

# THE CONNECTOR

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

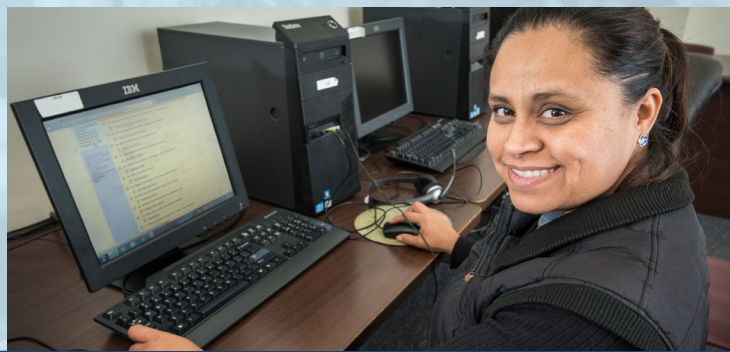
WEEK OF DECEMBER 14, 2020

VOLUME 6 ISSUE 14

## LEADING BY EXAMPLE

### TOP STORIES

**Adult Education Teams with Houston Methodist: English for Foreign Professionals p.2**



**Dyslexia Summit Helps Tackles Illiteracy Problem in Houston p.3**



**Fortis Hosts Exploratory Team from Lubbock ISD p.4**





## Of Note...



Seeing firsthand how impactful HCDE services and support are to a family is one of the greatest rewards of this job.

On Thursday at the Bates Car Giveaway there was not a dry eye in the house when the father, who was chosen for the refurbished car, broke down in tears while explaining how much of a difference the car and support for his daughter makes in his life. The emotion in his voice and the gratitude on his face was genuine, but it was the reaction from his daughter, Journee - who was born prematurely at one-pound, five ounces - that made several attendees choke up. When her father began to tear up, Journee started patting his back as if to say, "It's OK daddy. It will be OK." Watching a preschooler imitate what is obviously a loving parent with an expression of comfort was just about the most precious thing I have seen all year. It made my heart swell to know that HCDE had a hand in helping this deserving family and that what we do will impact their lives forever.

This week we also take a peek into an Adult Education partnership with Houston Methodist that blends our traditional English as a Second Language course with workforce development. This unique program seeks to enhance the conversational skills of highly educated foreign professionals to support a smoother transition to working at Houston Methodist's academic institute downtown. The course includes diverse topics ranging from American customs and traditions to sarcasm and slang. This program is a great example of how HCDE programs continue to transform, serving different sectors of our community and filling even more gaps in education in the region. I am excited to see how this partnership grows and evolves in the future.

I started the week fulfilling my duties on the UIL State Executive Committee and then holding several standing meetings. I met with ELT on Tuesday and several other leadership team members. On Thursday I attended the Bates Car Giveaway and stopped in at Highpoint East where I chatted with staff and was able to observe how the team is doing both in-person and virtual instruction. Today I am at my NPO office meeting with several staff members and enjoying the holiday spirit of the season. This will be the last Connector for this calendar year, as our offices officially close next Wednesday. We reopen on January 4 and the Connector will resume on January 8.

I wish each of you a very happy and safe holiday, with tidings of joy for you and your family. I'm sure you are like me and eager to put 2020 in the rearview mirror and welcome in the new year!



# PROGRAM

## CONNECTIONS

### Foreign Professionals from Houston Methodist Gain Conversation, Writing Skills in HCDE Adult Education Classes

An upbeat group of health professionals check into Norma Nieto's English as a second language Zoom class. Isaac Acquah, a Ghana native, is talking about moving to a new apartment in Houston. Nima Ahmadi, from Iran, chimes in as crime becomes the topic.



The English conversation class offered as a collaboration between Harris County Department of Education's Adult Education and Houston Methodist is unique because all its students have earned their doctorate degrees and are foreign professionals. The highly educated group shares vast cultural differences but are joined by the goal to acclimate.

Ahmadi is a computer analytics expert, a problem-solver who reduces computer errors for medical professionals. Acquah is a post-doctorate student working in cardiovascular research who is intent on improving his writing skills.

