



# NEWS RELEASE

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## HCDE, ABS East celebrate groundbreaking ceremony

*Hi-res photos can be downloaded from [here](#).*

*Video can be downloaded from [here](#).*

Oct. 29, 2021 — Harris County Department of Education kicked off construction on a new, 43,000 square foot school to replace the existing Academic and Behavior School East at a ceremonial groundbreaking Tuesday.

The groundbreaking ceremony for the new structure was held just beyond the site where the current school stands and adjacent to where construction crews have started work on the foundation for the new school.

“Look at this pretty dirty behind us,” said County Superintendent James Colbert Jr. “Today is a great day because it is another step towards what we aspire to be.”

The school, specifically designed for students with intellectual, developmental, and behavioral disorders, autism spectrum disorder, and other significant health impairments, will serve up to 184 students aged 5-22.

“This building will look like exactly [like] what we are aspiring to be,” Colbert said. “It’s going to be a building that is 100% designed for special needs students. I challenge anybody in this audience to find a facility that will rival the one we are about to build.”

Designed by Houston architectural firm Cre8 Architects, the new facility is largely based on its sister school, Academic and Behavior School West, whose new campus opened in August 2020.

The \$12.6 million project calls for rounded corners, a soothing color palette, a sensory room, a domestic learning lab with a commercial kitchen, laundry facilities, and an inclusive and sensory-rich playground featuring a zipline and special structures that will allow non-ambulatory students to participate in outdoor play.

“I’m extremely excited to see the progress that will happen [on these grounds] and that you will have a facility that matches the work that is going on in this building,” said Board President Danny Norris.

The new structure will also call for a new address, 7710 Office City Drive, which will allow for the main entrance to be on a quiet residential street. ABS East borders the I-45 Gulf Freeway and the 610 South Loop East Freeway in southeast Harris County.

Currently, students and staff are housed in a structure that was converted from a commercial office building into a school.

“It doesn’t really look like a school. The building wasn’t designed for children,” Colbert said. “We are trying to break the barriers for our kids in alternative programs to [construct] a building that is specifically for special needs students to help them aspire and be what they want to be.”

During the ceremony, ABS East student Christopher Morrison presented Colbert with a hand-drawn portrait.

“He just looked at a picture of Mr. Colbert and he was able to do that, and that is very reflective of the talent we have at our school,” said ABS East Principal Donna Treviño-Jones. “A new building is going to mean that they can take their teaching and everything they do to the next level. Our kids, they function by visuals. What we are going to get really allows for our students to comprehend, understand, and really be able to [take in] the learning.”

Colbert, a former special education teacher, used the moment to emphasize the significance of this construction project.

“You see what I’m talking about? This is what I’m talking about,” said Colbert. “Why is it that [these] kids need to be in an office building? They need to be in a school. It’s the staff that sees the potential in them. It’s the parents that appreciate us for being able to help them actualize that. They need a facility that does the same thing.”

Two additional groundbreaking ceremonies are anticipated this school year for HCDE’s new Adult Learning Center and Coolwood Head Start campus.

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