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## THE BEAUTY OF BEING MORE THAN A BUS DRIVER

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# THE CONNECTOR

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



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## COLBERT PARTICIPATES IN SUPERINTENDENTS' ROUNDTABLE



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## CHOICE PARTNERS WELCOMES NEW VENDORS AND MEMBERS

## I hope you had an incredible Thanksgiving and you were able to spend some time with family and friends.

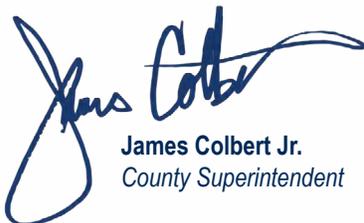
This time of year is not for the weary of heart, as we always seem to cram a month's worth of work into a couple weeks.

Each year, we have about three weeks between the Thanksgiving holiday and winter break and that time seems to fly by filled with holiday gatherings, celebrations and philanthropic give-a-ways for families in need. This year it is three weeks and two days which boils down to just 10 more days before HCDE closes for the rest of the calendar year. I really can't believe 2022 is almost over!

Over the course of the next two weeks, HCDE staff will celebrate the holidays with receptions at NPO and Irvington while participating in various activities with students including holiday programs at our schools. We will also journey to Baytown and Channelview to watch as two deserving Head Start families receive refurbished cars at the Bates Collision giveaway event. In addition to these major activities, Adult Education is hosting a toy drive for local children and our SuperMENTors will round out the year with special holiday celebrations at the Head Start campuses. I look forward to participating in these activities every year and celebrating the holidays with staff, students and families. This truly is one of the "most wonderful times of the year."

I started the week with ELT on Monday followed by standing meetings. On Tuesday I traveled to Maryland for the National Alliance of Black School Educators (NABSE) conference along with several HCDE leadership team members. This is a great conference that always gives us insight into trends and challenges facing educators and the children we serve. I am back in the office on Monday and look forward to seeing you at the NPO Holiday reception next Thursday, December 8.

Have a wonderful weekend.



**James Colbert Jr.**  
County Superintendent





*Vanessa Ausley poses for a photo on an HCDE school bus, Nov. 29, 2022.*

## THE BEAUTY OF BEING MORE THAN A BUS DRIVER

With a little grin, Academic and Behavior School East bus driver Vanessa Ausley will tell you she's a busy woman.

"I'm also the front desk receptionist, and I wear about nine other hats," laughs Ausley.

ABS East Principal Donna Treviño-Jones says Ausley—HCDE's December Employee of the Month—is one-of-a-kind.

"I was really impressed by her wanting to do more than sit around and wait for a field trip," said Treviño-Jones. "She does so many things, and it's because of her big heart."

Ausley, who has been with HCDE for nearly a year and a half, stumbled into her role after discovering she had a life-threatening blood disorder.

"Before I got to HCDE, I was a safety field supervisor for the Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County (METRO)," said Ausley. "I was with them for 16 years."

At the end of 2020, Ausley was diagnosed with Thrombotic

Thrombocytopenic Purpura (TTP) and had to take a leave of absence from her job at METRO. When she returned two months later, she learned she had been replaced and was offered a more junior role. Ausley chose to pursue another path and applied for a job at HCDE.

"This is a new adventure that God has me on right now. When I interviewed for the position, I told Dr. Ned I wanted to get my foot in the door," she said of Senior Director of Schools Charles Ned.

At HCDE, Ausley also fills in as a bus driver for Highpoint School East and Fortis Academy and is on ABS East's safety team, even helping to develop the school's emergency operations plan.

"Recently, he told me, 'Well, you got your whole body in now!' So I'm expecting to move up," laughed Ausley.

"I thought that when we hired Ms. Ausley, she would be serving the campuses and would always be gone," said Principal Treviño-Jones. "But she has totally surprised us all

because her role is about more than just driving the bus—it's about relationships. When it comes to customer service, she understands that she is the face of our school and can either make or break what our school is about.

