

The CONNECTOR

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

SERVING SIDE-BY-SIDE

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Of Note...

As a county-wide governmental entity, HCDE's influence upon our community is vast and continues to grow.

This week, the department partnered with a variety of organizations and programs to further our mission of supporting public education in the county and across the region. At the Safety Forum, hosted by HCDE's Center for Safe and Secure Schools, close to 300 people came together to share best practices and hear from local safety experts about how to keep our children safe at school. I was impressed with the quality of speakers and the support from local safety equipment vendors for this activity. By bringing ISD's, law enforcement and other advocacy agencies together to collaborate about school safety, HCDE is leveraging our support in the community for the betterment of local districts and the children and staff they serve. This is a perfect example of the impact we make everyday throughout Harris County.

This week we also kicked off CASE Debates and Head Start's Super MENTor program. Both of these initiatives rely upon community engagement and involvement to directly support student achievement and success. As a Super MENTor myself, I know the power of this program and its impact on the lives of the preschoolers I read to each month. This impact can also be seen upon the thousands of students who engage in CASE debates afterschool, guided by professionals from the University of Houston and the Houston Urban Debate League. This program, supported by our afterschool division, greatly benefits these students directly and often influences the direction of their lives in school and beyond.

I started the week off with various internal meetings including my standing Executive Leadership Team meeting on Monday morning. On Tuesday, I met with some community members about upcoming events and prepared for the board committee meetings and regular Board meeting on Wednesday. Thank you for your participation in those meetings.

On Thursday and Friday I held more internal meetings and attended the Human Trafficking training session for board members and local superintendents.

I have enjoyed the change in weather this week as Fall takes root and temperatures cool down. I plan to relax this weekend in the great outdoors, while actively planning for HCDE can continue to serve the students, staff and school districts of Harris County with high quality relevant programs and services. Have a great weekend.





Fifth Ward Head Start students and staff join the dress to support campaign during Breast Cancer Awareness Month. This week's campaign was about Fight for the Cure with camo dress attire.



The CASE for Kids Partnership Project at Ed White Elementary held a Hispanic Heritage Month cultural awareness event this month. Students donned apparel from their respective Latin American countries or chose to support the Astros.



HCDE hosted a Human Trafficking prevention information session with Crime Stoppers of Houston which targets school administrators. The workshop gave educators statistics and resources. Dr. Victor Keys listens to an instructor who talks about Houston being a major hub for trafficking.



Candidates for the Superintendent Institute met last week and were mentored by Superintendent Colbert, who spent the day with the 2019 superintendent cohort.



Sixty CASE Debates students from eight schools kicked off the debate season this month with a seminar after being delayed by Tropical Storm Imelda. Students were mentored by debate professionals, including students from the University of Houston central and downtown campuses and the Houston Urban Debate League.



Jesus Amezcua volunteers as a SuperMENTor at Compton Head Start with his new mentees. He read "The Bear's Big Day" which proved to be a bestseller.

PROGRAM

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CASE Providers Fair Offers Variety of Activities

From creating music to robotics to fencing, it could all be found at this year's Center for Afterschool, Summer and Enrichment, or CASE for Kids Providers Fair to explore additional services to offer to afterschool students.

Afterschool providers throughout greater Harris County use the vendor show to find providers for their program.

About 60 providers networked with schools on Oct. 11 to showcase their products and even a few students had their chance to test some out.

Ten-year-old Dexter Lewis experienced making his own music beats by adding his name with Just Add Beats. Founder Andrew Karnavas showed him how to operate the keyboard and laptop to make his unique music beats.

"The equipment that he had interested me in wanting to try it," Lewis said. "I was surprised and impressed with the final outcome and will let my parents hear it tonight."

Lewis said if his afterschool program offered this activity he would participate in it.



PROGRAM

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School Safety Forum Receives Positive Acclaim from Attendees, Supports Efforts of Senate Bill 11

Concerns over implementing new mental health initiatives in schools and general care for school safety brought approximately 273 educators to Harris County Department of Education Oct. 15 for the School Safety Forum. The event hosted by the Center for Safe and Secure Schools and the Harris County Sheriff's Office (HCSO) supplied international and local speakers on topics ranging from mental health to gang violence to emergency operations planning. Those included Harris County Sheriff Ed Gonzalez, renowned psychologist Scott Poland and emergency preparedness expert Michael Dorn.

