

# THE CONNECTOR

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

WEEK OF NOVEMBER 16, 2020

VOLUME 6 ISSUE 11

## SHARING THE SPIRIT

### TOP STORIES

**HCDE Receives 'Top Workplace' for Second Consecutive Year p.2**

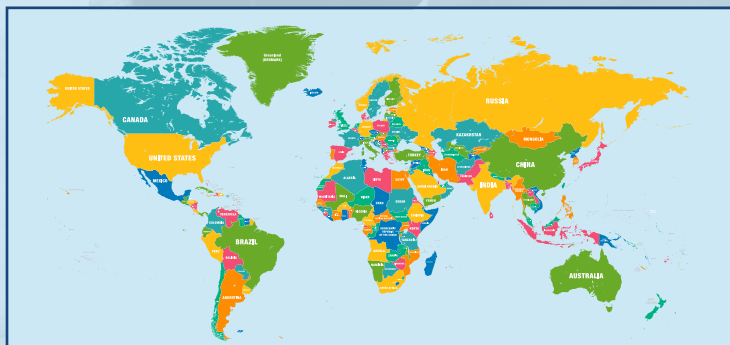


**Head Start Students Create Holiday Cards for Hospitalized Children p.3**



Archive Photo.

**Education Foundation Helps Provide Innovation in the Classroom p.4**





Of Note...



I often remark that HCDE is a great place to work. Today I'm proud to report that many of our employees agree with me!

For the second straight year, HCDE was named a Top Workplace by the Houston Chronicle. As I mentioned in my comments at the board meeting, this year we were ranked lucky number 13 in the large company category. Last year we came in at 24 and the increase this year placed us on the list of most improved scores. Approximately 130 companies were honored this year out of 3,000 nominations. HCDE had a 85% completion rate for the employee survey, which far surpasses the average of 68%. This is a huge testament to the positive culture at HCDE and a big feat given that the survey was sent out at the height of the pandemic while employees were working remotely. ELT will be analyzing the comments and feedback from the survey so we can continue to improve and provide an atmosphere of support and excellence throughout HCDE.

I started the week at the Lonestar College "Drive For Scholarships" golf tournament on Monday. ELT met on Tuesday followed by several standing meetings. On Wednesday we met for committee meetings and the November board meeting. Thank you for the feedback and insight regarding several projects at the board meeting.

Thursday started with a board meeting for the Northwest Area Ministries followed by several internal standing meetings, many of which continued today.

As you saw in the video Melisa sent you this week, many employees are becoming weary of the restrictions of the pandemic including wearing masks and remaining socially distant. With the numbers of COVID cases rising, I am resolved that now is the time to ensure we remain disciplined in our actions so we can continue to keep our students and staff safe.

We will not have a Connector next week due to the Thanksgiving holiday. Have a wonderful weekend and I hope your holiday is safe yet filled with good food and great memories.

# TOP WORKPLACE

## Harris County Department of Education Receives 'Top Workplace' as Large Employer for Second Consecutive Year

For a second consecutive year, Harris County Department of Education gains notoriety as one of Houston's Top large workplaces through the Houston Chronicle's Top Workplaces 2020 program.



Cupcakes distributed to HCDE employees

The Top Workplace program is unique because employees weigh in on their employer through a survey where participants remain anonymous. Topics include leadership, work-life balance, training, cooperation and pay/benefits. Companies are judged in three categories: small, medium and large companies.

Top Workplaces rankings are determined by a scientific employee survey provided by Energage, an independent research company partnering with the Chronicle for the past 11 years. This year, 130 employers earned recognition as Top Workplaces in the three categories as 3,000 companies applied for the award. Eight-five percent of HCDE's employees responded to the survey.

HCDE was ranked no. 13 in the large company category, a 46 percent improvement over last year's ranking of no. 24.

"This honor shows that HCDE has a family culture and spirit which is valued by our employees," HCDE Superintendent James Colbert Jr. said.

"During this past year, adversity has come our way here and there, but that has done nothing but bring our employees closer together as a family. We are proud we have been able to support our families during the pandemic as we continue to provide high-quality education services to our clients.

