

The CONNECTOR

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



CELEBRATE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

TOP STORIES INSIDE



HCDE Receives Top Workplaces Award



'No Place for Hate' Movement Addresses Cyberbullying



Highpoint Celebrates Veterans Day

The CONNECTOR



Of Note...

This week HCDE received the prestigious honor of being named a 2019 Top Workplace by the Houston Chronicle. With this recognition, HCDE joins 150 other select businesses in the greater Houston area.

HCDE was originally nominated by one of our employees. In July, employees participated in a survey to gauge the culture and climate of the organization. Responses to this survey provided the basis by which the Chronicle selected the Top Workplaces.

The Chronicle notified us in August that HCDE had been selected as a 2019 Top Workplace. This is a tremendous honor for the organization, as nearly 350 companies were nominated, and only 35 large companies (those with more than 500 employees) were selected. In addition, HCDE was one of only four public education organizations selected.

The Chronicle will run a special insert announcing the list of 150 Top Workplaces and recognizing these local businesses on Sunday. I am excited to see HCDE's name among our region's top companies and proud that our work and culture are being honored in this way.

The Executive Leadership Team and several members of the board represented HCDE at a reception hosted by the Chronicle last night where the list was ranked. I was so proud to see HCDE representing the educational category as one of four institutions selected. What an amazing honor! The event was a fun way to celebrate this recognition and mingle with the leaders of Houston's elite businesses.

To celebrate this great achievement, we are hosting a reception from 11:30 a.m. to 12:45 p.m. at Irvington right before Wednesday's board meeting. I hope you can join us to mingle with our employees as we celebrate the culture and climate of our organization. It is especially significant for employees as they are the ones who nominated us, answered the survey and showed the region how much they value HCDE's work environment, culture and mission.

I started the week with my Executive Leadership Team and meetings with several board members regarding my annual review. I left Tuesday for the National Alliance of Black School Educators Annual Conference in Dallas, returning to Houston for the Top Workplace reception on Thursday. I headed back to Dallas Thursday night to finish out the conference this weekend.

I look forward to seeing you on Wednesday for the Top Workplace celebration followed by the board meeting. Have a great weekend.



TOP WORKPLACES 2019

HCDE Receives Top Workplaces Award as Large Company

Harris County Department of Education is officially one of 35 large companies selected for the “Top Workplaces for 2019.” HCDE received the recognition at a special ceremony provided by the Houston Chronicle at the Royal Sonesta Hotel Nov. 14. Companies earning recognition are awarded solely on employee surveys completed about the workplace.

“HCDE is the best of both worlds as it is a dynamic place to work which encourages excellence and fosters an entrepreneurial spirit in an ever-changing educational environment,” said Superintendent James Colbert Jr. “We also gain the personal satisfaction of serving area school districts and helping a wide array of students succeed, from pre-k students to students with special needs to adult learners.”



PROGRAM CONNECTIONS

The Flippen Group Shares Goals Capturing Kids' Hearts with Local Teachers and Administrators

Administrators and teachers from local school districts attended the two-day Capturing Kids' Hearts workshop at HCDE Nov. 7 and 8. The workshop was presented by Christine Ramsey of The Flippen Group out of College Station.

Capturing Kids' Hearts is an immersive, participatory experience. Teachers, staff, and administrators learn and practice skills they will use and model in their classrooms, schools, and districts, including how to build meaningful, productive relationships with every student and every colleague. The goal is to build a high performing team inside the classroom.

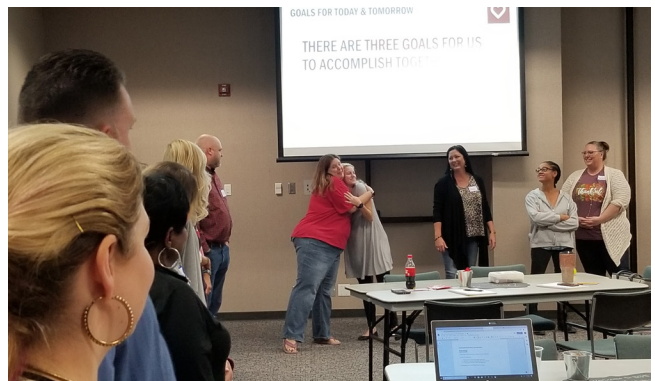
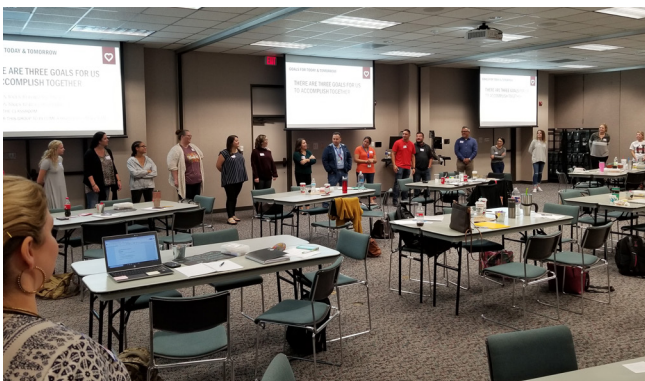
"We teach processes and leadership skills that are intentional towards those goals," said Ramsey.