Many administrators attended to learn more about mental health and compliance with Senate Bill 11, a bill supported by Gov. Greg Abbott as an effort to prevent school violence and protect Texas children.

"The bill better prepares and equips schools to handle security threats and provide resources to support the mental health of students and staff," said CSSS Director Julia Andrews. "The center is committed to helping our area districts with school safety concerns."

Superintendent James Colbert Jr. welcomed the administrators and safety experts as the forum opened: "I ask you to find something purposeful out of what you learn today so that we can all be proactive at trying to prevent some of these problems," Colbert said.

Assistant principal Raymond Lowery from Alief ISD said he came to the forum to learn about what the community is doing overall to keep schools safe and what kind of preventative measures are in place to help him gauge where his campus stands in terms of school safety enhancements. He left reassured about his campus and district's social and emotional learning efforts and safety updates.

View Lowery's testimonial: https://youtu.be/RxB5_gBs-ek

Tina Seamon, Katy ISD assistant principal, complimented the quality of information she took away from the forum. **See Seamon's testimonial:** <https://youtu.be/-GcCy2dqqu4>

"Not only were the speakers full of knowledgeable information, we also heard from Harris County Sheriff Ed Gonzalez," she said. "He shared his passion for wanting to help not only students and their parents, but the entire community."



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HCDE Salutes 4 Principals During National Principals Month

Harris County Department of Education's Board of Trustees and administration celebrated National Principals Month during the HCDE Board of Trustees meeting Oct. 16. During October, the school leaders are put in the spotlight for their endless commitment to the principalship.

The four principals celebrated include Marion Cooksey, Highpoint School; Donna Trevino-Jones, Academic and Behavior Center East; Antony Moten, Fortis Academy; and Victor Keys, Academic and Behavior School West; Plaques and accolades were given by leadership.

"Principals are near and dear to my heart because being a principal is one of the most challenging jobs in public education," said Superintendent James Colbert Jr. "The principal is responsible for every person on the campus. Our principals do an exceptional job. Our principals don't ask questions; they take every student and promote a culture where everyone loves that student.

"We appreciate everything you do."

Photo:

Holding plaques and being celebrated during Principals Month by administration and board members are principals Anthony Moten, Fortis Academy; Donna Trevino-Jones, ABS East; Victor Keys, ABS West; and Marion Cooksey, Highpoint School (not present, but treasured).



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Cy-Fair ISD Middle Schoolers Take Action in Hurricane Preparedness

The Houston area has been hit by numerous tropical storms and hurricanes in the past, and the public may not know what happens behind the scenes with emergency personnel. Thanks to a collaboration between multiple agencies, several dozen students were educated about the role of first responders.

More than 40 eighth graders from Cy-Fair ISD's Hamilton Middle School participated in an interactive exercise with the Harris County Office of Emergency Management and Harris County Department of Education's Center for Safe and Secure Schools, where they formed their own government and planned and recovered from a major weather event.

StormZone is a program out of Miami, FL that teaches students about the science of severe natural hazards, the effects of climate change, and how emergency management agencies work with local governments to prepare for and recover from such disaster.

"I've always wanted to bring this program to the rest of the gulf coast especially to students in Texas," said StormZone Executive Director Lucien C. Proby III. "We look forward to coming out each year and educating a new group of students about preparing and recovering from hurricane-related disasters.

Hamilton Middle School Principal Kim Sempe said that the eighth graders are beginning to look at their high school endorsement program to see what careers interest them and choose high school electives for next year.

"We're excited to have this unique and special hands-on opportunity with StormZone and the Harris County Office of Emergency Management," she said. "The challenges students participated in ties into some of eighth grade focus and curriculum. This also gave them the chance to talk to professionals from a variety of professions in one place."

Eighth-grader Ryan Wolfram portrayed the county judge during the mock exercise.

"I was assigned to oversee everyone doing their respective duties and after each challenge I read aloud what each did to solve the problem," Wolfram said. "I thought it was a great experience and something that I will hold with me forever."



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New School Year Welcomes SuperMENTors

Students at the Fifth Ward Head Start Center greeted their favorite SuperMENTors with smiles and hugs as their adult volunteers came to ready “Bear’s Big Day” to them Oct. 9.

