

# THE CONNECTOR

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

WEEK OF SEPTEMBER 14, 2020

VOLUME 6 ISSUE 2

## BEING RESPONSIVE

### TOP STORIES

**HCDE Board Votes to Lower Tax Rate for 6th Consecutive Year p.2**



**Free Virtual School Safety Forum p.3**

A graphic for the 'School Safety Forum 2020'. It features a red padlock icon in a white circle on the left. The text reads: 'School Safety Forum 2020 #STOPschoolviolence #ImpactSafety Hosted by Center for Safe and Secure Schools OCT. 16, 2020 | 8 a.m. - 4:45 p.m. CST'. At the bottom right are the logos for 'Harris County Department of Education' and 'Education Elements'.

**Head Start Adapts to Reduce COVID-19 Spread p.4**





Of Note...



The approval of the 2020 Tax Rate signifies the end of our 6-month budget process. Each year we start with budget meetings in March, adopt a balanced budget in July and then set the tax rate in September. I am proud that for the last six years, HCDE has been able to propose a balanced budget that allows us to meet the needs of our clients while reducing the tax rate.

Since 2014 when I arrived at HCDE, our tax rate has fallen from \$.005999 to the \$.004993 adopted Wednesday. With this latest adoption, the average homeowner in Harris County, with a home valued at \$200,000, will pay less than \$8 a year for HCDE's services.

With that 66-cents a month, HCDE provides a wealth of value to Harris County through our many divisions and services. The fact that we can provide these services with fidelity and still decrease the tax rate in the middle of a pandemic is a testament to HCDE's strong business model and the high quality of programs we provide.

One of the ways we show our value is through flexibility. Our Special Schools are providing both in person and virtual instruction to hundreds of students and our Head Start centers are working with families virtually until October 19. In addition, as you saw in the School-based Therapy presentation at the board meeting, our therapists are providing both virtual and in-person instruction. I find it fascinating to see how these professionals provide physical and occupational therapy virtually through creative collaborations with parents and caregivers. The dedication and innovation of our staff constantly amazes me!

I started the week with my Executive Leadership Team and several internal meetings before I saw the board on Wednesday. Thank you for your attendance at our first in-person board meeting in nearly six months. I truly believe the board and leadership need to be role models for our staff. With teachers expected to be back in the classroom with students it is important that we conduct our business in person as well. The new setup in the board room worked well, even as we allowed for appropriate social distancing for the board, staff and audience. We will continue with this format until state and national guidelines change regarding safe in-person interactions.

Thank you for your continued support of our programs, services and staff. I constantly get letters from employees thanking me for the support HCDE provides them. This is largely due to the valuable governance of our board. Have a relaxing weekend.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James Collier". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "J".



# PROGRAM

## CONNECTIONS

### Harris County Department of Education Board Votes to Lower Tax Rate for 6th Consecutive Year

Through a unanimous vote, Harris County Department of Education's Board of Trustees voted to lower the tax rate for a sixth consecutive year. The board adopted the recommended rate of \$0.004993, a slight decrease from the current \$.0050 tax rate.

For a home valued at \$200,000, the adopted rate of \$0.004993 means the average Harris County homeowner would pay HCDE less than \$10 a year in property taxes for education services. For a home valued at \$150,000, the yearly taxes are \$7.49. These calculations do not include a standard homestead exemption, which would lower the taxes.



Following the vote, HCDE Board President Eric Dick praised the move and support of his fellow board members.

"This shows that we are being good stewards of the county's money, especially during a pandemic," he said.

HCDE provides wraparound services to both school districts and the general public through afterschool programs, school-based therapy services, adult education, Head Start and four specialty schools. Additional services such as a national purchasing cooperative give school districts buying power. Educators also benefit from professional development and leadership training supplied by HCDE.



Superintendent James Colbert Jr. said creating a leaner budget allowed for the continuation of HCDE's conservative adopted tax rate.

"Our business model has allowed us to continue to reduce the tax rate," County School Superintendent James Colbert Jr. said. "That's a testament to the quality of services provided to our clients."

For more information about HCDE's impact and local support of education, visit [www.hcde-texas.org](http://www.hcde-texas.org).



