



WEEK OF APRIL 15, 2019

## IN THIS ISSUE

**3** *CASE Debates Duo from Alief ISD Takes Historic Win at Urban Debate National Championship in Washington D.C.*

**3** *Fortis Students Mentor Elementary Students During Cookie Culinary Exercise*

**4** *A Closer Look at Occupational Therapy in Recognition of Occupational Therapy Month*

## Of Note...

It was a great week at HCDE across the board. As recognized in yesterday's Board Meeting, our CASE Debates duo from Alief ISD realized a historic win at the Urban Debate National Championship in Washington, D.C. Our CASE division added this program beneath its umbrella during the 2017-2018 fiscal year—and even then—with a much-delayed start, due to Hurricane Harvey. What a win for both HCDE and our client school district. It's a tremendous victory for the student debaters. We should all be proud of this significant accomplishment.

I am also pleased to report that Fortis Academy will be showcased on ABC Channel 13. The affiliate was so impressed with the county's first recovery high school that a reporter visited the school, interviewed students and teachers, and captured footage during both a science and culinary class. Stay tuned to KTRK Channel 13 to watch the story. (Once we have an expected run date, we will apprise you accordingly.)

I began this week with a meeting of my Executive Leadership Team (ELT), followed by a lunch meeting with a representative from a local agency to discuss a possible partnership related to workforce development. I also conducted standing internal meetings. Budget hearings continued throughout the week, and I attended our regularly scheduled Board Meeting yesterday. We bring the week to a close today, in observation of the Good Friday holiday tomorrow.

This week, in the area of teaching and learning, HCDE hosted the following workshops: Music Therapy Leadership Group and Finding the Right Blend: Blending Content for the 21st Century Classroom. These specialized and unique workshops are part of what makes our professional development program such a bargain for educators. Not only do these sessions benefit the students of Harris County, but they also enrich our client school districts—exponentially—through our train the trainer model.

Looking ahead into next week, ELT and I will continue, and possibly conclude, all budget hearings. I will also conduct other regularly-scheduled meetings.

Thanks to all of you for attending yesterday's Board of Trustees Meeting. It is always rewarding to have all of our board members engaged in the business of advancing education in Harris County. I appreciate your service to HCDE.

In closing, I hope you enjoy this issue of **The Connector**. Have a great weekend and I wish you a Happy Easter.

### UPCOMING EVENTS:

**HCDE Board Meeting—Wednesday, May 15, 2019**

# Opportunity

## PROGRAM CONNECTIONS

### Fortis Academy to be Showcased on ABC 13



ABC 13 Digital Reporter Juan Beltran recently visited Fortis Academy to highlight how the school is helping students with academics during recovery. The county's first public recovery high school helps students who have completed a substance abuse or dependency rehabilitation program continue their high school education in a sober environment. He interviewed students and teachers along with taking video during a science and culinary class. The story is expected to air within the month, and we will update you once the date is announced.



## ADVANCED TEACHING AND LEARNING BY TRAINING THE TRAINER

**APRIL 16, 2019**

Music Therapy Leadership Group

**APRIL 17, 2019**

Finding the Right Blend - Blending Content for the 21st Century Classroom



# Opportunity

## PROGRAM CONNECTIONS

### CASE Debates Duo from Alief ISD Takes Historic Win at Urban Debate National Championship in Washington D.C.



Alief Independent School District Kerr High School teen CASE Debates students Queen Eche and Hillary Nguyen made history as the first debate team from their school to

place in the Urban Debate National Championship in Washington D.C.

The pair competed in the national tournament and narrowly lost to a Chicago team but earned second place and a college assistance scholarship. Eche was also recognized as the second-best individual speaker in the tournament. Forty-two teams from across the nation with a total of 83 students competed in the policy debate competition for the national champion title.

Also qualifying for the national championship but not placing was a team from Harmony School of Advancement, Riley Hardwick and Khalida Amla.

This year the champion teams gathered at

Georgetown University to debate about immigration reform.

