

THE CONNECTOR

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

WEEK OF SEPTEMBER 21, 2020

VOLUME 6 ISSUE 3

MAKING AN IMPACT

TOP STORIES

CASE for Kids
Partnership Project p.2



Virtual Expo 2020
'Making it Work' p.3



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Of Note...



As a Superintendent, one of the hardest decisions to make is not about academics, or budget or even facilities. It's about rain and weather. Knowing whether to stay open or closed with inclement weather is a real challenge because no matter what you do, someone won't be happy. For HCDE it's even more complex because it's not just about us. We need to also factor in the more than 25 school districts we serve and the fact that HCDE staff and students live all over the county.

So it was no surprise that Monday was a long night for me.

Whenever weather is anticipated, I actively monitor the local news, weather channel and updates from the county office of emergency management. I also receive reports of the status of our client districts. At 5:30 Tuesday morning, after seeing flooded roads and hearing city and county officials urge residents to stay off the highways, I determined HCDE needed to close for the safety of our students and staff. I never want one of our staff to be in a position where they are coming from or going to work and have to abandon their car in the middle of a flooded street because their safety is in jeopardy.

Tuesday's decision was harder than usual because the majority of weather and subsequent flooding was contained to the southern portion of the county. Our northwest and northeastern areas were only moderately impacted. And while I looked outside my own window and saw a light steady rain, I knew exercising "an abundance of caution" was the right thing to do for the HCDE family.

I started the week with my Executive Leadership Team on Monday. HCDE was closed Tuesday for inclement weather and on Wednesday we returned to the office to meet with five different potential project managers for our facilities plan. We viewed several presentations and I hope to bring our final recommendation to the board for approval in October.

On Thursday I met as a member of the Northwest Area Ministries board via Zoom. I also participated virtually in the Center for School Behavioral Health Annual Conference, speaking about racial equity and how educators can support students in finding success. I ended the week with internal meetings at my office at our North Post Oak facility.

Thankfully, the rain looks to have passed us for now and I plan to enjoy the beautiful fall weather. Have a great weekend.

PROGRAM

CONNECTIONS

CASE Partnership Project Makes Impact Among At-Risk Students Enrolled in 5Works Afterschool Program in Alief Apartment Complex

At an apartment complex in Alief, an afterschool program run by a nonprofit is being infused with \$10,000 in matching funds by the CASE for Kids Partnership Project. Supported through community partners like Harris County Department of Education's Center for Afterschool, Summer and Enrichment for Kids (CASE for Kids), children enrolled in the program are advancing academically and getting emotional help during COVID-19.



Twenty-nine nonprofits and schools with comprehensive afterschool programs gained their share of \$550,000 in funding from the Partnership Project for the 2020-2021 school year as awardees were announced by CASE for Kids. Award amounts ranged from \$10,000 to \$30,000. Awardees provide a 25 percent funding match. View the list: <https://tinyurl.com/PartProject20>.

The Partnership Project is a 21-year-old program founded by HCDE's CASE for Kids which fills afterschool funding gaps through a unique collaboration between local, state and federal partners. Partnership Project provides funding through CASE for Kids, the Houston-Galveston Area Council and the Texas Workforce Commission. Eligibility requires the program to be a comprehensive, 12-hour program which operates five days a week.

Aims of the Partnership Project are to provide supplemental funding to comprehensive afterschool programs for disadvantaged students ages 4-12 or children with disabilities up to 19. The program promotes social and emotional learning skills and increases support for academic programs promoting math and reading.

"Our goal is to support the afterschool program providers that are working diligently to serve youth and families during this difficult timeframe," said Dr. Lisa Thompson-Caruthers, CASE for Kids director.

Besides the Partnership Project funding, organizations such

as the nonprofit 5Works benefit from staff trainings; access to supplies and materials; and general afterschool support from staff at CASE for Kids.

The 5Works Inc. program operates from a one-bedroom apartment at Catalina Apartments and serves economically disadvantaged families of children in grades K-5 from two Alief Independent School District elementary schools.

"It's a very diverse community with over 60 different languages and dialects spoken," 5Works Inc. Executive Director Oralia Rios-Williams said. "We currently offer in person and virtual support and engagement options for our kids and families at the Catalina Apartments focused on academic improvement, healthy lifestyles and family involvement."



Since Alief ISD has been operating virtually, one of the program's goals has included focusing on teaching parents and children how to connect with the school's online instruction system. In addition to partnering with CASE for Kids, the afterschool program works in partnership with the school district and local YMCA.

[Read more...](#)

PROGRAM

CONNECTIONS

Virtual Expo 2020 'Making it Work' Helps Schools Find Solutions to Cafeteria Fare During Pandemic

Food co-ops which serve area school districts are finding innovative ways to deliver quality food items to students during the pandemic, such as small, prepackaged meals. Harris County Department of Education's Choice Partners joins with other food co-ops throughout Texas to host an inaugural Virtual Expo 2020 "Making It Work" children's nutrition food service expo from Sept. 29-Oct 1.



