



Of Note...

It's hard to believe that we're nearing the end of yet another academic year. Our programs have realized exceptional successes and we have achieved goals set for our unique populations throughout the Department. It is always a rewarding experience for me to reflect back over a school year, having the opportunity to see the growth and accomplishments of our students.

To that end, this month is designated as Autism Awareness Month. We hosted a successful Autism Summit for educators in client districts this week, but we also have numerous in-house success stories related to how we approach students who learn differently, including those on the Autism spectrum. Please be sure to read the inspiring article on page 3 about students who are flourishing at our schools. Without our special schools, client districts and parents would be at a great loss.

As usual, I began the week with a meeting of my Executive Leadership Team (ELT), followed by a series of meetings with internal staff. ELT and I spent Tuesday and Wednesday in budget hearings, thoroughly dissecting program plans for the upcoming year. This is a methodical process in accordance with my systemic leadership. Yesterday, I attended my ongoing SuperMENTor reading session with our Head Start students. There was also the continuance of budget hearings in the afternoon. Today, I will be attending internal meetings at the North Post Oak location.

In the area of advancing teaching and learning, this week, HCDE hosted the following workshops and training sessions: Autism Summit: Day 1- You're Going to Love This Kid!; Autism Summit: Day 2- Text Maps to Memory Caps; CPR and First Aid; and Out-of-School Time Spring Symposium. We ensure that our trainings and workshops are timely, and relevant to the needs of our client school districts and students across Harris County.

Looking ahead into next week, I will be away from the office, with the exception of Wednesday. I look forward to seeing you then, at Wednesday's regularly-scheduled Board Meeting.

In closing, thank you for your continued service to HCDE. I hope you enjoy this issue of **The Connector**. Have a relaxing weekend.

UPCOMING EVENTS:

HCDE Board Meeting—Wednesday, April 17, 2019

WEEK OF APRIL 8, 2019

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Opportunity

PROGRAM CONNECTIONS

E-Colors in Education: Understand Your Team's Personalities



Understanding your peers' personalities provides a new frontier in education leadership and team communications. Classes offered through E-Colors in Education are available through

a collaboration with Harris County Department of Education's Teaching and Learning Center.

E-Colors in Education CEO Rosalinda Mercado created the educational arm of the company after experiencing the power of human performance coaching through professional development in education six years ago.

Three leadership-themed workshops are available this spring and summer:

May 3 - E-Colors & Intentional Leadership: Diversity & Inclusion <https://bit.ly/2UAZddn> June 4 - E-Colors & Intentional Leadership: Accountability & Commitment <https://bit.ly/2WVqMvs>

June 18 - Leadership Institute for Social & Emotional Learning (E-Colors & Personal Intervention) <https://bit.ly/2YX6Rht>

(Discovering your E-Colors is as simple as going to the Equilibria website and completing the free inventory at www.equilibria.com/PDI-home .)

View the video: <https://youtu.be/RNlgtl2Dq8Q>

ADVANCED TEACHING AND LEARNING BY TRAINING THE TRAINER

APRIL 9, 2019

Autism Summit

Autism Summit - Day 1 You're Going to Love This Kid!

APRIL 10, 2019

Autism Summit - Day 2 Text Maps to Memory Caps

APRIL 11, 2019

CPR/1st Aid

APRIL 12, 2019

Out-of-School Time (OST) Spring Symposium



Opportunity

PROGRAM CONNECTIONS

Autistic Students Nurtured in Small Classes with Behavioral Curriculum in HCDE Special Schools



Teacher Tabori Grayson and student Hunter Clark

(April is National Autism Awareness Month. Autism now affects one in 59 children and greatly varies from person to person. Children with autism do progress; early intervention is key according to the National Autism Association.)

When John Clark learned his autistic son Hunter would be placed in a special school to deal with his behavior issues, he was dumbfounded, then upset. The father of the 9-year-old hired an advocate to represent his son. By the time he toured Academic and Behavior School East, a special school for children with behavior and intellectual challenges, he was already looking into private schools for his son.

