

The CONNECTOR

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

IMPACTING EDUCATION

TOP STORIES INSIDE



CASE Debates Wraps Up Regular Season, Heads to City Finals



HCDE Celebrates Teen Artists through area exhibits



ABS West Update: Home Stretch to the Finish Line!

The CONNECTOR



Of Note...

In my more than 25 years in education, the one thing that never ceases to amaze me is the talent of our youth. I am proud that one of the ways HCDE supports public education in Harris County is by fostering and highlighting the talents of local students.

This week we celebrated several members of our CASE Debates teams moving onto the City Championships through the Houston Urban Debate League. This is the debate program's third year and it is so cool to see nearly 200 students showcase their verbal skills on various topics including tax evasion, fashion and weapon sales. Winners of the City Championship advance to the national competition, where CASE had a tremendous showing last year.

Next week, we will celebrate more than 100 student works from our Regional Scholastic Art & Writing Awards. HCDE is one of more than 100 regional affiliate partners throughout the country and we are proud to have hosted this contest for more than 16 years. Nearly 9,000 pieces in 29 categories were submitted to HCDE for judging this year. Exhibits from our Gold and Silver Key Awardees will be on display beginning next week at the Galleria on Westheimer near Saks Fifth Avenue and at Texas Art Supply on Montrose Blvd. Viewing some of the samples of the winners, I am moved by the emotion and power of this artwork and I hope you can make it to view some of these masterpieces in person.

I started the week with my Executive Leadership Team before traveling to Austin to fulfill my duties as a member of the UIL State Executive Committee. On Tuesday I kicked off our budget season with our division budget managers who will be preparing their budgets for review this month. On Thursday I was able to spend some time with our students at the Humble Head Start Center reading to my SuperMENTor class and then toured construction progress at the new ABS West campus. I am excited to see our vision for this school come to life and proud that HCDE will boast a world-class facility tailored to meet the unique needs of students with special needs. With the specialized components of this new building including the calming color palette, sensory room and inclusive playground, I believe the new ABS West will become the gold standard for facilities serving students with special needs.

On Thursday afternoon I met with Harris County Commissioner Adrian Garcia about possible partnerships and projects we can collaborate on to support residents and the districts we serve. That evening I attended the LULAC Scholarship Dinner with trustees Cantu, Norris and Hinojosa. This was a great event and I was proud HCDE could sponsor a table to support this community organization.

Have a wonderful weekend.



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CASE Debates Wraps Up Regular Season, Heads to City Finals

CASE Debates wrapped up its fifth and final debate event of the year as 140 students from 36 teams representing 11 schools competed Feb. 8 at Harmony Charter School. Students prepare for the competitions in their high school afterschool debate programs.

Advancing to the Houston Urban Debate League City Championship Feb. 22 held at the Bob Casey Federal Courthouse are students from 16 teams from the following schools: Alief ISD's Elsie, Kerr and Taylor high schools, Spring ISD's Early College Charter, Spring Branch ISD's Westchester International Charter and Harmony Charter. Teams advancing from city debate competition will have the opportunity to travel outside Texas to compete nationally.

Debate topics this year ranged from weapon sales to tax evasion to fast fashion and more. CASE Debates is an afterschool program that is dedicated to college readiness and encourages critical thinking skills, research and engagement with real world topics.



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ABS West Update: Rounding Home Stretch to the Finish Line!

Construction at Academic and Behavior School West moves toward the finish line as plans are being made for a spring move in. Construction Director Joe Carreon says the Facilities Division has close communication ties to the ABS West team as Principal Victor Keys communicates plans for a Spring Break move with his faculty, staff, client districts and students.

Here is a checklist of progress this month:

- On Feb. 17, floors throughout the building will be 100 percent installed.
- Kitchen equipment is installed.
- Gym ceiling tile and flooring is complete.
- Landscapers began digging trenching for irrigation lines this week.
- Ceiling tile throughout the building is being installed and being inspected.
- Sidewalks in courtyard are poured and drying.
- Domestic water lines and fire sprinkler lines are tapped and covered for completion.
- Furniture arrived at the warehouse and is ready for installation.



