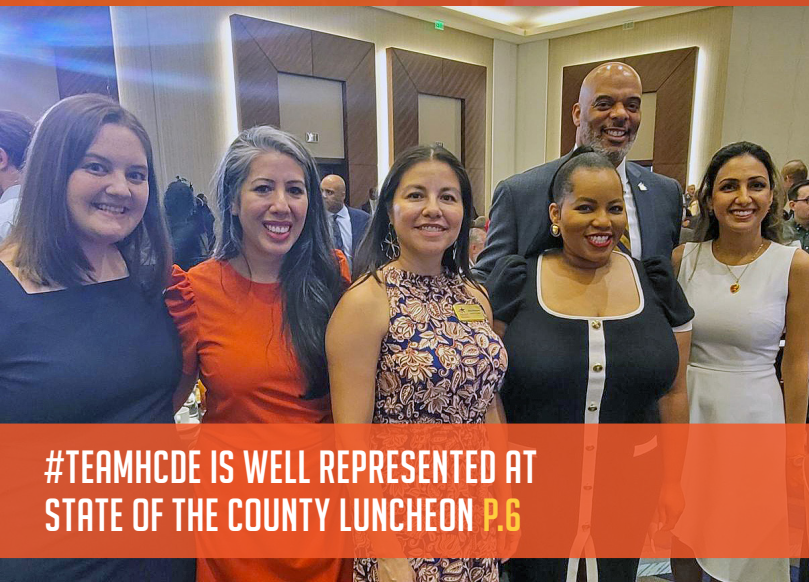


the **CONNECTOR**



**DEDICATION TO SPECIAL SCHOOLS EARNS ALAMOS PRAISE,
SEPTEMBER 'EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH' ACCOLADE P.3**



**#TEAMHCDE IS WELL REPRESENTED AT
STATE OF THE COUNTY LUNCHEON P.6**



**LEADERS DIG INTO DATA, NEW STRATEGIES AT
ACCOUNTABILITY IMPACT SUMMIT P.6**

of Note

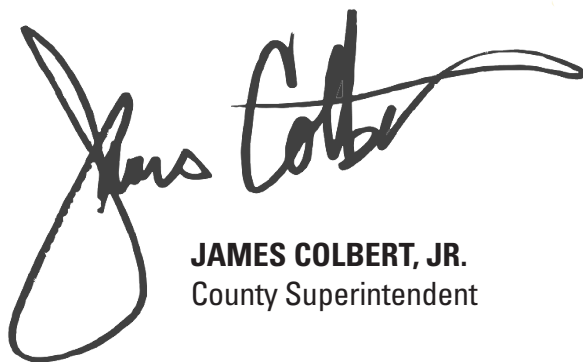
THE THEME FOR CONVOCATION this year, "HCDE is Varsity!" came from a unique place. I was sitting at the Qualtrics conference in Salt Lake City in March when I realized many of the attendees and speakers were talking about organizational pride: the belief staff have in the work of the organization and their role in doing that work every day. I instantly knew this was the perfect descriptor for HCDE. The positive culture and climate of our buildings is a living testament to this.

We see this organizational pride in action this week with a look at the September Employee of the Month, Denise Alamos, administrative assistant in the Schools Division. Ms. Alamos has worked at HCDE for 20 years, and according to her supervisors she demonstrates dedication to the organization, our schools, students and staff daily. One of the reasons Ms. Alamos said she loves to work at HCDE is because she can identify with many of the students we serve based on her experiences in high school. So, she comes to work each day ready to ensure HCDE can continue to provide opportunities for students to succeed. I love how time and again I hear about the connection employees have with the mission and work of HCDE. It is rewarding to know that we are not only impacting our community, districts and students, but touching the hearts of our employees as well.

I started the week on Tuesday with my monthly meeting with the Leadership Team followed by standing meetings with members of ELT. On Wednesday, I met with staff and then

with Ms. Langlois and Communications staff to continue to refine our presentation for txEDCON next week. On Thursday, I continued my quarterly meetings with board members, meeting with Trustee Duhon and today, I attended the State of the County Luncheon at the Marriott with the Education Foundation of Harris County.

Have a great weekend.



JAMES COLBERT, JR.
County Superintendent



Employee Spotlight



September Employee of the Month Denise Alamos, standing, manages the Special Schools budget and often assists Director of Curriculum and Special Services Dr. Margaret Patton in planning division professional development days and conferences.

