

# The CONNECTOR

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

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# The CONNECTOR



## *Of Note...*

It was a gold star week in HCDE as we hosted several outstanding community events and strengthened relationships with organizations throughout the county.

Last Friday, ELT and Mr. Flynn attended a luncheon with the crew that is building the new AB West campus, marking the half-way point of construction. It was great to see the new school taking shape and I will share our monthly construction update with you next week.

We started this week with the Intentional Leadership Symposium, at which 300 educators from the region listened to superintendents comment on the new accountability system, its challenges and positive attributes. The audience was able to engage in a question and answer session about other topics including the future of the superintendency and the impact of the arts on student success. The feedback from this one-day conference was outstanding, with several superintendents, board members and district administrators and teachers saying how valuable and worthy they found the conversation. I am proud of the collaboration between divisions that helped to make this event stand out and how HCDE provided quality support for our client districts and local educators.

On Wednesday, I joined hundreds of vendors at Choice Partners' annual food vendor show. This is an amazing event at which students and administrators from local school districts taste test new products for cafeterias and food service at schools. School lunches and breakfast items have certainly changed since I was a young boy. Today's students can choose from sushi, ramen bowls, pasta and General Tsao's Chicken with Lo Mein along with traditional favorites such as pizza, chicken nuggets and sausage breakfast sandwiches. All food showcased at the nutrition show meets USDA requirements for school lunches and members of our co-op get great prices on the food when they choose to buy the products using a Choice Partners contract.

On Wednesday and Thursday, HCDE was home to the Harris County Juvenile Probation Department's annual conference, hosting hundreds of probation officers and participating in discussions about positively supporting students within the juvenile system. I participated on a panel discussion at the end of the conference to talk about the philosophy of Fortis Academy and how we are changing the culture from punishing students with addiction to supporting them through recovery.

On Thursday we held agenda review in preparation for the October board meeting and Friday I met with staff members for internal meetings.

Next week I travel to Austin for a UIL meeting on Monday and Tuesday and will be out of the office on Thursday and Friday. Have a great weekend.

 Harris County  
Department of  
Education

# BOARD BRIEFS



Fortis students and staff participated in Recovery in the Park Sept. 28 at Discovery Green Park in Houston. The event in its fifth year celebrates recovery communities and alternative peer groups. Sober teens joined to network and socialize with games and food.



The Communications surprise patrol visited KTRK 13 and honored Juan Beltran as Media Honor Roll honoree in 2019 for a story he produced about Fortis Academy. The program is part of Texas Association of School Boards recognition process for positive media relations.



Veteran newspaper producer Gilbert Hoffman is honored by HCDE in 2019 for his continued support of public education and HCDE programs and services. Hoffman produces both the North Channel Star and Highland Star-Courier through Grafik Press. For the past decade, Hoffman has produced stories about HCDE events and programs.



Board President Josh Flynn joined HCDE leaders at the ABS West celebration luncheon provided by Webber Commercial for contractors and subcontractors Sept. 27. The lunch commemorated the completion of the structural phase of the school. The school is on track to be completed by February 2020.



ABS West construction workers enjoy a meal to celebrate the half-point mark in the construction of the new school.



HCDE Staff join and thank construction workers for their hard work.

# PROGRAM

## CONNECTIONS

### Healthy Minds Healthy Families Provides Helpful Information to Educators



Start early and young in regards to recognizing any mental health symptoms in children is what early childhood educators learned at the 5th annual Healthy Minds Healthy Families Conference Sept. 27. The conference was sponsored by the HOGG Foundation for Mental Health and Harris County Department of Education Head Start.

"We believe in order for our communities to be whole and well, that children and families have to be well," said Vicky Coffee, HOGG Foundation for Mental Health director of programs. "By supporting this conference that focuses on learning and education around mental health, the signs and symptoms of what to look for with young children we are starting early in recognizing their needs in ways we can support them in their future endeavors."

This year, over 200 attendees participated in breakout sessions ranging from depression, infant mental health, ADHD, stress, etc.

Dawn Brown, a double-board certified child psychiatrist, founded The ADHD Wellness Center in Houston.

"I love working with ADHD because I have it," she said. "I do recommend medication management to my patients even to children as young as 5. There are roadblocks and detours, but I am wanting to change that perspective. We are meeting your child where you are and teaching positive reinforcement."

