

Harris County
Department of
Education

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WEEK OF MARCH 20, 2023



HEAD START MOM COMES FULL CIRCLE

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THE CONNECTOR

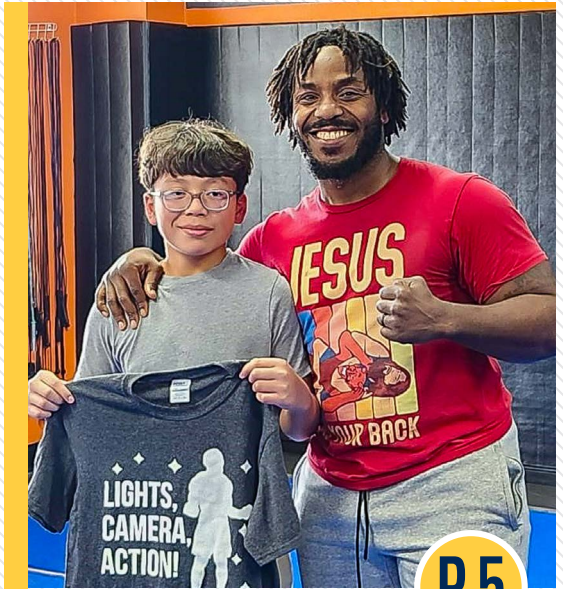
A weekly publication of Harris County Department of Education for the HCDE Board of Trustees



**Certificate
of Achievement**
FOR EXCELLENCE IN
Financial Reporting

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HCDE RECEIVES TRIPLE CROWN FOR EXCELLENCE



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LESSONS TAUGHT IN THE MMA RING FOR HIGHPOINT

There is no doubt that Head Start makes a difference in the lives of the children we serve.

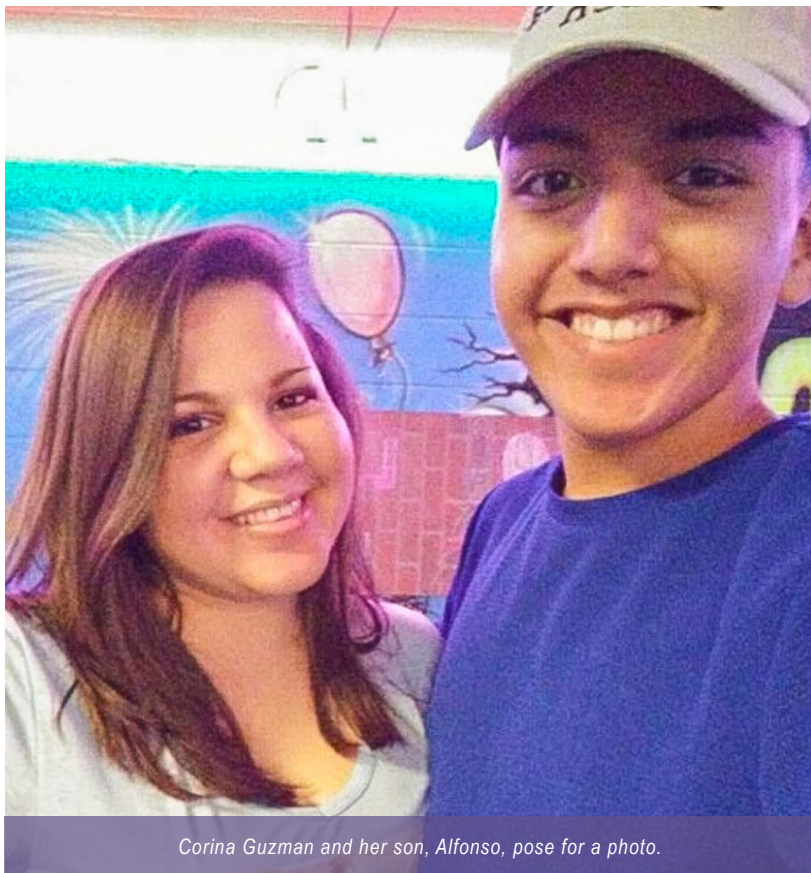
But what many may not realize is that the program also impacts parents and families, sometimes in a way that changes their lives forever. And that can often translate into this parent or family returning to Head Start as an employee, volunteer or local business offering community support.

