



WEEK OF SEPT. 2, 2019

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Of Note...

When we first began to imagine a new campus for AB West, we always talked about how we wanted our special schools to be the standard by which all other schools for special needs students are measured. This week, we are a few steps closer to that reality as construction continues on the new school and new staff members of our Schools Division make a large impact with our community in their first few weeks.

Construction of the new AB West is progressing well, with 90 percent of the concrete poured and beams set in place. The roof is scheduled for next week and the contractors are on schedule. We are finalizing decisions for a specialized inclusive playground specifically designed for students with special needs including those in wheelchairs. It is very exciting to see how many unique and specialized features we will provide to our students that are targeted to their specific needs.

While the exterior of the building is taking shape, we are also setting up the interior of the school in accordance with calm colors and functional furniture specially suited to students with special needs and behavior challenges.

And our staff is out in the community showcasing the caring and personalization we pride ourselves on at our special schools. Our new parent engagement liaison has hit the ground running, reaching out to families and strengthening relationships with parents, students and community partners including the Autism Walk and Special Olympics. Our new instructional coach has already made an impact, leading positive professional development for teachers and modeling appropriate instructional and behavioral strategies. She is also hosting a new teacher orientation for those new to the profession and HCDE next week.

This was a short week due to the Labor Day holiday and was filled with internal meetings including my Executive Leadership Team, Leadership Team, agenda review for the upcoming board meeting and continuation of my quarterly meetings with board members. I also spent time planning and preparing to moderate a panel of 10 superintendents at the upcoming Intentional Leadership Symposium on September 30, hosted by HCDE's Teaching and Learning Center. I hope you can make this great event, as it will provide a rare in person glimpse of the diversity of school systems we serve and how the recent accountability system impacts them all in different ways.

I hope you have a relaxing weekend with your family.

UPCOMING EVENTS:
HCDE Board Meeting—OCT. 16, 2019

Opportunity

PROGRAM CONNECTIONS

Schools Division Creates New Positions to Provide Support, Community Partnerships

Two newcomers are introduced this school year as the Schools Division adds a parent engagement liaison and instructional coach. Meet Gabriela Hernandez and Nkechi Ihejirika.

New Parent Engagement Liaison Hernandez Helps Ease Challenges, Strengthen Relationships

Gabriela Hernandez is the new parent engagement liaison for Harris County Department of Education's Schools Division. She is passionate about helping families of children with behavioral and learning disabilities because of her own family members' challenges and successes.

"I am grateful for all my personal and professional experiences because both environments helped me understand the challenges both families and professionals face," she said.

Hernandez's role includes supporting students with autism, intellectual disabilities and emotional disorders and advocating for them within the community. Specifically, the counselor will develop community partnerships which support vocational training for students, as well as Special Olympics opportunities.

The California native has a bachelor's degree in child psychology and will soon receive her master's degree in clinical counseling. She has supported students with special needs for four years as a counseling professional and educator and has worked with families in therapeutic settings for two years.

In her support capacity, Hernandez will provide counseling, resources and activities for the special education students enrolled in Harris county Department of Education's Schools Division, specifically at Academic and Behavior School East and West campuses.

"It is my goal to help children achieve success by providing resources from their community and matching parents with community-based tools to strengthen their family life," she said.



New Instructional Coach Ihejirika Supports Teachers of Special Needs Students

Nkechi Ihejirika is the new instructional coach within Harris County Department of Education's Schools Division. She holds a bachelor's degree in psychology from Prairie View A&M University and a master's degree in educational leadership from the University of St. Thomas.

She couples her entrepreneurial spirit with her learned skills in making research-based, data-informed decisions. She has used those skills in both education and business. In business, the Galleria-area resident coached small business owners. In education, she uses research-based decisions to impact student success.

"I'm able to use those very same skills to promote student success," she said.

As instructional coach, she has supported students with autism, emotional and intellectual disabilities and generalized learning disabilities in the Houston area for more than 10 years. Her responsibilities at HCDE will be to provide campus and teacher support by modeling lessons and facilitating instructional strategies and planning for teachers.

"I believe all students can learn," she said. "My goal is to positively impact classroom environments through increased student engagement."



Opportunity

PROGRAM CONNECTIONS

ABS West Construction: Post Labor Day Update Delivers Positive News

ABS West paving is 90 percent complete as we unofficially end summer with this Labor Day report. Having dodged any potential natural disasters to date with no rain delays, the construction is on track.

Here are some highlights:

- Steel erection is completed, and the crane has left the worksite. Additional welding continues on the steel joist, and an additional three weeks will be needed to prepare for the roof deck.
- Subcontractors will meet for a lunch appreciation later this month with the contractor to recognize a milestone in the project as concrete and steel are completed.
- Electrical and HVAC equipment is being moved onsite, and roofing materials will be delivered mid-September.
- HCDE Construction is working with the ABS West architect to design an inclusive playground which will be accessible to children with disabilities. More about that project to come.



NORTH
Academic & Behavior Center West

webber
commercial
08-16-2019



EAST
Academic & Behavior Center West

webber
commercial
08-16-2019



SOUTH
Academic & Behavior Center West

webber
commercial
08-16-2019



WEST
Academic & Behavior Center West

webber
commercial
08-16-2019

Opportunity

PROGRAM CONNECTIONS

Intentional Leadership Provides Insight from TEA Director Wright, Area School Superintendents

Education leaders hear from Texas Education Agency Director of Community and University Partnerships Harold Wright along with area superintendent panelists as the school year launches with Intentional Leadership Sept. 30, from 7:30 a.m. to noon at Harris County Department of Education, 6300 Irvington.