Educators learn how to develop self-managing, high-performing classrooms using team-building skills and a social contract.

At the beginning of the workshop, Ramsey had the attendees participate in the name game as a team building activity to get to know each other names and get everyone laughing.

"It's an interactive ice breaker game in which everyone decides on a positive adjective for their name," said Ramsey.

At end of the two days, participants received high-payoff techniques for dealing with conflict, negative behavior and disrespect issues.





'No Place for Hate' Movement Addresses Cyberbullying through Youth Summit

In today's school landscape, cyberbullying replaces the old-school modes of bullying: folded paper notes shared in class or messages written on bathroom stalls. With prevention strategies in mind, teens and counselors from eight area school districts met for the "No Place for Hate Youth Summit" Nov. 8.

The event, spearheaded by the Anti-Defamation League and held at University of Houston Central Law School, was funded in part by the federally funded STOP School Violence grant provided by Harris County Department of Education (HCDE) Center for Safe and Secure Schools (CSSS).

"The primary goal of the grant is to reduce school violence by creating a positive school culture and climate through various adult and student training sessions, and the Youth Summit is focused on the same outcome—reducing school violence through anti-bullying awareness training. The synergy couldn't have been better," said Dennis Calloway, grant manager for the CSSS.

Jason Brown, seventh-grade counselor at McAuliffe Middle School in Fort Bend Independent School District, said the use of social media platforms like Snapchat and Instagram for cyberbullying has increased 100 percent in recent years.

"What the Internet and social media allows is for someone to hide behind their computers and not face the person who they are negatively impacting," said Brown.

He credits David's Law, Texas Senate Bill 179, making it a crime to cyberbully during and after school hours.

"Cyberbullying is not just wrong morally, but it's also now criminally wrong," said the counselor who praised his district for being proactive in reducing cyberbullying.

Julia Andrews is director for HCDE's CSSS and says the summit helps support positive school climates. Besides providing services such as safety audits for school districts, the CSSS promotes trainings which help build healthy relationships on school campuses, part of a larger initiative called social-emotional learning.

"Students sometimes feel there is no place to go and just accept cyberbullying," said Andrews. "There are 261 students here today who are saying that it is not okay."

Students Macian Fussell and Emilia Strother attended the summit to gain strategies to take back to McAuliffe Middle School. Proactive tactics include taking screen shots of bullying on social media and sharing the proof with teachers and administrators at the school.

"We are learning how to deal with cyberbullying, but it's difficult," said Strother.

"I tell my friends to ignore it (cyberbullying) and don't let it get you off-track. You can go to an adult and talk all your problems away."

As students who can connect to classmates in several different social circles, the two girls are what Counselor Brown calls "influencers."

"We are looking for workable solutions that the kids will take back into their schools and spread to their friends," said Brown. "That's our goal."

One idea the teen influencers invent is "Free Compliments Monday," a day to build relations versus eroding them. Another is "Blue Shirt Day," a suicide awareness day to bring awareness to the results of bully.

At day's end, students and teachers have cultivated some good ideas—concrete solutions to combat the negativity of social media and cyberbullying. They know what they can do to stop bullying when they see it, but they also have ideas about building a positive school community.

To read more of the story go to: <https://wp.me/p4QJFI-15s>



"WE ARE LEARNING HOW TO DEAL WITH CYBERBULLYING, BUT IT'S DIFFICULT," SAID STROTHER.



PROGRAM

CONNECTIONS

Highpoint Celebrates Veterans Day

After posing for a picture with Army Specialist Daksha Richards prior to a Veterans Day program, Highpoint senior Peter Guerrero shook her hand and told her thank you.

"I think it's important to remember those who have fought because without them we wouldn't have the freedom we have today," Guerrero said. "Every time I see someone in uniform, I make sure to tell them thank you for their service."

