

# The Connector



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

From the office of **JAMES COLBERT, JR. | SUPERINTENDENT**



## Of Note...

This was a productive week for me at both the executive and program levels. I began the week with a mini in-service with my Executive Leadership Team. Because I am committed to efficiency in all areas of operations, we thoroughly examined the process by which Board agenda items are presented for submission. The goal of that discussion was to ensure that sufficient information is provided at the point of submission, and that we recalibrate the process to ensure that staff fully refocuses on the specificities associated with all agenda items. During that same meeting, I discussed my plan to implement best practices as it relates to our procurement process for professional and consulting services. In doing so, my goal is to ensure consistency and transparency in the selection of all individuals and entities secured for both professional and consulting services throughout the Department. In order for this to happen, previous internal processes and practices must be revamped. These changes are effective with the new fiscal year. Along with counsel, I will discuss this further with you during Executive Session at the July Board Meeting.

I also met with the Leadership Team which is comprised of all directors, principals, and members of the Executive Leadership Team. During that meeting, I informed this group of the same initiatives, and we had an opportunity to further explore and discuss how our specific programs and services might be affected by these changes, and we offered solutions to mitigate any difficulties that may result from these important tweaks in operations.

I am excited to report a significant achievement within our Teacher Alternative Certification program. HISD's Secondary Teacher of the Year is a graduate of our Alternative Certification program. The honoree, Vladimir Lopez, is also the 2014 recipient of the KBR Science Teacher of the Year award. In addition to teaching high school physics and algebra II, he also coaches the robotics team at East Early College High School. Mr. Lopez began our program in 2010 and started teaching in HISD only a year later. We are proud of both this division of HCDE and Mr. Lopez.

Also, in the area of professional development, the Summer Early Childhood Institute hosted a writers' workshop for educators of students in kindergarten through second grade. This training helped attendees explore how to help younger learners develop and understand the writing process. Along with our own curriculum specialists, the training was presented by teachers from Klein and Clear Creek ISDs.

Our Texas Virtual School Network program is offering a free online conference between HCDE and Region 10. This workshop will allow administrators and instructors to gain skills in online course design, development, instruction, accessibility, and assessment. Hundreds of educators are expected to network through this opportunity. HCDE continues to lead in the digital learning community.

Next week, I will be facilitating an in-depth professional development session with my Executive Leadership Team as we hone in on the goals and objectives for the 2015-16 academic year. During that session, I will articulate my vision for the Department for the next academic session, and for years to come. At that time, I will focus on the paradigm shift already underway, and I will revisit our purpose. I will deliver to each member of the team my expectations for every division—all of which will be shared with the Board in the near future.

In closing, please be reminded that the July Board Meeting will be held on Tuesday, July 21, 2015 at 1:00 p.m. As always, thanks for your service to HCDE and I hope you enjoy this issue of **The Connector**. Have a great weekend!

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# PROGRAM CONNECTIONS

## HISD Names HCDE Teacher Alternative Certification Graduate Vladimir Lopez as Secondary Teacher of the Year



The past five years may seem like a dream to Spain native Vladimir Lopez. Milestones include embracing a career in teaching, marriage, and parenthood, as well as taking in a new country and its culture.

For two straight years, Lopez has also received impressive teaching awards which many don't achieve throughout a lifetime. Through a wonder world of new experiences, he says he is grateful for the teacher training, preparation, and support from veteran educators in the Harris County Department of Education Teacher Alternative Certification Program.

Lopez moved to the U.S. in 2010, looking for adventure through a career as a math and science teacher in the Houston Independent School District, a large and forward-thinking district. Through a tip from a friend, he discovered HCDE's Teacher Alternative Certification Program and was able to begin teaching in HISD in one year. In addition to teaching high school physics and algebra II, he coaches the robotics team at East Early College High School.

Last May, Lopez earned the 2014 KBR Science Teacher of the Year award. KBR is an international engineering firm that rewards teachers using new and effective models of instruction. This May, Lopez was named Secondary Teacher of the Year in HISD, competing with nominees from several hundred campuses.

Experience and support are the keywords Vladimir uses to credit the HCDE teacher prep program. Veteran educators are employed to help with pedagogy, curriculum, classroom management, and job placement.

"They cover all the aspects of teaching," he said. "From day one you are supported—and from that day forward."

As a science, technology, engineering, and mathematics teacher who is bilingual, Lopez also earns teaching stipends. However, he insists his real rewards are of the intrinsic nature and include the "ah-ha" moments. (The robotics team goes home with an award. A student understands a higher-order concept.)

"The single-most challenge for a STEM teacher is when students don't come with the previous knowledge that they need to succeed in class," he said. "If the students don't have the right skills, they have a hard time catching up."

"The advantage is that science is very engaging. If you have the right approach, math is too. We can do a lot of 'cool' things that will help (reinforce) students' learning and that are also fun."