The project between Methodist and HCDE wraps up a first semester this month, with more classes planned in 2021. It came about as a Methodist recruiter visited with Workforce Solutions and the benefits of HCDE's ESL classes were mentioned. Methodist's academic institute employs approximately 900 employees, and a predominate portion are foreign nationals.

"Sometimes communication can be an issue," said Amber Kennedy, recruitment team, Methodist Hospital human resources. "The ESL program seemed to be a perfect fit."

Conversation skills and business writing are the main

goals of the program. Situational conversation requires customized lesson plans that might include safety issues, American customs and traditions and idioms, sarcasm and slang.

"It has been a great satisfaction to help them improve their English skills, help them understand American culture and learn about the culture from the countries they come from," said Nieto, who expresses gratitude upon teaching the inaugural class.

Each student underwent an assessment test as they entered the program. In the beginning, students shared their language challenges with Nieto.

"The curriculum was heavily involved by their needs," she said. "They would let me know what they wanted to learn, and I would come up with material to meet those needs."

Tonight, the conversation settles on Christmas traditions and the problems of crime in a large city. In past weeks Nieto helped students craft email greetings and worked through various communication scenarios.

[Click here to read more...](#)



Issac Acquah

# PROGRAM

## CONNECTIONS

### Virtual Dyslexia Summit 2021 Jan. 16 Helps Provide Solutions for Houston Students and Their Families

As the illiteracy rate continues to grow in Houston, local experts believe that learning disabilities like dyslexia are a factor. The virtual biannual Dyslexia Summit 2021 scheduled for Jan. 16 from 9 a.m.-3 p.m. is helping to provide strategies to support Houston-area dyslexic students.



“This is an underserved area that people are just at the tip of the iceberg understanding,” Harris County Department of Education Curriculum Director of Special Populations Brenda Arteaga said. “The Mayor’s Office released a report showing that Houston’s illiterate population has increased from a quarter of the population to a third of the population in the past four years.”

Three keynote speakers from the Neuhaus Education Center serve as keynote speakers. The nonprofit educational foundation is dedicated to promoting reading success. The summit’s focus is “Innovation in Dyslexia Services: A Virtual Event.” The purpose is to bring innovative strategies to students identified with dyslexia and to provide support to parents.

Traditionally, teachers, administrators, parents and community members attend the event.

Presenter Allison Peck leads a session called “Real Talk about Dyslexia.: The Top 10 Things I have Learned as a Parent and Educator.” Peck gives a personal journey into understanding and embracing dyslexia.



“By sharing real talk about dyslexia, I believe all families can survive and thrive,” she said. Her child’s journey with dyslexia led her to become a special education teacher to help others with reading disabilities. Peck is currently the vice president of professional learning at Neuhaus.

Rebecca Tolson, vice president of literacy initiatives for Neuhaus, is a second presenter. Tolson specializes in using structured literacy techniques as intervention for dyslexia and dysgraphia. She has a doctorate in elementary education from University of Akron and is a certified language therapist and a certified dyslexia therapist.

Neuhaus’s Barbara Conway provides a third session focusing on struggles with reading at older grade levels. The session explores what it takes to be a proficient reader at any age and examines ways to help older readers get basic skills they need for reading and meaning by using longer, more sophisticated words.

Cost for the Dyslexia Summit is \$99.