Licensed professional counselor and registered play therapist Haley Garth believes play is children's truest language, and toys are their words. She always gets asked what the toys mean, and she responds that they can mean whatever they want them to mean.

"When a child asks me this question, I say it's whatever you need it to be," Garth said. "We have a wide array of toys, physical and spiritual, animals, inanimate objects, highly aggressive and non-aggressive animals. The treatment cycle varies from 16 to 20 weeks to a few years, depending on the circumstance."

Attendees benefitted from specialists and also heard from keynote Dr. Melitón Moya.

The goal is for early childhood providers to be mindful of mental health issues and to be able to connect families to resources, said HCDE Head Start Senior Director Venetia Peacock.

# PROGRAM CONNECTIONS

## HCDE Hosts 8 Area Superintendents, TEA Director at Intentional Leadership Conference

Superintendents from eight area school districts joined Harris County Department of Education Superintendent James Colbert in a panel discussion on accountability and school communities Sept. 30 at HCDE with more than 250 area educators.

Keynote speaker Harold Wright, Texas Education Agency's state director of community and university partnerships, provided an overview of how schools fared after two years with the new A-F accountability process and spoke of challenges, progress and promising practices.

"Intentional Leadership: Sustaining Our Communities and Navigating Accountability" allowed educators to hear from area superintendents and supplied time for breakout sessions for legislative topics in subject areas like special populations, early childhood, social studies, math, science and English language arts.

Curriculum directors from HCDE's Teaching and Learning Center either coordinated or conducted the subject-related, breakout sessions.

Superintendents participating included Scott Davis, Crosby ISD; Grenita Lathan, Houston ISD; Lloyd W. Graham, La Porte ISD, Charles Dupre, Fort Bend ISD; Martha Salazar-Zamora, Tomball ISD; HD Chambers, Alief ISD; LaTonya M. Goffney, Aldine ISD; and Greg Smith, Clear Creek ISD.

Colbert asked the superintendent questions about the accountability system but also left time to vet questions from the audience. Questions ranged from asking leaders about opinions about fine arts in school to asking for opinions about how to retain good teachers.

While supportive central office staff and strong campus administrators are needed, Tomball ISD Superintendent Martha Salazar-Zamora underlines the importance of teachers to a district.

"In absence of that passionate, well-developed teacher, the magic cannot happen," Salazar-Zamora said. "I continue to say that what has to happen in the classroom does start and end with a highly-qualified, highly-developed, loving and nurturing teacher."



# PROGRAM

## CONNECTIONS

### **Students, Child Nutrition Directors Pleased with Food Options at HCDE Choice Partners Nutrition Expo**

Pizza and chicken nugget choices were top with students from school districts around Harris County at this year's Harris County Department of Education Choice Partners Nutrition and Product Expo at the Humble Civic Center.

This annual event brings about 100 vendors who offer products through HCDE's co-op showcase their foods in their uniquely beach-themed booth. A few of the new offerings this year included PizzaBoli from Tasty Brands and the maple seasoned beef sausage and pancake breakfast sandwich from Integrated Food Services.

Students and child nutrition directors from Channelview, Galena Park, Huffman and Humble ISDs and HCDE's Fortis Academy sampled various lunch options for their districts. Many of the products showcased this year will end up in their school cafeteria lines soon.



### **Karate, Etiquette, Robotics! Find Enriching Activities through Afterschool Providers Fair Oct. 11**

CASE for Kids hosts the Afterschool Provider Fair on Oct. 11 from 10 a.m.-1 p.m. at 6300 Irvington Blvd. The fair showcases 50 provider network members who offer afterschool services for youth participating in afterschool programs, ranging from hip-hop dance to golf to character education to tutorials.

"These vendor-providers are part of our afterschool network, and they have been chosen for their quality resources and reputations," said Lisa-Thompson Caruthers, director for CASE for Kids. "This event offers a one-stop-shop for resources for communities who host afterschool programs. You can talk one-on-one with company representatives about services ranging from homework help to robotics."

The fair is free and open to the public. Out-of-school time professionals may email [caseforkids@hcde-texas.org](mailto:caseforkids@hcde-texas.org) with questions.



