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FROM THE OFFICE OF JAMES COLBERT, JR.—SUPERINTENDENT

Of Note...

Let me begin on a somber note by reiterating my condolences to the Bush family as they mourn the loss of former First Lady Barbara Bush. She contributed a great deal to this country, and to our city, and her commitment to literacy was second to none. For that, communities across the nation should be forever grateful to the great strides she made in this essential facet of society.

It's unbelievable that the 2017-18 academic year is coming to a swift end. In reflection, this year has been one of great and unique challenges for many of our employees, as well as for all of our client districts, and many of our employees and students, due to Hurricane Harvey. While many families in Harris County are still struggling to get back on their feet, many others have either triumphed, or are in the midst of rebuilding, although their lives have been forever changed because of that experience. As the seasons change, and as hurricane season approaches, we are hopeful that it is an uneventful one. Our Facilities and Safe Schools divisions are staying on top of all things hurricane-related in order to keep staff, students, and facilities safe.

This week has been a busy one at HCDE. On Monday, I met with the Executive Leadership Team, prior to leaving for Austin to fulfill my responsibilities to the UIL. I departed Austin from my UIL Board Meeting Tuesday evening and returned to the office Wednesday morning, where we continued conducting budget hearings prior to the Board Committee meeting, immediately followed by the regularly scheduled April Board Meeting. To that end, thanks for your support at Wednesday's board meeting. We accomplished a great deal as we continue to move forward in the spirit of a team of eight to accomplish the Department's mission.

Later this week, I also attended the Good Reason Leadership Council Meeting, in addition to adhering to our aggressive budget hearing schedule. I am very hopeful about the ambitious aspirations of the Good Reason Leadership Council and its ability to make things happen.

Yesterday, I visited Fortis Academy to assess the construction timeline, and all is progressing well and on schedule. I remain excited about the future of this innovative learning environment that will assist students with substance issues.

This week in teaching and learning, HCDE hosted the following workshops, meetings, and sessions: Music Therapy Leadership Group;

STAAR Academy for 5th and 8th Grade Reading; and School Finance Council. We continue to lead in the area of professional and staff development.

Also, this week, our Head Start division is celebrating the Week of the Young Child with center and community tours centered around the Fonwood and Sheffield locations. This is an annual celebration hosted by the National Association for the Education of Young Children. This is always an exciting time in the life of our Head Start division.

This weekend, our CASE for Kids program and the Education Foundation will host an Agriculture-themed Ecobot Challenge for over 900 students from many of our client school districts. The event will be held at Kashmere High School, located at 6900 Wileyvale Road in Houston. This innovative program is certainly a welcomed addition on many of the campuses within our participating client districts.

Looking ahead into next week, as usual, I will begin with a meeting of the Executive Leadership Team and the week will continue with numerous budget hearings interspersed throughout. Additionally, I will be attending an American Leadership Forum event next Thursday evening, as an alumnus of this distinguished program. I will also be attending our Teen Summit next Friday.

As mentioned in yesterday's Board Meeting, we are very excited about our first Teacher of the Year event, which we hope to expand to include teaching assistants next year. Additional information will be forthcoming regarding this upcoming, inaugural event.

As always, thank you for the dedication and commitment you demonstrate to HCDE. I am appreciative of your support to the Department.

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

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Wednesday, May 16, 2018

- Board Meeting

Opportunity

PROGRAM CONNECTIONS

HCDE Digital Education and Innovation Division Creates STAAR Prep Courses for Cy-Fair ISD



In their ongoing support of digital learning in Cy-Fair ISD, HCDE's Digital Education and Innovation team in the Teaching and Learning Center recently created middle school math courses for all 21 middle school campuses in the district. The courses provide additional practice and resources for student success on the STAAR exam.

HCDE's Digital Education and Innovation manages the learning management system for online courses in Cy-Fair ISD. In the past, U.S. History and professional development courses have been available through the system. With the help of the HCDE Teaching and Learning Center, Cy-Fair ISD middle schools now have access to the online STAAR math prep courses.

DEI also replicated elementary math courses for all 55 elementary campuses in Cy-Fair ISD. The courses provide students with engaging review activities and quizzes.

Three ECPA Staff Present, Lead at National Association for Alternative Certification Conference

Two staff members from Educator Certification and Professional Advancement recently presented at the 2018 National Association for Alternative Certification Conference in Nevada.