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HCDE Celebrates Teen Artists through Galleria, Texas Art Supply Exhibits Feb. 18-March 16

Harris County teen artists and writers in grades 7-12 are celebrated through artist exhibits in the city as awardees through Harris County Department of Education's Regional Scholastic Art & Writing Awards.

The Awards recognize student achievement in the visual and literary arts in 29 categories, including editorial cartoon, poetry, graphic design, fashion, science fiction, photography and more.

Exhibits will be held from Feb. 18-March 16 to honor the artists and writers from public, private and home schools.

- Top Gold Key Awardees will be showcased at the Galleria, 5085 Westheimer, Houston, Texas, 77007 on the first-floor level near Saks Fifth Avenue during mall hours.
- Works from Silver Key artists and writers are being displayed at Texas Art Supply, 2001 Montrose Blvd., Houston, Texas 77066 during store hours.

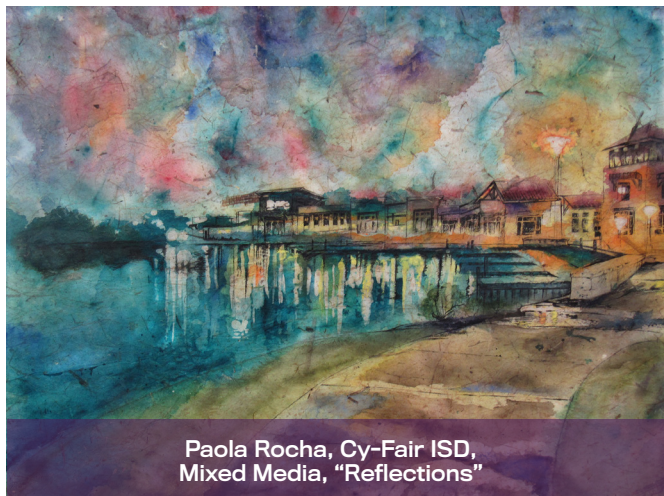
HCDE is one of more than 100 regional affiliate partners with Scholastic Art & Writing for the past 16 years. Since 1923, Scholastic Art & Writing has showcased the artist vision, ingenuity and talent of youth. Past honorees include notable alumni like Andy Warhol and Joyce Carol Oates. Students this year submitted approximately 350,000 original works for judging. Regional affiliate HCDE volunteers judged 8,997 pieces this year.

Teens awarded Gold Keys will advance for national judging in New York City. National Medalists will be announced on March 16.

"MANY NIGHTS PASSED JUST LIKE THIS, WHERE THE CHANTS OF ANTI-COMMUNIST PROTESTERS AND ADVERTISEMENTS ON LCD BILLBOARDS FILLED THE NIGHT." - JAMES SY, ST. JOHN'S SCHOOL, PERSONAL ESSAY/MEMOIR, "THROWN TO THE SHARKS"



Cristian Rojas, Aldine ISD, Photography, "Blue Future"



Paola Rocha, Cy-Fair ISD, Mixed Media, "Reflections"



Valentina Baffo, Houston ISD, Photography, "Patient"

For questions regarding the Regional Scholastic Art and Writing Awards program events, contact Andrea Segraves at asegraves@hcde-texas.org.

View press release with more details about teen artists and writers and other celebrations planned for the year: <https://wp.me/p4QJFI-18s>

PROGRAM

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HCDE Celebrates Teen Artists through Galleria, Texas Art Supply Exhibits Feb. 18-March 16

