

THE CONNECTOR

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

WEEK OF NOVEMBER 30, 2020

VOLUME 6 ISSUE 12

SERVING THE PUBLIC

TOP STORIES

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Of Note...



In education, December signals the start of a mad dash to winter break. The three weeks this month are typically filled with a flurry of activities at our administrative offices and sites, with everyone striving to end the year on a strong note. In HCDE this time is also filled with celebrations of the joyful season at our schools, Head Start Centers and offices.

This week you will see how our staff play a prominent role in the success of HCDE. From the creativity of decorating trees with hand sanitizer to providing top customer service with a smile, HCDE employees are the heart of our organization and the main reason we were once again designated a Top Workplace in Houston. I am proud to be Superintendent of this amazing organization in large part because of the family atmosphere in our offices and sites. I hope you can feel this happy and inclusive environment every time you visit our buildings.

I spent time with our recently elected board members, Ms. Erica Davis and Mr. David Brown, this week. As you know, I typically spend upwards of 4 hours with new board members, orienting them to HCDE through school visits and discussions about our culture and climate as well as current and future projects. This year, due to COVID and social distancing, I was unable to drive them around for campus visits, but was able to sit down with each of them and have robust conversations about HCDE's successes, challenges and the year ahead. I really enjoy these meetings with our new board members, as I am able to highlight the unique characteristics of HCDE and hear what interests them most about the organization and our services.

I started the week with my Executive Leadership Team on Monday and several standing meetings. Tuesday and Wednesday were filled with board orientation with Ms. Davis and Mr. Brown and agenda review in preparation for the December board meeting. Today I spent the day at my NPO office and met with several staff members and ELT members about current and future initiatives. All in all, a productive, if routine, week.

The rain appears to have passed for a while, so I hope you get out and enjoy what looks to be a beautiful fall weekend.

EMPLOYEES

Customer Service Skills Fuel Work, Personal Feats for Records Management Employee

Managing records might be viewed as a ho-hum job to some, but Harris County Department of Education Records Management records technician Brandon Fisher knows better.

View video: <https://youtu.be/PpEmStL4bJg>



Flashback to Hurricane Harvey in August 2017, when the division's 15 employees worked like first responders to get vulnerable records to higher ground. The city of Galveston and Galveston ISD were two examples of the numerous customers needing assistance. Records Management delivery employees were met by police escorts to navigate the floodwaters and debris to save the vulnerable, historical records.

"When people need their documents protected, these are the things we do," said Fisher, an 11-year HCDE employee who exudes energy and optimism.



As part of his daily duties, Fisher scans documents belonging to the hundreds of customers the division serves. He is on-the-go each day scanning, shredding, retrieving and delivering boxes from warehouse shelves. Nothing differentiates one document from another, he says, as each is equally important. Its purpose could range from being a tax document to a piece of critical evidence in a crime scene.

Most Harris County and area school districts use Records' services. The business was born in 1991 after enactment of the 1989 records act which requires certified storage of government documents. City and county municipalities are also accommodated through interlocal agreements. Over 600,000 paper, microfiche and scanned/digitized documents are stored at the massive storage space at 6005 Westview.



"Brandon is a really good asset for this division," Records Management Director Curtis Davis said. "He can talk to anyone. Being the employee of the month is a wonderful thing for Brandon and this division."

Before HCDE, Fisher worked as a deliveryman in Wharton, a small town southwest of Houston where he was raised. After the recession, he looked for jobs in Houston and was hired at HCDE. While he knew the delivery business, he admitted he didn't know how to put customers first.

[Read more...](#)

PROGRAM

CONNECTIONS

Former HCDE Head Start Student ‘Discovers’ Himself on Information Pamphlet Mailed to Thousands

Joshua Wright, 6, has so many friends in first grade that he has “lost count.”

As the new face on the cover of Harris County Department of Education’s programs and services pamphlet, he is beaming with confidence and poise.

Thousands of the brochures were mailed to Harris County residents this past month. Joshua’s mother Taylor received numerous calls from family and friends announcing his new superstar status.

“People keep calling and saying, ‘there is a pamphlet in my mail with Joshua’s photo on the front,’” Mom Taylor Wright said. “He is so proud of himself, and he loves the attention.”

Joshua attended school at HCDE’s Fifth Ward Head Start Center. As a single mom, Taylor saw her son’s newfound confidence as the 4-year old learned sight words, starred in plays and gained the social skills he would need in elementary school. She also accepted support from the family service provider as the family was assisted with counseling and other resources during hard times.



Joshua with his mom and two brothers who are also former Head Start students.

View video: <https://youtu.be/w2sr505W1aU>



“He is definitely ahead of the curve in his school,” she said. “Head Start gave us a great, close-knit community.”

Joshua’s two brothers, close in age, also attended Head Start and have gained the advantage with social skills and academics before entering school. As “the Wright brothers,” the band of three stick together like peanut butter and jelly.

“They are a little jealous,” Joshua concedes, pointing to his photo on the pamphlet.

Armed with a dozen brochures, Joshua plans on sharing them with friends and family.

“I have lots of friends at school, and we like playing cops and robbers and hide-and-seek,” he said.