**Register:** <https://tinyurl.com/DyslexiaSummit21>

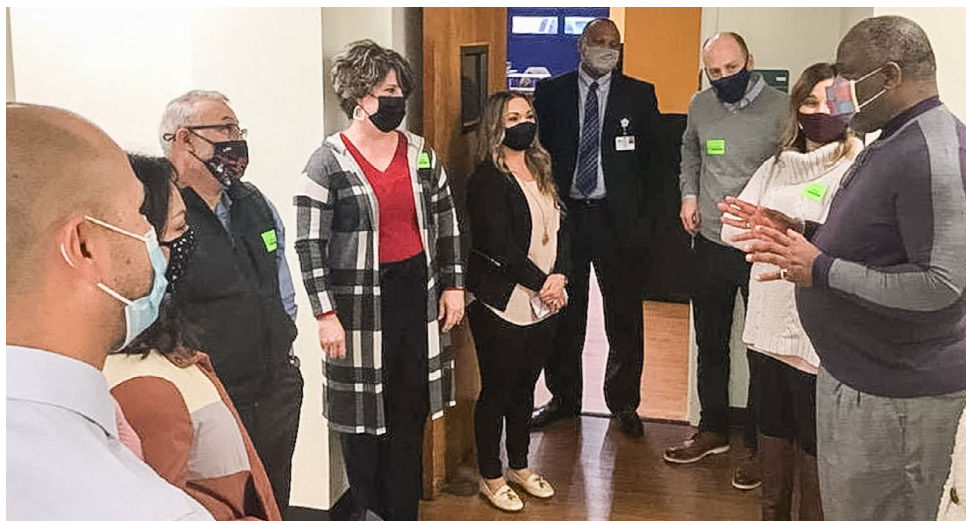


# PROGRAM

## CONNECTIONS

### Lubbock ISD Administrators Tour Fortis Academy

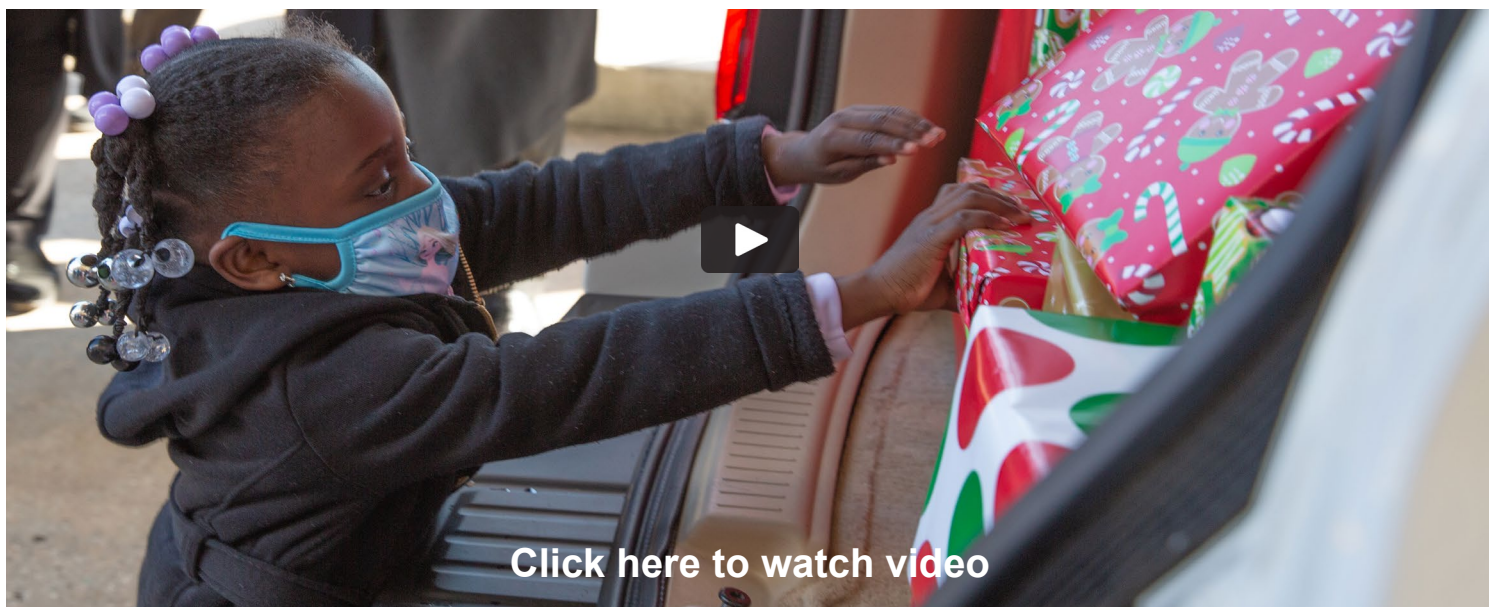
Fortis staff met with a group of education leaders from Lubbock ISD as they toured Fortis Academy this week. The group is exploring the possibility of opening a model of our school in their district. The tour included discussions with staff as they discussed the Fortis program and examined its services for students.





# A SEASON OF GIVING

Head Start Fifth Ward dad John Rose and daughter Journee are thankful for the gifted car and other donated gifts.



