

# The CONNECTOR

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

## RECOGNITIONS AND MILESTONES

### TOP STORIES INSIDE



Employee Spotlight: Jan Arnold, Choice Partners



Afterschool Debate Program Earns Alief Teen Spot at Ivy League College



Early Childhood Educator Conference Feb. 1 Features Bestselling Author Peter H. Reynolds

# The CONNECTOR



## Of Note...

I've often said that HCDE is like a family, with a clear chain-of-command and hierarchy. If HCDE were to have a family dinner table, the board would be at the head helping to lead the family through good times and bad, while keeping an eye on the future.

Once a year, HCDE takes time to celebrate the head of our family during Board Appreciation Month. As I said at the reception this week, our board is comprised of very diverse individuals with varying perspectives that come together to provide a rich and robust vision for HCDE. I am excited for what the future holds for HCDE and am looking forward to working with each of you to fulfill our mission of supporting the children and educators of this great county.

I started the week off with my Executive Leadership Team on Monday followed by Board Orientation with Ms. Duhon and Ms. Hinojosa on Tuesday. During this activity, I take the new trustees around the county to show them some of our buildings including visits to several of our campuses so they can see first-hand what we do. This is a great opportunity for me to chat with the new board members and for us to have informal discussions about their thoughts about the future of HCDE.

On Wednesday I started the day at the Aldine ISD State of the District before attending the PFC and Audit Committee meetings, then joined staff for the Board Appreciation reception. I know our employees really enjoy getting to mingle and fellowship with you in this casual setting and I hope you enjoyed getting to know our staff better, as we take a moment each year to honor the hard work you put into the governance of HCDE.

Thursday was spent preparing for our presentation at the TASA Midwinter conference, which is at the end of this month in Austin. As I mentioned at the board meeting, we are excited to share the ongoing story of Fortis Academy with school administrators around the state, as many of them are interested in hearing about the paradigm shift in supporting students with addiction. I ended the week with several standing internal meetings at NPO on Friday.

Quick reminder: We are closed on Monday for the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday. Have a fabulous weekend.





# BOARD SHORTS

## HCDE Congratulates Director Darlene Breaux as HAABSE Board Member of Year

Research and Evaluation Institute Director Darlene Breaux serves her community as board member to Alief Independent School District. On Feb. 7, Breaux will receive an award from the Houston Area Alliance of Black School Educators as the School Board Member of the Year. The ceremony takes place from 6-10 p.m. at the Bayou City Event Center, 9401 Knight Road.



## Visible Learning Series Helps Math Educators Provide Deep Math Learning

HCDE Math Curriculum Director Nicole Shanahan talks to a colleague about how to support student transfer of deep math learning during the fourth and final day of Visible Learning for Math Transfer and Learning for All. The workshop collaboration offered through the Corwin Institute brought national consultant Connie Hamilton as presenter along with math educators throughout the county.



## Center for Safe and Secure Schools Calls Attention to Human Trafficking Awareness Month

More than 79,000 youth are being trafficked for sex in Texas each year, and Houston is a major hub for human trafficking. To raise awareness, The Center for Safe and Secure Schools at Harris County Department of Education calls attention to trafficking crimes during Human Trafficking Awareness Month in January.

**Read more:** <https://wp.me/p4QJFI-17h>

**JANUARY IS  
HUMAN TRAFFICKING  
AWARENESS  
MONTH**





# PROGRAM CONNECTIONS

## HCDE Trustees Honored During January 'Board Appreciation Month'

Harris County Department of Education Board of Trustees were honored during Board Appreciation Month at the regular board meeting and during a reception prior to the meeting.

HCDE employees greeted trustees during the lunchtime reception, and students supplied handcrafted thank-you cards. Board members received certificates of appreciation from HCDE Superintendent James Colbert Jr., along with words of praise.



"We value you, we appreciate you and we thank you," Superintendent James Colbert Jr. said.

The Texas Association of School Boards prepares the theme for each year's celebration to help districts recognize their local trustees during School Board Recognition Month. This year TASB selected the space theme: Launching the Next Generation.

Board members honored (photos, left) include Eric Dick, president, Position 2, Precinct 4; Danyahel (Danny) Norris, vice president, Position 6, Precinct 1; Amy Hinojosa, board member, Position 1, Precinct 2; Andrea Duhon, board member, Position 4, Precinct 3; Richard Cantu, board member, Position 3, at-large; Don Sumners, board member, Position 7, at-large; and Mike Wolfe, board member, Position 5, at-large, (not present).

