



Harris County
Department of
Education

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the CONNECTOR



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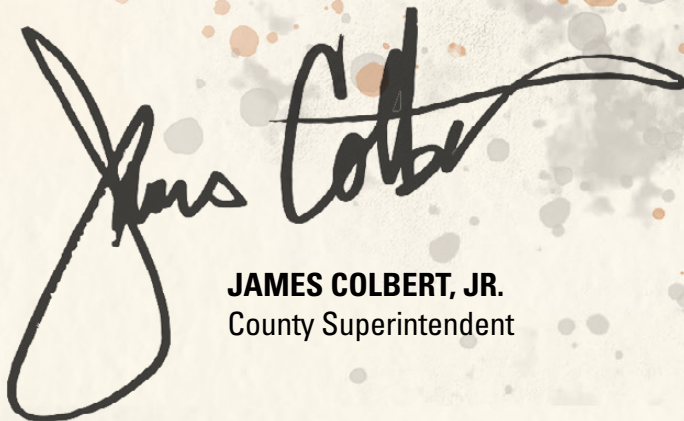
of Note

"FOR EVERY PERSON WHO DOUBTED what's possible, earning my GED was a way to prove to myself that I could overcome challenges and create something meaningful from my experience."

These words spoken by a GED student at last weekend's Adult Education ceremony not only sum up the speaker's journey, but are also representative of HCDE and how we approach our work. HCDE shows people what is possible instead of focusing on limitations and this makes a profound impact on our society as we accomplish goals many consider impossible. Knowing that the students we serve recognize this aspect of our programs and use it as an inspiration to achieve their personal goals makes every challenge we face worth it. HCDE is on a quest to Be Exceptional in all we do as we change the narrative of how students learn, grow and succeed. I am proud to be part of an organization that dedicates itself to helping others achieve their personal possible and look forward to hearing the success stories of the thousands of students we impact every year.

I started the week on Tuesday at the Board Budget Workshop followed by meetings with ELT staff. Thank you for your participation in this workshop where Dr. Amezcua and I explained how our budget works and the many different factors that we take into consideration before presenting you with a balanced budget. On Wednesday, I met with the Communications Team for Convocation planning after which I continued my semi-annual meetings with Leadership Team members. On Thursday, I dropped by the Center for Educator Success Demonstration of Learning culmination event for their Summer Intensive followed by meetings with ELT members. I end the week tomorrow at my NPO office.

Have a relaxing weekend.



JAMES COLBERT, JR.
County Superintendent



Program Connections



Adult Education graduates were all smiles after they crossed the stage in front of loved ones on June 21.

ADULT EDUCATION GRADUATES CELEBRATE MILESTONE MOMENTS, RECORD NUMBERS FOR 2024-2025

EVEN WITH MORE THAN 25 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE in adult education, Dr. Eduardo Honold proudly proclaimed that the excitement and emotions of graduation day never get old.

As Harris County Department of Education's (HCDE) Adult Education Senior Director, Honold stood at the podium on June 21 to recognize and celebrate more than 120 Adult Education students who earned their high school equivalency diplomas (HSE), formerly known as GED, during the 2024-2025 school year.

Family members, friends and HCDE staff were equally elated, demonstrated by the raucous applause and cheers the graduates heard as they filed into the Irvington Conference Center.

"At HCDE, we truly believe that education is the key to personal and community growth," Honold said in his welcoming address for the graduation ceremony.

As of June 21, a total of 269 HCDE Adult Education students completed and earned their HSE diplomas for the school year. The number is approximately 100 more than the previous year and 150 more than the 2022-2023 school year.

The record total is not only a reflection on division leadership, but it's teachers and support staff who assist students from registration to graduation – and even beyond as many enter workforce and certification training.

"What an incredible moment this is, not just for me but every single one of you here today," said graduate Emilio Lopez Jr., who

offered words of motivation during the ceremony. "Each cap and gown in this room represents strength, perseverance and belief that we can and we will become anything life throws at us."