Deirdre Williams, leadership advancement officer, and Chaney Williams-Ledet, curriculum and compliance officer gave a presentation entitled: "Have A Principal Certificate, Now What? Virtual Learning Communities." The session focused on lessons learned from the first-year implementation of virtual learning communities which supported HCDE principal candidates.

At the conference, ECPA's 2017 teacher graduate Jennifer Siger was recognized as gaining the "Honorable Mention Award" for the National Outstanding New Educator. Lidia Zatopek, ECPA director who serves as the national organization's Texas representative, also attended the conference to confer about executive decisions for the NAAC.

ADVANCED TEACHING AND LEARNING BY TRAINING THE TRAINER

APRIL 17, 2018

Music Therapy Leadership Group (MTLG)

APRIL 19, 2018

STAAR Academy for 5th and 8th Grade Reading

APRIL 20, 2018

School Finance Council



Opportunity

PROGRAM CONNECTIONS

HCDE CASE for Kids VISTA Members Participate in National Service Recognition Day this April



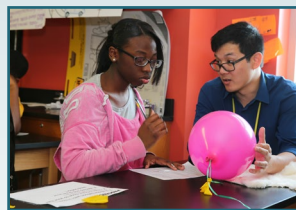
First-year teacher Christopher Nguyen sees himself as a guide for the next generation after his own struggles growing up without much life direction.

Post-college, he moved from one job to the next: nanny, librarian, martial arts instructor and cook. Once he decided to teach, Nguyen researched alternative teacher certification programs and chose Harris County Department of Education's Teacher Alternative Certification Program.

HCDE's educator preparation program provides a personalized training experience for aspiring teachers as qualified college graduates enter the program and spend seven to 10 months in pre-service training taking teacher preparation courses. The next 12 months are spent teaching and taking additional coursework. Veteran teachers model and mentor the new teachers with small group instruction which is hallmark to the teacher-prep program.

"In talking to fellow teachers, I have realized that the HCDE program had better prepared me for my school year because of their hands-on methods and excellent and experience staff," Nguyen said.

For six years, the program has recorded a 100 percent pass rate for students completing the courses and taking the certification exams, said Lidia Zatopek, director for HCDE's Educator Certification and Professional Advancement. Assistance is provided in securing teaching assignments in elementary or secondary education classrooms.



Nguyen found his first-year assignment at Worthing High School, a predominantly African-American, low-socioeconomic, Title 1 school which is being monitored by the Texas Education Agency for low performance. Many of his students came into his physics class reading at a fourth-grade level. In one year he's watched them grow academically and emotionally.

Houston Independent School District Assistant Principal Ashley Britton points to Nguyen's energy and passion as

part of the reason students in his classroom have seen phenomenal growth, moving from 20 to 70 percent proficiency for subject-area benchmarks.

"He incorporates a lot of writing and reading into the classroom," she said. "He makes kids think outside the box and gets buy-in from them."

The first-year physics teacher works determinably at a fast pace, moving with laser-focus from one student to the next in the eight stations he created to study electric force. They work with everyday household items like PVC pipe, balloons, straws and water. Comprehension of theories and hypotheses must be shared in everyday terms.

"I try my best to model it to real-world cases that will be supported by the student's own background knowledge," he said. "In that way, I hope the lesson sticks. "Being able to observe their growth is very rewarding."

The novice teacher doesn't mind giving up lunch hours and planning periods for tutoring or leaving campus late after teaching extracurricular martial arts classes.

In fact, it's hardly registered that Nguyen has earned the nomination of "Teacher of the Year" at Worthing High. He is also a nominee for the Texas Alternative Certification Association Intern of the Year.

Still, the 28-year old realizes he's taken on a challenging tour of duty. "By throwing myself into the fire, I (thought I) would hopefully be able to become a better teacher," he said.

Student Darius Hines, 16, never much liked science before his teacher came to Worthing. These days he looks forward to coming to physics class. "We have a really good connection with him," Hines said. "He's just a great teacher."