Upon meeting principal Keith Oliphant and his staff and walking the hallways, he began to issue apologies.

“If every school could be run like this one, they would be in a lot better shape,” said Clark.

Since Hunter was placed in Harris County Department of Education’s AB School East this year by his home school district, the Clarks have seen a transformation in the independence of their third-grader. He engages in conversation in restaurants and talks to neighbors.

Instead of banging a water bottle on the table to show he’s disgruntled, he says: “Daddy, I’m not happy.”

Autism is a bio-neurological developmental disability that generally appears before age 3, when Hunter was diagnosed. Children with autism usually have difficulties in verbal and non-verbal communication, social interactions and leisure or planned activities. It is diagnosed four times more often in boys than girls.

Harris County Department of Education has two specialty schools called AB School West and East to serve children with autism, behavioral disorders and other significant physical and emotional needs. The schools use Boys Town

curriculum to promote positive behavior and dismiss the negative.

Each of the 104 students currently attending the school is assigned an individualized education plan and benefits from small classrooms with a low, student-to-teacher ratio. Children are sent to the special schools through a district contractual agreement with a goal of returning to the home school district.

“We like having Hunter here, but our job is to get him to be independent and equipped with the skills he needs to be successful to return to his home school,” said AB East Principal Oliphant.

When Hunter goes back to his school in La Porte Independent School District next September, he will be equipped with improved social and academic skills or habits.

“I’ve seen his academics improve,” said Clark. “Hunter still struggles and will resist homework like any kids, but before he would throw a fit. He sighs but has learned that this is what we have to do. Homework is first.”

Parent Flobert Tiam, father to Kyle, says his son was diagnosed with autism and ADHD and has severe mood swings. He came to AB School West in 2016. He is thankful for the basic things his son has learned to do now like eat at the table, help dress himself and listen to instructions. He has this advice for parents:

“I would tell parents to get involved with a forum for parents of autism in order to have support,” Tiam said. “Consider a specialized school. These children need special attention.



Flobert and Kyle Tiam

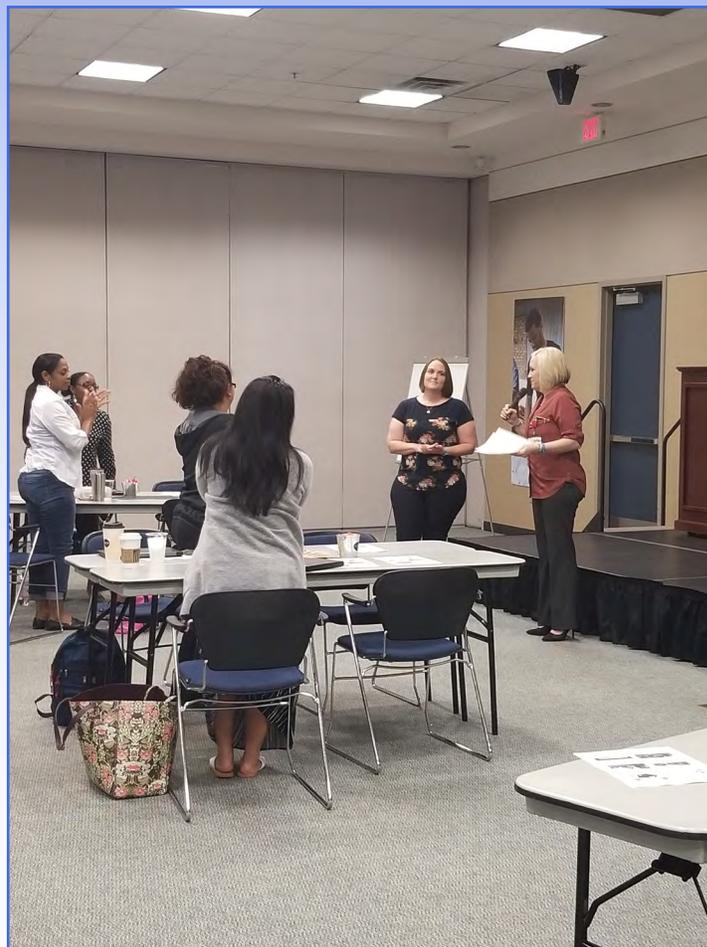
“When they feel that love, I think these children are able to do more.”

