

The CONNECTOR

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for the HCDE Board of Trustees



Harris County
Department of
Education

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FROM THE OFFICE OF JAMES COLBERT, JR.—SUPERINTENDENT

Of Note...

We're in the last few weeks of the academic year. Our client districts are winding down the year and I'm making my final rounds with my colleagues before school closes to assess how we may need to tweak our current operations to custom fit their needs for the next year. Our districts remain pleased with our service and we look forward to the 2018-19 academic year; however, they're hurting financially as a result of financial recapturing, changes in school finance and education allocation, among other grim scenarios. Now, more than ever, they can benefit from our cost-saving opportunities and we can assist them in increasing their efficiencies, possibly eliminating potential budget deficits. For our district, remaining competitive comes at a high price, and education in Harris County should not be compromised when HCDE serves as a viable option to that end.

Although summer is upon us, it is during that time that much of our real work towards planning, assessing quality control, and innovative professional development takes place to ensure continued excellence in our service to the districts and learners within Harris County.

This week, I began with a meeting of our Executive Leadership Team. This meeting allows each of us to remain in check with the pulse of the organization. It is a time where we discuss the needs of the various programs and divisions, and adjust systems and processes along the way, as necessary. It also allows us the opportunity to better evaluate our resources and it certainly informs our decision-making process for the allocation of resources.

On Tuesday, I met with representatives from UPSKILL Houston regarding partnering with them for a mutually beneficial endeavor which would greatly benefit our Adult Education students. This would also increase HCDE's positive visibility within the community. In addition, I conducted my ongoing meeting with Facilities regarding the status of Fortis Academy.

Thursday, I attended the SuperMENTor end of year celebration with the Head Start division. This was an exciting wind-down of the current SuperMENTor season of reading. (See additional details and photos from that event on the back page of this issue.) Today, I conducted my regularly scheduled meetings with staff.

In the area of teaching and learning, HCDE hosted the following workshops and trainings this week: National Incident Management System (NIMS) ICS 400 (a two-day workshop); Public Funds

Investment Training (a two-day training); and Charter School Share Meeting.

Looking into next week, I have called for a Fortis Update Meeting to be held Monday, on location (at Fortis Academy), and members of the board are encouraged to attend. At that time, you will be able to tour and see the transition that has occurred since the groundbreaking. I realize that many of you have not had an opportunity to visit the location since that time. Because two items (specifically related to the kitchen facility and other improvements), will be presented to you for approval at next week's meeting, I hope you can join us for this update.

Meanwhile, Tuesday, I will commence the process of interviewing for the Executive Director of Facilities. To that end, I have concluded interviewing for the Chief of Staff vacant position and I am pleased to inform you that I will be making a recommendation to you with regard to that position at Wednesday's Board Meeting.

Later Tuesday, I will be attending the Teacher of the Year Celebration at 6 p.m. at the HCDE Conference Center. This inaugural event will be a ceremony of excellence as we recognize the best of our best teachers on HCDE's campuses. Members of the board are invited to attend.

Again, please be reminded that the regularly scheduled May Board Meeting will be held Wednesday, preceded by a PFC Meeting at 12 noon. For the remainder of the week, I will continue interviews with candidates for the Executive Director of Facilities on Thursday, and Friday will be filled with my regularly standing meetings with staff.

In closing, I hope you enjoy this issue of The Connector. I look forward to seeing you at next week's Board Meeting. Thanks for your continued service to HCDE. I hope you have a relaxing weekend.

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Wednesday, May 16, 2018

- Board Meeting

Saturday, May 19, 2018

- Adult Education GED Graduation

Thursday, May 31, 2018

- AB West Graduation

Opportunity

PROGRAM CONNECTIONS

Seven Teachers of Year Semi-finalists Celebrated: 3 Finalists Profiled for May 15 Selection



Three finalists were named for the Teacher of the Year Award 2018 at Harris County Department of Education Schools. These stories provide a glimpse of the hard work and dedication involved in being a teacher every day. Their biographies also reflect the special attributes these teachers possess which resulted in their nominations.

The three finalists for Teacher of the Year are Gabrielle Gore Gardner, AB School East; Suzanne Boyd, AB School West; and JoAnna Lee, Highpoint School East.