Across HCDE, Ausley has followers who look forward to monthly bulletin boards she decorates around ABS East that tie into students' lesson plans. The decorated walls often highlight monthly observances such as Hispanic Heritage Month or Women's History Month.

"The decorated walls support anything that has to do with kids. That's always a focus for Ms. Ausley. They serve as a vehicle to foster relationships with kids and teachers," said Principal Treviño-Jones.

ABS East serves students with emotional, behavioral, and academic special needs. Students are referred to the school on a contractual basis by client school districts in greater Harris County.

"When representatives from different districts come in, they see that our school looks like a school, not an institution or a former warehouse. It's a place of learning," said Principal Treviño-Jones.

As a biracial Native American, Ausley says she adorns the walls and bulletin boards to educate others. She often highlights prominent individuals, innovators, and little-known cultural facts.

"These decorated walls are important because there's a lot of diversity on this campus," Ausley said. "Someone has to show our students the possibilities."

Ausley says she loves the environment at HCDE and her coworkers are her family away from family. Through her dedication, she's added value to her workplace and work family.

"She's a beautiful person who brought beauty to our school. Miss Ausley has a creative bone I could only wish to possess—and never will. I'm like, 'If we just paint the walls a different color, that should make it better,'" laughs Principal Treviño-Jones. "But Ms. Ausley took it to a different level. We're moving into our beautiful new school in a few weeks, and I can't wait to see what we're going to do at the new school with her." ■



Vanessa Ausley poses next to the wall she decorated for African American History Month.



▲ **COLBERT PARTICIPATES IN SUPERINTENDENTS' ROUNDTABLE AT 100 BLACK MEN CONFERENCE**

HCDE Superintendent James Colbert Jr. and leaders from various divisions recently attended "A Framework for Schooling: The State of the Black Manchild in Education," an education conference hosted by the 100 Black Men of Houston focused on the success of African American students in the K-12 environment.

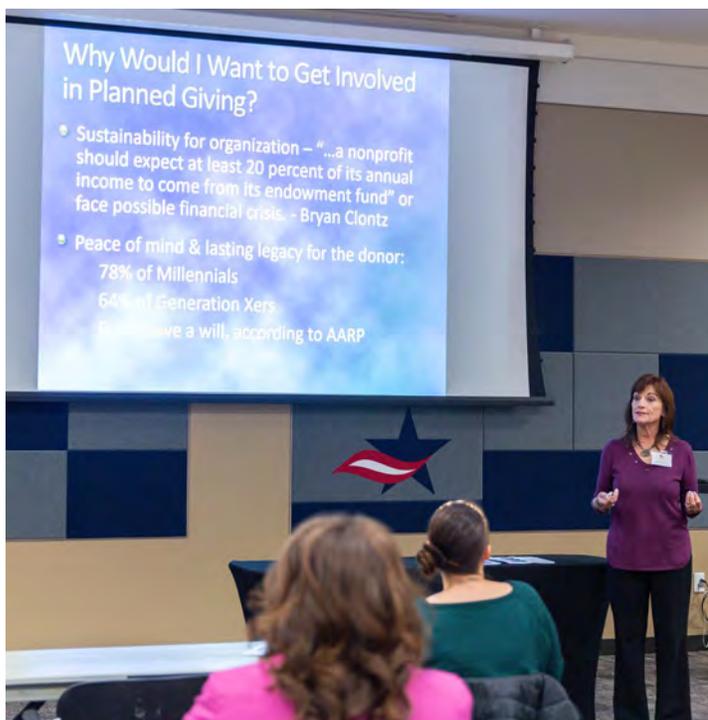
The 100 Black Men of Houston organization's mission is to enhance educational and economic opportunities for black youth through mentorship and community service. The event brought together K-12 educators, higher education professionals, community partners, and parents to discuss real-world, implementable solutions to improve academic outcomes and education completion for African American students.