We see this concept come true this week with a former Head Start parent who found herself going down memory lane at the Bates car giveaway in December. In 2004, Corina Guzman received the second refurbished car given away as part of the Head Start Responsible Parenting Award. Now, nearly 20 years later, she was standing at the same ceremony except this time as a representative of a local sponsor. Guzman said all the old emotions resurfaced as she knows how dramatically the car changed her life and what it means to a young family without transportation. The partnership between Bates and Head Start is a hallmark of the program and is one of the most gratifying events of the year. I am proud of the work all our Head Start campuses do with children every day and I look forward to another 20 years of partnering with Bates to enhance our programs and give our families a leg up on their future.

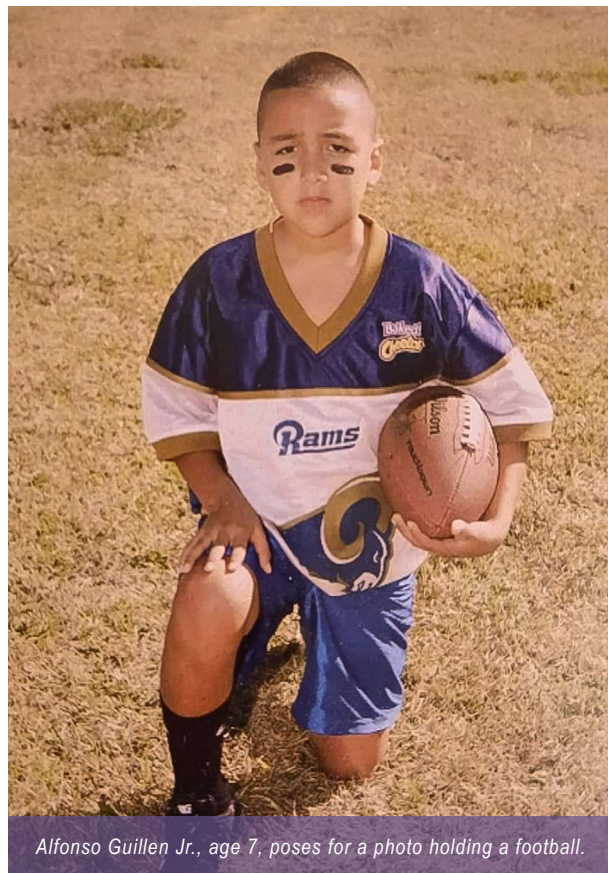
We returned from Spring Break on Monday and ELT reviewed our new employee evaluation system. That afternoon I met with staff to discuss ongoing projects and initiatives. On Tuesday I met with staff for regular updates and also met with Trustee Norris over lunch for my quarterly meeting. On Wednesday I met with the executive director of workforce solutions for the Houston Galveston Area Council (HGAC) to discuss our Adult Education program. When I returned, I met with staff to discuss our Picnic in the Parking Lot celebrations in April and discussed internal equity within our salary schedule with TASB. On Thursday I discussed the legislative session and communications with staff and today I am on vacation. Have a great weekend.




James Colbert Jr.
County Superintendent



Corina Guzman and her son, Alfonso, pose for a photo.



Alfonso Guillen Jr., age 7, poses for a photo holding a football.

AN EMOTIONAL, FULL-CIRCLE MOMENT FOR A FORMER J.D. WALKER HEAD START MOM

In 2004, twenty-year-old Corina Guzman cried tears of joy when she was awarded HCDE Head Start and Bates Collision Centers' Annual Responsible Parenting Award, an honor that recognizes the sacrifices parents often make to provide for their children.