The four men volunteer for the REAL SuperMENTors Read program, a mentoring program in which men from the Houston community commit one hour of their time to read, once a month. The program is a part of the ongoing HCDE Head Start Significant Male Initiative formed in 2002 to encourage male involvement throughout the HCDE Head Start centers.

The program works by recruiting, selecting and assigning mentors to each school. Mentors commit to at least one hour, once a month between October and May to read to students. During the month of May children celebrate their SuperMENTors.

Chris Frey, Bank of Texas vice president of commercial banking, is in his fourth year of participating in the SuperMENTor program and is one of three from the bank to mentor at the Fifth Ward Head Start Center. Bank of Texas also donated to the program this year to supply books.

“It’s always great getting to know the new students,” he said. “They were super engaged and eager as they are every year. I love doing it and look forward to it the most every month.”

Frey also said the great thing about the program is that he gets to see the same students throughout the year and by the end of the year they all know his name.

“I find that part very rewarding especially being able to see them progress in the learning experience through the school year is a great feeling and they definitely make my day,” Frey said.

SuperMENTor volunteers come from a multitude of businesses and are community members from across the greater Houston area. Additionally, through corporate sponsors, participating students receive a copy of the book read to them each month to grow a home library.

Reading dates are the second Thursday of each month beginning in October through May. Each school site will work with its mentor, as needed, for scheduling reading dates.

To sign-up to be a mentor, fill out the form at <https://bit.ly/32mBEFD> and email to SuperMENTors@hcde-texas.org.

For more information on the REAL SuperMENTors Read program at HCDE Head Start, please contact Armando Rodriguez at 713-696-2179 or e-mail SuperMENTors@hcde-texas.org.



IN THE NEWS

In the News: Telemundo, Univision Cover School Safety Forum



Gabriela Hernandez provides 11:30 a.m. live news interview with Univision

The School Safety Forum attracted several local media outlets to HCDE for event coverage. Univision 45 reporter David Herrera provided a live newscast at 11:30 a.m. which included an interview with Schools Parent Engagement Liaison Gabriella Hernandez who explained the value of the training to area educators. Univision 45 followed up with several updates later in the day.

View the live news coverage:

https://youtu.be/h_j3LCRP70Q

Telemundo 47 also supplied coverage and included an interview with Harris County Sheriff Ed Gonzalez on its 5 p.m. newscast.

View story: <https://youtu.be/ikoSJjvB9ow>

Houston Style Magazine promoted the event through its website: <https://bit.ly/2JbdBCf>



Sheriff Ed Gonzalez is interviewed by Telemundo 47



Adult Education's manager Bill Medina talks about the importance of school safety protocols with his adult learners

SYSTEMIC

ACHIEVEMENT...WITH PURPOSEFUL INTENT

Community Relations

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.

I start by stressing the importance of recognizing our principals during Principal Month. Our principals are invaluable to us as they are responsible for the success of both staff and students. Through our recent board meeting, we honored them with plaques and commendations. We also provided thanks through social media and our news blog.



School safety is a critical legislation and social issue as we continue to find better ways to make our schools safer. Today that means paying attention to mental health needs of students and staff. The School Safety Forum brought more than 200 experts, administrators and teachers and news media together to consider issues like gang violence, mental health and emergency operations plans. I personally welcomed attendees to HCDE and challenged them to take the information they

gained back to others on their campuses to share with colleagues and students. The day was productive and will lead to additional discussions and actions taken to continue to make schools safer in our communities.

We are forging ahead with our SuperMENTors Read program at our Head Start centers and thank supporters like the Bank of Texas and our own employees for taking time to read and mentor our Head Start students. This program also allows companies and nonprofits to see the work we are doing in our Head Start programs as we focus on building strong families.



By ensuring that we offer these types of activities and events to our communities, I am functioning as a primary ambassador for the Department. I am also presenting a positive, professional image of the Department in all venues—community, political, educational, business and board. I am maintaining visibility and involvement in the community with ISD superintendents, elected officials, community leaders and the HCDE board. In doing so I am open to their ideas and needs, listen and accept criticism and am willing to seek advice and counsel when necessary.

HCDE BOARD

Board President

Josh Flynn

Vice President

George Moore

Board Members

Richard Cantu

Eric Dick

Danny Norris

Don Sumners

Michael Wolfe

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Teachers, WRITE

October 22, 2019

Lights On! Brains On!

October 24, 2019

Play with Math

October 25, 2019

Board Meeting

November 20, 2019

