



WEEK OF AUGUST 26, 2019

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Of Note...

The first day of school has a certain magic to it. The colorful pop of new bulletin boards and posters that line a room. The shine of freshly waxed floors and in some cases, new paint. But most of all, it's the brightness of a smile on a student's face as he or she walks into their new classroom and greets their teacher that makes a school seem to shiver with excitement.

This spirit was evident in our campuses this week, as HCDE welcomed our students back to school on Monday. With Cy-Fair and HISD starting this week as well, all schools in Harris County's 25 school districts are officially back in session.

I visited our schools on Tuesday, walking the halls and greeting students and staff on their second day of school. Our campuses were alive with enthusiasm for a new year. Everywhere I went I saw smiles and an eagerness to get started with teaching and learning. I am excited for the future of our special schools as we continue provide high quality education in alternative settings for the hundreds of students who walk through our doors each day.

Staff from our Special Schools Division also made several home visits to new and returning students last week, to welcome them back to school, allow students to get to know a few faces and answer any questions parents or guardians may have had. Home visits are a common practice in many schools around the Houston area. It is a proven strategy for establishing and feeding relationships between the school and parents. I look forward to seeing the positive interactions that grow from these initial meetings and how we work with families to support student success all year long.

I started the week with my Executive Leadership Team and a debrief of the convocation. Thank you to Mr. Flynn, Dr. Moore, Mr. Cantu and Mr. Norris for your attendance. I hope you enjoyed the Realm of Possibility and getting a chance to talk to HCDE's 1,000 staff members, celebrate accomplishments from last year and see our animated video. For those of you who were not able to make it, we have posted all the photos and video from the event on our internal portal called "The Hub." You can access it by using your HCDE login and password at <https://hcdeportal.hcde-texas.org>.

As mentioned above, I spent all day Tuesday at our four campuses, meeting new staff and watching students, teachers and aides interact and establish routines and structure that will set the tone for a positive school year.

The rest of the week I met with staff for internal meetings, started my quarterly meetings with several board members and held discussions about first week activities. Next week we delve into our normal school-year activities including our monthly leadership team meeting, agenda review and preparing for the September board meeting.

Monday is Labor Day holiday and all offices and schools will be closed. I hope you enjoy the three-day weekend!

UPCOMING EVENTS:

HCDE Board Meeting—Wednesday, September 18, 2019

Opportunity

PROGRAM CONNECTIONS

Students Return to ABS East and West, Highpoint and Fortis: Scenes from First Week



HCDE Superintendent James Colbert visited Academic and Behavior School West on Tuesday, the second day of school. He took a moment to pose for a picture with ABS West Principal Victor Keys, student Christopher Barnes and Assistant Superintendent Jonathan Parker.



Academic and Behavior School West teacher Suzanne Boyd stands with her bulletin board, Welcome to the Realm of Possibilities, the theme of this year's Annual Staff meeting.



Academic and Behavior East students and teachers were all smiles at the end of the second day of school.



Fortis Academy culinary teacher Ouindetta Thomas helps student Roberta Vasquez with making a quiche during the second day of school.



Superintendent James Colbert visits with new Fortis Academy teacher James Hilton on Aug. 27. Colbert was impressed with his history-related posters displayed around the room.



HCDE Superintendent James Colbert, Assistant Superintendent Jonathan Parker, Senior Director of Schools Anthony Mays visit a class at Highpoint. Students were completing a life map about their lives to learn about each other.

Opportunity

PROGRAM CONNECTIONS

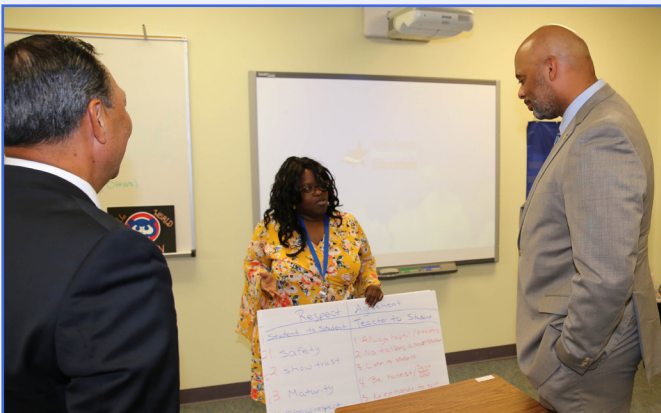
Students Return to ABS East and West, Highpoint and Fortis: Scenes from First Week



Superintendent James Colbert admires the new artwork inside of Fortis Academy. The artwork consists of inspiring words for the students as they complete their high school education in a sober environment.



