

The CONNECTOR

A weekly publication of Harris County Department of Education for the HCDE Board of Trustees



HELPING HANDS

TOP STORIES INSIDE



p. 3

Employee Spotlight: Petra Garza



p. 5

Head Start Families Gain Gifts for Children
Thanks to Houston Children's Charity



p. 4

Area Math Specialists Gather at Leadership Meeting

The CONNECTOR



Of Note...

One of my favorite aspects of the holiday season is watching as our employees and community put others before self. While this attitude is exhibited throughout the region, I am especially proud of how this spirit is alive in HCDE.

This week was a prime example of the supportive environment that embodies HCDE. Houston Children's Charity donated dozens of gifts to the families of more than 450 Head Start students to ensure they have a special holiday. For many of these families, these gifts not only make the children happy, but give parents peace of mind that life won't get in the way of Christmas for their children.

We also learned more about a Head Start employee through our monthly employee spotlight.

This month we are highlighting a housekeeper who spends her days not only maintaining a clean environment but giving out hugs and support wherever needed.

This week was also filled with celebrations. I attended the holiday reception at NPO and was a guest at three different retirement celebrations. I always enjoy hearing about someone retiring as staff deserve the opportunity to pursue their personal passions after dedicating many years to HCDE. December is a popular time for employees to retire, with it being a natural break and the end of the calendar year. This year, we have several retiring and it was a joy to wish them well in the next chapter of their lives. Their work, dedication to the job and spirit of collaboration will truly be missed, but I am excited for the journey that lies before them.

I started the week with a presentation at the Region 13 Educational Service Center Principal Academy in Austin, which I have done for the last nine years. Upon returning to Houston, I engaged in various standing meetings to prepare for the board meeting next week and get a jump start on activities for the new year.

Have a wonderful weekend and enjoy the beautiful cool weather.



BOARD SHORTS

4 Employees with 94 Combined Years of Service to HCDE Retire with Formal Reception

Four longtime HCDE employees elected to celebrate their retirements this month with formal receptions hosted by their divisions. They were provided with gifts of appreciation and celebrated through testimonials and cake-and-punch receptions.

Annette Ardoin celebrated her retirement from Facilities Division after 22 years of service.

Nathaniel Jones retires from the Technology Division with 21 years of service.

Lydia Torres and Mary Yocham retire from Human Resources Division with 31 years and 20 years, respectively.



Mix and Mingle: Holiday Reception Held at NPO

HCDE employees mixed and mingled to the jingle bell beat at the Dec. 12 Holiday Reception 2019 held at 6005 Westview. Light snacks and punch were served as employees greeted new and old acquaintances and shared holiday plans. A similar reception will be held at Irvington Dec. 18 at noon before the board meeting.



PROGRAM CONNECTIONS

Employee Spotlight: Petra Garza

Head Start Housekeeper Petra Garza has been working at the Fifth Ward center for almost two years. She enjoys greeting the children each morning and giving hugs as they leave for the day. Not only does she do her job with diligence, she is constantly volunteering and assisting in the classrooms, kitchen or wherever there is a shortage or need. Petra also steps up to translate calls when needed. Fifth Ward Head Start Center Manager Traci Houston said she has never had to ask her to lend a hand.

"She has a great positive attitude and works effortlessly as a team player," Houston said.

As part of our monthly employee spotlight, we interviewed Petra to ask her about her favorite part about working at the Fifth Ward Head Start Center, what makes her happy and how she spends her spare time.



How long have you worked at HCDE? What are your duties?

I have worked at the Fifth Ward Head Start Center for almost two years. Before I came here I was a cook at Channelview High School in Channelview ISD. I do general cleaning throughout the day and clean all the rooms at the end of the day to get ready for the next day. I also help the staff if they need anything during the day because I enjoy helping others.

What is your favorite part about working at HCDE?

I love working with the little children, they are all my babies. I have worked with children for over 10 years, but have realized that I really enjoy the little ones more. They express a lot of love and they need a lot of it. Plus, all the lovely ladies here are like family to me. They know I will help them at anytime and they do the same with me.

Tell us about your family?

I have been married to my husband for almost 42 years and we live in Channelview. Together we have two sons and one daughter along with nine grandsons and one granddaughter. I was born in Monterrey, Mexico and moved to Houston in 1981. We moved here because we wanted something different than what we had in Mexico.

What are your hobbies? Spare time activities?

I enjoy maintaining my saltwater fish tank that has various kinds of fish. When I look at it, it helps me relax and be at peace. I also crochet and make beaded jewelry for my daughters and granddaughter. During the Holiday season, my daughter and I will make tamales...a tradition we've done for more than 20 years.

What's your favorite color?

My favorite color is anything purple.

Favorite food? Favorite movie? Favorite band?

My favorite food is any dish with pasta especially shrimp alfredo. Finding Nemo is my favorite movie. I have the two types of fish that look like Dory and Nemo in my fish tank. I don't have a favorite band, but enjoy all Spanish music bands and Christmas music.

Name three things that annoy you or three things that make you happy?

Three things that annoy me are gossiping, being lied to and disrespectful to others. The three things that make me happy are having my family together at holidays, my yorkie dog- Sweetie and to see children happy.

If money wasn't an object what would you buy?

If money was no object, I would buy a huge house to have my entire family together. I enjoy having everyone together at holidays and it would be my dream to have everyone living together. I am lucky to have them all living within 20 minutes from me right now.

What would your dream retirement job be? What will you do?