# PROGRAM

## CONNECTIONS

### School Safety Summit Enlists 3 Dynamic Safety Experts in Dialogue with Education Community Oct. 15

School Safety is the topic as three international and local safety experts talk about school violence and solutions at Harris County Department of Education Oct. 15, from 8 a.m.-3:30 p.m. Psychologist Scott Poland, emergency preparedness expert Michael Dorn and Harris County Sheriff Ed Gonzalez lead the discussions.

Learn to recognize, respond to and prevent acts of violence at the School Safety Forum Oct. 15, from 8:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m. The Center for Safe and Secure Schools, a division of HCDE, and the Harris County Sheriff's Office (HCSO) partner to present the School Safety Forum 2019.

The workshop equips parents, teachers, students and the community with an empowerment toolkit.

Cost for the workshop is \$85.

**Register:** <https://bit.ly/30QTPSP>.

#### Presenters:

**Scott Poland**, Ph.D., is a licensed psychologist and international recognized school safety expert. His presentations include youth suicide, self-injury, bullying, school crisis prevention/intervention, threat assessment and parenting during challenging times. He co-authored Suicide Safety School Plans for the state of Texas and was the former psychological services director for Cypress-Fairbanks ISD.



**Michael Dorn** is executive director for Safe Havens International where he shares his expertise in safety, security, culture, climate and emergency preparedness assessments. Dorn is an established school safety expert who works internationally; he has authored or co-authored 27 books on school safety and emergency preparedness. As a renowned public speaker, he known to speak on topics ranging from bullying prevention to student supervision.



**Ed Gonzalez**, Harris County Sheriff and keynote speaker, served 18 years in the Houston Police Department before joining the Harris County Sheriff's Office. He served on the HCSO hostage negotiation team and was assigned to homicide as an investigator prior to becoming sheriff. As chair of City Council's Public Safety & Homeland Security Committee, Gonzalez broke new ground with initiatives to protect vulnerable seniors from elder abuse. He has also expanded the HCSO's fight against human trafficking. His law enforcement background strengthens his ability to improve public safety and protect area neighborhoods.



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# SYSTEMIC

## ACHIEVEMENT...WITH PURPOSEFUL INTENT

### Community Relations

**In keeping with the Board's expectations of me 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.**

This week we hosted eight area superintendents along with a TEA director, allowing an audience of 200 education leaders and the community to network, hear and be heard. The positive feedback has us planning similar events for the future and we continue to build positive community relations.



Choice Partners hosted its Nutrition and Product Expo this week as school districts and other municipalities came together with food co-op vendors to network and taste-test new products which may eventually make their way into the school cafeteria. A great number of students will benefit from the contracts we have procured between Choice and our vendor partners, and the districts will save time and money in the process while gaining quality products and equipment.

The story about the expo ran on KTRK, and the Houston Chronicle chronicled the experience through photos.

Communications began delivering Media Honor Roll Awards we give annually as a part of the TASB program for positive media communications with our media partners. This program reinforces our positive relationships we meld with local media.

Positive relations were also reinforced as we thanked contractors and subcontractors for keeping our construction contract on track at ABS West. A luncheon held this week promoted the stellar work being done on the school as we look forward to meeting our February completion date.

Finally, the Healthy Minds, Healthy Families Conference which is support by our community partner the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health allowed us to reinforce the importance of mental health in early childhood education. Many stories, ideas and goals were shared as we move forward.

**In making these kinds of opportunities available to the community and by bringing our positive work forward, we are presenting a stellar image of the Department in all venues—community, political, educational, business and board. By maintaining visibility and involvement in the community with ISD superintendents, elected officials, community leaders and the HCDE Board, I am meeting my goal of acting as a primary ambassador for the Department.**



### HCDE BOARD

#### Board President

Josh Flynn

#### Vice President

George Moore

#### Board Members

Richard Cantu

Eric Dick

Danny Norris

Don Sumners

Michael Wolfe

### UPCOMING EVENTS: Integrating Reading and Writing in the Bilingual Classroom

October 8, 2019

### Capturing Kid's Hearts

October 8, 2019

### Cybersecurity Ethics and Law

October 11, 2019

### Board Meeting

October 16, 2019