[Click here to watch video](#)



# A SEASON OF GIVING

Community gathers around to help support the event, donating gifts and services to the family. Media coverage included the Houston Chronicle, KPRC online and the Baytown Sun.

Page one top fold of Houston Chronicle

## HOUSTON CHRONICLE

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2019 • HOUSTON CHRONICLE • 77 • 100,000, 100,000 • 100,000

### Abbott hails vaccine, rules out lockdown

Governor Greg Abbott hailed the rollout of first booster shots, saying it shows a path forward for the state.

By Jeremy Hsu  
Houston Chronicle

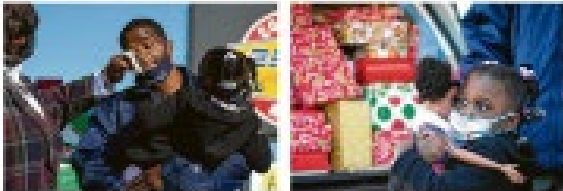
Gov. Greg Abbott on Thursday hailed the arrival of the new booster shots, calling it a "game-changer" for the state's fight against the coronavirus. He said the booster shots will help protect the state's most vulnerable populations, including the elderly and those with underlying health conditions.

Abbott said the booster shots are a "game-changer" for the state's fight against the coronavirus. He said the booster shots will help protect the state's most vulnerable populations, including the elderly and those with underlying health conditions.

Abbott said the booster shots are a "game-changer" for the state's fight against the coronavirus. He said the booster shots will help protect the state's most vulnerable populations, including the elderly and those with underlying health conditions.

Abbott said the booster shots are a "game-changer" for the state's fight against the coronavirus. He said the booster shots will help protect the state's most vulnerable populations, including the elderly and those with underlying health conditions.

### A careful of kindness



Photos by Kaitlin Mulligan | houstonchronicle.com

John Rose, a 41-year-old dad, drove his 4-year-old daughter, Isabella, to the hospital at the Houston Chronicle's press room for the first time in 10 years. He said the girl is the first of his children to be born in the United States. He said the girl is the first of his children to be born in the United States.

### Feds warn hack poses 'grave' risk to country

Authorities say removing threat will be challenging.

By Rose Hsu  
Houston Chronicle

WASHINGTON — Federal authorities warned Tuesday that a sophisticated cyber attack poses a "grave" risk to the country. The attack, which targeted the federal government, is believed to be the work of a group of hackers known as the "Lazarus Group."

The cyber attack, which targeted the federal government, is believed to be the work of a group of hackers known as the "Lazarus Group." The attack, which targeted the federal government, is believed to be the work of a group of hackers known as the "Lazarus Group."

### Delivery services fill with gifts, vaccines

By Kaitlin Mulligan  
Houston Chronicle

Delivery services are filled with gifts and vaccines as the holiday season approaches. The services are filled with gifts and vaccines as the holiday season approaches. The services are filled with gifts and vaccines as the holiday season approaches.

### Pharmacies step up hiring plans in anticipation of vaccine demand

By Kaitlin Mulligan  
Houston Chronicle

Pharmacies are stepping up hiring plans in anticipation of vaccine demand. The pharmacies are stepping up hiring plans in anticipation of vaccine demand. The pharmacies are stepping up hiring plans in anticipation of vaccine demand.

Pharmacies are stepping up hiring plans in anticipation of vaccine demand. The pharmacies are stepping up hiring plans in anticipation of vaccine demand. The pharmacies are stepping up hiring plans in anticipation of vaccine demand.

Pharmacies are stepping up hiring plans in anticipation of vaccine demand. The pharmacies are stepping up hiring plans in anticipation of vaccine demand. The pharmacies are stepping up hiring plans in anticipation of vaccine demand.



Kaitlin Mulligan, a Houston Chronicle reporter, is seen working at a computer screen.

Click2Houston.com

### Houston-area dad receives car from Baytown company ahead of the holidays



John Rose and his daughter Isabella will be recipients of this year's Bates' 22nd Annual Responsible Parenting Award. (Harris County Department of Education)

HOUSTON — A Houston-area dad made history as becoming the first to receive a rehabbed car from Bates' 22nd Annual Responsible Parenting Award on Thursday.

