

THE CONNECTOR

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

WEEK OF SEPTEMBER 28, 2020

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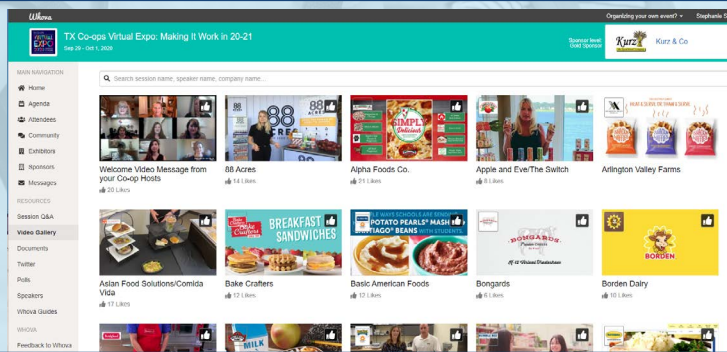
LEADING THE WAY!

TOP STORIES

Tech-Savvy School-Based Therapists p.3



Choice Partners Co-op Promotes Through Virtual Conferences p.4



HCDE's See the Impact Campaign in the Media p.5



Of Note...



This week things began to feel a bit more normal as I made my usual beginning-of-the year campus visits. I really enjoy being able to get out and see first-hand the way our teachers work so diligently with our students to ensure they make progress towards their goals.

On Tuesday I visited both AB campuses and Fortis Academy. At all sites I was able to talk with students and staff about how they are feeling being back in the building, how things are going in terms of instruction both in person and virtually and what they need to help them do their jobs even better. I also was able to see how our students and staff are adhering to our safety protocols like wearing masks, face shields and social distancing. HCDE put a lot of thought and effort into ensuring our campuses are safe for students and staff to engage in person. I am proud of the lengths to which we are going to protect everyone including the daily and weekly cleaning schedule that our facilities staff has implemented. This, along with our healthy habits and safety protocols, have created safe and productive learning environments for everyone.

I started the week with my Executive Leadership Team on Monday and held several internal meetings. On Tuesday I visited our campuses and on Wednesday I helped two potential mentees with their professional development. I also said goodbye to Dr. Anthony Mays, our Senior Director of Schools, as he is moving on to be the Chief of Schools for the Austin Independent School District. I am proud of the work Dr. Mays accomplished during his three years with HCDE and know he will be very successful in this newest endeavor.



On Friday we had our Special Board Meeting so Head Start can complete their grant application and submit it on time to the Department of Health and Human Services. Thank you for your flexibility in meeting to ensure we make this critical deadline.

Enjoy the beautiful fall weather this weekend.

SCHOOL TOURS



Superintendent James Colbert Jr. checks out a feature in the sensory room at ABS West during a visit Sept. 29.



Looking over student progress at ABS East



Meeting with staff at Fortis Academy



Taking in the new playground at ABS West

PROGRAM

CONNECTIONS

Tech-Savvy School-Based Therapists Support Students with Special Needs, Teachers, Parents

Problem-solvers, parent-coaches, think-tankers and tech-savvy are terms which describe school-based therapists as they help students with physical and intellectual disabilities be successful through virtual learning.

Harris County Department of Education School-Based Therapy Services employs 157 physical, occupational and music therapists and assistant therapists who work in 32 school districts and charter schools. HCDE's team of highly trained therapists provide support for more than 7,000 students in greater Harris County with autism spectrum disorder, intellectual disabilities and other challenges.

"Therapy sessions are conducted in a variety of ways, depending on the individual needs of the student," HCDE School-Based Therapy Services Director Carie Crabb said. "Sometimes therapists are attending a virtual class lesson along with the student they are supporting. At other times, the therapist is providing a virtual session with a student and their parent or caregiver."

As therapists continue to meet a main goal of helping students succeed in the school setting, the biggest adjustment since the pandemic is with technology. Districts first struggled to get equipment to families. Therapists then had to climb a steep technology learning curve themselves.