Eighteen years later, Guzman is still crying those same tears of joy.

At the time, Guzman was a single mother working to build a life for her son, Alfonso.

Referred to Harris County Department of Education's Head Start program by Workforce Solutions' childcare program, Guzman enrolled Alfonso at the J.D. Walker Head Start campus in Baytown.

"I asked if I could go on a visit," recalls Guzman. "As soon as I walked in, it was very warm and welcoming. It had a good atmosphere. I saw how the kids were extremely engaged in their activities and how nurturing the teachers were. I just had a really good feeling."

Guzman noticed a change in Alfonso's development within a few short months.

"Alfonso was a shy child, but I did see a difference in him," she said. "I saw a huge improvement in his social interactions and communication skills. The program built his self-esteem and confidence."

His progress could also be seen at home.

"He was more active and independent," said Guzman. "He would try to do things on his own, like start a puzzle or make a sandwich. He was just more open to doing things on his own."

She reinforced what she learned at home, despite the challenges of being a young mother.

"Due to my situation, I don't think we had a TV or any electronics for a while," said Guzman. "So we went to the library, and the park, and we did a lot of coloring and puzzles. I would just encourage him to use his imagination."

At the time, Guzman worked late nights as a bartender at a local restaurant to make ends meet and save up for a car. She also volunteered at J.D. Walker, helping to set up breakfast and get students settled into the classroom in the morning.

Though her engagement and involvement didn't go unnoticed, staff didn't know that Guzman depended on friends, family, and coworkers for car rides.

"I relied on family to get me to work, and then I would have coworkers take me home because

Continued on page 4

PROGRAM CONNECTIONS

we didn't close the restaurant until 2 a.m.," said Guzman. "At times, I wouldn't get home until 3 or 4 a.m. because I didn't want to ask family to do that. Instead, I had coworkers who offered that to me."

When J.D. Walker faculty learned that Guzman had been involved in a car accident earlier that year with an unlicensed, uninsured driver that totaled her car, they were quick to nominate her for the Annual Responsible Parenting Award.

As part of the award, HCDE's Head start division and Bates Collision Centers gift deserving Head Start parents with a rehabbed vehicle packed full of wrapped presents for their children just in time for the holidays.

Guzman recalls the call that changed her life.

"When I was notified, I jumped up and down and screaming, and my dad came running down the stairs asking if I was okay because I was pretty heavily pregnant with my second child at that time," she laughs.

Guzman was the second Head Start parent in the program's 25-year history to receive a car through the partnership with Bates.

"It was absolutely life-changing," recalls Guzman, as she holds back tears. "We take having a vehicle and the ability to just go and do as we please for granted. You feel like you are an inconvenience to your family and friends, but also to your child. You feel like a burden and that's not a good feeling at all."

With the car, Guzman was able to create stability for her child and herself. Her son, Alfonso, armed with classroom-ready skills, went on to Ashbel Smith Elementary School in Goose Creek CISD.

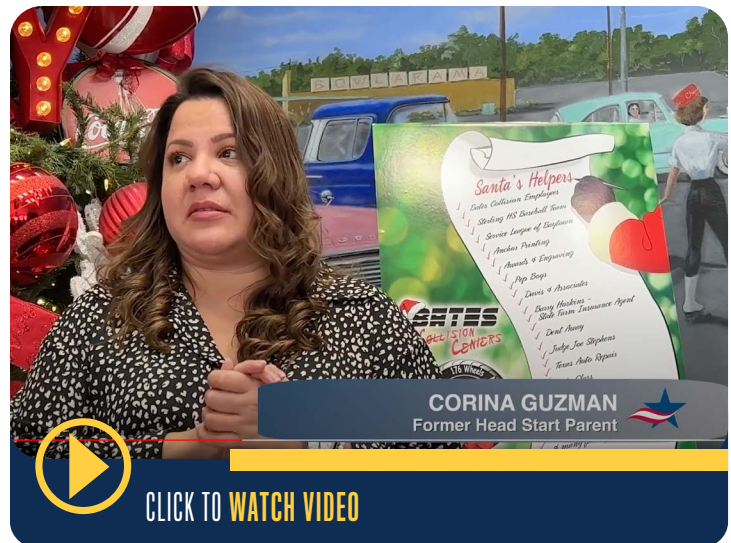
"When he got to kindergarten, his teacher praised him for being at the top of his class," said Guzman. "He got all A's and B's. He even helped other children."