# PROGRAM

## CONNECTIONS

### Free Virtual School Safety Forum Oct. 16 Covers Host of Hot Topics: COVID-19, Social Justice, Child Trafficking

Sept. 15, 2020 - The Virtual School Safety Forum 2020 set for Oct. 16 addresses social justice, COVID-19 precautions, school safety hot topics, human trafficking, cultural awareness, mental health and more. Hosted by Harris County Department of Education's Center for Safe and Secure Schools and the Harris County Sheriff's Office, the forum features national presenters along with local experts who are hosting breakout sessions.



The free, eight-hour event is hosted on Zoom from 8 a.m.-4:45 p.m. and features vendor showcases from 8-8:30 a.m. and 4:15-4:45 p.m. Register at <https://tinyurl.com/SafetyForum20>.

Michael Dorn, president of Safe Havens International, is morning keynote. His presentation centers on developing trends in school emergency preparedness and recommunicating school safety. Districts take away tangible, actionable tips to bring them up to speed on emergency preparedness measures and steps to protect robust technology systems.

Carly Posey, mission director for I Love U Guys Foundation, talks about lessons learned from Sandy Hook and COVID-19. Her discussion includes heartfelt stories of Sandy Hook Elementary and ways to reassemble the school community and secure trust and safety. The foundation is a national advocate for school safety.

Breakout sessions include the following:

- Hot topics in school safety with Dorn, featuring a question-and-answer discussion with the presenter and school staff
- Trauma 101 with Sharif Charles and Nicole Milton of the Center for School Behavioral Health at Mental Health of America Greater Houston as they discuss trauma classroom strategies
- Human trafficking and keeping students safe with Christa Mayfield, director of prevention, Unbound Houston
- Best practices for social justice in schools presented by Charles A. Barrett, psychologist, Loudoun County Public Schools. Barrett also presents on systemic racism and police violence and the implications for promoting possible outcomes for students
- Online predators and cybersecurity for the online learning environment, a discussion with Gary Spurger, manager –Harris County Sheriff's Office High Tech Crime Division.

The School Safety Forum, now in its third year, is a mainstay for area educators and school safety officials throughout greater Harris County, said Julia Andrews, director for the Center for Safe and Secure Schools.

“As COVID-19 joins school security as being an issue of utmost concern to school districts, this forum continues to gain support and visibility among school security experts and area educators,” Andrews said.

The forum is funded through the Student, Teachers and Officers Preventing (STOP) School Violence Grant which is designed to improve school security by providing students and teachers with the tools they need to recognize, quickly responded to and help prevent acts of violence.

More details about the speakers and schedules may be found on the registration page at: <https://tinyurl.com/SafetyForum20>.



# PROGRAM

## CONNECTIONS

### Head Start Learning Environment Adapted to Reduce COVID-19 Spread



Head Start students will be returning to a different learning environment when in-person classes resume. Classrooms and teaching practices have been designed to encourage social distancing among students and staff.

Early Head Start classrooms will be split in half by a divider with an identical set-up on each side. These “mirrored” classrooms each will accommodate groups of up to 4 students, who will have access to the same items and experiences throughout the day. Regular Head Start classrooms will also have a divider to split the number of children into smaller groups of up to 10 students.

However, the classroom set-up as a whole will remain the same as it was, allowing both groups access to the materials and areas at different times of the day. The same teacher and education support staff will stay with the same group of children each day. There will be more outdoor learning and play, though only one class at a time will be allowed in the playground area. The use of indoor communal space will be limited. Festivals and special events will be canceled or postponed.

All staff will be required to wear a mask. Students will not be required to wear a mask, but if parents would like their child to wear a mask, they must provide them for their child. Reusable masks will be sent home daily to be

washed. Minimum standards for cleaning and disinfecting educational facilities will be maintained every day. Toys that can be put in the mouth will be cleaned and sanitized after each use. High touch surfaces, such as tables, doorknobs, countertops and toilets, and items in regular use will be cleaned regularly throughout the day.

In anticipation of this “new normal,” Education and Special Services Coordinator Lenora Reed advised parents to talk to their children about how things will look when in-person classes start.