Four teachers were nominated as semi-finalists. They are Abigail Okeadu, AB School West; Breeana Cooke, AB School West; Angela Ugo, AB School West; and Frank A. Harris Jr., Highpoint School East.

The Teacher of the Year will be announced from 6-7 p.m. on May 15 at HCDE Irvington through a special awards ceremony. We hope that you can celebrate the successes of these teachers as we wrap up Teacher Appreciation Week through this surprise announcement.

ECPA Employee Completes MS 150, Raises \$1,500 for MS Society



Amy Thompson, secretary to Educator Certification and Professional Advancement, completed the MS 150 this year to raise \$1,500 to support multiple sclerosis research. As a fourth-year participant in the fundraiser, Thompson trains regularly for the, two-day, 150-mile biking event and is committed to her personal fundraising goal each year.

It is the largest of the 100 Bike MS events in the United States, with 13,000 cyclists and over 3,000 volunteers with countless spectators along the route and at the finish line in Austin.

To date, the national endeavor has raised over \$1 billion for MS research. HCDE is proud for Thompson to represent us for the cause.

ADVANCED TEACHING AND LEARNING BY TRAINING THE TRAINER

MAY 8, 2018

National Incident Management System (NIMS) ICS 400 (2 Day Workshop)

MAY 9, 2018

Public Funds Investment Training

MAY 10, 2018

Public Funds Investment Training

Charter School Share Meeting



Opportunity

PROGRAM CONNECTIONS

Teacher of the Year Finalist: Positive Life Skills Teacher Gabrielle Gardner Takes the High Road



Life skills teacher Gabrielle Gardner knows that each of her students can learn. Much like a tailor alters clothes, it's her job to provide differentiated instruction modified to fit to each of her student's needs.

Challenge is part of an everyday routine for this 11-year teacher at Harris County Department of Education's Academic and Behavior School East, a small campus near Gulfgate Mall with 350 students with emotional and

intellectual challenges. Students ages 5-22 travel here from their home district on a contractual basis and thrive in a nurturing, specialized environment, with one teacher and an aide for every eight students.

Gardner teaches skills which can be generalized outside of the school. Through positive behavior management and support, Boy's Town curriculum and applied behavior analysis, she reinforces her lessons. Students learn to vote in a mock presidential election. They plant a vegetable garden and learn the parts of plants. By turning a vocational lab into a pizza parlor for the day, social skills are reinforced.

Principal Mindy Robertson calls Gardner passionate and faithful. This year she is Teacher of the Year for her campus, one of four special schools provided by HCDE.

"She has been instrumental in growing our vocational program for students in the life skills program and takes a leadership role in supporting new teachers with special education case load management," Robertson said.

Classroom learning solutions are important for Gardner. Though seemingly simple, the results are life-changing. There was the student who had a pattern of screaming and running across the classroom while biting his hand. Perplexed and worried about the repetitive behavior, Gardner worked to find answers and found that the boy wanted water. Once the behavior was erased and he learned sign language to request water, he was able to return to his home campus.

Another student who is a high-functioning student did not want to participate in vocational activities this year. He would sit with his head down, disengaged from his classmates, using profanity and refusing to work. Once she introduced cooking, he came out of his shell. Now he's in charge of the oven and assists others with cooking activities

"It takes a special type of person to work with special needs populations with behavioral disabilities," she said. "You can't take the student's behavior personally. Every day is a new day."

In Gardner's world, all her teacher colleagues are superheroes. In that sphere, she spiritedly calls herself superwoman. Her personal super-power superlatives are positivity, dedication and the desire to improve the lives of those around her.

HR Hosts Yogurt Socials to Fuel Employees During Health and Fitness Month



During Health and Fitness Month, Human Resources hosted two "Yogurt Bar" events at Irvington and NPO to fuel employees for the day with yogurt and fruit. Human Resources is also hosting several fitness workshops throughout the month for employees.