Three years ago, Guzman, who still lives and works in the Baytown and Channelview area, took a job at Sentinel Integrity Solutions, a company in the oil and gas industry.

In 2021, Guzman received an email from Human Resources that took her by surprise.

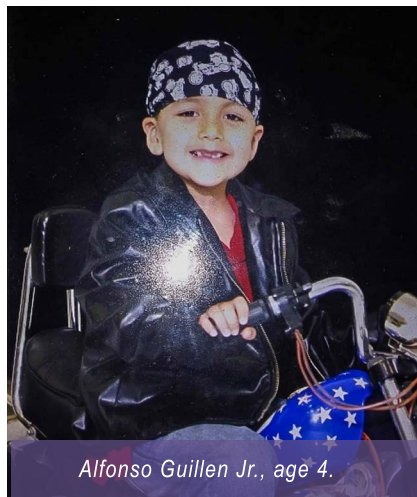
"Our H.R. manager, Theresa, sent out an email letting us know that we would be partnering up with Bates for the holidays to help parents in need," she said tearfully. "As soon as I opened up that email, I started crying because it was a full-circle moment. What are the chances that my company would partner with Bates? I was one of those parents almost two decades ago, and now I work for a company that wants to help parents like me. So I ran to her office, in tears, and told her my situation. She started crying, too."

Last December, Guzman quietly attended the 2022 Responsible Parenting Award presentation at the Baytown Bates Collision Center. The H.R. manager, who joined her at the event, mentioned to Bates employees that Guzman was a previous recipient of the award.



Listen to Corina Guzman thank Head Start and Bates Collision Center staff at the 2022 Responsible Parenting Award presentation in Baytown.

"Their faces just lit up and they were so excited," said Guzman. "I felt so bad. I didn't want to steal the thunder from that year's recipient, but I did want to thank Mr. and Mrs. Bates and their team. It was very emotional for a lot of people. Mr. Bates was crying, and I felt so bad because he's this big 'ole tall, buff guy, and he's over there crying. I just wanted them to feel my gratitude."



Bates Collision Center co-owner Leila Bates recalls the revelation.

"That moment was priceless," said Leila. "Corina's story touched us in several ways. It filled our hearts to be able to hear first-hand how much our gift of transportation from 18 years ago had impacted her family's life. It was especially touching for several of our employees who had worked on her car and

are still employed with us and who continue donating their time to this program year after year. It was a sweet surprise for our staff!"

For the past two years, Guzman has donated toys, books, and children's clothes for Responsible Parenting Award Recipients in Baytown. Her son, now 22 years old, plans to start college in the fall of 2023.

"They have no idea how much they impact the people they choose for this award, and in more ways than they'll ever know," said an emotional Guzman. "And as long as I'm at Sentinel, I will definitely make sure that we continue partnering with Head Start and Bates." ■

HCDE RECEIVES TRIPLE CROWN FOR EXCELLENCE IN PUBLIC FINANCE

Harris County Department of Education has received a Triple Crown Award from the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) for its excellence in government finance for the fiscal year ending August 31, 2021.

GFOA's Triple Crown recognizes government agencies who have received GFOA's Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting, Popular Annual Financial Reporting (PAFR) Award, and the Distinguished Budget Presentation Award.

The Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting is the highest form of recognition in governmental accounting and financial reporting, and its attainment represents a significant accomplishment by a government and its management.