Veterans Day is a day to honor those who have fought for the freedom that everyone in the United States gets to enjoy today, and Highpoint students heard from several presenters.

The North Shore Senior High School Air Force JROTC presented the colors at the beginning of the program and teacher Sgt. Darick Smith spoke to students about his life and why he chose the military.

"Your choices can make or break you, but your life isn't over because of bad decisions," Smith said. "You can overcome those decisions because I was able to overcome mine. It's not going to be easy but with the discipline I learned while being in the military I was able to get through it."

Richards is part of the National Guard and serves as a recruiter in the Humble area and has made previous trips to Highpoint to speak with students. She spoke about her experience as a recruiter for the last five years and being able to go to school part-time while enlisting young men and women.

"If it wasn't for the military, I don't know where I would be right now," Richards said. "Just keep trying because you never know what might happen for you."

Highpoint Principal Marion Cooksey recognized teacher Dick Swenson, Richards and Smith with a certificate of appreciation for their military service and speaking to the students.



HCDE Featured in Campus Safety Magazine

The Human Trafficking Summit hosted by the Center for Safe and Secure Schools was featured recently in the national publication Campus Safety Magazine.

View the article: <https://www.campussafetymagazine.com/safety/human-trafficking-summit/>

The screenshot shows a webpage from Campus Safety Magazine. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the site logo and categories: News, School, University, Hospital, Technology, Clergy/T. Below the navigation bar is a banner for 'AFFORDABLE NEW TOOLS FOR SCHOOLS' by L3HARRIS, featuring an image of a yellow forklift and a 'LEARN MORE' button. The main article is titled 'Human Trafficking Summit Urges Educators to Look for Red Flags' and is categorized under 'School Safety'. The article text discusses a summit held in Houston, Texas, on November 5, 2019, where experts, advocates, and survivors discussed human trafficking. It mentions presentations by Children At Risk staff, Love People Not Pixels, the Harris County District Attorney's Office for Sex Crimes and Trafficking, human trafficking survivor Sandy Storm, and former U.S. Representative Ted Poe. A photo shows U.S. Rep. Ted Poe speaking at the summit. The article concludes by mentioning Project 180, a local program that helps sexually exploited victims.

Campus Safety HOSPITAL / SCHOOL / UNIVERSITY

News School University Hospital Technology Clergy/T

AFFORDABLE NEW TOOLS FOR SCHOOLS LEARN MORE L3HARRIS

School Safety

Human Trafficking Summit Urges Educators to Look for Red Flags

Approximately 80% of humans trafficked in the U.S. are American, challenging the common belief that most victims are immigrants.

★ Press Release 🕒 November 09, 2019 👤 CS Staff 💬 Jump to Comments

Experts, advocates and survivors came together at an event held earlier this week to discuss the realities of human trafficking in the United States and to provide solutions for impeding the epidemic.

The Human Trafficking Summit, hosted by Children At Risk and the Center for Safe and Secure Schools at the Harris County Department of Education in Houston on Nov. 5, included presentations from Children At Risk staff, Love People Not Pixels, the Harris County District Attorney's Office for Sex Crimes and Trafficking, human trafficking survivor Sandy Storm, and former U.S. Representative Ted Poe, a supporter of victims' rights.



U.S. Rep. Ted Poe speaks to attendees at the Human Trafficking Summit held Nov. 5 in Houston, Texas.

According to the Harris County Department of Education's [press release](#), an estimated 80% of humans trafficked in the U.S. are American. In Texas, nearly 900,000 children attend school within one mile of illegal massage businesses acting as fronts for human trafficking.

Johna Stallings from the Harris County District Attorney's Office of Sex Crimes and Trafficking discussed Project 180, a local program that helps sexually exploited victims get away from their pimps and connects them with social services. Approximately 90% of the women helped have backgrounds of [child sexual abuse](#), she added.

EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

17-Year Adult Education Teacher Evelyn Steptoe

Evelyn Steptoe is a 17-year employee with the Adult Education Division. As part of our monthly employee spotlight, we interview Evelyn to ask her about why she chose to teach, her memorable career highlights and what makes her happy. Here's what she said:

How long have you worked at HCDE?

I have worked at HCDE for 17 years, first as an ESL Teacher then a GED Teacher.

What do you like about teaching, and what subjects do you teach?

What I like about teaching is transforming and making a difference in my students' lives. Many adult students enter the class being stressed out, having low self-esteem and having no confidence in themselves. I have 8- to-10 weeks, sometimes less, to prepare the students to pass reading-language arts, science, social studies and math at two sites and three subjects at two other sites in Pasadena.