“Intentional Leadership: Sustaining Our Communities and Navigating Accountability” looks at the impact the accountability system has on community partnerships already at work in school districts. The discussion continues about how educators can best use that system as a community tool to help support area districts. Following Wright’s address, HCDE Superintendent James Colbert Jr. moderates a panel of area superintendents for their perceptions.

Superintendent panelists include: HD Chambers, Alief; LaTonya Goffney, Aldine; Greg Smith, Clear Creek; Scott Davis, Crosby; Charles Dupre, Fort Bend; Grenita Lathan, Houston; Lloyd Graham, La Porte; Rodney Watson, Spring; Robert Bostic, Stafford MSD; and Martha Salazar-Zamora, Tomball.

Breakout sessions include the following topics: school and district leaders, math, science, social studies, English language arts, special populations and career and technology.

To register, go to <https://bit.ly/30VaZiT>.



TEA Director Harold Wright

HCDE Head Start Hosts 5th Annual Healthy Minds Healthy Families Conference

Harris County Department of Education Head Start is hosting the 5th annual Healthy Minds Healthy Families Conference Sept. 27 from 9 a.m. to 4p.m. at 6300 Irvington Blvd.

The conference is open to early childhood educators, families, members of the Head Start community and other who work with children with challenging behaviors. The focus of the event is to provide attendees with tools for providing emotional support for young children and their families, increase attendees’ awareness of mental health issues among children and provide strategies for self-care.

Cost of the conference is only \$10 and includes lunch. The conference is made possible through a grant-funded initiative from the Hogg Foundation, which advances recovery and wellness in Texas by funding mental health services, policy analysis, research and public education.



For more information about the conference, contact Taiwan Reliford at 713-696-2170 or treliford@hcde-texas.org.

Opportunity

PROGRAM CONNECTIONS

Back-to-School Means Homework! HCDE Offers Transitioning Tips from Offtime to Schooltime

Students are back in school, and that means homework is back. Harris County Department of Education Teaching and Learning Center curriculum directors Andrea Segraves and Brenda Arteaga offer tips for easing into good homework habits.

Make sure your child has a quiet, well-lit place to do homework. Take away distractions like TV and electronics. Avoid doing homework in high-traffic areas of your home.

Be positive about homework. Tell your child it's important. The attitude you express is the attitude your child acquires.

Help your child figure out what is hard and what is easy homework. Have your child do the hard work first. Use alert time for the most difficult. Easy material will go faster when fatigue begins to set in.

When your child does homework, you do homework. If your child reads, you read too. If your child is doing math, try balancing your checkbook. Show your child the skills they learn are related to things in everyday adult life.

When your child asks for help, provide guidance, not answers. Giving answers means your child will not learn the material. Too much help teaches your children that when the going gets rough, someone will do the work for them.

Stay informed. Talk to your child's teacher and make sure you know the purpose of homework and what your child's class rules are.

Watch for signs of failure and frustration. Taking short breaks can help improve homework mindfulness.

Let your child struggle sometimes. There is growth in the process.

Talk to your child about the school day before diving into homework. Destress before diving in and remember to allow for brain breaks as they work.

(HCDE's Teaching and Learning Center provides teacher and administrator training for area educators. In addition to workshops, curriculum experts supply customized trainings in school districts. More at www.hcde-texas.org/teaching-and-learning-center.)



Systemic Achievement

...with purposeful intent

In an effort 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 community; and

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

Later this month, we are hosting the annual Healthy Minds, Healthy Families Conference, a collaborative between Head Start and the Hogg Foundation.

The foundation is committed to focusing on mental health issues in the community. This conference allows us to network with educators. The Sept. 27 event also provides an opportunity to invite community into the conversation of mental health, including parents.

We involve education leaders, including superintendents, to discuss accountability measures within the Texas Education Agency through our Intentional Leadership workshop Sept. 30.

Continuing our commitment to lending our educational expertise to the greater Houston community, we offer study tips through our Teaching and Learning Center experts. We provide these tips to the community through social media posts, our news blog and press releases. It allows us to share our education expertise for the greater good of the community.

Finally, we share the updates from ABS West as the construction continues (on time) at our school which will benefit area students and the entire Houston community.

By making these opportunities available to the community, I am acting as the primary ambassador for the Department. We present a positive, professional image of the Department in all venues—community, political, education, business and board. Visibility and involvement in the community with ISD superintendents, elected officials, community leaders and the HCDE board continues to be my goal as we embark on a new school year.



HCDE BOARD

Board President

Josh Flynn

Vice President

George Moore

Board Members

Richard Cantu

Eric Dick

Danny Norris

Don Sumners

Michael Wolfe

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Learning Forward Coaches Academy (Multiple Dates)

SEPT. 11, 2019

Alternative Certification Program for Teachers - Information Session

SEPT. 12, 2019

Civilian Response to Active Shooter Events

SEPT. 12, 2019

Building Community

SEPT. 13, 2019

October Board Meeting

OCT. 16, 2019

