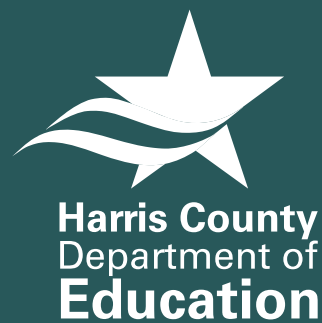


VOL. 9 | ISSUE 3 | WEEK OF OCTOBER 9, 2023

THE CONNECTOR



WWW.HCDE-TEXAS.ORG | CONNECT WITH US



**JAVIER LOPEZ
RETURNS TO CASE
DEBATES ROOTS > P.3**



**IRVINGTON BUILDING RENOVATION
PLANS UNVEILED > P.5**



**EDNA JOHNSON SHAPES
PROCUREMENT CERTIFICATION
CURRICULUM > P.6**



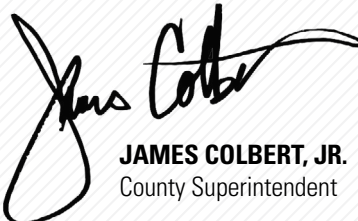
OF NOTE

IN EDUCATION, IT IS ALWAYS GRATIFYING WHEN the cycle of life comes full circle. Often, we see former students come back to school as teachers and then work their way up to Principal and even Superintendent. There is nothing more gratifying than watching a former student succeed and then pay that success forward by influencing the next generation of children.

We see CASE Debates' impact come full circle this week as a former Houston Urban Debate League student joins HCDE as the new CASE Debates project coordinator. CASE partners with HUDL for the debate program. Javier Lopez said his experience in debate expanded the horizon of his world, providing learning experiences that helped him grow mentally and emotionally. He wants to provide that experience to young debaters and expose them to new opportunities. I look forward to seeing how the debate program continues to thrive under Javier's leadership and how he impacts student lives by empowering them to believe they can do things they never before considered.

I started the week with ELT on Monday followed by Agenda Review in preparation for the October 18 board meeting. This was followed by an all staff meeting about the upcoming Irvington renovation. I felt it important to meet with staff about the renovation as every employee in the building will be impacted and I needed to set expectations about the temporary moves as well as answer any questions. The lunch meeting was well attended and questions ranged from file retention to moving supplies and garage protocols. On Tuesday I attended the annual business meeting for the Education Foundation of Harris County and on Wednesday I interviewed candidates for the board secretary position. I also met with our security firm regarding previous incidents at Irvington and safety protocols in the building. I was out of the office Thursday and Friday visiting family.

I look forward to seeing you at the board meeting next week.



JAMES COLBERT, JR.
County Superintendent

relationships between
state citizens



Javier Lopez, left, and HCDE Trustee Danny Norris discuss CASE Debates student's activities at the HUDL Summer Debate Institute hosted at the University of Houston.

JAVIER LOPEZ INSPIRES NEXT GENERATION OF CASE DEBATES STUDENTS

JAVIER LOPEZ, A SEASONED ORATOR who began his debate journey over a decade ago through the Houston Urban Debate League (HUDL), has been named the new CASE Debates project coordinator for Harris County Department of Education's Center for Afterschool and Summer Enrichment for Kids (CASE for Kids).

Lopez's new role brings him back to his roots as CASE Debates partners with HUDL to provide local high school students the opportunity to engage in elite speech and debate tournaments. Through CASE Debates, debaters from more than a dozen high school teams in Harris County receive free training and access to coaches. The initiative also offers them scholarship prospects and the opportunity to build self-esteem, expand their horizons, and meet other like-minded students locally and nationally.

As a high school freshman at the Houston Academy for International Studies, Lopez traveled the country for debate tournaments, refining his skills to construct compelling

arguments and growing from an underdog to a seasoned orator. Eventually, Lopez was awarded a debate scholarship to attend the University of North Texas, where he launched his coaching career.

As he settles into his new responsibilities, Lopez reflects on his experiences as a speech and debate student and the activity's transformational power on youth. He hopes to create a safe space for at-risk youth to thrive in competitive speech and debate.

How does it feel to lead the next generation of high school debaters?