Opportunity

PROGRAM CONNECTIONS

Teacher of the Year Finalist: Special Education Teacher Suzanne Boyd Uses Past Experience to Reach Students



Suzanne Boyd knew from a young age she wanted to be a teacher, but her experience in law enforcement led her to special

intellectual, developmental and behavioral challenges. Area school districts contract with the two schools that provide specialized instruction to prepare students ages 5-21 to return to their home districts.

AB School West Principal Victor Keys says Boyd is the greatest advocate for her students and has experienced the highest success rate at the school in sending students back to their home campuses. She was also selected as the campus' 2018 Teacher of the Year.

Boyd's greatest joy as a teacher is watching her students grow and show progress despite personal and physical challenges. Her classroom is differentiated, so each student works on their own level, at their own pace. Boyd rises to this challenge by providing alternative approaches to learning and presenting material in a variety of ways so each student can learn as deeply as possible.

Boyd also combines her differentiated instruction with social skills development so her students are empowered socially and intellectually. She encourages them daily to respect others and explore learning in creative ways.

"I want to make an impact on young minds and help students believe they can learn, overcome challenges and accomplish any dream if they work hard enough," said Boyd. "I also hope to inspire my students to become role models in their communities."

education. In her second year as a special education teacher at Harris County Department of Education's Academic and Behavior School West, Boyd brings a unique perspective to her job.

Boyd began working for the Houston ISD Police Department in 1989 as a campus officer, where she interacted with students daily and often resolved conflicts and concerns. During her tenure, she developed a passion for working with students with social and emotional issues and wanted to reach them before they were placed into the criminal justice system.

Her law enforcement experience combined with two degrees in psychology helped Boyd realize there are many mental and emotional disturbances that mirror criminal intent.

"It became my passion to help high-risk students with learning and emotional challenges reach their full potential," said Boyd. "I felt I could be a role model and advocate for students with special needs."

HCDE's Academic and Behavior Schools provide an enriching and supportive environment for students with

Opportunity

PROGRAM CONNECTIONS

Teacher of the Year Finalist: Veteran Teacher JoAnna Lee Shares Knowledge, Passion for At-Risk Students



Highpoint East English teacher JoAnna Lee goes beyond developing her students' love of literature and writing. As a veteran teacher in the Disciplinary Alternative Education Program (DAEP) setting,

Lee is passionate about helping a population of students that often falls between the cracks in the general education system.

Highpoint is a campus for troubled youth in grades 6-12 that offers a safe and highly-structured learning environment, with a low, 15-to-1 student to teacher ratio. Students come to Highpoint on a contract basis through their home school district with the goal of returning and graduating from their home-district high school.

While teaching special education in Cypress-Fairbanks ISD, Lee became familiar with Harris County Department of Education's Highpoint School East. Three years ago, Lee sought out a job teaching at Highpoint East to work exclusively with adjudicated or expelled youth.

Effective and supportive teachers are a critical factor contributing to student achievement, but DAEP campuses often have high teacher turnover. Lee has made it her goal to work with teachers in this setting and share her experience and passion for teaching at-risk students. She also hopes to help at-risk populations understand the importance of graduating and pass on her love for reading and writing.

"Most at-risk students have experienced some type of trauma, abuse or neglect by loved ones," said Lee. "They need educators who are proficient and compassionate to meet their educational needs and break the shell of their defiant behavior."

For Lee, this involves differentiating English lessons to meet the differences in abilities, interests and learning styles of her students. She uses the Love and Logic approach to encourage her students to own and solve their problems, an important skill in the real world. She also works to gain their trust and help them realize the importance of education for their future.

Moving forward, Lee hopes to share the knowledge she's gained from her 10-year teaching career with a new generation of teachers by becoming a college professor for pre-service educators. She is currently working on her doctorate in ethical leadership.

"Above all else, JoAnna possesses a passion for teaching," says Highpoint East Principal Marion Cooksey. "I've witnessed her growth as a leader as she consistently shares her knowledge and experience with her peers."

Lee serves on the Campus Improvement Committee at Highpoint East and mentors teachers new to the DAEP setting. The goal is to ensure that each student is successful while being served by HCDE.

"Every person has the right to an education," says Lee. "Our schools serve the community by ensuring each student, no matter their past behavior or mistakes, can learn and grow."