According to a release from the Harris County Department of Education (HCDE), in collaboration with Bates' Collision Centers in Baytown, this was the first time in 22 years a young father was presented the keys to a rehabbed car.

The award is normally given to needy moms during the holiday season whose children are enrolled in HCDE Head Start.

[Click here to read story](#)

## The Baytown Sun

Covering Southeast Harris, Chambers County and Southeast Liberty County

### Bates Collision presents car to deserving family

By Matt Hollis matt.hollis@baytownsun.com Dec 19, 2019

It has been months since Erica Casas has driven a car after a drunk driver with no insurance struck her vehicle head-on, leaving her and her two sons injured.

But just in time for Christmas, the team at Bates Collision Center in Baytown has come through and Erica Casas' family will have a new car.

[Click here to read story](#)



# BOARD BRIEFS

## Giving: The Greatest Gift of All

Family is family! At ABS West, staff spreads holiday joy with turkey and all the trimmings as four families receive holiday meals from Santa Dr. Victor Keys (principal) and his helpers (ABS West staffers). Giving is the greatest gift of all!



## SuperMENTor Santa Claus Amezcua

In keeping with tradition, Santa Jesus Amezcua visited Compton Head Start this month, spreading cheer and handing out gifts. Amezcua is a SuperMENTor at the center where he reads once a month to children.





# BOARD BRIEFS

## Ecobot Challenge Goes Virtual in 2021

The Ecobot Challenge is featured on Fox 26 through consultant Joe Panietz and Fox anchor Melissa Wilson. The Challenge will be held virtually in January and February.

Find out more at

<http://ecobotchallenge.com>.

View the interview on Fox 26:

[www.fox26houston.com/video/880719](http://www.fox26houston.com/video/880719)



## Superintendent Holiday Video

Superintendent James Colbert Jr. shared an important holiday message with staff as the semester officially ends Dec. 22. Colbert stressed safety precautions for employees and their families during the holidays. He also expressed appreciation for employees' service and wished them a restful, deserved holiday break.

[View the video here:](#)



# SYSTEMIC

## ACHIEVEMENT... *WITH PURPOSEFUL INTENT*

**This week, the following Board expectations were met:**

***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 E:  
Instructional Management***

- Ensures that goals and objectives form the basis of curricular decision making and instruction and communicates expectation for student achievement.
- Ensures that appropriate data are used in developing recommendations and making decisions regarding the instructional program and resources.
- Establishes a system for regular evaluation of instructional programs to meet student instructional needs and to attain desired student achievement.

***Superintendent Objective G:  
Professional Growth and Development***

- Stays abreast of developments in educational leadership and administration.



While the semester is winding down, there is still a host of HCDE activities. The Bates Collision car giveaway provides opportunity to publicize our Head Start services and the critical work we do to prepare young students and their families for successful school careers. The event also provides visibility and partnerships within the community.

This week you'll read about our newest Adult Education initiative with Houston Methodist. Workforce development provides extra opportunities for us to make a difference. Foreign professionals from all over the world come to Methodist to do medical research, and we are making a difference by providing educational leadership.



This successful partnership will expand in the coming semester, and more Methodist programs are considering using our English as a second language services. I credit the professionalism and knowledge of our staff in creating this successful partnership.

In closing, Fortis Academy is in the spotlight as Lubbock ISD leaders scheduled a visit to replicate a recovery school in their district. This further amplifies our outcomes in using effective practices as we maximize student achievement within HCDE schools.

### **HCDE BOARD**

#### **Board President**

Eric Dick

#### **Vice President**

Danny Norris

#### **Board Members**

Richard Cantu

Andrea Duhon

Amy Hinojosa

Don Sumners

Michael Wolfe

### **UPCOMING EVENTS:**

#### **WORKSHOPS**

(Online Only)

#### **Jan. 1**

Swearing in for New Trustees at Irvington 10 a.m.

#### **Jan. 13**

Board Meeting at Irvington 1 p.m.

#### **Jan. 16**

Dyslexia Summit 9 a.m. - 3 p.m.

#### **Jan. 30**

Early Childhood Winter Conference 9 a.m. - 3 p.m.