DENISE ALAMOS HELPS CREATE SCHOOL SYSTEM SHE ONCE NEEDED

MORE THAN 200 Special Schools educators listened as Harris County Department of Education's (HCDE) Chief Human Resources Officer, Dr. Tyrone Sylvester, spoke during their professional development. He called for Denise Alamos to join him at the front of the Irvington Conference Center and asked the crowd, "Who is this?"

Sylvester was met with shouts of, 'That's Denise,' or 'Our administrative clerk.' All he could do was shake his head and say, "No, this is HCDE's September Employee of the Month!"

The Special Schools' administrative assistant laughed at the realization of her recent accomplishment and cried as her colleagues offered congratulatory praise, because over the past 20 years, she has dedicated her career to helping Harris County students and educators obtain the necessary tools to be successful in the classroom.

"Denise is number one in my books when it comes to the work she does for our campuses, our students, our staff and partner districts as well," said Dr. Charles Ned, senior director of schools. "I can say good job to her all day but getting that acknowledgment throughout the organization

goes a long way towards people really seeing the worth of their work and knowing that they do make a difference in the lives of those we serve."

Colleagues describe Alamos as loyal. Her strong work ethic and institutional knowledge of the education system landed her employment offers outside HCDE, but she has always declined. Alamos

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4



September Employee of the Month Denise Alamos, center, helps check in educators at the Special Schools Curriculum Conference on Aug. 19.

Employee Spotlight

believes in the Department's mission to serve students who struggle in a traditional setting because she was one of them.

"I would have been one of our kids at Highpoint School," Alamos said. "I moved schools a lot and was always the new kid. Our school had gangs and cliques, where everyone grew up with each other. I was small, liked to talk and would get into many fights. That made me not want to go to school."

When Alamos enrolled at Houston Community College to finish earning credits for her high school diploma, she learned about HCDE and was quickly hired. Throughout her tenure, she's worked at Academic and Behavior Schools East and West and Highpoint North before it was transformed into Fortis Academy. Her experiences as an administrative assistant and educational aide allowed her to get to know the students personally and become their haven.

"We would see a lot of students run out of the classroom upset or be very angry and destroy the classroom, and for some reason they would run down to my office," Alamos recalled. "I would try to calm them down and ask what's happening. I think since they didn't see me as an authority figure, they could relate to me, and I was able to figure out what upset them."

She learned how to build a foundation of trust with the students and gained an understanding of campus operations that worked to her advantage when she moved to HCDE's main Irvington office. Now, she plays an invaluable role in the Special Schools division.

"Denise Alamos-Jones is a superstar," said Dr. Margaret Patton, curriculum and special services director. "I can't imagine our Schools division being so purposeful and successful without Denise. She handles everything with our contracts, ensuring they're solid and tight with our home districts. She is our customer service representative because she cares for everyone and makes them feel like a valued part of the HCDE family. Life without Denise would probably not look at all the way it does now. She is the glue that binds our Schools division."



Alamos, center, photographed with administrative assistants from each of HCDE's four special school campuses at Convocation 2025.



Alamos met her husband, while attending classes at Houston Community College. They have been together for more than 20 years and have four children.



Assistant Superintendent of Business Services Dr. Jesus Amezcua, left, and Alamos meet frequently to discuss the Special Schools division budget and make adjustments to ensure students, teachers and each campus have what they need to be successful.

Alamos is positioned to touch the lives of every student served at HCDE's four special schools as she handles the contracts with each ISD that purchases a seat for their student. She works with districts on emergency placements, payments and potential resources like the sensory rooms at each AB school. After communicating potential needs to campus principals, she sits down with them to look at their budgets and analyze where adjustments can be made. She's developed a specific process over the years to make budgeting easier for campus staff, which has aided in principals in obtaining necessary additions on campus while remaining profitable and stress-free.

"It doesn't matter who it is; if they don't get the budget, they know they can call me," Alamos laughed. "If they're asking me questions, I'll sit there, and if we have to go through it 10 times, we'll go through it 10 times. If you don't understand it, you can keep asking me questions until we figure it out."

In addition to assisting the campuses with their budgets, Alamos keeps an eagle eye on the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 5

Employee Spotlight

division's annual budget to ensure they can support educators and students. The funds provide additional classroom resources for teachers, support several professional development opportunities throughout the academic year and networking events like the Schools Division Update.

"She is here sometimes until 7 p.m. the night before those events to make sure the rooms are set up, and in the morning, she makes everyone feel at home with a warm greeting," Patton boasted. "We make sure our people have snacks throughout the day to keep them engaged and alert, but Denise is very purposeful and intentional about setting up our budget so that we can afford to do those things."