**More photos:** <https://tinyurl.com/yx83w93m>





# PROGRAM

## CONNECTIONS

### Early Childhood Educator Conference Feb. 1 Features Bestselling Author Peter H. Reynolds, 50 Breakout Sessions

New York Times bestselling children's author and illustrator Peter H. Reynolds entertains and inspires early childhood educators Saturday, Feb. 1, from 8:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m. at the R.T. Garcia Early Childhood Winter Conference. As a bonus for registering, attendees will receive one of his children's books.

The 34th annual Harris County Department of Education conference held at the Kingdom Builder's Center, 6011 W. Orem Dr., is one of the Texas' largest conferences for children in grades pre-k through second. Bilingual keynote is singer and songwriter Gilberto Soto, professor of music education at Texas A&M International University.

"This year, every attendee receives one of six bestseller books from Peter Reynolds, courtesy of Scholastic Books, a generous sponsor and supporter of our conference," conference coordinator Andrea Segraves said. "Reynolds is globally popular as his books are now published in over 25 languages."

Storyteller Reynolds' books are about protecting and nurturing the creative spirit, including the three books in his "Creatrilogy": The Dot, Ish and Sky Color. He owns the Blue Bunny Bookstore in Denham, Massachusetts and has written or illustrated more than 50 children's books.

More than 50 conference breakout sessions include presentations ranging from classroom management, reading, math, social studies, science and social-emotional learning. Education vendors line the exhibition hall with products and educational services.

Historically, HCDE continues to provide the conference at a low cost for early childhood educators. The daylong conference is available for \$125. **Register:** <https://buff.ly/2PEhT8U>.



# PROGRAM

## CONNECTIONS

### Employee Spotlight: Jan Arnold, Choice Partners

Choice Partners Client Services Manager Jan Arnold has been at HCDE for five years. Jan stays busy with her daily duties and enjoys what she does at HCDE. Choice Partner's million-dollar months occur, in large, as a result of Jan's hard work and diligence in timely and accurately invoicing vendors that report activity using their contracts. Choice Partners Assistant Director Joann Nichols said Jan is one of the hardest workers they have in the Choice Partners Division.

"You don't ever have to tell her to get to work, wonder what she might be working on or have to worry where she might be," said Nichols. "She is always at her desk or running (yes, literally "running" down the halls) to get required signatures or make copies of her paperwork."

As part of our monthly employee spotlight, we interviewed Jan to ask her about her favorite part about working with Choice Partners, what she did before coming to HCDE and how she spends her spare time.



#### How long have you worked at HCDE?

I started at HCDE just after Labor Day in September 2014, so just a little over five years. Before I came here, I worked for Cooper Industries for 21 years and was in public accounting for 10.

#### What are your daily duties?

I do several things each day including invoicing our facilities or job vendors, researching our commodity vendors, handling accounts receivable, reporting, working the ebids system, processing consultant expense reports, looking at contracts and paying bills. I also work with the business services division a lot of the time with these duties.

#### What are your short and/or long-term goals?

My short-term goals would be to hire two new employees and get them trained. I'm close to retirement, so I guess I would say my long-term goal would be to retire.

#### What is your favorite part about working at HCDE?

Working at HCDE helps keep me busy and I enjoy interacting my compadres here along with the vendors and members. Each are a variety of their own and keeps me entertained.

#### Tell us about your family?

I live in Crosby with my horse, Refund. She was born on April 15 almost 17 years ago. I was born and raised in Liberty, TX. I have two siblings, an older sister who lives near Corpus Christi and brother who lives in Lufkin. My father is deceased, and my 91-year-old mother is living in Humble.

#### Share your education background? Training?

I'm a retired Certified Public Accountant (CPA). I graduated from Lamar University with a bachelor's degree in accounting with a 3.5 GPA. I went into public accounting and worked for Coopers & Lybrand. I then went to work for my father's CPA firm for about two and a half years. I moved on to a firm in Baytown for the next three years then to a temporary firm at Cooper Industries and stayed for 21 years.

#### What are your hobbies? Spare time activities?

I enjoy spending time with my horse Refund, who takes up a lot of my time; golf; and travel locally especially to Lake Charles, LA.

#### Favorite food? Favorite band?

My favorite food is Mexican. I judge a Mexican restaurant by its cheese enchiladas. I enjoy listening to Fleetwood Mac, Linda Ronstadt and Pink to name a few.

#### Name one strength and one weakness you have?

I would say a strength of mine is my multi-tasking ability and a weakness is that I'm very impatient.

#### What makes you happy and what annoys you?

I would say inconsiderate drivers annoy me the most. Traveling and my horse Refund make me happy.

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

I would buy a lake house at either a lake in Texas; Lake Hamilton in Arkansas; or Lake Tahoe.