"HCDE is one of the best places I have worked in my career as a leader in education."

HCDE provides education services to school districts and the community through a wide array of programs. Five pillar programs include afterschool, Head Start, special schools, school-based therapy services and adult education.

Educator Dr. Colina Poullard works as HCDE curriculum director for digital education and innovation. As a teacher trainer, she says she likes working for HCDE because it allows her to serve a large sector of educators.

"Outside of just serving just one district, we get to serve educators in all 25 districts in Harris County, and beyond," she said.

Employee Amy Thompson works for Educator Certification and Advancement, a HCDE division which trains professionals to become teachers, principals and superintendents.

"I value working at HCDE because everyone works as a partner here for the benefit of the students in greater Harris County, and all our hearts are into it," Thompson said.

[Read more...](#)



Amy Thompson, Educator Certification and Advancement



# PROGRAM

## CONNECTIONS

### Head Start Students at Barrett Station Crosby Create Holiday Cards for Hospitalized Children

Messages of hand-crafted joy sealed in envelopes are on their way to young patients at Texas Children's Hospital.

Head Start students at Harris County Department of Education's Head Start Center at Barrett Station participated in the "Holiday Cheer Cards" project through a collaborative with community partner Triose, Inc. and the Texas Children's Hospital Foundation.

Triose is a national healthcare solutions company which helps medical institutions. The company's Houston regional office provided individual art kits for students to create the cards.

Several of the Triose employees mentor children at the Head Start center through a program called SuperMENTors Read, a male, role-model volunteer initiative supported through HCDE Head Start.

"Being a SuperMENTor has been extremely rewarding," said Antonio Lozano district manager of field operations for Triose. "I enjoy being a part of something bigger than myself and giving back in a way that is meaningful to me."



Equipped with markers, crayons and stickers the 3-year olds added personal touches to the holiday cards. Many of their older siblings created their own greetings at home to contribute to the project.

"Parents became inspired and started to bring us Christmas cards made by Head Start siblings who also wanted to be a part of the 'spirit of giving'," said Sylvia Davis, HCDE Head Start family services provider at the center.

"We believe that children hold the key to the future," Davis said. "Research studies show that children who start early in childhood the spirit of giving through community service become responsible adults. This project fits in nicely within our Head Start curriculum that promotes community service."

Lozano said he usually goes into the center once a month with a book and reads to a classroom of students at the center in Crosby, but the pandemic has put a halt on outside visitors. Sending in the holiday card kits give his mentees a little holiday spirit as they share their artwork with children in the hospital.

"I am fortunate to have the opportunity to give back to my community, and even more so to be able to partner with organizations like Head Start who we're willing to take on this project with us while teaching the values of giving back and creating a sense of community with the students," he said.