Students play a game of basketball during a PE class at the school Tuesday morning.



ABS East teacher La'Reque Yarbrough shows Superintendent James Colbert and Assistant Superintendent Jonathan Parker the respect agreement she and her students came up with for the new school year. At the bottom of the agreement they all signed their names that they will abide by the rules.



HCDE Superintendent James Colbert visited classrooms during the second day of school Aug. 27 at ABS East. The students told Colbert they were excited about being back at school after a great summer break.

KHOU Calls on Afterschool Expert CASE for Kids for Tips on Summer Learning Loss Recovery

Recovering from Summer Brain Drain CASE for Kids Director Dr. Lisa Thompson-Caruthers helped KHOU anchor Brandi Smith break down brain drain and offered suggestions to parents about helping their kids recover from summer learning loss. https://youtu.be/aJW_k0fvFHI



Opportunity

PROGRAM CONNECTIONS

Easing Pre-K Stressors: Head Start Shares Tips as First-Time Students Begin School

For first-time students and their parents, the first weeks of pre-k can be daunting. HCDE Head Start Senior Director Venetia Peacock says it's important to prepare young children ages 3-5 for the first days of school to ease anxieties.

At the 15 HCDE Head Start centers, staff members are sharing these tips for success with families as students go to school this week:

1. Plan on getting to school on time to eat a healthy breakfast or eat a healthy breakfast at home.
2. Prepare for the day ahead. Load the backpack. Communicate with the teacher as necessary.
3. Ease nervousness by helping your children visualize what the day will look like. (They will have breakfast, nap time, read books and meet new friends.)
4. After the day is over, share. Talk about what happened and affirm your young student is doing a great job standing in line, staying quiet when the teacher is talking, washing hands, brushing teeth, etc. Small things matter as students gain social and academic skills.



A La Porte Head Start student is all smiles after a hearty lunch.



Students at the La Porte Head Start show off books they were reading Aug. 28.



Students enjoy a spaghetti and peaches lunch.



Head Start students share a smile during lunch.

Opportunity

PROGRAM CONNECTIONS

From Student to Teacher: Story of English Language Learner's Success Inspires His Adult Students

When adult learner Emmanuel Nieves Aviles returned to school 10 years ago, the native Spanish speaker never dreamt he would someday be teaching English as a second language.

Aviles moved to Houston from Puerto Rico after teaching there for almost 20 years. In Texas, as he acquired a new language, he discovered his teaching certification didn't transfer.

Bold and bent on providing for his family, he enrolled in basic ESL classes at Harris County Department of Education's Baytown Learning Center. Several semesters later, he progressed to advanced ESL with teacher Laurie Jensen.

The Switch: Student to Teacher

Something strange happened one day when his teacher was discussing his academic future. Aviles couldn't believe his ears when Jensen advised him that he could teach the ESL class himself and was well-equipped with his past teaching experience.

HCDE Adult Education Baytown Center Manager Guillermo Medina recalled the day he addressed the accomplished-yet-nervous student in his office.

"I called Emmanuel to my office for a brief interview," said Medina. "I saw his potential, and he's been with me now for nine years."

"I've hired many teachers in 17 years as manager, and Emmanuel has been outstanding and one of my best choices."

Recipe for Relating

Empathy allows Aviles to relate to his students, as he has traveled the road himself.

"Students have many things going on in their lives, worrying about childcare and the money they need," he said. "I try to keep them on track the best I can."

Sometimes that means phoning disgruntled students whose adult problems get in the way of coming to class.

"I can't lose them," said Aviles, throwing up his arms in show of mock despair.



