

THE CONNECTOR

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

WEEK OF OCTOBER 19, 2020

VOLUME 6 ISSUE 7

MOVING AHEAD TOGETHER

TOP STORIES

CASE for Kids Hosts Virtual Afterschool Provider Fair p.2



Center for Safe and Secure Schools Wraps Up Safety Forum 2020 p.3



Head Start is now Back-to-School In Person p.4



Of Note...



Something that typically surprises people about me is that I like to work with my hands and build things. I spend many weekend afternoons in my garage workshop crafting specialty items like a custom wood desktop and wood block wall art.

This fascination with building is one reason I am very excited for our capital improvement plan. This week we interviewed architecture firms for the Adult Education, Highpoint School and Irvington renovation projects. It was interesting to listen to the different approaches of each firm and hear them talk about the process of crafting a plan for outstanding facilities. I am confident that whichever firm we choose, when the plan is complete, HCDE facilities will be a true reflection of the high-quality educational services we provide. We will be bringing a contract for the final architecture firm to you for approval at the special called board meeting next week.

There is no doubt that HCDE's services are extremely diverse. This week alone we are highlighting a virtual School Safety Summit hosted by the Center for Safe and Secure Schools, student return to Head Start campuses and CASE's virtual afterschool provider orientation. The range of activities and services provided by HCDE divisions showcase the varied ways we impact our community every day. I'm really excited to see how we expand our support for the community and public education this school year.

I started the week with Executive Leadership Team on Monday followed by several internal meetings. On Tuesday I met with several members of the Leadership Team. Starting this month, I began meeting one-on-one with all Leadership Team members to open the lines of communication and allow them to get to know me better in a personal and professional way. These meetings, which will continue on a monthly basis, have been very enlightening for me so far. I am hoping that my schedule will allow me to continue these meetings through the end of the year.

On Wednesday we held our regular board meeting and I had a few more internal meetings. Thank you for a very productive board meeting and your feedback on several items.

On Thursday we interviewed architecture firms and today I had more standing meetings with staff at my NPO office. All in all, a pretty routine but very productive week!

Have a relaxing weekend.

PROGRAM

CONNECTIONS

Virtual Provider Fair Set for Oct. 29 and 30 Connects Afterschool Community Service Providers, Programs

The Virtual Provider Fair set for Oct. 29 and 30 from 10-11:30 a.m. will allow the afterschool community to network with 40 service providers or vendors offering activities ranging from character development to theatre to academic activities, sports and more.

[View the flyer.](#)

The free, annual event is provided by the Center for Afterschool, Summer and Enrichment for Kids, or CASE for Kids. The event pairs vendors (service providers) with afterschool programs.

“The fair is an opportunity for vendors to speak directly to the afterschool community,” CASE for Kids Director Dr. Lisa Thompson-Caruthers said. “Each provider has a few minutes to present and share their services through PowerPoint or video and interact with attendees through Zoom.”

The pandemic has provided opportunities for vendors to expand their services to virtual platforms, in addition to traditional in-person.

“Afterschool programs have many different needs, and this event helps match providers with various afterschool programs,” said Thompson-Caruthers. “It’s also a networking opportunity for both vendors and attendees.”

Samples of vendors attending the virtual event include Mad Science of Houston, Science of Sports, Ensemble Theatre and many more.

The event has been split into two days to allow vendors and programs ample time to connect. Register for [Oct. 29 Day 1](#) and [Oct. 30 Day 2](#) for the optimal opportunity to visit with all vendors. Questions may be sent to jchavez@hcde-texas.org.



PROGRAM

CONNECTIONS

Virtual School Safety Forum 2020 Benefits from Local, National Interest from Educators, Law Enforcement

As the School Safety Forum went virtual for a first time this Oct. 16, more than 250 participants throughout the nation took advantage of the opportunity to network, collaborate and gain new information about safety initiatives for public schools.



Sessions targeted topics ranging from racial equity to human trafficking to mental health to cybersecurity. The significance of “overcommunicating” during COVID-19 was a repeated topic of four school district police chiefs who served as panelists in a “Chat with the Chiefs” preconference session Oct. 15. Messages from the chiefs also emphasized nurturing relationships with students, staff and families and proactive steps to address community-police relations.

“Students don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care,” said Chief David Kimberly of Klein Independent School District.

The summit was hosted by Harris County Department of Education’s Center for Safe and Secure Schools and the Harris County Sheriff’s Office. Superintendent James Colbert Jr. gave a Texas welcome to virtual attendees, many of whom logged in from out-of-state locations like New Jersey and Virginia.

Colbert touched on cultural responsiveness as schools are back in session this fall.

“Race relations in our country went dormant,” he said. “We need to address this—formalize strategies through honesty for improvements in order to meet student needs.”

Popular keynote Michael Dorn of Safe Havens International discussed emerging school safety concerns which include cyber threats, increased calls for accountability and conflicting perspectives relating to the role of police in schools and restorative practices. Dorn also presented real-life school violence scenarios to help attendees brainstorm possible outcomes and solutions.

Afternoon keynote Carly Posey shared her story as the mother to two children who attended Sandy Hooks Elementary School when an armed intruder made his way into her son’s first-grade classroom, killing his teacher and a classmate. As the shooter stopped to reload, her son and with nine other students, escaped. Her daughter hid in a closet in the school art room. During the mass shooting in 2012, 28 died and two were injured. Posey is now a national advocate for school safety and travels the country to address preparedness.