She also creates training for campus administrative staff to ensure they can provide excellent service to their principals, students and parents who might need daily assistance. While the sessions are often hosted during work hours, Dr. Ned recalled when Alamos continuously stayed late to ensure a new administrative assistant received training when it became difficult to focus during school hours.

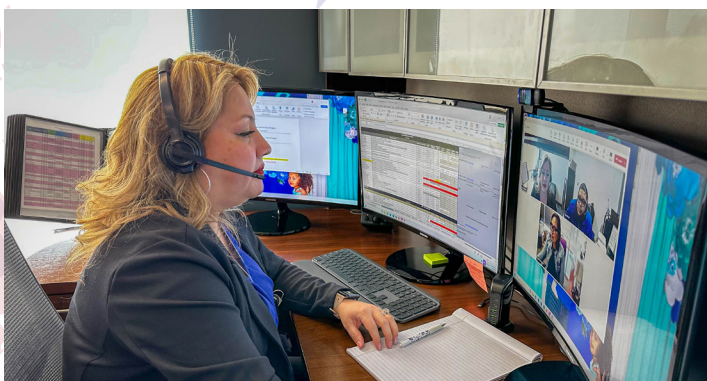
"I'm packing up to leave, and she's training our admin because the kids kept pulling their attention during school," Ned described. "I figured it might happen occasionally, but this was ongoing, and Denise never complained. For many people, life happens after 4 p.m., and it's time to go, but Denise will always provide an opportunity for individuals to work on getting better at their craft and show them how to be successful."

Alamos is HCDE's September Employee of the Month because of her dedication to serving others and intention in daily tasks. She wants to create and maintain a better school system than the one she experienced, and what better place to do that than HCDE?

"You're only as good as your reputation outside of the organization, and if people don't have good things to say about the organization, it's going to be very difficult for you to grow your business," said Ned. "Denise is a big part of why our relationship with the districts is so successful, and why we can serve each student placed at one of our Special Schools campuses. We are grateful for her." ★



Alamos, right, and members of the Special Schools team step in to serve meals at the campuses when districts are closed and unable to provide lunch.



Alamos works closely with campus administrative assistants to provide training sessions, ensure the students and teachers have the necessary resources and that each campus remains on budget throughout the academic year.



TO SEE MORE
OF THE STORY:

VIEW OUR VIDEO

Board Briefs

HCDE LEADERSHIP ATTENDS 2025 STATE OF THE COUNTY LUNCHEON

HARRIS COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (HCDE) was well represented at the 2025 State of the County luncheon on Sept. 5 at the Marriott Marquis. Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo's signature event by the Greater Houston Partnership highlighted recent successes, her priorities, the future of the county, and plans for supporting business partners and workforce pipelines.

Representing the Department were Superintendent James Colbert Jr.; Chief of Staff Danielle Bartz; Education Foundation and Partnerships Director Trina Silva; Center for Afterschool, Summer and Enrichment Dr. Lisa Caruthers; Board President Amy Hinojosa and Trustee Eric Dick. They were joined by Education Foundation of Harris County Board Members Steven David, Mary Shekari and Emma Oliver, and Advisory Board Member Courtney Taylor. ★



CES, REI TEAMS DIG INTO DATA-DRIVEN STRATEGIES AT ACCOUNTABILITY IMPACT SUMMIT



RECOGNIZING THAT ACCOUNTABILITY can transcend data points and help guide the future of public education, school leaders came together for the Accountability Impact Summit 2025 to focus on insights and strategies for the new year. Among them were a Harris County Department of Education contingent led by Dr. CJ Rodgers, assistant superintendent of education and enrichment.

Held Sept. 5 by the Region 4 Education Service Center, the summit focused on the latest TEA ratings and how to leverage those results to improve student outcomes. Area superintendents Dr. DeeAnn Powell (Pasadena Independent School District) and Dr. Demetrius McCall (Sheldon ISD), and YES Prep Chief Executive Officer Mark DiBella were showcased in a fireside chat, while Houston ISD Superintendent Mike Miles served as a featured speaker. Breakout session topics included curriculum alignment, data-driven instruction and performance management, retention strategies, leadership development and leveraging financial resources for innovation.