Value

BUSINESS CONNECTIONS



Business Services Hosts GTOT

HCDE hosts the Government Treasurers of Texas (GTOT) Public Funds Investment Training seminar for investment officers on May 9 and May 10, 2018.

Attendees received 10 hours of investment training, and over 80 attendees participated in the training.

Service

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Nearly 300 Attend Head Start Healthy Minds Healthy Families Conference



Nearly 300 parents, caretakers, educators and others involved in early childhood education attended the Healthy Minds Healthy Families Conference on May 4 presented by HCDE Head Start and the HOGG Foundation of Mental Health. The conference provided training to educators and caregivers

of children with challenging behaviors and increased awareness of mental health issues in children as well as adults.

Training sessions with health professionals and others in the mental health industry covered subjects like domestic

violence, mindfulness in the classroom, early childhood trauma and the power of positive parenting. Participants also heard from keynote speaker Dr. Jinneh Dyson, an author and mental health advocate who discussed trauma and our reactions to it.

See photos from the event at <https://bit.ly/2KL7aEQ>.



10 Ways to Thank a Teacher: Accolades, Freebies/Discounts



May 7-11 is Teacher Appreciation week, so we're recommending

10 ways to say thank you. In addition, our Harris County School Superintendent James Colbert is expressing his thanks to teachers throughout HCDE and beyond: http://youtu.be/OEG4Lt_S25o.

10 ways to say thanks:

1. Let's start with saying it. Thank you. Teachers never hear that thoughtful expression too much. Express yourself through social media, a handwritten note, a certificate or just say it! If you're using social media today, choose from these hashtags: #ThankATeacher or #TeacherAppreciation or #TeacherAppreciationWeek .
2. Stock the classroom with school supplies. At year's end, resources are depleted and these supplies come out of teachers' pockets. Leave your teacher with supplies for the next school year. These can include cleaning supplies, tissues or basic staples like printing paper, glue, pencils, etc.
3. Gift cards: Teachers love them. From fast food to car washes to nail salons to hardware stores, never underestimate the power of plastic.
4. Volunteer: During the last week of school, teachers need muscle to pack up their classrooms. Offer an hour, two or three to assist.
5. Supply a list of freebies to your teacher so that she/he can take advantage of the "best deals" for educators this week: <http://wp.me/p4QJFI-Lz>
6. Give flowers or a plant.
7. Create a goodie basket of healthy or unhealthy snacks for your teacher, depending on preference.
8. Bring breakfast before class. Deliver a hot coffee and bagel to start the day off right.
9. Tell the principal. Everyone appreciates a recommendation to the boss. Send an email about your awesome teacher to the principal and cc your teacher or tell the principal in person.
10. Set up a coffee and cookie table in the teacher's lounge. It's not too late, even after Teacher Appreciation Week. Work with your community to host a teacher appreciation event!

Systemic Achievement

...with purposeful intent

INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT

In my goal to meet the elements of performance related to the board's goal for me to

- Ensure that goals and objectives form the basis of curricular decision-making and instruction, and communicate expectations for student achievement; and
- Ensure that appropriate data are used in developing recommendations and making decisions regarding the instructional program and resources

This week, the Head Start division celebrated its end of the year celebration for the SuperMENTors. I have served as a SuperMENTor for several years and it has been one of the most rewarding experiences during my tenure at HCDE.



I regularly encourage gentlemen within HCDE to volunteer in this endeavor. It is very exciting to see the eyes of these young learners light up and become engaged when listening to and watching dads and other male figures read with strong expression and even with some sound effects.

I strongly endorse this program and it is certainly a valuable initiative within the Head Start division and overall program, nationwide.

By HCDE continuing this initiative, and because of both my continued endorsement and participation, I am meeting the Board's expectations of me to ensure that quality curriculum and instruction, along with innovative teaching methods, are in place, and that I am encouraging a sense of community within the Head Start division, while representing the Department in a positive way—impacting learners, staff, parents, and the Head Start communities in the areas where I volunteer.



It provides the opportunity to demonstrate the strength of strong male figures, and the positive impact they can make in the lives of our youngest learners.

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UPCOMING EVENTS:

Wednesday, May 16, 2018

- Board Meeting