View the photo album from the event: <https://tinyurl.com/y4hzaek5>



# EDUCATION FOUNDATION

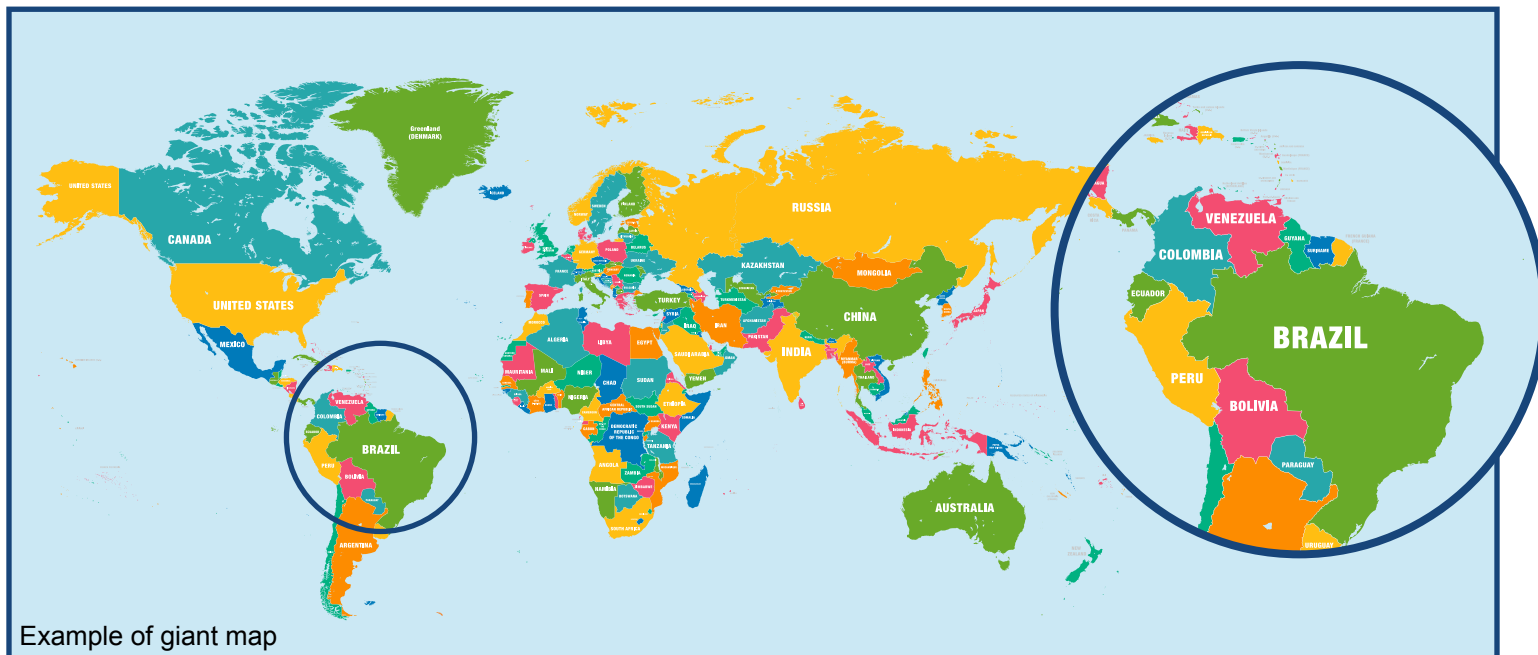
## Clear Creek ‘Thank You’ to Education Foundation Outlines Plans for a Teacher Innovation Grant

At Clear Creek ISD, the world is a better (and smaller) place thanks to a grant supplied through the Education Foundation of Harris County. The Clear Creek ISD (CCISD) Education Foundation distributed Teacher Innovation Grants through funding approved by the HCDE Board.

A thank you note arrived recently from Deborah Laine, executive director of the CCISD foundation.

“Your support to help provide innovation in the classroom this year has been most meaningful,” Laine wrote.

The specific teacher grant cited was called “Step into My World,” an innovative teacher grant requested by Stephenie Ruby at Clear Creek Intermediate.



“We as teachers are always striving to become more culturally aware and to provide experiences that lend themselves to authentic engagement,” she said. “By using giant maps, students will have an opportunity to work together to form new understandings of the world.”

The giant maps take up space equivalent to a half-court in the gym, allowing students plenty of room for social distancing as they physically experience the geographical makeup of continents.

“At a time when many of our hands-on activities have been altered, finding ways to engage students can be a challenge,” Ruby said. “I am so excited to use these maps to support our learning.”

Ruby extended an invitation to see the maps put to use when they arrive in January--and when the district’s pandemic-related restrictions on school visitors are lifted.

“I look forward to sending you pictures of our adventures in World Cultures and hope that one day you will be able to come visit,” she said.

# BOARD BRIEFS

## Center Training with Specialist Allows Educators to Think Through Active Shooter Scenarios

Area educators gained valuable training for active shooter scenarios with Harris County Sheriff's Office Sgt. Jeff McGowen on Nov. 12. The two-hour, online training was hosted through the Center for Safe and Secure Schools. "Civilian Response to Active Shooters Events (CRASE)" was free and allowed teachers and administrators to "think through" various school crime scenarios.

Some takeaways from CRASE:

### When you find yourself in an open area with active shooter:

- Seek immediate protection. Find a safe area and secure it the best you can.
- Put something between you and the shooter.
- Think it through: Is escape the option? Do you know where shooter is? Is escape immediately available.
- Know your building's floor plans.