In front of the video camera, he points out that “learning is important.”

“I’m learning Spanish,” he said, counting from one to 10 in his new second language.

Shrugging his shoulders, Joshua’s ready to go because he doesn’t know what else to say.

Except yes. He will do autographs.

BOARD BRIEFS

HCDE Tree-Trimming Trends 2020

Layne Thomas-Faust lives by the phrase waste not, want not. When the HCDE Facilities Division employee was tasked with decorating a lobby holiday tree at Irvington office, he decided to use a box of mini-sanitizers encased in red-rubber holders.

When asked how he came up with the idea, he said he found the box of errant sanitizers in the storeroom and decided they might make good tree-trimmers. He and co-worker Eric Schoellman got busy.

“Only in 2020,” Thomas-Faust said.



View the video: <https://youtu.be/49FkBLM1Zjk>

HCDE Awarded Best Practices in School Budgeting by Government Finance Officers Association



Harris County Department of Education (HCDE) Business Services has gained the “Award for Best Practices in School Budgeting” for fiscal year ending Aug. 31, 2020. Awarded through the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA), the honor is given to organizations

demonstrating a budget process aligned with GFOA’s best practice recommendations.

HCDE was also awarded the “Recognition for Implementing Best Practices in School Budgeting” for fiscal year ending in Aug. 31, 2019.

The GFOA, founded in 1906, represents public finance officials throughout the United States and Canada. The association’s more than 20,000 members are federal, state/provincial and local finance officials involved in planning, financing and implementing thousands of governmental operations.



A First: Head Start Dad to Receive Refurbished Car from Bates Collision Center Dec. 17

Save the date for the Bates Collision Center car giveaway for Thursday, Dec. 17 at 10 a.m. This year, John Rose, a father from Fifth Ward Head Start, is the car recipient. Rose’s daughter Journee, 4, attends the center.

The ceremony is scheduled to be held outside the Bates Collision Center in Baytown at 3219 North Main for social distancing. It is the first year the car has been awarded to a father. Rose is active as a volunteer at the center and is also Head Start Policy Council Chairperson there.

In it’s 22nd year, Bates Collision Center “Responsible Parenting Award” continues to award keys to brighter futures with restored vehicles. Bates owners Lee and Leila Bates have made the annual giveaway a priority because they recognize the sacrifices parents make in order to provide for their children.

SEE THE IMPACT

Awareness Campaign : November Metrics

November was a very visible month for HCDE as the department mailed out a brochure to nearly 900,000 households and increased views on ads in every area.

[View all billboards online](#)

The brochure made a huge impact, hitting 898,000 mailboxes between Nov. 13 and 25. Staff have received many comments about the mailer from friends and family. HCDE was even contacted by the mother of the child on the cover, a former Fifth Ward Head Start student. (See the related news feature and video in this issue!).

In other advertising venues, HCDE's presence increased in all areas:

- 24% increase in clicks on digital ads (number of people who engaged with the ad)
- 30% increase in total impressions (number of opportunities to view the ad)
- 18% increase in total reach (number of people who saw the ad)
- Increased Facebook page likes and shares to almost 10,000
- More than 15,000 views of the HCDE promo video on Facebook

In December we will continue with social media ads (Google and Facebook).

Two rotating billboards will move each month throughout the greater Houston area for the next three months and continue through March. Beginning Dec. 7, you can see those billboards at:

- Hwy 225 at Red Bluff (eastbound – left side of freeway)
- I-45 South at Emancipation (northbound – left side of freeway)



SYSTEMIC

ACHIEVEMENT...*WITH PURPOSEFUL INTENT*

This week, the following Board expectations were met:

***Superintendent Objective B:
Organization Morale***

- 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***

- Establishes and maintains a program of public relations to keep the public well-informed of the activities of the department, affecting a wholesome and cooperative working relationship between the department and community.

We better understand the working parts of our divisions by hearing employees share their professional and personal stories. Case in point is Brandon Fisher, the energetic face of Records Management. The customer service skills he has gained through his job help him in his personal life. The mission, goals and objectives of



the department are seen through his everyday actions as he listens to and meets the needs of our client districts.



Updates from our community impact campaign are brought to you through our monthly update. The campaign is working as evidenced through our climbing social media numbers. Through the story of a mom whose son is gaining notoriety as the student featured on our informational brochure, we see the immediate impact of the campaign.



Telling our story through the campaign also helps us maintain a highly visible and positive profile.

As I update you on the community impact campaign and other significant issues, we continue the information flow so that you are knowledgeable and sensitive to issues critical to our education community.

HCDE BOARD

Board President

Eric Dick

Vice President

Danny Norris

Board Members

Richard Cantu

Andrea Duhon

Amy Hinojosa

Don Sumners

Michael Wolfe

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Dec. 8

Recipe for Change:
Moving from Cookbook
Labs to Inquiry
4 - 6 p.m.

Dec. 10

Capturing Kids' Hearts
8 a.m. - 5 p.m.

Dec. 10

Cybersecurity Ethics
and Law
8 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Dec. 16

Board Meeting
at Irvington
1 p.m.