Co-host Harris County Sheriff’s Office supplied the session “Online Predators” with Gary Spurger, high tech crimes manager. Spurger gave an overview of online safety for students, focusing on protecting them from predators.

Unbound Houston’s Christa Mayfield presented startling statistics on sex trafficking in teenagers in Texas as 79,000 students are victims of trafficking each year. Social media opens additional avenues for human trafficking, Mayfield explained. Large cities like Houston allow for trafficking opportunists because of our large population and ease of mobility because of multiple interstates.

For more information about upcoming workshops offered by the CSSS, go to www.hcde-texas.org/safe-and-secure-schools.



PROGRAM

CONNECTIONS

HCDE Head Start Back-to-School In Person with Small Classroom Sizes, Social Distancing, CDC Protocols

A detailed orientation for back-to-school made the first day of in-person school smooth-sailing for HCDE Head Start Compton Center Manager Merevonna Daniel, her staff, students and their families.

“We only had one crier,” Daniel said.

Children at all the HCDE Head Start and Early Head Start centers and childcare partnerships are now attending school in person. All centers are following CDC protocols.

Students and staff are met at the door and checked for temperatures. An emailed questionnaire checks for COVID-19 symptoms prior to class. Personal protection equipment such as masks, sanitizer and gloves are used. Classrooms are split in two with a divider with two teachers to accommodate small class sizes.

“We are also practicing social distancing in the classroom,” Daniel said.

HCDE Head Start staff were working with their students and parents virtually beginning in September. Parents chose one of three daily time slots for virtual classes with their children. Families picked up student work packets along with drive-by meals for their children.

“The process for back-to-school in person was easier because



Merevonna Daniel
Head Start Compton Center
Manager

View video: <https://youtu.be/wBw6HAlvHRc>

they were able to see us online prior to coming into the building,” Daniel said.

Staff at Channelview Head Start provided a “soft launch” last week as several classrooms of students returned and practiced the new safety protocols. The experience provided valuable feedback as staff worked out minor kinks.

Daniel said most Compton Head Start Center parents and children are excited about returning, especially after receiving information about detailed safety procedures being used.

“We look forward to an outstanding school year and we hope everyone remains safe,” said Daniel.

Head Start is now recruiting students for enrollment. Go to www.hcde-texas.org/head-start to learn more.



BOARD BRIEFS

CASE for Kids Increases Services, Numbers of Students Served Summer 2020

The pandemic didn't slow demand for afterschool services this summer; it fueled the need as in-person childcare center sites and elementary schools looked to Center for Afterschool, Summer and Enrichment for Kids (CASE for Kids) to provide activities.

Typically, numbers of students served with afterschool enrichment services is approximately 6,000 July through August, but COVID-19 increased the need for services as CASE for Kids, recorded 8,000 students served.

Summer Learning Kits are activity packages supplied to organizations like the YMCA, Baker Ripley, Boys' and Girls' Club and Precinct 1 targeted toward



learners in grades K-5. Project 40 is an additional initiative that packaged learning kits for approximately 40 daycare centers and community centers in Harris County.

To further serve the community, CASE for Kids delivered \$13,000 in funding for direct service for afterschool to YMCA of Greater Houston and \$8,000 for Boys' and Girls' Club Houston.



"Helping families with safe summer care for their children and enriching activities was critical to our goals as families struggled with childcare issues and basic needs caused by unemployment and teleworking," CASE for Kids Director Dr. Lisa Thompson-Caruthers said. "Filling these gaps became our focus, and we were proud to help these Houston-area families."

IN THE NEWS

Principals Month Video Series Celebrates HCDE's 4 Principals of Special Schools

As communities across the nation take time out to "thank a principal" this month, HCDE produced a video as testament to our four principals' hard work, commitment and care they put into their jobs.

Shorter videos were produced and shared on social media throughout the month which celebrated each of the four principals.

View video on YouTube:
<https://youtu.be/tZBiYEgpxVk>



SYSTEMIC

ACHIEVEMENT... WITH PURPOSEFUL INTENT

This week, the following Board expectations were met:

**Superintendent Objective B:
Organization Morale**

- Creates an open and positive environment for sharing resources and exchanging ideas to improve organizational climate.
- Celebrates accomplishments and acknowledges excellence.

**Superintendent Objective C:
Personnel Management**

- Encourages, oversees and participates in staff recognition activities.

**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**

- Establishes effective mechanisms for communication to and from staff in instructional evaluation, planning and decision making.

As Head Start students and staff return to school this week in person, we worked and continue to collaborate with local ISDs to ensure we initiated and implemented the best possible safety protocols and decisions about their return. Ultimately, we must always have the health of our students and families in mind.

Our first large virtual event this year was held last Friday with our School Safety Summit. We report this week on its



success as we worked with communities across the county, state and nation to discuss school safety issues in 2020-2021. School superintendents sent representatives from their police departments, classrooms and administration buildings to hear from national safety experts on topics ranging from racial justice to the pandemic to human trafficking to school violence. The training was made available to many of our own staff as we fulfill our commitment to their professional growth. The feedback has been very positive, and we expect this summit to return next year, be it virtual or in person.



Lastly, we take time out to honor our principals this week as we continue to build a culture among staff which strives to achieve excellence and recognizes those who go above and beyond each day.

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

UPCOMING EVENTS:

WORKSHOPS
(Online only)

Oct. 27
Teaching for Understanding: Multiplication and Division of Rational Numbers with Pattern Blocks (6-7)
4 p.m. -6:30 p.m.

Oct. 28
Dual Language: The Art of Building Proficiency in Both Languages
9 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