### When reporting the shooting to authorities:

- State your specific location: building name, office and classroom number.
- Report number of people at your specific location.
- Let authorities know number of people injured and type of injuries.

### When law enforcement officer enters room:

- Do not present a threat to officers.
- Do not point at officers or the shooter.
- Do not make quick movements.
- Do not run towards them or attempt to hug them.
- Do not scream or yell.



**CIVILIAN RESPONSE TO  
ACTIVE SHOOTER EVENTS**  
(CRASE)

*Workshop # 13046*

**Thursday, Nov. 12, 2020 | 10 a.m. – 12 p.m.**

**Virtual Online Training (Zoom)**

**STOP**  
SCHOOL VIOLENCE



# BOARD BRIEFS

## HCDE Holiday Card Contest Extended to Employees in 2020

The HCDE holiday card has become a tradition within our organization. Sometimes the cards are imagery created by our students. In years past, we used artwork from our Scholastic Art & Writing awardees.

This year, we opened the contest to create the card to our employees. The winning entry will include information about the employee who created the card. The employee also receives a small gift basket with holiday goodies.

We'll be sharing that card with you as we provide copies to board members. Many of our divisions send the cards to clients.

Let us know if you'd like to order extras. The entries are already coming in for the contest, and we'll announce the winner soon!



## Superintendent's Holiday Message Praises Employees for Staying the Course During COVID-19 While Urging Patience, Continuing Precaution

The superintendent provided an uplifting November holiday message to HCDE staff this week as all prepare to acknowledge the Thanksgiving holiday. Staff are off work Nov. 26-27, but the message was delivered this week as many take vacation days to spend with family.

Colbert reminded staff to stay the course with due diligence in regards to COVID-19 safety protocols. He also applauded employee work ethics and discussed the strength of the HCDE business model.

"I appreciate you, I value you and I love you," Colbert said in closing his message.

View video: <https://youtu.be/jlznQcGBJwE>



# SYSTEMIC

## ACHIEVEMENT...WITH PURPOSEFUL INTENT

This week, the following Board expectations were met:

**Superintendent Objective B:  
Organization Morale**

- Seeks systematically to improve the climate by obtaining and utilizing feedback from the employees of the Department.
- Celebrates accomplishments and acknowledges excellence.

**Superintendent Objective C:  
Personnel Management**

- Administers a compensation and benefits plan for employees based on clearly defined goals and priorities and ensures consistency in all personnel practices.

**Superintendent Objective D:  
Community Relations**

- Works with other governmental entities and community organizations to meet the needs of students and the community in a coordinated way.

**Superintendent Objective H:  
Board Relations**

- Interprets and supports board policy and decisions to staff and community.

Employees celebrated Top Workplace this week as we distributed cupcakes along with the good news about our organization. From the informal feedback we have received, we believe we are fulfilling our goal of treating every person with respect and dignity and implementing effective management practices and ensuring all policies are support by effective procedures. We will be using this feedback to assess our strengths and weaknesses and make adjustments accordingly.



In our news release about Top Workplace, you will hear from an employee who has positive things to say about HCDE benefits and our Human Resources services. As we establish a culture among staff to strive to achieve excellence, we are not stopping with an average performance. We are also striving to ensure that supervisory staff administers personnel practices with consistency and fairness with respect for the individual.



Through an activity with Head Start students and the gifting of holiday cards, we are promoting the spirit of giving and communicating that philanthropy to the public. We are also working with the community members for the greater good.

Finally, we bring you good news from our support of area school districts with grants for teachers in Clear Creek ISD. As we respond to the needs of our constituents, I continue my promise to provide a flow of information about the progress of board requests.

### HCDE BOARD

#### Board President

Eric Dick

#### Vice President

Danny Norris

#### Board Members

Richard Cantu

Andrea Duhon

Amy Hinojosa

Don Sumners

Michael Wolfe

### UPCOMING EVENTS:

**Nov. 26-27**

**HAPPY  
THANKSGIVING**

