

THE CONNECTOR

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

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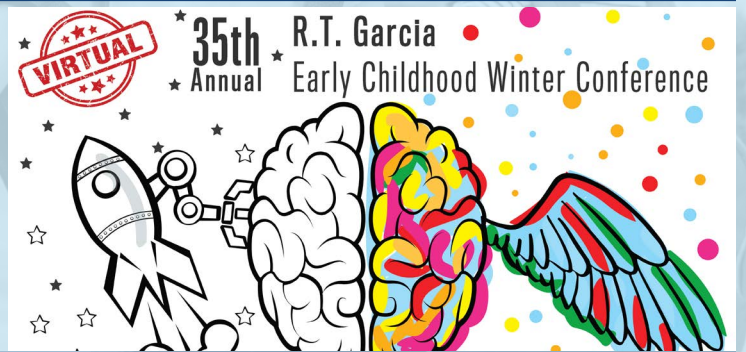
REACHING BEYOND HARRIS COUNTY

TOP STORIES

HCDE Celebrates National Board Recognition Month
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Of Note...



The purpose of **The Connector** is to provide information to the board on a weekly basis to give you insight into the programs, projects and services HCDE provides. Each week, we profile a different program or event and showcase happenings around the department's 15 different divisions.

This week we take a peek inside our Early Childhood Education professional development program. This year, due to COVID, HCDE's Early Childhood Winter Conference is being hosted virtually. This has opened the door to even more attendees, many tuning in from around the world! We are up over 1,000 registrations so far and more keep coming in each day. This is the second largest early childhood conference in Texas and presents an opportunity for PK-2 teachers to gain valuable training in literacy techniques, leadership skills and developmental milestones for our youngest learners. This is always a fun conference with high energy and fabulous presenters. I look forward to seeing it in its virtual form and reading the feedback from participants.

This week was shorter than normal with the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday on Monday. I met with my Executive Leadership Team on Tuesday after which we discussed proposed renovation plans for the Irvington building with the architects. All our projects are moving along, and our goal is to have a board work session about the entire capital improvement plan before the February board meeting. I am excited for you to see the conceptual vision for our new buildings!

On Wednesday we met for the audit committee and our regular board meeting. Thank you for your comments during both meetings. Board Appreciation Month is something we look forward to every year, as we try to come up with new and innovative ways to honor your dedication and service to public education in Harris County. I hope you enjoyed the Board recognition and like the small gifts we packaged for you. We had a lot of fun imagining them and picking them out.

Thursday began with introductory remarks at our Annual Choice Partners Vendor and Member Appreciation Luncheon. This is a great opportunity for me to showcase HCDE's innovation in public education. The event attracts member districts as well as large vendors, like Borden Dairy and allows me to explain that our staff does not get commission, nor do we offer rebates. Rather, profits from the purchasing cooperative are funneled back into our general fund and offset costs, which allows for unique HCDE offerings including Leadership programs that study Civil War battles and strategy with the US Army War College. Profits from Choice also further our ability to leverage the tax rate and offer services and items below cost to school districts. A few of the types of things we can do because of Choice include the inclusive playground and sensory room at AB West, Fortis Academy's commercial kitchen, outdoor learning center and ropes course and the \$500,000 the board transferred to the foundation for scholarships, grants and sponsorships. These are items a traditional school district cannot afford but HCDE is able to provide because of our tax rate, business model and Choice Partners' transfers to the general fund each year. I wrapped up the day planning for our Board Retreat on February 19 and spent Friday at my NPO office where I participated in standing meetings.

Have a great weekend.

BOARD BRIEFS



Board of Trustees President Eric Dick



HCDE Board of Trustees from left to right, David W. Brown, Richard Cantu, Erica Davis, Vice President Danny Norris, Superintendent James Colbert Jr., President Eric Dick, Amy Flores Hinojosa and Andrea Duhon

January is National School Board Recognition month. The HCDE trustee's leadership and dedication to the more than 1 million children and educators of the greater Houston area was recognized during this week's board meeting.