# PROGRAM

## CONNECTIONS

### Debate Skills through Afterschool Debate Program Earns Alief Teen Spot at Ivy League College

Before debate, Alief Independent School District Kerr High senior Queen Eche was a competitive force on the soccer field. Upon enrolling in a magnet high school where sports weren't the focus, the spunky, extroverted senior turned to debate through an afterschool program.

Today the Dartmouth-bound, 17-year old insists it's not just her grades that helped her get recruited into the Ivy League college, but rather her steadfast dedication to debate after the school day.

Harris County Department of Education funds debate for inner-city youth through CASE Debates, an afterschool collaboration between HCDE's Center for Afterschool, Summer and Enrichment for Kids (CASE for Kids) and the Houston Urban Debate League. Tournaments scheduled throughout the year give teens the opportunity to compete locally and nationally. Last year Eche went to nationals, climbing her way up the ranks in Washington, D.C. She was named as one of two top national debaters.

CASE Debates offers two debate formats for competition: World Schools Debate and Policy Debate. Eche prefers Policy Debate, honing the pros and cons about an argument throughout the year.

In a debate round, she feels empowered by sharing facts, putting ideas forth a mile-a-minute. They are contested by teammates and judges. New arguments are researched, reasoned and put forth.

As her team continues to collect awards, she insists it's not about the winning or losing. "Competition isn't about hard feelings; it's about ideas," she said.

While some high school students might shun afterschool opportunities, Eche welcomes the chance to learn new things, especially when it comes to debate.

"Passion strikes out of nowhere," she said. "You miss all the shots you don't take, and you've got to test new things out."

Parents Peter and Jenifer Eche praise the power of afterschool as they watch the eldest of three children set an example through her activity of choice. They moved to Houston from Singapore and understand the importance of their three daughters venturing into the macrocosm outside their southwest Houston neighborhood.

"Without afterschool, kids have a monotonous life," said her father. "But afterschool helps kids see beyond the academics, and they become unique by finding new talents and even choosing their future."

Mom Jenifer elaborates on the benefits.

"Kids spend most of their time in the classroom, but she (Queen) gets to express herself freely within the supervised school space," she said. "It helps them realize their potential."

Kerr Principal Vinson Lewis traveled to Washington, D.C. with the debate team members last year as they qualified for nationals. Because of financial limitations, many students wouldn't have the opportunity to leave the four-square miles surrounding the school, he explained.

**Read more:** <https://bit.ly/2tc0rjC>



### Personnel Management, Organizational Morale and Instructional Management

In accordance with the Board's expectations of me to:

- Encourage, oversee and participate in staff recognition activities;
- Create an open and positive environment for sharing resources and exchanging ideas to improve organizational climate;
- Celebrate accomplishments and acknowledge excellence;
- Establish a system for regular evaluation of instructional programs to meet student instructional needs and to attain desired student achievement; and
- Ensure that goals and objectives form the basis of curricular decision-making and instruction and communicate expectations for student achievement.

This week we hear the story about a young woman who is making amazing strides in her future by being a part of the CASE Debates program. Queen Eche attends school in Alief, a Title 1 district in southwest Houston. The debate and the CASE Debates camps she attended helped her get acceptance into the Ivy-League Dartmouth. Debate is a program which is costly and is usually available in the private school sector. HCDE funds debate so that low-income students can access it. Debate enhances critical-thinking skills and promotes higher-order learning. This program continues to grow and be successful in the districts we serve.



Next, HCDE employee Jan Arnold is recognized for working behind the scenes to help Choice Partners run seamlessly. Her competence with handling customers and contracts is to be commended, and we praise Jan for her commitment to excellence.



As we celebrate the Board this week at our Board Appreciation Reception, our employees are given the opportunity to feel inclusive as they shake hands with board members, share refreshments and give thanks to you for the sacrifices you make.

**As result of CASE for Kids and HCDE's commitment to grow the CASE Debates program; as we celebrate an employee who makes a difference; and as our employees share their appreciation with you, we strive to meet your expectations of me to:**

**Establish a culture among the staff so that all strive to achieve excellence and do not accept mediocre performance.**

**Investigate best practices for student achievement and utilize effective practices that maximize achievement of student potential.**

**Identify learning needs of students and develop a process that ensures each student's learning goals are met and exceeded.**

### HCDE BOARD

#### Board President

Eric Dick

#### Vice President

Danny Norris

#### Board Members

Richard Cantu

Andrea Duhon

Amy Hinojosa

Don Sumners

Michael Wolfe

### UPCOMING EVENTS:

#### Jan. 21

Charting With the Chicks:  
Interactive Approach to  
Science  
8:30 a.m.

#### Jan. 24

Winter Symposium  
8 a.m.

#### Jan. 25

Move Your Bus: Ron  
Clark  
9 a.m.