Joining Rodgers were Research and Evaluation Institute and Center for Educator Success team members, including division directors Yolanda Pyrtle (REI) and Andrea Segraves (CES). ★



Center for
Educator
Success



In the Community



FOUNDATION DIRECTOR CONTINUES BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS TO BENEFIT HARRIS COUNTY STAKEHOLDERS

EDUCATION FOUNDATION AND PARTNERSHIPS DIRECTOR

Trina Silva has attended a number of events in recent weeks, showcasing the Education Foundation of Harris County (EFHC) to community and business partners while building relationships to benefit Harris County Department of Education (HCDE).

On Sept. 2, she attended a Greater Houston Partnership luncheon that explored the impact of House Bill 117 on families and the future of Houston's workforce. The forum, titled, "Beyond Access: Strengthening Early Childhood Systems in Texas," featured insights from Early Matters Executive Director Wendy Uptain and Texas Restaurant Association Chief Public Affairs Officer Kelsey Erickson Streufert on how aligned systems can expand access and improve quality across the state.

Silva represented the EFHC on Aug. 28 at the Houston Astros game as a guest of CenterPoint Energy, which invited nonprofit organizations to celebrate their partnerships. CenterPoint has supported numerous HCDE initiatives, including the All-Earth Ecobot Challenge and other Center for Afterschool, Summer and Enrichment (CASE) for Kids programs. The same day, she joined CASE for Kids staff at the Lakeland Houston K-12 Food Show – the vendor donated food to the division's Kids' Day Healthy Living event and cooking competition in July.

EFHC leverages its business and community relationships to support students and educators in Harris County through grants, scholarships and school supplies. ★



CHIEF OF STAFF REPRESENTS HCDE AT THE TEXAS LYCEUM NETWORKING EVENT



HARRIS COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION Chief of Staff Danielle Bartz recently attended a Houston recruitment event by The Texas Lyceum. Held Aug. 21 at Wooster's Garden, Bartz joined other Houston leaders

across numerous industries for the networking opportunity. The Texas Lyceum aims to bring together statewide leaders for civil discourse in critical public policy issues facing all stakeholders in Texas. ★

WELCOME TO HCDE

Please join us in welcoming HCDE's new hires for August! Sixty new faces have joined our CASE for Kids, Center for Educator Success, Choice Partners, Head Start, School-Based Therapy Services and Special Schools divisions.