Like many others, Lopez began his journey toward his GED diploma later in life after adversity in his younger days. He shared that he made poor decisions – ones he later regretted after they compounded and snowballed into more ill-advised decisions and outcomes.

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Harris County Department of Education celebrated more than 120 Adult Education graduates who completed their High School Equivalency during the 2024-2025 school year.

Program Connections



Nathan Alexander De La Cruz, center, poses with Dr. CJ Rodgers, assistant superintendent of Education and Enrichment, and Dr. Eduardo Honold, Adult Education senior director.

As a young father, Lopez stepped away from traditional education in 10th grade.

"I tried life without a foundation of education and a high school diploma and quickly realized how difficult that road could be," he said.

His road didn't end, however. Lopez gained valuable skills and experience in the workplace, climbing to a corporate senior recruiter. But he also wanted to return to his formal education and complete that task.

"Something inside me told me I wasn't finished," he said. "I wanted to close the chapter that opened up and rewrite it this time with intention. For every person who doubted what's possible, earning my GED was a way to prove to myself that I could overcome challenges and create something meaningful from my experience."

"And more importantly, it was a way to show my family that with dedication and hard work in yourself, progress is always possible."

The graduation, which returned to an in-person ceremony in 2023 following a years-long hiatus, has already grown to capacity numbers. The Irvington conference space was filled as the increased number of graduates meant limiting guests per honoree. An overflow room helped accommodate additional guests, while record numbers watched the ceremony's livestream on HCDE's YouTube channel. The video was viewed more than 1,000 times within 48 hours.

During the ceremony, attendees heard from honor graduates Mark Batson and Shelby Cruz in addition to Lopez. They led the invocation and Pledge of Allegiance, respectively.

Isaac Eguia, community relations specialist for the Office of County Judge Lina Hidalgo, delivered the commencement address.

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Isaac Eguia, community relations specialist for the Office of County Judge Lina Hidalgo, gives the commencement address at the graduation ceremony.

Program Connections



HCDE and Adult Education leadership congratulate graduates to conclude the graduation ceremony.

"Today we celebrate not just the completion of your GED, but the grit, determination and resilience it took you to get here," he said. "The theme of today's ceremony – 'I can. I will.' – couldn't be more fitting. It perfectly captures the spirit of progress. One step at a time. One milestone at a time.

"This has brought each of you to this point."

Eguia shared his own story, which included academic suspension from the University of Houston-Downtown more than 20 years ago due to a poor GPA. It wasn't until he worked in Alief Independent School District a decade later as a family and community liaison that the spark to complete his education returned.

Eguia was serving families like his own and even prepared many for GED diplomas, but he needed more.

"I knew if I wanted to make decisions for my community, I needed to be an educated person in my community," said Eguia, who graduated with honors from UH in 2020 and earned a master's degree from the University of Houston last year. "I did it and I know you can too."

Following the speeches, it was time to cheer again. Family members shouted out as each graduate crossed the stage and posed for photos. Finally, it was time to turn their tassels and move onto the next adventure in life.

"As you move forward, take pride in what you achieved," Honold said. "This is just the beginning. The knowledge and experience you've gained will open doors to more opportunities, and don't forget that HCDE is right here for you.

"Always continue to move forward and take the next step. Congratulations Class of 2025 – may your future be as big and bright as the great state of Texas." ☆



TO SEE MORE
OF THE STORY:

[VIEW OUR VIDEO](#)



TO SEE MORE
OF THE STORY:

[VIEW OUR PHOTO GALLERY](#)

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT TEAM BRIDGES ART EXPRESSION, ADVOCACY FOR HARRIS COUNTY YOUTH



HARRIS COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION'S (HCDE) Civic Engagement team recently used paint and a blank canvas to help Harris County youth better understand that advocacy comes in many forms and fashion.

Art and advocacy.

