

The CONNECTOR

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



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Of Note...

In education, we often take the talent of our students for granted. We know what our kids are capable of and cheer them on when they let their special skills shine. But sometimes we forget that the general public doesn't see student work every day. So, it is always fun to watch as community members are inspired and awed by something created by a middle schooler that displays a profound level of intricacy and depth.

This week, the Scholastic Art & Writing winners were on display in the Galleria mall, just outside Sacks Fifth Avenue. Row upon row of artwork is showcased, giving shoppers a glimpse of Harris County's student talent. While inspecting the set up on Wednesday, HCDE staff was approached by mall walkers who were marveling at the skill of our middle and high school students and were excited to see that HCDE facilitates and supports art in our schools. The best entries in the exhibits will continue to the national competition in New York. I hope you can carve some time in the next few weeks to stop by the Galleria and Texas Art Supply to see the winning entries in person.



I started the week with my Executive Leadership Team and standing meetings. I also attended the Texas Association of Black School Educators annual conference in San Antonio this week, where I presented to aspiring Superintendents about the "Art of the Interview" and discussed other considerations that should be factored in when someone is applying to lead a district. For me, the power of conferences comes in the conversations that happen in the hallways and over lunch, when you are able to dissect issues with like-minded people. These discussions have proven fruitful in the past and always inspire me to think outside the box regarding how HCDE can support our client districts and public education in the region even better. While in San Antonio, Mr. Parker, Dr. Mays and I also took the opportunity to visit several premier equine therapy stables in the area. The idea of having HCDE provide this type of support for special needs students, military veterans and the greater Harris County community continues to intrigue me.

I look forward to seeing you at our board meeting next week. Have a great weekend.



PROGRAM

CONNECTIONS

Aldine ISD Teen Photographer Humanizes Homeless: HCDE's Scholastic Art & Writing American Visions Nominee

It all started with a 6-year-old boy's daily commute with his parents and a homeless man playing guitar on a busy northeast Houston street corner. The man serenaded the boy's mother as the car idled at the red light. The little boy teased his mom that the "guitar man" liked her.

Eleven years later, Aldine Independent School District student artist Anthony Abarca returned to that corner to photograph and meet the man named Northside Ray and tell the old man's story through imagery.

The teen's photograph entitled "Love Affair" depicts a weathered homeless man with dried, caked blood on his face. The man's piercing blue eyes make the case for hope, not despair.

The photo earned the Carver High School senior an American Visions nomination, one of five best-of-show art awards judged in a pool of more than 5,000 entries with Harris County Department of Education as regional affiliate of the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards.

Teacher Matthew Kirkpatrick says the often cliché influence of photography on teens via social media and advertising is strong, but he tries to show students the meaningful side of photography.

The storytelling concept stuck with high school senior Abarca.

"It sparked my idea of how every day we see less fortunate people and how we never really get the chance to know their story," said Abarca, reflecting on his teacher's influence. "Mr. Kirkpatrick taught me that I can't be afraid to try new things and that my work must have meaning through a story that I want to tell. I will never forget that and will continue to show it through my work."

Setting out to find Ray wasn't that hard. Abarca found the homeless man on the same street corner he left him in his memories a decade before. His decision to photograph Ray helped him understand the plight of the homeless. A twist of fate had put Ray on the street, and he never found his way back.

As Ray grew older, homelessness became more difficult and dangerous. In fact, the day Abarca took the man's photo, the old man had just been beaten. Two months after taking the photo, Abarca returned to Near Northside to share the photo and an award he had won in a juried art show.

Northside Ray died after being stabbed on the streets. Abarca never got the chance to share Ray's infamy.

The photograph "Love Affair" will now be judged at the national level through Scholastic Art & Writing in New York City, and that feels good to both student and teacher. Awardees will be notified on March 16, and an awards ceremony will be held in New York City Carnegie Hall in June.

"I am both nervous and excited for Anthony and what this means moving forward," said Kirkpatrick.

"I appreciate this contest (Scholastic) in comparison to the others that my students participate in for it's high regard to concept. I often tell my students that this contest will judge their work as that of an adult artist."

For information about HCDE's Scholastic Art & Writing 2020 exhibits and receptions or to enter, judge or sponsor the Awards, go to <https://hcde-texas.org/scholastic-awards> or email Andrea Segraves, asegraves@hcde-texas.org. View the Awards press release: <https://wp.me/p4QJFI-18s>.



PROGRAM

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Employees Gear Up for Chili Cook-Off

The HCDE Chili Cook-Off will provide the opportunity for employees to show-off their culinary skills and network with fellow employees and board members.

Below are some details about the cook-off. Hope to see you there!