JL: It's an honor and a full-circle moment. I joined CASE for Kids in 2017 as an AmeriCorps member in their VISTA Program, where I worked with previous CASE Debates coordinators to develop program materials for students in Harris County. I witnessed firsthand CASE's commitment to students and am

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4



Javier Lopez, center front, photographed with Houston Urban Debate League members while working in the AmeriCorps VISTA Program.

excited to have found people as passionate as I am about debate. CASE Debates is a nationally recognized program. I hope to continue preparing students to compete at that level and empower them with the confidence to participate in various debate circuits.

Why is this program vital for student success? How will CASE Debates help Harris County learners achieve their goals academically and professionally?

JL: Speech and debate equips students with transferable skills they will use throughout their lives. Two that immediately stand out are notetaking and communication. All our students learn how to effectively take notes in a capacity that is easy to understand. This is a skill they use for debate preparation and in the classroom, and it can also be used in the boardroom. Similarly, many of our students enter the program with the fear of public speaking. We help shift their mindset so they can confidently communicate with anyone and deliver their debate position. When they travel to tournaments and meet representatives from various companies, these middle and high school students can discuss high-level topics with industry experts and have a contextual understanding of what they are saying. Whether it's politics, economics, social, or environmental ideas, our CASE Debates students can speak about it all because they have done the research. This program fosters professional opportunities and helps create well-rounded citizens.

Describe the impact speech and debate programs had on your life, which led you to this position.

JL: I felt like the world expanded as I became a more experienced debater in HUDL tournaments. My first time flying, visiting a college campus, and spending an extended period away from home were all because of debate competitions. They were learning experiences

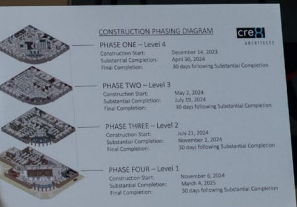
that helped me grow mentally and emotionally. By the time I began competing and coaching at the collegiate level, I felt well-prepared. Now, I get the opportunity to see our kids have similar experiences through CASE Debates events like the HUDL Summer Debate Institute hosted at the University of Houston.

What do you hope students will learn from your personal experiences as a debater?

JL: The ability to manifest change in their lives. The biggest component in my shift to break into highly competitive academic spaces was the belief that I could participate on that level. One day, I envisioned myself in those spaces and worked to get there. I'm grateful for the people who took a chance on me, and I want to provide the same opportunities for Harris County learners. Students' expectations for themselves vary, but what will be consistent in CASE Debates is an environment where students feel safe and where they find a sense of purpose and inspiration for the future.

As a former high school speech and debate student, how will your experience impact how you lead the CASE Debates program? What are your goals as the new coordinator?

JL: Having been in their shoes, I can motivate students who, due to financial or transportation constraints, might not normally access these opportunities; however, CASE Debates bridges these gaps, allowing them to thrive. Going forward, I want this program to focus on retention and recruitment. We have an incredible array of students, but there is so much untapped potential in Harris County schools, and we can help them shine. Additionally, I want to unite the speech and debate community because it's fractured between private schools or leagues and the public circuit. CASE Debates has already made a name for itself on the local and national scene, and I'm excited to continue pushing this program and our students to greatness. 🌟



IRVINGTON BUILDING RENOVATION PLANS UNVEILED TO STAFF

ON MONDAY, HCDE employees were invited to view renderings of the upcoming Irvington building renovation plans for the first time. During a lunchtime staff meeting, Superintendent James Colbert Jr. announced the four phases of construction, the first of which will begin in December.

Plans include the installation of a new roof, replacing the current heating, ventilation, and air conditioning system, and improvements to meet current city building code regulations. Colbert touted an inviting workplace environment with glass walls and LED lights to brighten the building and new furniture throughout—a necessity to complement the caliber of HCDE employees.

“Our Board of Trustees and I strive to build facilities to match what HCDE will become,” said Colbert. “I’m confident this Department will continue hiring top talent from across the nation, and I want the quality of this building to represent the incredible people who walk its halls.”

The fourth floor will receive the most significant structural change, extending the board room and creating space for a new board conference area.

