



# the CONNECTOR



**CESILIA PEREIRA'S IMPACT FOR OTHERS MAKES HER A DESERVING  
EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH P.3**



**HCDE CLEARS 90,000 LBS OF OUTDATED TECHNOLOGY  
THROUGH IT SERVICES' C.L.E.A.R. INITIATIVE P.7**



**ABS STUDENTS BRING JOY TO AREA HEALTH CARE CENTER  
WITH 'BAGS OF THANKFULNESS' P.9**

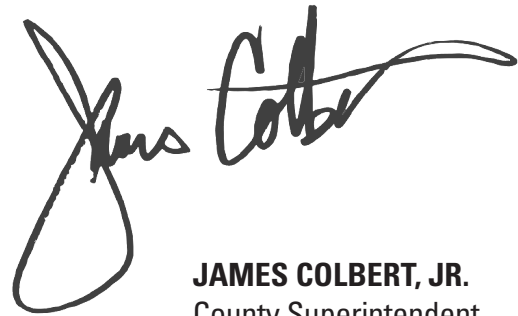
# of Note

**ONE OF THE GREATEST THINGS** about Head Start is the comprehensive nature of the program. Our campuses not only serve students with academics and other services; they support whole families and even communities with valuable resources.

This week we celebrate the Head Start Family Services Coordinator as our December Employee of the Month. Cesilia Pereira does more than engage with families: she helps them navigate community resources that support the child's educational path including medical and dental services and clothing needs. It was gratifying to learn that Pereira sees the value of Head Start for families and the community, especially when she thinks about how these services could have helped her mom when she was growing up. It is always fulfilling to see how HCDE services touch the heart of our employees and I am so proud of how we engage with parents and families to make our communities even better.

I started the week fulfilling my duties on the UIL State Executive Committee. On Tuesday, I met with ELT and the Leadership Team before meeting with staff to discuss ongoing projects. On Wednesday, I participated in the Education Foundation of Harris County board meeting followed by a meeting with the New Waverly ISD superintendent about a potential partnership. On Thursday, I met with staff to discuss the needs of school districts in relation to our capacity for growth and the efficiency of our programs. Today, I met with staff at my NPO office and I ended the week at Montgomery ISD to meet with the superintendent.

Enjoy the beautiful cool weather this weekend.



**JAMES COLBERT, JR.**  
County Superintendent



# Employee Spotlight



*Cesilia Pereira has excelled as a family services coordinator for Harris County Department of Education's Head Start division. The former family services provider embraces the mentor role for the team's young professionals and families they serve.*

## HEART FOR OTHERS: DECEMBER EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH WORKS FOR OTHERS, IMPACTS ALL

**IT'S NOT UNUSUAL** for those who work with students and young learners on a daily basis to miss those interactions as they move up and into administrative and managerial roles.

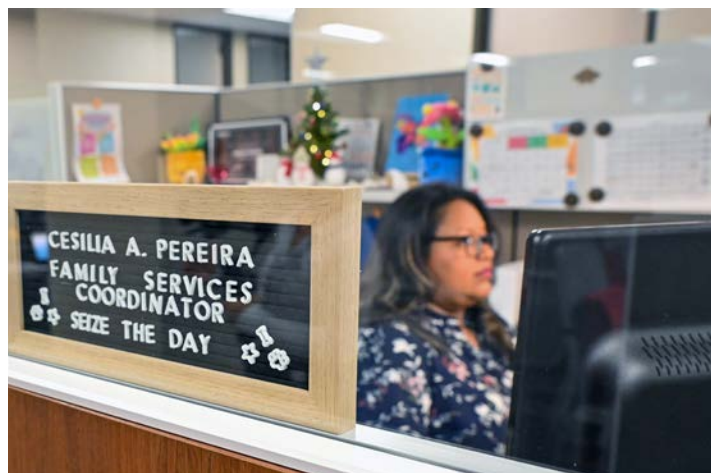
That's where Cesilia Pereira found herself when she transitioned from a family services provider within Harris County Department of Education's Head Start division to family services coordinator.