[Watch video](#)

BOARD BRIEFS

HCDE Board of Trustees



Vice President Danny Norris



Board Member David W. Brown



Board Member Richard Cantu



Board Member Erica Davis



Board Member Andrea Duhon



Board Member Amy Hinojosa

CONNECTIONS



35th Annual R.T. Garcia Early Childhood Winter Conference



R.T. Garcia Early Childhood Conference to be held online for the first time in its 35-year history

Over 1,000 educators from around the world will participate in the 35th annual R.T. Garcia Early Childhood Winter Conference from 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. on Saturday, January 30, 2021.

Despite the pandemic, participation is expected to be high because the conference will be held virtually for the first time ever.

“The positive side of having it online is being able to have an extended reach beyond our county,” said HCDE director of special projects for the Teaching and Learning Center Andrea Segraves, who oversees this annual event.

Registration has increased more than 25% over last year with educators from New York to Los Angeles and a number of countries, including the Dominican Republic, China and Qatar signing up to learn the latest trends in early childhood education.

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CONNECTIONS



Keynote Speaker Eric Litwin, author of Pete the Cat

“Hosting this event virtually has allowed us to build partnerships with people from all over,” Segraves said. “We are considering hosting this conference in both in-person and virtual formats in the future so that we can continue being a leading resource for educators locally and globally.”

Segraves took a different approach to promote this year’s conference by turning to LinkedIn. As a result of her efforts, one of this year’s presenters is Dr. Kathryn Murray, an Australian-based early childhood education specialist who connected with Segraves on the professional networking platform.

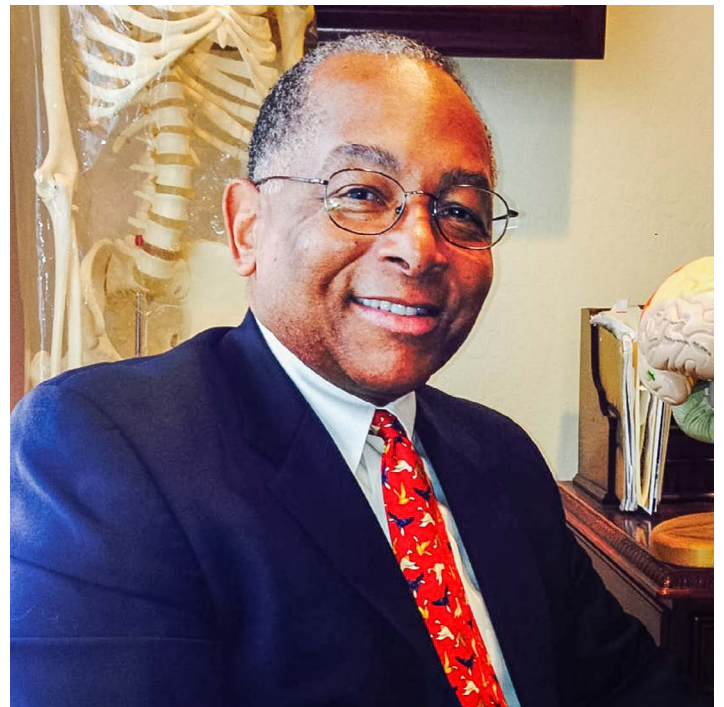
Murray will be presenting her sessions, “Keeping Development of the Brain in Mind when Designing Effective Learning Environments” and “The Role of Parents and Educators in Nurturing Brain Development in the Early Years,” from her home in Queensland, Australia.

More than 50 breakout sessions during the one-day event include presentations for educators that focus on the needs of bilingual and special education students, teachers who need help with strategies to address social and emotional learning, and of course, tips for teaching in a virtual environment.

“This is a great opportunity for educators to receive a high-quality level of professional development,” said Segraves. “We’ve paid special attention to the kinds of sessions we are offering this year. We want to make sure that the sessions are current and practical in developmentally appropriate activities so that we are meeting the needs of our youngest learners, especially in an online teaching environment.”

As one of the largest early childhood conferences in Texas, the R.T. Garcia Early Childhood Winter Conference is named after former HCDE Board President R.T. Garcia, a longtime supporter of early childhood education.

The cost of the conference is \$75. To attend the live sessions and pose questions and comments through a virtual platform or view the sessions post-conference, register today at <https://bit.ly/39O9JU2>.