"We are able to do things now that we never imagined possible before," said Crabb.

A student needs help with handwriting skills or with using a pair of scissors. Distraction-free home workspaces are set up to help students with attention-deficit disorders. Parents are shown how to use writing or typing accommodations such as text-to-speech devices with their children.

HCDE manager and physical therapist Leah Alba talks about the qualities needed to be an excellent "tele-therapist." "I think being a 'tele-therapist,' one needs to be patient, flexible, innovative and resourceful," said Alba.

When students began learning from home, she recalls challenges including computer connectivity, unfamiliarity with

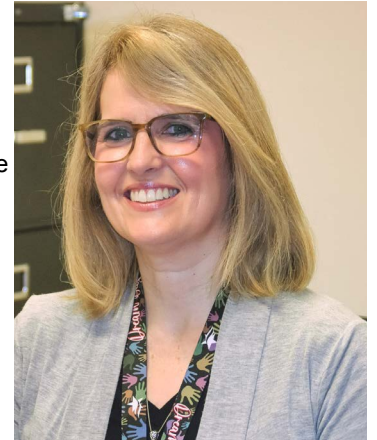


software and learning platforms, schedules and meeting parents' needs.

"But when you start seeing your students on the other end of the computer and how the parents participate during the session, it gave me a sense of purpose," Alba said. "It was an opportunity for me to share my ideas with parents, problem-solve how their child can participate during instructional lessons, modify their environment, identify alternative strategies and help guide parents through the instructional routine."

Occupational therapist and HCDE manager Traci Gault has worked in school therapy for over a decade. She agrees with Alba about the pandemic making therapists "think outside the box."

"Therapists were able to successfully transition from in-person learning to virtual learning since we use a 'coaching model,'" Gault said. "Teachers and staff are shown and instructed in various strategies to help support students. These strategies are used by teachers and staff when providing support to their students daily."



As many districts return to in-person instruction, therapists are careful to follow strict guidelines set forth by each of those districts, including social distancing, plexiglass barriers and face masks.

Manager Alba believes the feeling of being "connected" rings true for both in-person and virtual therapy.

"If think the most difficult part about my new role as a manager in the virtual world is making sure everyone feels connected and stays motivated," she said. "Phone calls, emails and virtual chat are still available, but it can still be difficult to ensure everyone feels connected and supported."

Crabb thinks of her staff of therapists as unsung heroes who have a deep sense of dedication and care for the students with disabilities whom they serve.

"These challenging times have brought to light the hard work and selfless sacrifice that they put forth every day," she said.

PROGRAM

CONNECTIONS

HCDE's Choice Partners Co-op Promotes Services, Products through Virtual Conferences