The three-day event features new presentations each day, including approximately 100 vendors that offer food, small-wares, equipment and software products and services to area school districts participating in school nutrition programs. To date, about 600 attendees from school districts, municipalities and government nonprofits have registered.

The event provided by co-ops in Texas is cosponsored by Choice Partners, Multi-Region Purchasing Cooperative, Region One, Region 5, Region 7, Region 8, West Texas Food Service Cooperative, Texas 20 and Sodexo.

Live speaker sessions pack the expo agenda, which features new presentations daily. Special presentations from the Food Network spotlight recipes and cooking techniques with celebrity chefs like Jason Smith. Expo sessions focus on procurement; USDA waivers and community foods; and Texas Department of Agriculture updates. Meetups and chats with industry partners will be included.

The event is free. Register today:

<https://tinyurl.com/y2yf9lwo>

Exercise, Donate to Autism Speaks Walk on Behalf of our Schools Division to Help HCDE Students

The HCDE Schools Division is actively raising funds for Autism Speaks Walk scheduled for Oct. 24. Although the walk has been officially cancelled in person, a virtual event is taking shape. HCDE's goal for donations is \$3,000.

This year, Human Resources is also promoting Autism Speaks as an HCDE personal health event as part of HCDE's ongoing employee wellness efforts. HR is encouraging employees to get active in support of the event by walking, biking, swimming or adopting other physical activities to stay in shape, while also supporting autism awareness and research.

The annual event benefits autism research, screening, information services and awareness. Many of the students who attend HCDE's Academic and Behavior Schools are diagnosed with autism at various stages in their lives.

One in 54 children is diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder nationally. HCDE's participation in the walk will support the national Autism Speaks nonprofit, which in turn supports students and their families with various resources.

More information will be shared about virtual event activities.



To donate to Autism Speaks directly on behalf of HCDE Schools, go to:

www.act.autismspeaks.org/goto/HCDESchoolsDivision.

IN THE NEWS

Assistant Superintendent Parker Interviewed by Fox 26



Fox 26 reporter Maria Salazar interviewed Assistant Superintendent Jonathan Parker for a story about COVID preparedness with area districts:
<https://tinyurl.com/y59kyhjy>

Board Lowers Tax Rate for 6th Consecutive Year: Community Impact News

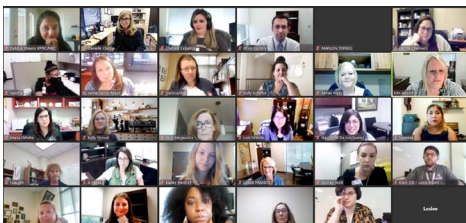
This article appeared in Heights/River Oaks/Montrose Community Impact News following the board's approval of the lowered tax rate: <https://tinyurl.com/y5qw79be>



BOARD BRIEFS

HCDE Communicators Help Host Media Roundtable

HCDE Communications helped host the Houston Area School Public Relations Media Roundtable on Sept. 18 via Zoom. The virtual event provided networking between local media and public relations officers from area school districts. Attending were representatives from print and broadcast media along with approximately 30 public relations officers.



Through the Zoom platform provided through HCDE Communications, media rotated from room to room to visit with public information officers.

Issues discussed included building relations between media and school districts and how media is operating during COVID-19. Collaborating strategies were established and contact information was shared.

Employees offered Flu Shots Next Week at Irvington, NPO

Employees will be offered flu shots next week by HEB Pharmacy at both Irvington (Sept. 28) and NPO (Sept. 30). Health officials are urging the community to be immunized against the flu this year due to the pandemic and the possible double-whammy effect of both viruses.



The flu shot is no cost for our TRS ActiveCare Blue Cross Blue Shield plan and other insurance plans. (Shots are \$39 for those without insurance.)

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.
- 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 relationships between the Department and community.

Through the Partnership Project, a collaborative between CASE for Kids, the Houston-Galveston Area Council and Texas Workforce Commission, schools and nonprofits in the area can serve more children with enhanced services in out-of-school time.

HCDE announced the 29 awardees of the Partnership Project this week. In doing so, we are partnering with numerous school districts and multiple nonprofits for the greater good and safety of students. We are also able to sustain programs which are suffering during the pandemic.



We also received media coverage this week to help us spread the good news about our fiscal responsibility through lowering the tax rate for a sixth year. Assistant Superintendent Jonathan Parker talks to Fox 26 about how we are using COVID safety best practices to keep our students and staff safer.



Through these activities and programs, I am acting as the primary ambassador for the Department and presenting a positive, professional image of myself and the Department in all venues. I am also being open to ideas and needs, listening and accepting criticism and am willing to seek advice and counsel when necessary.

HCDE BOARD

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Danny Norris

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Richard Cantu

Andrea Duhon

Amy Hinojosa

Don Sumners

Michael Wolfe

UPCOMING EVENTS:

WORKSHOPS

(Online only)

Oct. 2

Harris County
Special Populations
Leadership Team
10 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

Oct. 16

Virtual School
Safety Summit
8 a.m. - 4:45 p.m.