On the first day of the event held in downtown Houston, HCDE Officer of Partnerships and Certification from the Center for Educator Success Isaac Carrier led attendees in a workshop

on leadership and policymaking titled "Fighting the Good Fight: Narratives of The African American Principalsip."

The following day, Colbert took part in a Superintendent's Roundtable. He was joined by Houston ISD Superintendent Millard House II, Aldine ISD Superintendent LaTonya Goffney, and new Alief ISD Superintendent Anthony Mays. The superintendent panelists challenged attendees to reevaluate how they support students of color.

With the goal to address the subject holistically at HCDE, division leaders from Head Start, Special Schools, and Adult Education also attended the event. They were joined by Assistant Superintendent of Education and Enrichment CJ Rodgers, Assistant Superintendent of Academic Support Jonathan Parker, and Senior Director of Head Start Venetia Peacock.



▲ **HCDE HOSTS EDUCATION FOUNDATION LEADERS IN WORKSHOP TO GROW AND DEVELOP INITIATIVES**

The Irvington conference center served as the backdrop for a Board2Board Workshop for education foundations and related organizations from across the state this week.

The workshop, an activity of the Texas Education Foundation Network (TEFN), provided opportunities to network, share best practices, and obtain the training and resources needed for foundations to succeed.

At the event, HCDE Trustee Andrea Duhon was joined by Chief of Staff Danielle Bartz and Community Development Director Cindy Tan, the Department's liaisons to the Education Foundation of Harris County (EFHC).

Through the Partners In Education program, the EFHC annually funds programs and projects in Harris County's 25 area school districts that support student initiatives and impact thousands of students' academic outcomes.

The workshop welcomed more than 50 attendees representing foundations as far away as Corpus Christi, Dallas, and Odessa.



## ▲ CASE FOR KIDS “AMPLIFIES” OUT-OF-SCHOOL-TIME LEADERSHIP SKILLS

Out-of-school-time (OST) personnel had the opportunity to sharpen their leadership skillset at the AMPLIFY Leadership Symposium hosted by the Center for Afterschool, Summer and Enrichment for Kids (CASE for Kids) in partnership with the YMCA of Greater Houston.

More than 180 attendees from the YMCA, CASE for Kids, Dream Academy, Precious Moment Child Care Center, and Texas ACE Cycle 11 grant campuses participated in the daylong event at the Irvington conference center.

Welcome remarks were provided by Juliet Stipeche, Director of Human Services for Houston Galveston Area Council (HGAC), which is heavily involved in workforce development and supports the role that OST plays in youth development.

Workshop sessions covered post-pandemic youth mental health, emotional intelligence, time management, wellness and social-emotional learning, personal growth, and team building.



## ◀ CHOICE PARTNERS CLOSES OUT THE YEAR WITH VENDOR AND MEMBER WORKSHOPS

Choice Partners held a vendor orientation and member workshop this week. The vendor orientation on Nov. 29 provided newly awarded contract holders the opportunity to learn how to utilize the online reporting system to record their contract usage quickly and efficiently as well as how to stay in compliance when using a cooperative contract for construction services.

The following day, Choice Partners members received training on how to report purchase orders to qualify for the Choice Cash rebate program, a new member benefit. Vendors and members also participated in sessions on federal compliance laws to reinforce their understanding of Choice Partner’s legal and compliant contracts. Both workshops were held in a hybrid format.



# WELCOME TO HCDE

Please join us in welcoming HCDE's new hires for November! Twenty-seven new faces have joined our Adult Education, Therapy Services, Special Schools, Head Start, CASE for Kids, Information Technology, Business Services, and Center for Educator Success divisions.