The Award for Outstanding Achievement in Popular Annual Financial Reporting (PAFR) considers creativity, presentation, understandability, and reader appeal in its evaluation. According to GFOA, the award is a prestigious national



award recognizing conformance with the highest standards for the preparation of state and local government popular reports. This award also acknowledges HCDE's Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR), from which its PAFR report is derived.

The Distinguished Budget Presentation Award recognizes state and local governments that prepare high-quality budget documents that reflect both the guidelines established by the National Advisory Council on State and Local Budgeting and the GFOA's best practices on budgeting.

The GFOA is a nonprofit professional association whose mission is to advance excellence in public finance that serves approximately 20,000 government finance professionals.



▲ LESSONS TAUGHT IN THE RING GO BEYOND MIXED MARTIAL ARTS

At Highpoint School East, confidence and self-discipline are taught in creative ways. This week, more than 20 young men in the school's Safe Haven for Overcoming Problems (SHOP) program went on a field trip to Press Forward Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) Gym where they learned both physical and social-emotional skills.

Students in the SHOP program often lack healthy, present male role models at home. The SHOP program, founded by Assistant Principal Troy Moore, serves to support at-risk young men who need mentors in their lives.

Gym owner Charles Cheeks, a retired MMA fighter and business owner, spoke to the students about his own journey which mirrors that of many Highpoint students. He shed light on the impact his mother's incarceration had on him emotionally, including feeling anger and rejection, which led to violent outbursts. Cheeks

emphasized that he chose to change his lifestyle and discovered the sport of MMA, which eventually led him to become a business owner.

Cheeks talked to students about self-esteem and peer relations and taught students to make connections to support their classmates. He also spoke about the role that self-discipline plays in conflict resolution and used MMA as an analogy to explain how the choices an MMA fighter must make in the ring are representative of life outside the ring. These choices also included the importance of working on physical and mental health.

Students left with the knowledge that there is not just one path they can take to channel their emotions and be successful. Many left the gym with plans to begin a workout regime and are considering owning their own gym in the future.



BUSINESS SERVICES VOLUNTEERS AT KIDS MEALS INC.

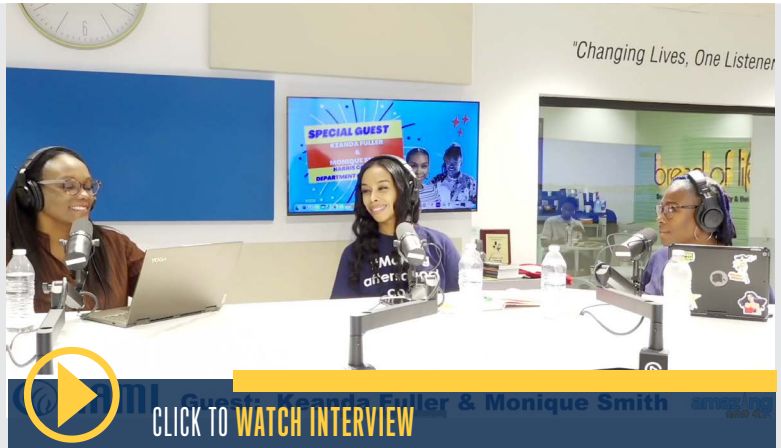
The Business Services team are not just savvy financial professionals, but generous members of the community. This week, a group of 12 members of the division dedicated three hours of their day to volunteer at Kids Meals Inc., a nonprofit that makes and delivers free, healthy meals directly to the homes of hungry children. The team packed sacked lunches containing sandwiches and granola bars.



IN THE NEWS

NAMI GREATER HOUSTON RADIO SHOW INTERVIEW WITH CASE FOR KIDS

On Thursday, CASE for Kids Site Coordinator Keanda Fuller joined National Alliance on Mental Health (NAMI) Greater Houston Development Director and host Gussie Fuller on 102.5 FM's public access show "The Challenge Is" to discuss the mission of CASE for Kids and the role that out-of-school-time plays in social and emotional learning. Every fourth Thursday of the month, Gussie spotlights a local organization that serves the Harris County community.