HCDE Teacher Alternative Certification Program Director Lidia Zatopek said the students in Lopez's classroom get to experience science at its most exciting level. They see science through hands-on, experimental, project-based approaches that have direct connections to the real-world science they will encounter as adults.

"We are thrilled to see Vladimir recognized at the district level," Zatopek said. "He is truly an amazing teacher."



## CASE for Kids City Connections Update



On Saturday, June 20, Houston Council Member Richard Nguyen (District F) and CASE for Kids Program Coordinator Adrian Fields presented Texans Together a check totaling \$14,545 to implement a City Connections grant. The organization used the money to reopen the Resource Center at The Falls of Bellaire apartment complex, located in west Houston's Alief community at 6700 S Dairy Ashford Road. The Resource Center will host a summer afterschool program for the apartment complex's youth featuring youth empowerment classes, teen summer jobs, and a host of other summer activities.

## Reminder: You're Invited to CASE for Kids AmeriCorps Recognition Ceremony

Don't forget that you're invited to our CASE for Kids AmeriCorps Recognition Ceremony on July 16. Link to invite: <http://www.hcde-texas.org/users/0221/docs/Connector/AmeriCorps%20Recognition%20Ceremony%20Invitation%202015%20%282%29.pdf>



# PROGRAM CONNECTIONS

## CASE for Kids Official Opens Lending Library

The CASE for Kids Lending Library is now open at HCDE's North Post Oak location. CASE for Kids' Lending Library contains a comprehensive collection of valuable resource materials available to all Harris County out-of-school time programs. The library contains hundreds of items, including resource guides; comprehensive curriculum; activity books and kits; sports and fitness equipment; and electronics. Additionally, the library includes a list of free, web-based curriculum and activities. This service is offered free of charge to the public via funding to CASE for Kids from the Houston-Galveston Area Council.



## Summer Early Childhood Institute: Using Writers' Workshop in K-2



Ninfa Zayas and SanJuanita Cruz are among a dozen educators who travelled over 300 miles from McAllen ISD to attend our Summer Early Childhood Institute on teaching writing to young students. During the 3-day workshop held July 6-8, attendees explored how to

help K-2 students develop and understand the writing process. The training is hosted by HCDE Curriculum Specialists and is presented by Klein ISD teacher Jan Cook and Clear Creek ISD teacher Morgan Fanning.



## ADVANCING TEACHING AND LEARNING by training the trainer

### Trainings hosted at HCDE this week

**07.07** | EC Summer Institute Day 2- Writing and Conferring with our Youngest Writers K-2

**07.08** | EC Summer Institute Day 3 - In Pictures and in Words: Illustration Study in the Writers' Workshop

**07.08** | HCDE Principal Certification Academy Information Meeting

# COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

## 3 Area Journalists Honored at HCDE Board Meeting August 18

Three area journalists will be honored at the August 18 HCDE Board of Trustees meeting. The Media Honor Roll 2015 awards are issued by Harris County Department of Education on behalf of the Texas Association of School Boards. The awards recognize journalists for providing valuable education as well as fair and balanced reporting. Three journalists will receive plaques and will be honored through a video presentation: Bill Spencer, KPRC-Channel 2; Michael Carl, KIAH-Channel 39; and Rebecca Jones, African American News.



## Free Virtual Online Learning Conference Promoted Through Texas Virtual School Network

The Texas Virtual School Network, a collaboration between HCDE and Region 10, hosts the "Speaks VOLumes, Virtual Online Learning Conference" on July 29-31. The workshop allows administrators and instructors to gain skills in online course design, development, instruction, accessibility, and assessment. Hundreds of educators will network through the online conference in the convenience of their offices or homes. Continuing professional education credits will be issued to participants at the end of the conference.



# BOARD CONNECTION

## MOTTO

HCDE...Always Educating

## MISSION STATEMENT

Harris County Department of Education supports Harris County by enriching educational opportunities and providing value through services.

## GOALS

### GOAL 1:

Impact education by responding to the evolving needs of Harris County

### GOAL 2:

Deliver value to Harris County by utilizing resources in an ethical, transparent, and fiscally responsible manner

### GOAL 3:

Advocate for all learners by using innovative methods to maximize students' potential.

### GOAL 4:

Provide cost-savings to school districts by leveraging tax dollars

### GOAL 5:

Recruit and maintain a high-quality professional staff

*Adopted by the HCDE Board of Trustees at its April 21, 2015 meeting.*

## HCDE BOARD

**BOARD PRESIDENT**  
POSITION 2, PRECINCT 4  
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*Position 7, At Large*

**Diane Trautman**  
*Position 3, At Large*

**Michael Wolfe**  
*Position 5, At Large*

## Upcoming Board Events:

**July Board Meeting**  
**Tuesday,**  
**July 21, 2015**  
**1:00 p.m.**