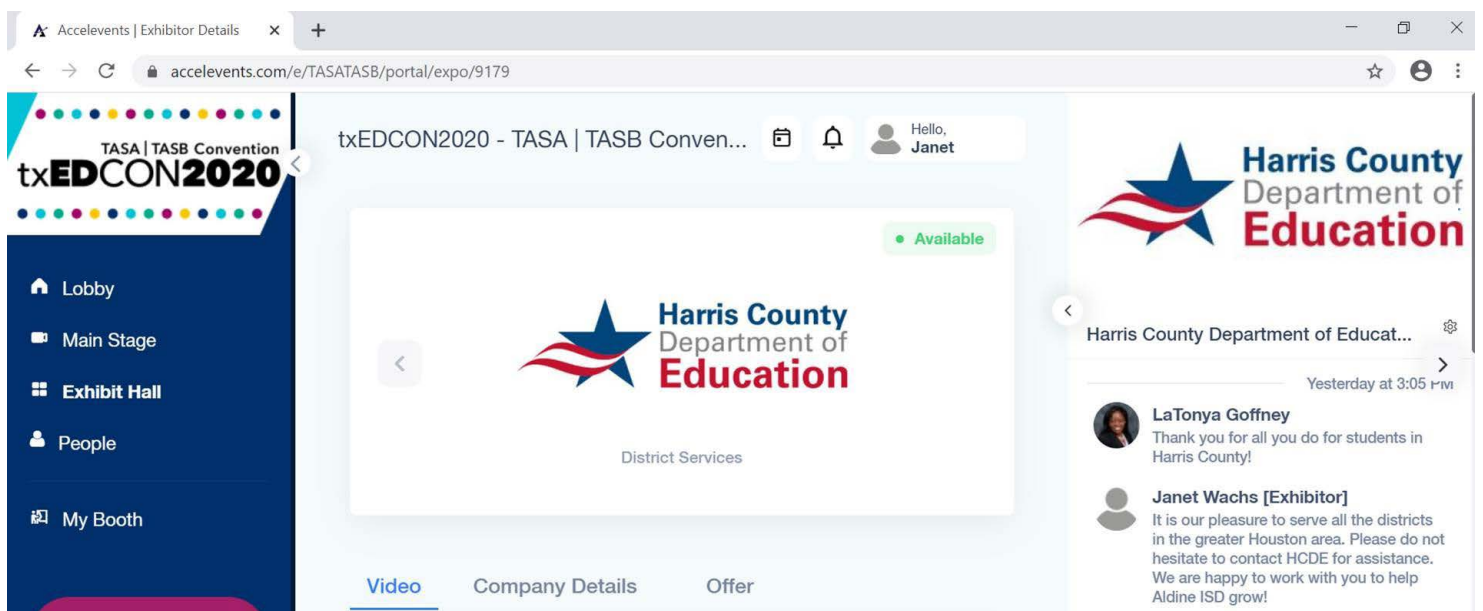
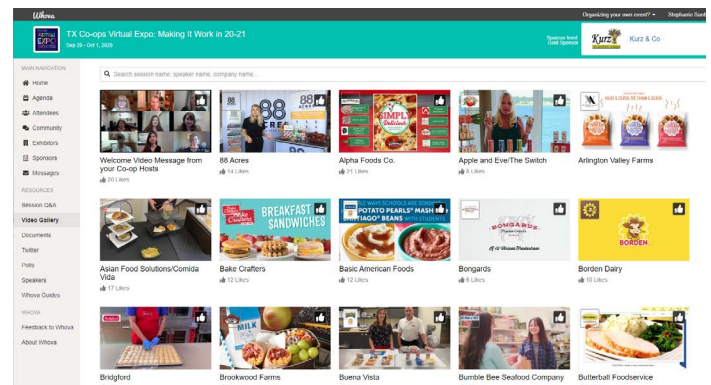
Choice Partners Cooperative and HCDE participate annually in at least a dozen trade shows and school conferences to network with governmental entities as well as local, state and nationwide vendors, but COVID-19 temporarily halted those scheduled, in-person events. The new norm are virtual conferences allowing for services to be promoted online.

Client Engagement says the Virtual Texas Food Expo is the perfect example of how food co-ops throughout Texas are collaborating to focus on the latest trends, food products and equipment which service school district cafeterias during COVID-19. Choice Partners joined the Texas Co-ops Virtual Expo 2020 "Making It Work" to put on their annual food show.

"The Choice Partners annual food show has always proven to be successful by being well attended by both members and vendors alike," said Stephanie De Los Santos, director of client engagement. "Although we miss the dynamic in-person experience, having the opportunity to collaborate with other co-ops to network with vendors and customers has been worthwhile."

From prepackaged lunches to personal protective equipment, the show allowed virtual interaction between vendors and customers, including chatrooms.

With more trade show exhibits at conferences on the horizon, vendors and their customers continue to practice safety protocols strictly through virtual shows. Additional shows that HCDE and Choice Partners either have or will participate in include: the TAC Legislative Conference and the NIGP Conference (held in August); TASA/TASB (this week); the TASBO 2020 School Operations Conference and the Texas Municipal League (in October).