CLICK TO WATCH INTERVIEW

NTD NEWS ENGLISH CLIP OF CHESS TOURNAMENT

Chinese media outlet NTD News/Epoch Times, which covered the 6th annual HCDE Chess Tournament has published its English-language news report on the event. The story features Assistant Superintendent for Academic Support Services Jonathan Parker, Fortis Academy student Rebeca Santiesteban and chess coach James Hudson.



CLICK TO WATCH STORY

TRAVITA GODFREY INTERVIEW WITH MAYO LAB PODCAST ABOUT FORTIS ACADEMY

Fortis Academy Principal Travita Godfrey was a guest on "The Mayo Lab Podcast" to discuss how substance misuse in young adults is often a response to trauma. Godfrey also shared tips for parents.

The podcast is hosted by bestselling author David Magee, whose oldest son, William, died of an accidental overdose. The podcast is a production of the University of Mississippi's William Magee Institute of Student Wellbeing, named after David's son. "The Mayo Lab Podcast" equips parents and educators to start a different conversation around student mental health and substance misuse.



CLICK TO WATCH INTERVIEW

CSSS PODCAST WITH HIGHPOINT PRINCIPAL COURTNEY WATERS

Highpoint School East Principal Courtney Waters joined principals Lisa Langston (Ft. Bend ISD) and Dr. Regina Sims (Goose Creek CISD) on the Center for Safe and Secure School's podcast, "Take Care Tuesday" to discuss strategies to ensure campuses and emotionally safe and secure.



CLICK TO LISTEN TO PODCAST

Take Care Tuesday

By The Center for Safe Secure Schools, Division of Harris County Dept. of Education

Welcome to the Center for Safe and Secure Schools "Take Care Tuesday" podcast series. The podcasts are centered around one topic and our guests are local, state, national and international school safety experts. We will introduce this podcast series in short segments, keeping it short and relevant. We are breaking down important and sometimes difficult topic...

See more

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THIS WEEK THE FOLLOWING BOARD EXPECTATIONS WERE MET:

Superintendent Objective A: Management of Administrative, Fiscal, and Facilities Function

- Oversees budget implementation in a way that ensures appropriate expenditure of budgeted funds and provides for clear and timely budget reports.



This week, we shine a light on a Head Start mom who reflects on how HCDE's Head Start division changed her life. As educators, we know it's no secret parental involvement is an important part of a child's academic success. We also know that engaged parents build a community of support to help them navigate the early school years. This is true for Corina Guzman, who was an involved single, young mother when her child attended J.D. Walker Head Start nearly 20 years ago. Through HCDE's Head Start community, Guzman received the incomparable gifts of a quality early childhood education for her son and a refurbished car that provided her with reliable transportation. We are proud to share how she is now paying it forward for other deserving Head Start parents.

Business Services continues to rack up financial excellence awards. The Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) has bestowed HCDE will the Triple Crown Award for its 2021 Fiscal Year. Triple Crown recognizes government agencies that have received GFOA's Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting, Popular Annual Financial Reporting (PAFR) Award, and the Distinguished Budget Presentation Award. This acknowledgement signals HCDE's commitment to serving Harris County learners at a minimal cost to taxpayers.

Finally, we showcase one of the many creative ways in which Highpoint School East is helping at-risk young men with self-confidence and social-emotional skills. This week, a select group of students had the privilege of visiting a mixed martial arts gym in Friendswood. While there, the young men learned that self-discipline, healthy interpersonal skills, and well-being are at the core of the sport, much like in life.

By managing the budget with prudent judgment, I am meeting the expectation to look for ways to improve programs and resources without greater expenditures and without sacrifice to high-quality services.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

April 7

Good Friday (HCDE Closed)

April 13

Schools Division Annual Update

April 19

Board Meeting

April 21

[CASE for Kids Provider Fair](#)

April 22

[All-Earth Ecobot Challenge Day](#)