"While it's tough to discuss things like voting – some of them won't be doing that for another decade – there are absolutely ways for them to learn to express themselves and their opinions long before that," said Avery Spranger, HCDE Civic Engagement Coordinator, who spearheaded the June 23 Civic Art Immersion Tour. The tour included a new local art studio and stops to see civic art murals across Houston.

Students from the Center for Afterschool, Summer and Enrichment (CASE) for Kids Texas ACE Cycle 11 grant campuses participated in the event. Each group started at Sanman Studios' downtown art gallery. There, the students explored the space, checking out local artist Robert Leroy Hodge's exhibit, "Diamonds That Falls from the Treetop," in the gallery and looking through numerous books in the reading room.

One group then boarded a bus provided by Precinct One and visited murals in Third Ward, while the other worked on an art project. At the SHAPE Community Center, there were murals depicting racial injustice and the importance of the census.

Back at Sanman, students created collage art pieces, cutting out pictures and words from magazines before piecing everything together.

"A lot of the students expressed how powerful it was and that this was the first time they really interacted with art, books and other pieces – specifically about Black culture," Spranger said. "For a lot of their sites, they don't have libraries or art programs, so it really opened up their eyes to a new world of possibilities as a writer or artist." 🌟



TO SEE MORE
OF THE STORY:

VIEW OUR PHOTO GALLERY

CASE FOR KIDS PREPS PROGRAM LEADERS FOR NATIONAL SUMMER LEARNING WEEK



JULY 14-18 IS DESIGNATED as National Summer Learning Week, a nationwide celebration dedicated to ensuring all youth have accessible, high-quality learning experiences during the summer months. Those experiences can have lasting effects on young minds, which include closing achievement gaps, preventing the “summer slide” and garnering lifelong skills beyond the classroom.

Harris County Department of Education’s (HCDE) Center for Afterschool, Summer and Enrichment (CASE) for Kids

team was busy June 24-27 ensuring community partners, local educators and summer program leaders have the strategies, resources and tools available to maximize summer learning. With its Summer Learning Week Training Series, CASE for Kids showcased four engaging activities partners could implement, covering science, literacy, technology and engineering/mathematics.

Among the hands-on activities were dissecting a strawberry and constructing and launching straw rockets. ★

Board Briefs



ASPIRING EDUCATORS SHOWCASE NEWFOUND KNOWLEDGE TO CLOSE CENTER FOR EDUCATOR SUCCESS' SUMMER INTENSIVE

WITH DAILY LESSONS AND A FULL SLATE of instruction, more than 20 alternative teacher certification candidates were busy this week completing their three-week Summer Intensive cohort. Put on by the Center for Educator Success (CES) at the Adult Education Learning Center, "From Passion to Practice: Building A Strong Foundation" empowered aspiring educators to participate in daily learning on topics that included classroom management, instructional planning and

content methodologies.

On the final day (June 26), each cohort member demonstrated his or her newfound knowledge and skills in a 10-minute comprehensive presentation to colleagues, CES staff and school district representatives.

The Summer Intensive helps district educators prepare for content exams, which candidates must pass before continuing in their respective certification programs. ★



HCDE OBSERVES INDEPENDENCE DAY, WILL BE CLOSED JULY 4

ALL HARRIS COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION offices will be closed on Friday, July 4 in observance of Independence Day. Offices will resume the summer flex hours on Monday, July 7. ★

'FISHING FOR DATA' BY REI TEAM HELPS PRODUCE 'REEL TIME, REEL RESULTS' FOR HCDE DIVISIONS



READY FOR an early morning trip to the lake, Harris County Department of Education's (HCDE) Research and Evaluation Institute (REI) took its fellow divisions on a fishing expedition to better understand client information this week. Held June 26, the annual client satisfaction data session included presentations, analysis and hands-on group activities. It allowed division leaders to maneuver their Client Satisfaction dashboards, support data-driven decisions through analysis, and understand key metrics and act on those insights.