Tell us about a student who you'll never forget?

A student I will never forget is Salvador Escobedo, because he has been the oldest student, 84-plus, to attend my class. Salvador had a fourth-grade education in Mexico, yet, he learned algebra and helped mentor the younger students in class. Amazing! He personified learning has no age limit. Why did you choose teaching as a career? Did someone influence you?

I did not choose teaching as a career, instead, teaching chose me. I had a career in the business/legal fields and decided to spend more time with my two sons. Actually, my sons chose substitute teaching for me and Margie Palco guided me to adult education where Anthony Chan hired me over the phone.

Favorite part about working at HCDE?

My favorite explanation about working for HCDE are the part-time hours. For the last 10 years, my sons have been pushing me to find a full-time job. Each year I reiterate to them that I have a full-time job. I work four mornings, come home, have lunch, text students that were absent, reply to various texts from students, tutor a student in math or writing on any given day, take a nap, have brunch and teach four evenings.

Tell about your family?

My parents had 12 children and raised 10. Two are retired from education in a small town outside of Bay City, Texas. I am the third oldest child and I was the first to go to college. I was able to be a role model for my younger brothers and sisters to get an education. Two siblings are now deceased, and my dad passed in 2018, a month short of being 101, and my Mother is 92. Both of my sons are in the military, Navy Reserve and Air Force, and I have four granddaughters, the oldest is deceased.

What area of town do you live in?

I live near Hobby Airport, near my jobs in Pasadena and no longer have to fight traffic to get to work.

What are your hobbies? Spare time activities?

My hobbies are reading, sewing, quilting, scrapbooking and tutoring.

Tell us something your co-workers don't know about you?

To read more of the story go here: <https://wp.me/p4QJFI-15k>

BOARD

BRIEFS



Curriculum specialists, principals and teachers attended the Instructional Materials English Language Arts and Reading Showcase for selecting instructional materials in ELAR Grades 9-12 for statewide adoption on Nov. 12 at Irvington. The showcase offered a pressure-free environment for ELAR teams to examine curriculum provided by curriculum publishers.



The second CASE Debates tournament was held Nov. 9 at the YES Prep Brays Oaks School. Students competed in Policy and World Debate formats.



Directors Julia Andrews and Darlene Breaux attended the National Alliance of Black School Educators Conference in Austin this week. HCDE's Client Engagement hosted an exhibitor booth on behalf of the Department and Choice Partners.

SYSTEMIC

ACHIEVEMENT...WITH PURPOSEFUL INTENT

Organizational Morale, Organizational Improvement and Community Relations

In meeting the Board's expectations of me as it relates to these elements of performance:

Create an open and positive environment for sharing resources and exchanging ideas to improve organizational climate;

Seek systemically to improve the climate by obtaining and utilizing feedback from employees for the Department;

Model and support responsible risk-taking so that employees can be innovative and try new ideas;

Ensure that key planning activities within the Department are coordinated and consistent with Board policy and applicable law and that goals and results are communicated as appropriate;

Celebrate accomplishments and acknowledge excellence;

Establish and maintain a program of public relations to keep the public well-informed about the activities of the Department, affecting a wholesome and cooperative working relationship between the Department and community; and

Work with other governmental entities and community organizations to meet the needs of students and the community in a coordinated way.

Several opportunities availed this week to support the education public and let our stakeholders know about how we can support them.

First, we were recognized through the Top Workplaces awards as being an incredible place to work. What a unique way to recognize our stellar organization and incredibly talented employees.



Through the No Place for Hate Youth Summit, we empowered youth to reject cyberbullying and gave them the tools to combat bullying in their schools.



This week we introduce you to longtime HCDE Adult Education teacher Evelyn Steptoe. Her continued dedication to her students has created countless success stories. We celebrate her fervor for helping others.

Lastly, we celebrated our employees who served our country this week on Veterans Day. We also used that celebration as a teaching moment for our students as we honor those who work to preserve our independence.

In bringing these programs to the community and our employees, we are presenting a positive, professional image of ourselves and the Department in all venues: community, political, educational, business and the Board. I am also treating every person with respect and dignity, implementing effective management practices and ensuring all policies are supported by effective procedures. I am also developing and fostering an entrepreneurial spirit and understanding HCDE's role in the changing educational environment.

HCDE BOARD

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Eric Dick

Danny Norris

Don Sumners

Michael Wolfe

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Executive Functioning and Self-Regulation In Autism

November 20, 2019

Board Meeting

November 20, 2019

Introduction to Emotional Intelligence and Mindfulness

November 22, 2019