“We are extremely proud of our CASE Debates students who have only participated in CASE Debates for the two years the program has been in existence,” said Lisa Thompson-Caruthers, director for the Center for Afterschool, Summer and Enrichment for Kids, or CASE for Kids. “We are thankful for the support for high school debate from our HCDE Board and Superintendent James Colbert.”

CASE Debates pairs a successful, established debate model created by the Houston Urban Debate League 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.

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.

### Fortis Students Mentor Elementary Students During Cookie Culinary Exercise



Fortis Academy culinary arts students visited Houston Independent School District Atherton Elementary School with a cooking lesson this month that included math and science. After mixing the ingredients for fondant, the Fortis mentors helped the elementary students decorate the cookies.

# Opportunity

## PROGRAM CONNECTIONS

### A Closer Look at Occupational Therapy in Recognition of Occupational Therapy Month



*(April is National Occupational Therapy Month. Harris County Department of Education served 7,426 students and 6,391 teachers in the 2018-2019 school year. Over 100 occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants are part of that success story.)*

Sometimes a smile from a child is all you're looking for to know you've made a difference. Harris County Department of Education occupational therapist and Horizon Award winner Adele Brunson knows that to be true on a daily basis as she works with children with physical challenges in the school environment.

Brunson, who joined HCDE's School-Based Therapy Services in 2018-2019, earned the Horizon Award from the Texas Occupational Therapy Association. The state award recognizes a new occupational therapist who has five years or less of experience in the field.

"The Horizon Award is meaningful to me in allowing me to feel that my love and passion for occupational therapy, through deed and word, is reaching and inspiring others," said Brunson. "Occupational therapy enables people to live their best life--to its fullest--by giving people of all ages back their independence."

Over 100 school-based occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants work for HCDE and provide occupational services in 28 school districts and charter schools. They help children to fulfill their role as students by supporting their academic achievement and

promoting positive behaviors necessary for learning.

Occupational therapists and occupational therapist assistants support academic and non-academic outcomes, including social skills, math, reading and writing, behavior management, recess, participation in sports, self-help skills, prevocational/vocational participation, transportation and more.

Brunson works for HCDE and services Katy Independent School District at elementary, junior and high schools through a partnership that HCDE has with the district.

As an example of the impact she makes with children, she remembers the student with cerebral palsy she was helping with handwriting. The little girl was who was right-handed was forced to learn to write left-handed because her cerebral palsy had affected the control of her right hand.

"She told me that she did not like being left-handed because it made her stand out and be different from all her other classmates," Brunson said.

Brunson is left-handed herself and told the little girl during her evaluation that left-handed people were awesome, creative and fun.

"At the end of the school day, she came up to me, smiled, giggled and told me that she felt so cool to be left-handed," Brunson said.

"To me, seeing her smile so big was the greatest gift that day."

# 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 to**
- **Work with other governmental entities and community organizations to meet the needs of students and the community in a coordinated way**

This week, we celebrate the recent CASE Debates victory at the Urban Debate National Championship in Washington, D.C. Using a model created by the Houston Urban Debate League (HUDL), and tweaked by HCDE, CASE Debates provides debate opportunities for high school teens in Harris County, including charter schools.



A duo from client school district Alief ISD competed in the national tournament, narrowly losing to a Chicago team, but earned second place as well as a college assistance scholarship.

This year alone, CASE Debates serves almost 300 students in six school districts and three charters. Students have earned numerous awards and scholarships through this extraordinary program for high schoolers.

**By HCDE continuing to participate in this endeavor, I am working to achieve the Board's goal of me to present a positive, professional image of HCDE; maintain visibility in the community; be open to the ideas and needs of the community; and communicate the needs and accomplishments of the Department, as appropriate.**

## HCDE BOARD

### *Board President*

Josh Flynn

### *Vice President*

George Moore

Richard Cantu

Eric Dick

Danny Norris

Don Sumners

Michael Wolfe

## UPCOMING EVENTS:

### **May Board Meeting**

Wednesday, May 15, 2019