PROGRAM

CONNECTIONS

See the Impact Campaign

HCDE's Awareness Campaign 2020-2021 kicked off this September. Communication for "See the Impact" includes a five-second TV ad during morning, evening or nighttime newscasts on KTRK 13 as well as Google and Facebooks ads. [See the 5 second ad here.](#)



In October, radio messages are added to the mix through KHMx 96.5 FM, KLOL 101 FM, KQBT 93.7 FM and KTBZ 94.5. Each of the five radio ads focuses on divisions working with students: Schools, CASE for Kids, [Head Start](#), School-Based Therapy Services and Adult Education.

KHMx 96.5 FM

KLOL 101 FM

KQBT 93.7 FM

KTBZ 94.5 FM

(Each month, the Connector will include an update on the awareness campaign as part of my pledge to keep the Board informed on key initiatives.)



Google ads



Facebook carousel ads

BOARD BRIEFS

Video Promotes Upcoming Safety Summit Oct. 16

The Center for Safe and Secure Schools shares this video which promotes the upcoming School Safety Forum Oct. 16. Over 200 registrants will attend the daylong virtual event through a collaborative with HCDE's CSSS and the Harris County Sheriff's Department.

Watch video: https://youtu.be/UaURZB_A6cY



Human Resources Promotes Breast Cancer Awareness Month Activities: Themed Fridays

In recognition of Breast Cancer Awareness Month, employees are expressing support by participating in "Themed Dress Fridays." A facemask decorating contest is also planned.

Oct. 2 – "Stay STRONG and FIGHT against cancer" (Wear camo, jeans, tennis shoes/combat boots.)

Oct. 9 – "SOCK it to cancer" (Wear crazy socks/tennis shoes.)

Oct. 16 – "Give cancer the boot" (Wear jeans and boots.)

Oct. 23 – "Leave cancer in the past" (Decade day—wear your favorite 20s, 50s, 60s, 70s, 80s or 90s attire.)

Oct. 30 – "PINK OUT" (Wear pink head-to-toe and tennis shoes.)

In the Workplace: Employees Get Flu Shots

Eighty-three HCDE employees took advantage of onsite flu shots made available through HEB Pharmacy this week at both Irvington and NPO locations. The event sponsored by Human Resources provided free shots for employees with insurance. Requiring appointments allowed for social distancing.



SYSTEMIC

ACHIEVEMENT...*WITH PURPOSEFUL INTENT*

This week, the following Board expectations were met:

**Superintendent Objective B:
Organizational Morale**

- Models and supports responsible risk-taking so that all employees can be innovative and try new ideas.
- Creates an open and positive environment for sharing resources and exchanging ideas to improve organization climate.
- Celebrate 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**

- Keeps the Board informed on significant issues as they arise, using agreed-upon criteria and procedures for information dissemination.

Our HCDE staff never ceases to amaze me, and this week the story about our “tele-therapists” at School-Based Therapy Services proves my point. When times required all-virtual therapy assistance at schools, therapists employed their coaching model with parents as they already do with teachers. The result has been phenomenal as their division model continues to grow.

I also bring you a report on our See the Impact campaign as we continue to maintain visibility with the public.



Swinging on the zipline at ABS West

Choice Partners uses new resources to communicate with new vendors and potential customers through participating in virtual trade shows and exhibits as the pandemic provides new opportunities for virtually creativity in communicating with our colleagues and customers.

Through internal activities such as acknowledging Breast Cancer Awareness Month with support activities and supplying employees with onsite flu shots, we are creating a positive workplace climate which works towards improving organization morale.

Students at ABS are making great gains in academic and behavioral improvement and we already see many students meeting our goals of returning to their home district/school. As a result, our staff is accomplishing the mission, goals and objectives of the Department.

Finally, as I toured schools this week I must compliment the teamwork I see as we continue to work toward common goals.

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)

Oct. 6
Examining Craft Moves
in Grades 6-8 (Text Sets)
9 a.m. - 11 a.m.

Oct. 6
Master It! Improving
Problem-Solving (3-5)
Part 1
4 p.m. - 6:30 p.m.

Oct. 9
School Finance Council
9 a.m. - 1 p.m.

