

Map It: Connecting Early  
Literacy Skills with Content

**FEBRUARY 2, 2018**

Out-of-School Time Winter  
Symposium



# Service

## COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

### HCDE's CASE Debates Prompts Critical Thinking, Constructive Argument Among Teens in Harris County Schools



High school seniors Diego Colindres and Syed Fatmi both joined CASE Debates for the appeal of crafting an argument with their peers. Colindres' debate format in a team of five called "World Schools"

is impromptu. Fatmi's style with one teammate is formal and defined as "Policy" debate.

Teen debate in Houston is blossoming through a new project called "CASE Debates" which pairs a successful, established debate model created by the Houston Urban Debate League, or HUDL, with Harris County Department of Education's afterschool intermediary which serves 9,000 youth in Harris County, the Center for Afterschool, Summer and Enrichment for Kids, or CASE for Kids.

"Having debate as an activity is an access point where multiple campuses have the same interest, allowing us to bring together teens from multiple districts under one content area," said Lisa Thompson-Caruthers, CASE for Kids director. "Kids can see the real-world application for personal development, and there is appeal because it's competitive."

Fatmi, from Kerr High School in Alief ISD, likes to explore his debate topic, digging deeper into researching climate change. His "Policy" debate style is a well-established, traditional style which is research-based and allows students to specialize in a single subject throughout the year. Colindres, from charter school Yes Prep North Central in Aldine, likes to argue in the moment through "World Schools" debate style, grabbing his research topic 30 minutes before the debate and using the dictionary, almanac and thesaurus to map his positioning.



HUDL coordinator Andy Stubbs is deft in listing the positives of both styles of debate for youth adults.

"The core skill set is that it's interdisciplinary," Stubbs said. "Learning how to research comes in handy in classes like science and social studies. One of the things we teach is that a good argument is structured, whether it be in writing or speaking."

The CASE Debates program is funded through HCDE and provides debate services, including three seminars, for students in 10 high schools in greater Harris County. Previously, HUDL was serving campuses in HISD only, so spreading the program is literally spreading the fervor for debate.



"Debate sparks and nurtures critical thinking while also helping students improve communication skills," said HCDE Superintendent James Colbert, Jr. "We are building relationships across school districts in Harris County, allowing youth to converse and compete and educators to build partnerships."

Teachers like Yes Prep North Central English instructor Alison Kilfoyle say debate is the tool they are using to equip their students for college as it makes use of organization, research and oratory skills.

"I happened to reach out to HCDE CASE for Kids when this came up," said Kilfoyle, who teaches gifted students. "My kids had been asking for debate for years, and it really aligns with where they are headed."

CASE Debates is supported by several members of AmeriCorps VISTA, professionals who commit to volunteering for a year of service to specific projects. Members focus on building organizational, administrative and financial capacity for the organization they serve.

A CASE Debates tournament held Jan. 20 at Taylor High School in Alief ISD will be followed by a tournament at Elsik High School in Alief ISD on Feb. 3. A third finalist tournament will be held in downtown Houston on Feb. 24.

For more information about CASE Debates, call 713-696-1331 or go to [www.afterschoolzone.org](http://www.afterschoolzone.org).

Photo: Students from Taylor High School in Alief ISD strategize before a debate tournament held at their school Jan. 20.

View photos: <https://goo.gl/KUT4NK> (password is hcde1889)

# Systemic Achievement

*...with purposeful intent*

## Community Relations

In accordance with the elements of performance associated with this category 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
- Work with other governmental entities and community organizations to meet the needs of students and the community in a coordinated way

Last week, I attended a meeting with a group of leaders across the Houston area who are in the infancy stages of forming an impressive initiative called Good Reason Houston. The goal of Good Reason Houston is to improve early education, K-12 instruction, workforce preparation, and higher education options for every child to ensure that Houston is a world-class city and a national model for equity.

Leaders from every segment of the community are represented on the Leadership Council, including myself, but not limited to the following list of distinguished individuals:

- Chancellor Renu Khator, University of Houston
- President David Leebron, Rice University
- Chancellor Cesar Maldonado, Houston Community College
- Superintendent Richard Carranza, HISD
- CEO Stephen Head, Lone Star College
- Bob Harvey, President/CEO Greater Houston Partnership
- Mayor Sylvester Turner, City of Houston
- Christopher Greely, Chief of Public Health Pediatrics of Texas Children's Hospital
- Anna Babin, President and Chief Executive Office of United Way

The Board of Directors includes the following notable Houstonians:

- Nancy Kinder, Kinder Foundation
- Scott McClelland, President of HEB
- Jim Postl, Former President/CEO-Pennzoil-Quaker State Company
- Monolo Sanchez, Former Chairman/CEO, BBVA Compass

By participating in this necessary initiative, the Department will be able to leverage relationships in the future because of its contributions towards this effort. Additionally, it is affording me the opportunity to meet the expectations of this element of performance to:

- Function as the primary ambassador of the Department;
- Present a positive, professional image of both myself and of HCDE, 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;
- Be open to the ideas and needs of the aforementioned, and listen and accept criticism;
- Be willing to seek advice and counsel when necessary and determine the appropriate course of action to address issues;
- 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;
- Represent HCDE by attendance at events and speak professionally;
- Make professional presentations to all audiences in all arenas; and
- Listen and consider differing viewpoints of various constituencies using good judgment to discern the best decision and action for the Department.

## 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 EVENTS:

**Saturday, January 27, 2017**

- Early Childhood Winter Conference

**Sunday, January 28-31, 2017**

- TASA Midwinter Conference

**Wednesday, February 28, 2018**

- Board Meeting