Lynnette Crane
Teacher
ABS East



Gerrid Doaks
Educational Aide III
ABS East



Eugene Edwards
Educational Aide III
ABS East



Alyssa Jackey
Educational Aide III
ABS East



Deedra Patterson
Teacher
ABS East



Jim Vela
Teacher
ABS East



Kristofar Rhymes
Educational Aide III
ABS East



Taies Letren
Educational Aide III
ABS East



Naushia Swearington
Educational Aide III
ABS East



Marinela Bolerjack
Food Services Clerk
ABS West



Surinder Harrell
Campus Clerk
ABS West



Rosalind Caesar
Substitute Teacher
ABS West



Michael Hellen
Teacher
ABS West



Kianna Joubert
Educational Aide III
ABS West



Prince Montgomery
Educational Aide I
ABS West



Victoria Morones
Teacher
ABS West



Sandra Pete-Hay
Teacher
ABS West



Edwin Roberts
Educational Aide I
ABS West



Mackenzie Sims
Relief Instructor
ABS West



Danielle Redhead
Project-Based Learning Associate
CASE for Kids



Thomas Graham
Compliance Manager
Center For Educator Success



Emily Tea
Contract Billing Specialist
Choice Partners



Joshua Adams
Teacher
Fortis Academy



Donna Williams
Educational Aide III
Fortis Academy



Lesley Cisneros
Family Services Provider
Head Start

WELCOME TO HCDE



Martha Cruz
Non-Instructional Aide
Head Start



Esperanza Gonzalez
Compliance Coordinator
Head Start



Mallery Lacerda
Instructional Coach
Head Start



Cindy Vazquez
Non-Instructional Aide
Head Start



Karen Washington
Campus Manager
Head Start



Ashley Perry
Special Ed Coordinator
Head Start



Maria Barajas Godinez
Teacher
Head Start



Norma Guevara
Family Services Provider
Head Start



Jennifer Tennihill
Early Head Start Teacher
Head Start



Yazmin Walker
Non-Instructional Aide
Head Start



Darrylynn Williams
Teaching Assistant
Head Start



Kassandra Cerda
Educational Aide III
Highpoint School



Sharon Ford
Teacher
Highpoint School



William Gatlin
Teacher
Highpoint School



Tanaisha Johnson
Relief Instructor
Highpoint School



Jessica Bejar
Occupational Therapy Assistant
School-Based Therapy Services



Stephanie Belz
Occupational Therapist
School-Based Therapy Services



Teresa De La Isla
Occupational Therapist
School-Based Therapy Services



Maria Fuentes
Occupational Therapist
School-Based Therapy Services



Kyra Gainous
Occupational Therapist
School-Based Therapy Services



Kimberly Garcia
Occupational Therapist
School-Based Therapy Services



Rebecca Ham
Occupational Therapist
School-Based Therapy Services



Macey Harmeier
Occupational Therapist
School-Based Therapy Services



Sarah McHan
Occupational Therapist
School-Based Therapy Services



Beatriz Menendez
Occupational Therapist
School-Based Therapy Services

WELCOME TO HCDE



Sara Perez
Music Therapist
School-Based Therapy Services



Norma Pesantes
Occupational Therapy Assistant
School-Based Therapy Services



Riya Qureshi
Occupational Therapist
School-Based Therapy Services



Courtney Stelzer
Music Therapist
School-Based Therapy Services



Phebe Patel
Occupational Therapist
School-Based Therapy Services



Alysia Larin
Occupational Therapist
School-Based Therapy Services



Laura Lorentz
Physical Therapist
School-Based Therapy Services



Cassandra Cahee
Occupational Therapist
School-Based Therapy Services



Mary Benedict
Occupational Therapist
School-Based Therapy Services



Shauntee Johnson
Instructional Coach
Special Schools

SYSTEMIC ACHIEVEMENT: WITH PURPOSEFUL INTENT

THIS WEEK, THE FOLLOWING BOARD EXPECTATIONS WERE MET:

SUPERINTENDENT OBJECTIVE B: ORGANIZATION MORALE

Celebrates accomplishments and acknowledges excellence.



September Employee of the Month Denise Alamos, left, meets with Senior Director of Schools Dr. Charles Ned frequently to discuss the budget, plan professional development days and more.

MEANINGFUL WORK becomes even more powerful when it's personal. That's the case for our September Employee of the Month, Denise Alamos. Alamos serves as the administrative assistant for our Special Schools division, where she has dedicated her career to serving Harris County students and educators. But as a young student, Alamos struggled and described herself as someone who would have attended one of our schools. However, she turned her life around, joined HCDE and became an outlet and trusted confidant for students. Those same qualities carried over to serving the entire division, where she supports teachers and routinely goes above and beyond to provide excellent service. Thank you, Mrs. Alamos, for your dedication to HCDE and congratulations on being named the September Employee of the Month.

Community and business partnerships are vital to our daily operations at HCDE and how our divisions best serve Harris County learners of all ages and their families. So when a member of HCDE attends an event, fundraiser or networking opportunity, one objective is building those relationships and partnerships that will best serve our mission. Among those events where #TeamHCDE has been in attendance was this week's State of the County luncheon. Mrs. Bartz recently attended a Houston recruiting event by The Texas Lyceum, which brings statewide leaders together for

conversations and civil discourse on critical public policy issues. Ms. Silva represented HCDE and the Education Foundation of Harris County at a Houston Astros game last week, as CenterPoint Energy celebrated its partners. Like many others, CenterPoint supports numerous HCDE initiatives. Thank you to all community partners for supporting HCDE and the work we do for Harris County students.

Finally, every year at the beginning of a school year, we welcome a large number of new HCDE members to our team, and this August was no different. Sixty new hires joined #TeamHCDE last month, ranging from CASE for Kids, CES and Choice Partners divisions, to Head Start, School-Based Therapy Services and all four Special Schools. The addition of high-quality staff speaks to the culture we've built here and makes HCDE a destination workplace. I want to welcome our new employees and thank them for making the decision to join our mission. But, this is just the beginning. Whether you're an educational aide within Special Schools, a contract billing specialist in Choice Partners or a music therapist within School-Based Therapy Services, the goal is to best serve Harris County students and enrich their learning experiences.

By treating every person with respect and dignity, and celebrating excellence within the Department, I am meeting the expectation of systematically seeking to improve HCDE's climate. ★



HCDE BOARD

Board President
Amy Hinojosa

1st Vice President
Richard Cantu

2nd Vice President
Dr. Erica Davis

Board Members
Eric Dick
Andrea Duhon
Silky Joshi
Dr. John McGee

UPCOMING EVENTS

September 10
Board Meeting

September 11-14
[TASA/TASB txEDCON](#)

September 12
[iPASS](#)

September 26
[CASE for Kids Houston Out of School Time Conference](#)

October 8
[Choice Partners Nutrition Show](#)

October 15
Board Meeting