View YouTube video: <https://youtu.be/qOtdHmbExk>

Opportunity

PROGRAM CONNECTIONS

Galena Park ISD Autism Specialist Shares Story at Autism Summit



Going above and beyond the call of duty is exactly what Galena Park Independent School District Autism Specialist Blair Overman did recently when one of her students was involved in a tragic car accident that killed his brother and mother. She shared her story to attendees at the Autism Summit April 10 of how she has spent countless hours at the hospital following the accident to help the student cope with his injuries and the loss of his family while relatives from out of state were traveling to Houston. From creating an emotions chart using characters from Inside Out to assisting him to the ambulance then following it to the sub-acute inpatient rehabilitation facility. Overman received a standing ovation from attendees for helping this student in his recovery.

Opportunity

PROGRAM CONNECTIONS

Power of Debate Attested by 2 CASE Debaters at Luncheon



The power of debate was the focus of the Houston Urban Debate League Annual Awards Luncheon in downtown Houston on April 4 at the J.W. Marriott. Harris County Department of Education joined HUDL as several CASE Debates students provided testimonials.

Toni Candis, CASE for Kids project coordinator and CASE for Kids AmeriCorps VISTA member Aundrey Mosley represented CASE Debates at the event.

“Two of our students talked about their life experiences, how debate has influenced their lives and how it will shape their futures,” said Candis.

CASE Debates pairs a successful, established debate model created by HUDL with CASE for Kids, an afterschool intermediary. While HUDL provides debate opportunities for high school teens within HISD, CASE Debates expanded the program to provide opportunities to other districts in Harris County, including charter schools.

“While many of our students spend a lot of time debating about policy and global issues, this event

which addressed supporters of the program gave two of our students the chance to share their life stories in front of an audience,” said Mosley.

Kennedy Scott, a junior from Spring Early College Academy in Spring ISD shared with the crowd of 115 how debate fueled her ambition to become a criminal defense attorney and community leader.

Hamza Bouderdaben aspires to become a lawyer. He is a junior from Harmony School of Advancement. He was inquisitive about debate after thinking that a classroom of peers was engaged in a yelling match. The teacher explained the process of debate and welcomed him into her classroom. Since that day, he was hooked.



Both students plan to be involved in CASE Debates during their senior year.

In 2018-2019, CASE Debates served almost 300 students in six school districts and three charters. Students have earned numerous awards and scholarships through the CASE Debates program.



Sushi 101: Fortis Academy Culinary Students Get Sushi Savvy

Students at Fortis Academy, Harris County’s first public recovery high school, take the sushi challenge as they explore a new culinary genre. Culinary arts is added to the school’s traditional academic curriculum. View the video:

<https://youtu.be/2PJ5HKN0m0>

Systemic Achievement

...with purposeful intent

Community Relations

In an effort to meet the elements associated with this expectation of performance for 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 the community; and**
- **Work with other governmental entities and community organizations to meet the needs of students and the community in a coordinated way.**

This week, HCDE hosted an Autism Summit for educators as we recognize Autism Month. Autism Spectrum Disorder refers to a broad range of conditions characterized by challenges with social skills, repetitive behaviors, speech and nonverbal communication. According to the Center for Disease Control, autism affects an estimated 1 in 59 children in the United States today.



The summit was a success and exceeded the needs of the educators in attendance from client district, also working with this unique population of students.

By HCDE continuing to host conferences such as this, I am working to achieve the Board's goal to maintain visibility in the community; be open to the ideas and needs of the community; communicate the needs and accomplishments of the Department, as appropriate; and listen and take into account differing viewpoints of various constituencies using good judgment to discern the best decision and action for the Department.

HCDE BOARD

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UPCOMING EVENTS:

April Board Meeting

Wednesday, April 17, 2019