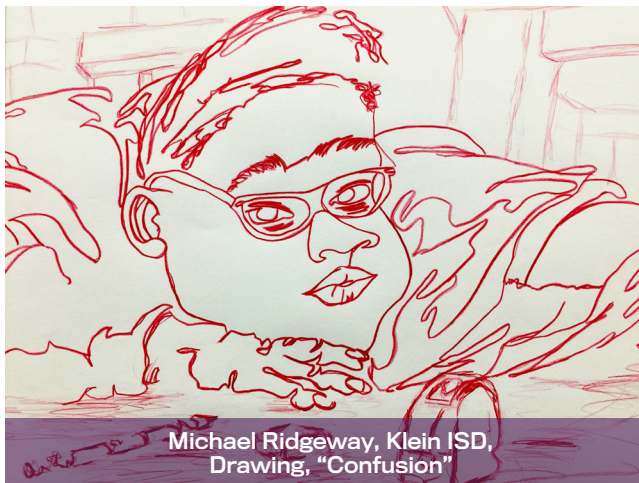
"THEY SAY ANTI SEMITISM IS THE 'OLDEST HATRED,' A DISEASE THAT CAN NEVER BE ERADICATED AND THAT METASTASIZES OVER TIME." - JOSHUA DANZIGER, EMERY WEINER SCHOOL, CRITICAL ESSAY, "DISCRIMINATION WITHOUT DELINEATION"



Mikaela Saenz, Katy ISD, Photography, "Soul Dealer"



Alejandra Rincon, Katy ISD, Printmaking, "Moonchild"



Michael Ridgeway, Klein ISD, Drawing, "Confusion"

"THE INDIAN-AMERICAN SCHOLASTIC GUILD (IASG) RECENTLY FOUND THAT HUNDREDS OF INDIAN AMERICAN PARENTS ARE APPLYING FOR NAME-CHANGES FOR THEIR KIDS. THIS REVELATION COMES AFTER THOUSANDS OF STUDENTS TAKING THE ANNUAL ADVANCED PLACEMENT EXAM STRUGGLED TO BUBBLE IN THEIR LENGTHY FIRST AND LAST NAMES ON A TIME CRUNCH." - ADITYA NAMJOSHI, PEARLAND ISD, HUMOR, "THE AMERICANIZED TIMES OF HINDOOSTAN"



Jeanette Barraza, Cy-Fair ISD, Digital Art, "Do You Know Who You Are?"

HCDE Superintendent, Personnel Serve as SuperMENTors for Head Start

Superintendent James Colbert Jr. made his monthly visit to the Humble Head Start Center to share the love of reading and promote literacy as part of the SuperMENTors Program. The students enjoyed the tale of a boy who won't let anything get him down in *Every Little Thing: Based on the Song 'Three Little Birds' by Bob Marley*. Each child received their own copy of the book to take home.

Several members of the HCDE staff, including Assistant Superintendent Dr. Jesus Amezcua, participate in the program each month during the school year. The program is a part of the ongoing HCDE Head Start Significant Male Initiative formed in 2002 to encourage involvement in our Head Start centers.

To become a SuperMENTor, visit <http://hcde-texas.org/media/uploads/2019/08/SuperMentor-Application-2019.pdf>.



Director Breaux Receives Board Member of Year Award, Accolades from City, State Officials

Research and Evaluation Director Darlene Breaux was recognized by the Houston Area Alliance of Black School Educators as School Board Member of the Year for her community work as vice president and policy council chair for Alief Independent School District.

Breaux received certificates from Texas Senator Borris Miles and Harris County Commissioner Rodney Ellis. Mayor Sylvester Turner provided words of appreciation at the recognition ceremony held Feb. 7 at Bayou Event Center. Breaux also serves as chair for the policy committee on the Alief Board of Trustees.

Photo: Breaux receives accolades from Alief Board President Ann Williams and Alief Superintendent H.D. Chambers at a recent board meeting.



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Employee Spotlight: Erick Leon, School-Based Therapy Services

School-Based Therapy Services Occupational Therapist Erick Leon has been at HCDE since August 2012. Erick divides his time amongst his 16 schools within Houston ISD and KIPP Houston Public Schools and is thankful for the support he receives from his managers. He supports students in special education through a mix of collaborative educational and functional goals. School-Based Therapy Manager Laura McFarland said Erick assists students in benefiting from their special education program by tailoring strategies and interventions to their individual needs.

"Erick always has a smile on his face and is ready to take the extra steps needed for his students, teachers and campuses," McFarland said.