Themed, "Fishing For Data: Reel Time, Reel Results," the session assisted HCDE divisions in developing innovative tips to gather relevant information from clients. Division leaders and directors in attendance reviewed their own client satisfaction data collected from the 2024-2025 school year, and REI coordinators assisted in analyzing the information. ★

IN THE NEWS

TELEMUNDO FEATURES HCDE ADULT EDUCATION GRADUATION

TELEMUNDO HOUSTON featured Harris County Department of Education's (HCDE) Adult Education Graduation in a digital article on June 21. The article discusses the benefits of HCDE's GED program and highlights a recent graduate, age 53, who completed her graduate requirements through the new Spanish GED courses, alongside her daughter.

The article also emphasizes the dedication and sacrifice of students enrolled in Adult Education programs, underscoring that it's never too late to achieve a goal. ★

[CLICK HERE TO READ THE FULL TELEMUNDO DIGITAL ARTICLE.](#)



Systemic Achievement: With Purposeful Intent

THIS WEEK, THE FOLLOWING BOARD EXPECTATIONS WERE MET:

SUPERINTENDENT OBJECTIVE F: ORGANIZATIONAL IMPROVEMENT

- Organizes the central administration in a manner consistent with Department priorities and resources and monitors administrative organization at all levels for effectiveness and efficiency.



Adult Education graduates pose with division leadership and staff following the graduation ceremony June 21. More than 120 graduates who completed their High School Equivalency were recognized.

AFTER MORE THAN DOUBLING in size a year ago, our Adult Education graduation numbers continue to increase, demonstrated by the more than 260 students who have completed and earned their high school equivalency diplomas (HSE), formerly known as GED, during the 2024-2025 school year. It's a record number we can all be proud of. On June 21, we honored more than 120 of those students during the Adult Education Graduation ceremony. Graduates heard motivational words from fellow student Emilio Lopez Jr., who shared how adversity led him to stepping away from school as a high school sophomore. However, he came back, knowing that completing his formal education was meaningful for him as well as a way to show his family that progress is always possible. We also heard from Isaac Eguia, the commencement speaker and community relations specialist for the Office of County Judge Lina Hidalgo. Eguia's message was also one of adversity and perseverance – he went from academic suspension in the early 2000s to earning his bachelor's and master's degrees in the last five years. Good luck to all the graduates as they move onto the next steps in their journey.

Our leadership team took a deep dive into data and analytics this week, all with the purpose of better understanding client information and in turn, providing better service to our fellow HCDE team members and HCDE students, families and stakeholders. Led by the Research and Evaluation Institute

team, kudos to leadership for having fun with the "Fishing For Data" theme. Hopefully everyone in the room caught their "big fish." Events like this are vital in understanding data and maintaining the high standards we've set here at HCDE. Through client satisfaction data, divisions and teams are able to make data-driven decisions and procedures. Clients and families are the direct beneficiaries, but insights derived from data will also make HCDE better as an organization. I look forward to seeing how leadership uses this data as we head into a new academic year.

Finally, the three-week Summer Intensive cohort wrapped up on June 26. Hosted by the Center for Educator Success, more than 20 alternative certification teacher candidates demonstrated their newfound knowledge and skills gained from the program, each showcasing a 10-minute comprehensive presentation in front of cohort members, CES staff and school district representatives. The intensive is indeed intense, with three complete weeks of daily lessons and instruction on topics including classroom management and planning. But even with the short timeframe, these cohort members are able to grasp concepts that will prepare them for content exams and support their future classrooms. Good luck to the cohort and these future teachers.

By understanding HCDE's role in the changing educational environment, I am meeting the expectation to ensure that objectives are achieved. 🌟



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UPCOMING EVENTS

July 4
Independence Day (HCDE Closed)

July 16
Board Meeting

July 24
Professional Translators and Interpreters Conference (PTIC)

August 1
School Safety Summit

August 8
Convocation

August 20
Board Meeting

September 1
Labor Day (HCDE Closed)

September 12
iPASS

September 17
Board Meeting