“Talk to them daily about what will happen, what to expect and what they might see in the classroom,” Reed said. “This type of support to the child will help the transition process go smoother since they will have some prior knowledge of what to expect.”

(This article is featured in the Head Start Heads Up Newsletter for fall 2020. The article outlines adaptations in the Head Start classrooms as children and staff return. [View the entire newsletter.](#))

# IN THE NEWS

## Univision 45 Highlights Adult Education Move to Virtual Learning



Adult Education teacher Ismelda Truan and student Maria Sosa were featured on Univision 45 Friday to discuss the move to virtual classrooms. Adult Education provides synchronous (live) learning through the Zoom platform and provides independent learning activities. The story supports recruitment for students for fall classes.

View story:

[https://youtu.be/QF84KCt3\\_9o](https://youtu.be/QF84KCt3_9o)

# BOARD BRIEFS

## Take Care Tuesday Podcast Focuses on Human Trafficking and Effects on Students

Take Care Tuesday is a podcast offered through the Center for Safe and Secure Schools. Each podcast centers on a relevant school safety topic discussed by local, state, national and international school safety experts. Guest podcasters provide short bites, breaking down sometimes difficult topics.

“Human Trafficking: Effect on Youth and Communities” is provided by expert Christa Mayfield, director of prevention for Unbound Houston.

Podcasts may be heard on most podcast platforms, including Spotify, Google Podcasts, Breaker, Overcast, Apple Podcast, Pocket Casts and Radio Public. The podcasts are also pushed out through HCDE and CSSS social media.

Hear the podcast:

<https://anchor.fm/safe-secure-schools>





# SYSTEMIC SCHOOL BUS

## ACHIEVEMENT... WITH PURPOSEFUL INTENT

This week, the following Board expectations were met:

**Superintendent Objective A:  
Management of Administrative, Fiscal  
and Facilities Function**

- Oversees a budget development process that results in recommendations based on Department priorities and available resources.
- Ensures the Department investment strategies, risk management activities and purchasing practices are sound, cost-efficient and consistent with policy and law.
- Implements and oversees a planning process that results in goals, targets or priorities for major areas of operations.
- Monitors effectiveness of operations against appropriate benchmarks.

**Superintendent Objective F:  
Organizational Improvement**

- Ensures that key planning activities within the Department are coordinated and consistent with board policy and applicable law and that goals and results are communicated as appropriate.
- Oversees procedures to ensure effective and timely compliance with all legal obligations, reporting requirements and policies.

By working diligently with HCDE executive and administrative leaders, we supplied a lean budget that will live within the board and the public's expectations of fiscal responsibility. As a result, we



were able to reduce the tax rate. For a sixth consecutive year we present the public with a lowered tax rate.

When Head Start students return to school in the coming month, staff and parents will see a carefully, thought-out approach to social distancing with attention to COVID-19 safeguards. These same safeguards are being practiced in varied models throughout our organization as we perform automated health questionnaires and temperature checks daily. When Head Start staff, infants, toddlers and pre-k students do return to their classrooms, we will be using multiple resources to ensure a safe learning environment. These precautions meet CDC and government best practices and standards as we continue to serve the needs of our community.

As I work with you to set the vision, mission, goals and objectives for the Department, I remain committed to managing the day-to-day business of the Department to ensure all objectives are met. As a conservative financial leader, I also look for ways to improve programs and services without greater expenditures and with concern for cutting expenses and costs to public schools for our services.

**HCDE BOARD**  
**Board President**  
Eric Dick  
**Vice President**  
Danny Norris  
**Board Members**  
Richard Cantu  
Andrea Duhon  
Amy Hinojosa  
Don Sumners  
Michael Wolfe

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### UPCOMING EVENTS:

**WORKSHOPS**  
(Online only)

**SEPTEMBER 22**  
Resiliency Strategies for Educators in Emergencies  
8 a.m. - 12 p.m.

**SEPTEMBER 22**  
Harris County Social Studies Leadership Team  
9 a.m. - 1 p.m.

**SEPTEMBER 23**  
Grant Writing Best Practices (webinar)  
1:30 - 3 p.m.

**SEPTEMBER 23**  
Increasing English Learners Student Growth and Progress  
8:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m.