Based at HCDE's administrative building at Irvington, Pereira was no longer at a Head Start campus directly working with some of Harris County's youngest students and their families.

"It was hard, and I still miss it," said Pereira, a coordinator for more than 10 years after serving nearly five as a family services provider. "Whenever I am at a campus, I may jump to answer the phone or I try to get in there because I do enjoy working with the families."

While her role changed, her heart for serving others didn't, making Pereira an invaluable team member for Head Start. Her passion for seeing beyond paperwork and meeting requirements with every individual she encounters is what separates Pereira, and why she was selected as HCDE's December Employee of the Month.

Pereira looks at the young child as a whole person and not just a body in the seat within Head Start, said Health and Family Services Manager Jasmine Imo, who nominated



*Once having dreams of being a librarian, Cesilia Pereira joined Harris County Department of Education in 2008 and has been in her current position for more than 10 years.*

Pereira for the recognition.

"You can tell she really has a heart to help families in Harris County, to make sure their children's needs are met as well as the families' needs are met," Imo said. "It's not just checkmarks, papers, files and boxes with Cesilia. She goes a step further, like if your child doesn't have a physical or dental record, she'll ask, 'Why not? Do you need health insurance? Has your child been feeling okay?'"

"She goes beyond the paperwork and beyond what Head Start requires

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 4**

# Employee Spotlight

from us. She really wants to make sure children's health and well-being are taken care of."

Part of Pereira's affinity to Head Start and its impact comes from her background. Originally from Los Angeles, Pereira was raised by a single mother who didn't have the opportunity to learn to read and write.

Resources were limited in their community.

"Had a Head Start been in our lives, it would have helped my mom so much," Pereira said. "I feel that my mom would have had those resources to know I could learn to write here, learn to read and get some of those basic skills."

What Pereira's mom, Vicenta, did teach her was the importance and value of hard work. She pushed her to be better, building resilience and overcoming hardships.

As Pereira grew, her accomplishments were just as much her mother's. She credits her mother for being able to send her to college. When Pereira graduated, she said it was because of her mom.

Pereira's path to education started as a volunteer while in high school at the Los Angeles Central Library. She saw her future as a librarian, but needed more hours when applying for an entry-level position. That led her to volunteer for an afterschool program at a neighborhood elementary school.

Upon completion, Pereira asked for a letter of recommendation. The site coordinator countered with an open position and Pereira accepted, working as a program worker and then supervisor for six years.

She enjoyed the program but realized a gap existed between the school and its programming and family engagement. So, Pereira moved over to social work to better assist families and their needs.

"Head Start bridges both," she said. "We get to work with the families, we get to work with the children but we also get to build skills for the families as well – skills to become self-reliant and build a network within their community."



*Cesilia Pereira, left, helped Jasmine Imo smoothly transition to the Head Start division when she came on as Health and Family Services Manager.*



*While considered a "mother figure" with her coworkers, Cesilia Pereira, left, is a proud mother to 11-year-old Krisna.*

"My values, both professionally and personally, align working for Head Start."

Pereira puts the same passion and energy in raising her 11-year-old daughter, Krisna. As she moves from one interest and hobby to another, Pereira is there cheering her on. From soccer and tap dancing to equine therapy.

And in her role as a family services coordinator, Pereira is a "mother" figure for the family services providers who directly interact with families.

She even catches herself – and has to remind herself that the providers are professionals, albeit young professionals, in this field.

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# Employee Spotlight



*Cesilia Pereira, right, joins some of her Head Start teammates at Convocation.*

**“YOU CAN TELL SHE REALLY HAS A HEART TO HELP FAMILIES IN HARRIS COUNTY, TO MAKE SURE THEIR CHILDREN’S NEEDS ARE MET AS WELL AS THE FAMILIES’ NEEDS ARE MET.”**

“I do feel a sense of accomplishment, like their win is my win,” Pereira said. “Sometimes I can tell that I might be pushing them too much and I need to slow down. Then you’re like, ‘Let’s build this, let’s do this, let’s do that.’ It feels good to know that you are impacting the community.”