Keynote Speaker Dr. Kenneth Wesson, Educational Consultant, Neuroscientist

IN THE NEWS

- Profits from Choice support education in southeast Texas



Superintendent James Colbert Jr. speaking at the Choice Partners Vendor/Member Appreciation event

Choice Partners Vendor/Member Appreciation

Choice Partners hosted its annual Vendor/Member Appreciation Luncheon this week. Director Jeff Drury opened the event by welcoming all vendors and members in attendance.

Superintendent James Colbert Jr. Colbert shared key highlights about Harris County Department of Education focusing on schools and future goals of the organization that are supported by revenue from Choice Partners.

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IN THE NEWS

SCHOOL BUS

As part of the celebration, two member districts received awards for their usage of Choice Partners contracts and 16 vendors were awarded for the volume of reported contract usage. Not all vendors and members could attend the event due to the pandemic, there were a total of 23 member awards and 35 vendor awards (see lists below).

Member Awards

Aldine ISD
 Alief ISD
 Brownsville ISD
 Coppell, Texas
 Cypress-Fairbanks ISD
 Fort Bend ISD
 Galena Park ISD
 Galveston ISD
 Harris County
 Harris County Department of Education
 Houston ISD
 Humble ISD
 Katy ISD
 Pasadena ISD
 San Jacinto Community College
 Sheldon ISD
 Spring Branch ISD
 Spring ISD
 Texas A&M University
 Texas Southern University
 Texas State University
 University of Houston
 University of North Texas

Vendor Awards

Accelerate Learning Inc.
 Borden Dairy Company
 Bosworth Paper
 Buckeye Cleaning Center
 CDW Government
 CFI Mechanical, Inc.
 Construction Masters of Houston
 CS Advantage USAA Inc.
 Educator's Depot, Inc.
 Enhanced Laser Products
 Facilities Sources
 Falkenberg Construction Co., Inc.
 Gordon Food Service
 High Point
 Hunton Services (HVAC Mechanical)
 ISI Commercial Refrigeration
 Istation



Above: Choice Partners Directors Jeff Drury and Joann Nichols presenting Vendor/Member awards



Safety First!

HCDE continues to monitor the COVID situation in the Houston area, while maintaining processes to keep employees safe at work. Current safety protocols include a daily employee health assessment, mandatory masks, social distancing, video conferencing when possible and enhanced cleaning routines. These protocols will continue until health officials determine the virus is no longer a threat to our communities.

Superintendent Colbert received the COVID vaccine this week. View vaccine distribution information [here](#).

ACHIEVEMENT...WITH PURPOSEFUL INTENT

This week, the following Board expectations were met:

Superintendent Objective B: Organization Morale

- Celebrates accomplishments and acknowledges excellence.

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.

Superintendent Objective H: Board Relations

- Maintains a positive and professional working relationship with the board.

This week it was an honor to celebrate National School Board Recognition Month with you during the January board meeting. Your leadership and dedication to education and public service allows HCDE to provide the very best services to the students and educators of Harris county.



Next week the 35th annual R.T. Garcia Early Childhood Winter Conference will take place in a virtual environment for the first time. Because of that, we have gone global. Presenters are normally drawn

from a regional pool but this year they come from as far away as Australia. Attendees are now logging in from China and Qatar. It will be a different experience for attendees, but the highly relevant and engaging sessions will remain the same. I expect future conferences to continue in a hybrid model, expanding the reach of HCDE far beyond the county.



Finally, we celebrated the vendors and members of Choice Partners with a socially distanced luncheon and awards ceremony. I had the opportunity to share with them the value they bring to HCDE by showing them real examples of the big work we do with the small fees they pay.



HCDE BOARD
Board President
 Eric Dick
Vice President
 Danny Norris
Board Members
 David W. Brown
 Richard Cantu
 Erica Davis
 Andrea Duhon
 Amy Hinojosa

UPCOMING EVENTS:

WORKSHOPS (Online Only)

- Jan. 30**
Early Childhood Winter Conference
9 am. – 3 p.m.
- Feb. 6**
Leadership Series
Family Engagement
10 am. – 12 p.m.