Aviles packs a punch when he addresses his students. He challenges them by introducing math word problems through everyday situations.

A lesson in buying a Lexus includes analyzing whether the used-car salesman is offering a bad deal or not.

"Is the car affordable?" he asks. Heads nod yes.

Throughout the exercise, students are adding, subtracting, multiplying and dividing while also being introduced to percentage rates. They get a dose of reality when realizing they can't afford \$2,000 down and 48 payments of \$200, plus substantial interest.

"Wake up and do the math," says Aviles, walking students through his own journey of buying a used minivan. "Take the car back."

Heads nod yes again as students understand the rationale of high interest rates.

Similar exercises involve measures for recipes. Is there enough milk to make all the meal? Will there be enough for four people?

Student Talk

Student Jordan McCain, 29, has enrolled in the GED class to take care of his growing family with the addition of a third child this year.

"He's good," McCain said, pointing at his teacher. "He makes math easy to learn."

Student Jecenia Chavez, 20, works in retail and is pregnant with her third child. In the past, she has suffered with depression. Her children keep her centered.

"The only thing that can stop me right now is me, and that's not going to happen," she said.

Aviles encourages her to believe in herself, she said.

"I want to get my certification to be a phlebotomist and get more medical training after that," Chavez said.

To keep himself centered and humbled, Aviles need only to think about the first day he walked into his ESL class with a limited number of English vocabulary words.

"As teachers, we need to be facilitators," he said. "What do I gain if I ignore them?"

"I'm here to help them overcome their life obstacles."

Systemic Achievement

...with purposeful intent

Instructional Management and Community Relations

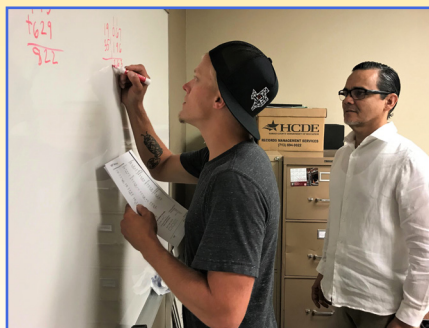
To meet the Board's expectations of me as it relates to this element of performance to...

- Establish effective mechanisms for communication to and from staff in instructional evaluation, planning and decision-making;
- Oversee annual planning for increased student learning and conducts periodic assessments of the effectiveness of the planning process;
- Ensure that goals and objectives form the basis of curricular decision-making and instruction and communications expectations for student achievement; and
- Work with other community and governmental entities and educational organizations to meet the needs of students and the community in a coordinated way.



Students from our Schools and Head Start divisions returned to class this week as HCDE and all 25 school districts are back in session. As tradition has it, I travel to each of the schools campuses to meet with principals and staff and to welcome our new students. Administration also visits Head Start centers to ensure a smooth start to the new year.

Back-to-school also applies to our adult learners as we begin registering them for the new



semester. This week I share a success story about an adult learner who went back to school to learn English and became one of our finest Adult Education teachers. It's an inspiring story that reminds us it's never too late to learn.

Our last back-to-school story with local media is highlighted as Lisa Thompson-Caruthers is featured on KHOU to talk about summer slide, the loss of learning that occurs during summer months, especially with children in low socio-economic families. In addition to sharing the learning deficits during the summer, Dr. Caruthers also extolled the virtues of summer enrichment programs in keeping kids engaged during summer months.

Through our interactions with staff at the schools, I am in keeping with the Board's expectations for me to investigate best practices for student achievement and utilize effective practices that maximize achievement of student potential within HCDE schools and to capture best practices for student learning. By presenting our leaders as experts in education through the media, I am working to present a positive, professional image of the Department in the community and maintaining visibility and involvement.

HCDE BOARD

Board President

Josh Flynn

Vice President

George Moore

Board Members

Richard Cantu

Eric Dick

Danny Norris

Don Sumners

Michael Wolfe

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Instructional Coach and Teacher Leader Collaboration

Wednesday, September 4, 2019

Learning to Lead for Success

Thursday, September 5, 2019

September Board Meeting

Wednesday, September 18, 2019