- Gather from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. in the 500s at Irvington on Friday, Feb. 28.
- Each division will bring a pot of chili. Side dishes will also be provided in each division, and don't be surprised to see a dessert or two!
- A brand challenge contest has been added. Each division will display its personal cattle brand for judging.
- Prizes are provided for top chili and most creative brands.
- Attire is western. Boots, jeans, hats and buckles will be trending, and a backdrop/photo area will be provided.
- No chili cook-off is complete without music and dance, so expect to see boot-scoot boogie!



PROGRAM

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School Safety Solutions for Charter, Private Schools Promotes CSSS Services, Provides Networking

Several dozen administrators from charter schools and private schools attended the free School Safety Solutions for Charter and Private Schools Feb. 13. with the goal to introduce school safety solutions services.

Topics for school safety ranged from security to care to welfare to safety with speakers from the Center for Safe and Secure Schools discussing safety audits, emergency operations training, bomb threat response and restorative practices.

Guest speakers included Michele Pola, former HISD administrator who talked about mindfulness in the classroom and stress reduction.

University of Houston Professor Keith Butcher talked about equity and cultural responsiveness. Lauren Pursley discussed trauma and strategies for understanding triggers and classroom de-escalation strategies.

Attendees were from Pro-Vision Academy, Harmony Schools, Garza-Gonzalez Charter School, George Sanchez Charter, Charter School Success, The Fay School and Houston ISD charter.



Black History Month Celebrated

Students at Compton Head Start celebrated Black History Month with a program highlighting notable African Americans through skits, musicals and speeches. Some students even dressed up as their favorite author, astronaut, baseball or basketball player. Black History Month was also celebrated on other HCDE campuses and centers.



PROGRAM

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Fortis Academy Culinary Students Deliver Cookies to HCDE Staff

Fortis Academy students enrolled in culinary arts classes and their teachers delivered 200 baked Valentine's Day treats to staff at 6300 Irvington on Feb. 14. The students greeted and shook hands with staff, often stopping to ask questions about employees' job roles. Cookie selections included macadamia nut, chocolate chunk and oatmeal raisin.

"I was very impressed with their baking expertise and their social skills," said Kelly Tummy, a HCDE cookie recipient and English language arts curriculum director.



Policy Council Hosts Food Science Fair

The Head Start Policy Council hosted the Food Science Fair, and food was taste-tested through a panel of six judges. Age categories included infant, toddler and pre-k. Students and their families selected a vegetable or fruit to be used in a healthy recipe.



Equine Therapy

While attending the TABSE conference in San Antonio this week, Superintendent Colbert, Mr. Parker and Dr. Mays took the opportunity to visit two premier Texas equine therapy stables in that region. The visits to RISE Equestrian Center and The Saddle Light Center are part of HCDE's continued study of equine therapy as a viable option for special needs students, military veterans and the Harris County community.



Instructional Management and Community Relations

In accordance with the Board's expectations of me 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 community;
- Work with other governmental entities and community organizations to meet the needs of students and the community in a coordinated way;
- Establish a system for regular evaluation of instructional programs to meet student instructional needs and to attain desired student achievement;
- Establish effective mechanisms for communication to and from staff in instructional evaluation, planning and decision making; and
- Ensure that goals and objectives form the basis of curricular decision-making and instruction and communicate expectations for student achievement.



A young man tells a story of the plight of the homeless through a photo which is then shared throughout the nation. Photography is a practiced science but also requires the gift of storytelling. As

regional affiliate of Scholastic Art & Writing, HCDE continues to share the talents of local teens in our county through this iconic, highly respected awards program.

Head Start wraps up its Food Science Fair after children and their families have been introduced to healthy food curriculum. It is just one extra way that we can facilitate the healthy development of families in Harris County.

Through Fortis Academy, culinary students shared the joy of their accomplishments with staff this past week. Our students are using a combination of math and science expertise in their great bake-offs. In the process, they are participating in community service projects.

The teens are working within culinary teams to reach their achieved goals, whether that means cooking a meal for each other or reaching out to share cookies with the community.

By providing these established curricula to our students and sharing accomplishments with the community, we are investigating best practices for student achievement and utilizing effective practices that maximize achievement of student potential within HCDE schools.

By publishing the results, we are implementing data archive and retrieval systems to capture best practices for student learning and publishing those to public schools and the general community.

We are also working with other governmental entities and community organizations to meet the needs of students and the community in a coordinated way.

HCDE BOARD

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Eric Dick

Vice President

Danny Norris

Board Members

Richard Cantu

Andrea Duhon

Amy Hinojosa

Don Sumners

Michael Wolfe

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Feb. 25

Youth Mental Health First Aid Training
6300 Irvington
8 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Feb. 25

HCDE Math Leadership Meeting
6300 Irvington
10 a.m. - 1 p.m.

Feb. 26

Board Meeting
6300 Irvington
1 p.m.

Feb. 28

Go Texan Day/Chili Cook-Off
6300 Irvington
11:30 a.m. - 1 p.m.