I would love to travel the world. I went to Cozumel and Cancun last year and just loved it. It did rain three days out of the four we were there, but being able to just relax and look at the beach was perfectly fine for me. I told my husband I would like to go back and explore the places we weren't able to last time.

PROGRAM

CONNECTIONS

Area Math Specialists Gather at Leadership Meeting to Network, Gain Updates from TEA

Forty-eight math directors and supervisors from 22 area school districts and four charter schools networked at HCDE for the Math Leadership meeting this month. Educators gained updates from TEA through a webinar about math TEKS and testing. Afterwards, the math specialists socialized with a holiday lunch.

Teacher and Learning Center Math Curriculum Director Nicole Shanahan leads the Math Leadership group and says the area specialists are eager to learn and share through the quarterly meetings.

Pasadena Independent School District Specialist for High School Mathematics Sondra Cano says she comes to the meetings for camaraderie and support from fellow math specialists.

"I value coming to the HCDE mathematics leadership meetings because of the collaboration with the mathematics leaders across Harris County in support of our student success," Cano said.

For info about attending these free math leadership meetings, contact nshanahan@hcde-texas.org.



PROGRAM

CONNECTIONS

Needy HCDE Head Start Families Gain Gifts for Children Thanks to Houston Children's Charity

Through the generosity of nonprofit Houston Children's Charity, more than 450 Harris County Department of Education Head Start students and their siblings will have gifts this holiday season. That's a sigh of relief for Fonwood Head Start parent Jasmine Samuel.

"At the time, I wasn't so sure about Christmas for us," Samuel said. "My mom passed away from cancer about two months ago. I didn't think I would be able to afford Christmas presents for my daughter."

Kailyn Samuel-Clark, 4, attends the Head Start program at Fonwood, one of 15 Head Start centers in east and northeast Harris County administered through Harris County Department of Education.

Income-eligible families and children with disabilities gain free Head Start services to help equip children with academic and social skills for school. Families receive support services in the school readiness program through community partners like Houston Children's Charity.

Siblings in HCDE Head Start families will also each receive three gifts from the nonprofit, even the teenagers, said Michael Muniz, marketing communications and social media manager for Houston Children's Charity.

"This partnership with HCDE Head Start is particularly meaningful because we get to share our community's giving spirit and joy of Christmas with so many families as the blessed recipients of donations collected through the U.S. Marines' Toys for Tots program," he said.

Muniz said the goal for this year is for the nonprofit to provide 6,500 Houston families with toys for more than 20,000 children.

Families receive their toys at George R. Brown Convention Center on Dec. 20 and 21. The preidentified families will be provided wristbands and a letter to enter the toy store. Giveaways range from plush toys to Lego sets to bikes to board games.

Head Start mother Samuels is excited about seeing the look on her daughter's face on Christmas morning as she opens the gifts donated to her family.

"I'm grateful and really appreciate them for doing this for us and everyone else," Samuels said. "It will help me put a smile on her face and see her happy to receive something on Christmas morning."

If you would like to donate gifts to the Houston Children's Charity for the holiday gift giveaway, learn more at www.houstonchildrenscharity.org.

Head Start and Early Head Start centers at HCDE serve children ages six weeks to age 5.

For more information about HCDE Head Start, go to www.hcde-texas.org/Head-Start.



IN THE NEWS

In the News: Top Workplace Video Launched through Social Media

View the video from the Top Workplaces 2019 Celebration held at HCDE.
In the video, employees talk about why they love to work at HCDE.
Superintendent Colbert shares his pride.

View the video: youtu.be/ODKVecjSdHE



HOUSTON★CHRONICLE
TOP WORK PLACES
CELEBRATION!

Instructional Management, Personnel Management and Community Relations

Following my goal to meet the elements of performance related to the Boards' goals to:

Establish effective mechanisms for communication to and from staff in instructional evaluation, planning and decision making;

Ensure that goals and objectives form the basis of curricular decision making and instruction and communicate expectations for student achievement;

Encourages, oversees and participates in staff recognition activities;

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

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.

As the semester ends, we are hosting leadership groups by subject area within our Teaching and Learning Center. Districts are sharing in their successes and challenges with new state Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) requirements. Our leadership skills are making a difference in supporting these educational leaders.

On the giving front, we experience the joys of the holiday season as our Head Start families receive toys for their families. Next week we experience more community giving as Bates Collision Centers gifts a car to one of our Head Start families.

Finally, we recognize an employee who works for the welfare of children as a housekeeper at our Fifth Ward Head Start Center. This

employee comes to work each day with a positive attitude and that is recognized by both staff and our students.



By hosting leadership groups for area school districts, we are using best practices for student achievement and effective practices to maximize achievement of student potential.

We also investigate best practices for student achievement and utilize effective practices that maximize achievement of student potential. We share our expertise with area school districts through the leadership meetings.

In recognizing Petra Garza, the Head Start employee, we are establishing a culture among staff so that all strive to achieve excellence and do not accept mediocre performance.

Finally, by partnering with our organizations such as Children's Charities and Bates Collision Centers, we are maintaining visibility and involvement in the community through community leaders and the HCDE Board.

HCDE BOARD

Board President

Josh Flynn

Vice President

George Moore

Board Members

Richard Cantu

Eric Dick

Danny Norris

Don Sumners

Michael Wolfe

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Bates Car Giveaway
Channelview - 10 a.m.
December 17, 2019

ABS West Holiday Program - 10 a.m.
December 18, 2019

Holiday Reception
Irvington - 12 p.m.
December 18, 2019

Board Meeting - 1 p.m.
December 18, 2019

ABS East Holiday Program - 10 a.m.
December 19, 2019