Irvington employees will temporarily relocate to various HCDE facilities during each phase of construction. Renovations are expected to be completed in March 2025. 🌟



SPECIAL SCHOOLS TEACHERS BOOST CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT SKILLS DURING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT DAY

SKILL ENHANCEMENT WAS AT THE TOP of mind for educators from HCDE's Special Schools division on Monday, who gathered at Irvington and the Adult Education Learning Center for a professional development day. Academic and Behavior Schools East and West, Fortis Academy, and Highpoint School East faculty and staff brushed up on classroom management skills and techniques to help them foster smoothly running

classrooms, keep students engaged, and reduce disruptive behavior. Strategies discussed during the seminar effectively support students with social, emotional, academic, and behavioral challenges. Classroom instructors were also reminded to prioritize their mental health and practice techniques to remain centered when faced with challenges on campus or at home. ★



HCDE SETS STANDARDS IN PUBLIC PROCUREMENT

PROCUREMENT DIRECTOR EDNA JOHNSON'S expertise was front and center at the Texas Association of School Business Officials (TASBO) one-day 2023 Committee Connect event on October 3. The gathering brought TASBO Committee members together to network and review the organization's professional certification curriculum for the organization's upcoming Engage Annual Conference in Houston.

Johnson, who has served on TASBO's annual conference planning committee for procurement since

2014, was pivotal in revising the Competitively Sealed Proposals/ Request for Proposals certification curriculum, which had not been updated in several years. The updated curriculum enables procurement professionals to understand financial accounting rules from Texas statutes, the Texas Education Agency, the Texas Comptroller's Office, and other state and federal agencies.

Johnson's influence on the committee ensures that industry professionals seeking certification follow local and federal laws and cements HCDE as a standard-bearer in public administration across the state. ★





HIGHPOINT, ABS EAST STUDENTS EMBRACE CREATIVITY FOR HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH

THIS WEEK, students at Harris County Department of Education's Special Schools tapped into their creative abilities to celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month, which ends on October 15.

Interactive lessons at Highpoint School invited students to research a Hispanic country and create shirts, hats, popsicle stick flags, and classroom door decorations representing their chosen nation. Academic and Behavior School East art students constructed multiple piñatas filled with their favorite Spanish candy. Faculty then selected merit-based students for an opportunity to break open the popular fiesta vessel.

Educators supported the activities with lessons about the vibrant histories, traditions, and values of Spanish-speaking people whose ancestors came from Spain, Mexico, the Caribbean, and Central and South America. 🌟



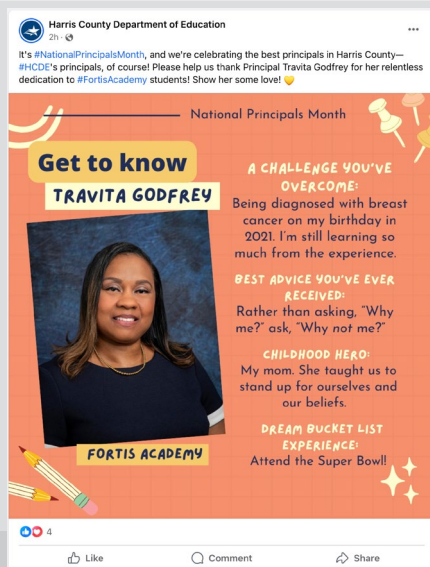
HCDE STAFF DIVE INTO EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS TRAINING

HARRIS COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION EMPLOYEES gathered at the North Post Oak building on October 6 for the first in a series of Emergency Preparedness in the Workplace workshops facilitated by the Department's Center for Safe and Secure Schools (CSSS). HCDE is uniquely positioned to host these workshops thanks to the in-house expertise of CSSS leaders, who helm the field and routinely host seminars on campus security for local school districts.

Officer of School Safety and Security Jeremy Foster, and School Safety and Security Specialists Sergio Lopez and Janice Owolabi guided more than 30 colleagues through the Standard Response Protocol (SRP). The SRP is a nationally

recognized methodology used by schools nationwide that ensures a uniform response by faculty, staff, students, and first responders to school-based emergencies. As it provides consistent terminology and response actions during an emergency, the SRP can also be used in the workplace as an element of a standardized emergency management approach.