As part of our monthly employee spotlight, we interviewed Erick to ask him about why he chose to work at HCDE, his goals and how he spends his spare time.



What is your favorite part about working at HCDE?

My favorite part is the flexibility with our schedule. Our day-to-day is very fluid. There are usually anchors for our day, but if there's a need then I will gravitate towards it and being able to have choices on what we can do throughout the day. Also, sometimes I work with a student and I show him or her something small and that's all he/she needed to understand. Seeing a face light up makes me feel good. My managers are very supportive, and I know I can call them anytime when I need another perspective.

How long have you worked at HCDE?

I have been with HCDE since August 2012. I started out working with Pasadena ISD then went to Houston ISD in 2013. I also work with KIPP Houston Public Schools now.

What are your daily duties?

I usually have something planned either the day, week or month before where there is usually an anchor for the day whether it's a meeting with the parents and administrators or assisting students with a specific need.

Tell us about your family?

I'm originally from New York and grew up in the Bronx. I met my wife, who is from Houston, while she was doing an internship in New York, and I moved to Texas with her. We got married in 2014 and live in East Downtown Houston (EaDo). We have been real estate investors since 2015, and she does the day-to-day operations.

Share your education background? Training?

I went to the City University of New York (CUNY) and have a Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology. For my OT training, I have a Master of Science degree in occupational therapy from State University of New York (SUNY) Downstate Medical Center.

Tell us something your coworkers don't know about you?

I used to play soccer in high school and college as a defender.

What are your hobbies? Spare time activities?

I started playing in a Thursday soccer league last year and will occasionally play on Sunday mornings.

Name three things that make you happy.

I would say wanting to learn more because it makes me feel empowered, when I feel like I'm bringing value and making a difference and being challenged with new opportunities- all make me happy.

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

Because I am in real estate, I would have to say buying a "grade A" high-rise building or multi-family property in an area that is considered a vacation spot.

Management of Administrative, Fiscal and Facilities Function and Organization Morale

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

Monitor effectiveness of operations against appropriate benchmarks;

Implement and oversee a planning process that results in goals, targets or priorities for major areas of operations;

Model and support responsible risk-taking so that all employees can be innovative and try new ideas; and

Celebrate accomplishments and acknowledge excellence.

With our ABS West nearing completion, excitement is contagious. Facilities crews and school staff continue to prepare for the move, making checklists and communicating plans to local districts and parents. With Spring Break on the horizon, we are on pace to move into our new school home to begin the spring semester.

On another celebration front, we prepare for the Scholastic Art & Writing Exhibits at the Galleria and Texas Art Supply this month. On display will be work from our amazing Harris County teens. You'll want to drop by at least one of these venues to see for yourself.



We also bask in the success of CASE Debates as teens gain college readiness skills from the art of debate.



This month we honor the work of several employees. School-Based Therapy Services occupational therapist Erick Leon is profiled in our February employee spotlight. You'll hear about why he loves his job and find out more about the amazing work our therapists are doing with students in our client districts.

Through our fiscally conservative construction budget for ABS West and adherence to meeting construction deadlines, I continue to look for ways to improve programs and services without greater expenditures and with concern for cutting expenses and costs to public schools for service without sacrifice to high quality services. By encouraging the growth and development of our employees, I am developing and implementing a clear vision for the Department while also developing and fostering an entrepreneurial spirit and understanding of HCDE's role in the changing educational environment. We are also assessing risks and deterring appropriate actions using sound business judgement to provide programs and resources that support reductional opportunities.

HCDE BOARD

Board President

Eric Dick

Vice President

Danny Norris

Board Members

Richard Cantu

Andrea Duhon

Amy Hinojosa

Don Sumners

Michael Wolfe

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Feb. 18

Scholastic Exhibits
Galleria and Texas Art
Supply (Montrose)
9 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

Feb. 20

Make-and-Take for
Grade 2 Science
6300 Irvington
9 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

Feb. 26

Board Meeting
6300 Irvington
1 p.m.

Feb. 28

Go Texan Day/Chili
Cook-Off
6300 Irvington
1 p.m.