First-year teacher Christopher Nguyen works with student Darius Hines in his physics class at Worthing High School. Nguyen gained his college degree and is now working on his certification through Harris County Department of Education's Teacher Alternative Certification Program. For information about the program, go to www.hcde-texas.org/teacherprep

HCDE is recruiting teachers for its Teacher Alternative Certification Program. For more information, go to www.hcde-texas.org/teacherprep, call 713-696-1348 or email hcdeacp@hcde-texas.org

Opportunity

PROGRAM CONNECTIONS

Save the Date: Two Upcoming May Graduations



Adult Education hosts its high school equivalency degree graduation on May 19 from 11 a.m.- 1 p.m. at the 6300 Irvington Conference Center. The graduation traditionally gathers 100-plus students and their families from communities across Harris County. Stories include students involved in workforce programs, adult basic education studies and students in English as a second language classes.

Academic and Behavior School West students will participate in a graduation exercise at the campus May 31 at 1 p.m. in the school cafeteria.

Students who are graduating from grade levels will join students who are graduating from high school.



Service

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

HCDE Head Start Celebrates Week of the Young Child with Center Tours



Students stretch during Week of the Young Child exercise day.

HCDE Head Start celebrates Week of the Young Child this week with celebrations at each of the centers and community tours at the Fonwood and Sheffield locations.



Center staff and community partners check out the mini gardens planted on the campus.

Week of the Young Child is an annual celebration hosted by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) celebrating early learning, young children, their teachers and families.



Community partners pose for a group photo after touring a Head Start classroom.

Look for highlights from the week in next week's issue of **The Connector**.

Service

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

900-Plus Student Robotic Contenders Compete at Agriculture-themed Ecobot Challenge April 21



Robotics is paired with agriculture history as 96 teams of students test their skills and knowledge at the 10th All-Earth Ecobot Challenge set for

Saturday, April 21 from 8 a.m.-4 p.m. at Kashmere High School, 6900 Wileyvale Rd.

The event for 900-plus students in grades 4-8 is hosted by the Education Foundation of Harris County and Harris County Department of Education's Center for Afterschool, Summer and Enrichment for Kids, or CASE for Kids. With a tradition of supporting science, technology, engineering and math, or STEM studies, the event is supported by CenterPoint Energy, Best Buy Foundation, Quality Feed & Garden Company and the Houston Independent School District.

Morning sessions begin at 8 a.m. and afternoon sessions start at 1 p.m. Teams rotate to compete in robotics judging with Mindstorm Lego kits.



Many of the teams prepare for the event through their afterschool programs.

Trends in agriculture provide opportunity for teams to test their knowledge from agriculture eras in the mid-1970s to current trends. Points are wagered based on questions and answers.

Volunteers from area industries provide demonstrations in the Eco-Genius Lab which supplies real-world examples of STEM labs and career opportunities. Organizations sponsoring demonstrations include Women's Engineer Network (robot coding), Quality Feed & Garden Co. (gardening), Nintendo Wii (exercise) and Harris County Public Health (nutrition).



"Robotics has fast become a popular hobby for students, and CASE for Kids hosts and supports this curriculum and event because of the critical thinking skills it promotes



along with team-building and STEM," said Lisa-Thompson Caruthers, CASE for Kids director. "Teams are formed from diverse areas of the city and include students from afterschool programs, home school organizations, boys' and girls' clubs and more."

School districts sending teams to the competition include Aldine, Alief, Cleveland, Cy-Fair, Galena Park, Houston, Huffman, Humble, Klein, La Porte, New Caney, Pasadena, Pearland, Spring, Spring Branch and Stafford.

For more information about the event, go www.ecobotchallenge.com.

Systemic Achievement

...with purposeful intent

Community Relations

In keeping with the Board's expectations of me to

- Ensure that appropriate staff development is available and monitor staff development for effectiveness;
- Stay abreast of developments in educational leadership and administration; and
- Work with other community and governmental entities and educational organizations to meet the needs of students and the community in a coordinate way

young children, their teachers, and families.

This year's featured centers and communities include Fonwood and Sheffield.

By ensuring that HCDE continues to offer these kinds of opportunities to the community for the betterment of learners, I am working to meet the expectations of the board to identify the learning needs of students and develop a process that ensures each student's learning goals are met or exceeded and to investigate best practices for student achievement and utilize effective practices that maximize achievement of student potential within HCDE Head Start centers. Further, I am ensuring that HCDE maintains visibility and involvement in the community and by representing HCDE at attendance at such events.



This week, HCDE's Head Start division celebrates the Week of the Young Child. This annual celebration is hosted by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) celebrating early learning,

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UPCOMING EVENTS:

Wednesday, May 16, 2018

- Board Meeting