During the workshop, attendees were also presented with various site-specific scenarios and tasked with identifying the correct response. This training is part of HCDE's commitment to ensuring that staff is equipped to handle emergencies, prioritizing their safety and well-being. 🌟



PRINCIPALS MONTH SOCIAL MEDIA SPOTLIGHT

HCDE'S PRINCIPALS ARE FEATURED in a National Principals Month campaign on the Department's social media platforms that will run through the end of October. Principals Travita Godfrey, Jatata Hutton, Timothy Mullican, and Courtney Waters will be highlighted

in individual posts featuring trivia about them. The campaign aims to publicly recognize campus leaders for their commitment to the unique needs of Harris County students, bring principals closer to the community, and create awareness about HCDE's Special Schools. 🌟

TOOLS FOR TEACHERS SHOPPING PERIOD UNDERWAY

THIS WEEK, SCHOOL SUPPLIES FILLED the virtual shopping carts of Harris County educators selected for the fall 2023 Tools for Teachers initiative. The first 2,000 eligible teachers who applied for the \$100 credit were notified of their selection via email last week and provided instructions to complete their purchase. During the first two days of the shopping period, which will remain open through Monday, October 16, Tools for Teachers recipients submitted nearly 800 orders. 🌟



SYSTEMIC ACHIEVEMENT: WITH PURPOSEFUL INTENT

THIS WEEK, THE FOLLOWING BOARD EXPECTATIONS WERE MET:

Superintendent Objective A: Management of Administrative, Fiscal, and Facilities Functions

- Recruit and maintain high-quality, professional staff at all levels.



Javier Lopez, left, and HCDE Trustee Danny Norris at the HUDL Summer Debates Institute hosted at the University of Houston.

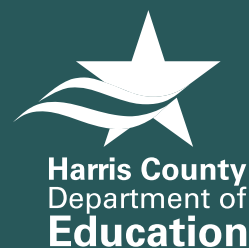
THIS WEEK, JAVIER LOPEZ, an alumnus of the Houston Urban Debate League and a debate scholarship recipient from the University of North Texas, joined #TeamHCDE as the new CASE Debates project coordinator for CASE for Kids. Javier's deep-rooted passion and expertise in debate will benefit students receiving free training, mentorship, scholarship opportunities, and access to platforms for self-development through the program. Javier is well-suited to engage students' growth and success, and we are eager to see which CASE Debates teams earn top honors in the year ahead under his leadership.

On Monday, I unveiled the Irvington building renovation plans to HCDE staff. The four-phase construction begins in December, featuring a new roof, HVAC system, and updates to meet city codes. It's crucial that our facilities reflect the caliber of our employees, who have long awaited Irvington's overhaul. The 15 months during which the building will be renovated will

present challenges for staff, but I am confident the result will be worth it for #TeamHCDE and our community.

Finally, Procurement Director Edna Johnson showcased her expertise at a recent TASBO Committee Connect event. Having served on TASBO's planning committee since 2014, Edna was instrumental in updating the Competitively Sealed Proposals/Request for Proposals certification curriculum. Her contributions ensure that procurement professionals are well-versed in Texas financial accounting rules and adhere to both local and federal laws. Her influence reaffirms HCDE's position as a leading standard-setter in public administration across Texas.

By recruiting and maintaining a high-quality professional staff, I am meeting the expectation to find ways to improve programs and services without greater expenditures and with concern for cutting expenses and costs to public schools for service without sacrificing high-quality services. 🌟



HCDE BOARD

Board President

Andrea Duhon

1st Vice President

Amy Hinojosa

2nd Vice President

David W. Brown

Board Members

Richard Cantu

Erica Davis

Eric Dick

Danny Norris

UPCOMING EVENTS

October 18

Board Meeting

Choice Partners Nutrition and Product Expo

October 19

Choice Partners Vendor Exhibit

October 20

Healthy Minds, Healthy Families Conference

October 27

Head Start Awareness Month Community Celebration

November 15

Board Meeting

November 23-24

Thanksgiving Break (HCDE Closed)