**Anastacia Burke**  
Family Services Provider  
Head Start



**Alisa Burns**  
Teacher  
Adult Education



**Arnell Cook**  
Teacher  
Adult Education



**Lakeita Dodson**  
Sub Teaching Assistant  
Head Start



**Eric Felker**  
Teacher  
Adult Education



**Desirae Guillory**  
Family Services Provider  
Head Start



**Kendra Hall**  
Teaching Assistant  
Head Start



**Karina Hernandez**  
Teacher  
Adult Education



**Shenekia Hines**  
Campus Manager  
Head Start



**Kalyn Jackson**  
Program Specialist  
Center For Afterschool  
Summer & Enrichment



**Kaya Jenkins**  
Program Specialist  
Center For Afterschool  
Summer & Enrichment



**Patricia Martinez**  
Early Childhood Teacher-CDA  
Head Start



**Roderick Nealy**  
Educational Aide III  
Academic & Behavior  
School - West



**Jennifer Nicholson**  
Occupational Therapist  
School-Based Therapy Services



**Azelia O'Neal**  
Family Engagement Coordinator  
Center For Afterschool  
Summer & Enrichment



**Bishop Ozan**  
Program Specialist  
Center For Afterschool  
Summer & Enrichment



**Sjourney Porter**  
Teacher  
Adult Education



**Catalina Ramos**  
Parent Engagement Liaison  
Special Schools



**Jordyn Raymundo**  
Aide  
Adult Education



**Emily Rincon**  
Process Improvement  
Coordinator  
Information Technology



**Luis Rivas**  
Teacher  
Adult Education



**Anai Rodriguez**  
Staff Accountant II  
Business Services



**Dawn Schappert**  
Early Childhood Teacher-CDA  
Head Start



**Sondra Spencer**  
Educational Aide III  
Highpoint East



**Micaela Vasquez**  
Early Childhood Teacher  
Head Start



**Karla West**  
Program Coordinator  
Workforce Division  
Adult Education



**Peter Zagone**  
Teacher  
Adult Education

## THIS WEEK THE FOLLOWING BOARD EXPECTATIONS WERE MET:

### Superintendent Objective D: Community Relations

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



This week, we profile HCDE's December Employee of the Month, Academic and Behavior School East bus driver Vanessa Ausley. Ausley is so much more than a bus driver for the ABS East community. The self-professed jack-of-all-trades is best known for building relationships with students and teachers through walls and bulletin boards she decorates every month. The decorated walls often highlight monthly observances such as Hispanic Heritage Month or Women's History Month and are intended to educate and serve as a mirror for the diverse students who attend the school.

Various HCDE leaders joined Superintendent James Colbert Jr. at the 100 Black Men of Houston's "A Framework for Schooling: The State of the Black Manchild in Education" conference to support African American students' success in the K-12 environment. Colbert participated in a Superintendent's Roundtable alongside the superintendents of Aldine, Alief, and Houston ISDs, who challenged attendees to reevaluate how they support students of color.

Finally, leaders who serve, lead, and liaise with the Education Foundation of Harris County attended a workshop this week to network, share best practices, and obtain the training and resources needed for foundations to succeed. Some of HCDE's biggest events of the year began as initiatives funded by the EFHC. Workshops like these will help HCDE develop a more robust foundation that will generate greater support for current programs and future initiatives to better serve the students of Harris County.

By communicating the initiatives of the Department and partnering with other governmental entities to meet the needs of students and the community in a coordinated way, I am meeting the expectation to impact education and advocate for all learners.

## HCDE BOARD

### Board President

Richard Cantu

### 1st Vice President

Andrea Duhon

### 2nd Vice President

Amy Hinojosa

### Board Members

David W. Brown

Erica Davis

Eric Dick

Danny Norris

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### December 8

[NPO Holiday Reception](#)

### December 13

[ABS East Student Holiday Program](#)

### December 14

[Bates Collision Responsible Parenting Award-Baytown](#)

[Irvington Holiday Reception](#)

Board Meeting

### December 15

[Bates Collision Responsible Parenting Award-Channelview](#)

### December 21 - January 2

Winter Break (HCDE Closed)