When Imo joined Head Start four years ago, Pereira helped make her transition smooth.

Four years later, Pereira is still just as valuable to all those she encounters, both professionally and personally.

“Cesilia deserves to be employee of the month at Harris County Department of Education,” Imo said. “She’s a mom of a sweet girl and again, she comes to work daily, gets the job done, goes over and beyond and doesn’t boast at all. You know people that just do amazing stuff and it’s not for a job. It’s for people and they don’t get acknowledged but they just keep doing amazing work. That’s Cesilia.” ★



*Cesilia Pereira, left, a family services coordinator for HCDE’s Head Start division, is highly regarded for the impact she has on everyone she meets.*



TO SEE MORE  
OF THE STORY:

**VIEW OUR VIDEO**

# Board Briefs



## LEARNING WALKS PROVIDE CONTINUOUS DEVELOPMENT FOR TEACHERS AND QUALITY EDUCATION FOR STUDENTS

**PART OF ENSURING** students receive a quality education means providing teachers with adequate professional development. However, that investment means nothing if educators are not putting those skills to use.

This year, Special Schools division leaders launched “Learning Walks,” a quarterly initiative which inspects the classroom management skills, educational content and student participation they expect at Harris County Department of Education campuses. The program was inspired by #TeamHCDE’s desire to receive continued professional development outside of the hours mandated by the state.

Campus principals escort Dr. Charles Ned, division senior director; Dr. Margaret Patton, curriculum and compliance services director; Michelle Rayson, compliance and technical

support officer; and instructional coaches Shauntee Johnson and Courtney Atkinson through each classroom. They analyze how teachers are implementing new teaching strategies, if the lesson plans align with the content taught during the visit, how students are interacting throughout class and the accuracy of their work. The group then meets with principals to discuss their observations and provide constructive feedback for each teacher, holding them accountable and creating a safe environment for continued learning.

Learning Walks ensure professional development doesn’t stop in the training room and continues into the classroom. It helps division leaders monitor educators and students’ progress throughout the academic year and is a powerful way to keep HCDE schools moving forward. 🌟



# Board Briefs

## TECHNOLOGY SERVICES CLEARS 90,000 POUNDS OF E-WASTE

**#TEAMHCDE** is rounding out 2025 by cleaning out the buildings. Information and Technology Services recently launched the C.L.E.A.R. (Centralized Lifecycle & Equipment Asset Renewal) Initiative, which tasked employees with identifying and disposing of outdated and unused electronic equipment.

Nearly 90,000 pounds of outdated technology were collected, enough to fill three semi-trucks, from divisions across the Department. The initiative paves the way for replacing staff devices and launching a centralized asset management system that will improve security, reduce downtime and enable better long-term planning.

The initiative underscores HCDE's dedication to sustainable practices and responsible recycling. With cleaner workplaces and new technology on the way, we're stepping into the new year ready to support students and families more efficiently than ever. ★



## CSSS SPECIALISTS PRESENT ON 'CALM IN CHAOS' AT NATIONAL MENTAL HEALTH CONFERENCE



**DR. TIFFANY CHANEY AND MICHELLE CALHOUN**, climate and culture specialists at Harris County Department of Education's (HCDE) Center for Safe and Secure Schools, presented this week at the 30th Annual Advancing School Mental Health Conference. Their session, "Calm in Chaos," focused on crisis response and behavioral threat assessment.

Held Dec. 1-4 in Orlando, Fla. by the National Center for School Mental Health, the conference unites educators, counselors, nurses, social workers, psychologists, physicians, mental health leaders, policymakers, practitioners, researchers, family members, advocates and other partners in the school mental health field to share the latest research and best practices. It emphasizes a shared family-school-community agenda to promote mental health and well-being, and provides skills related to school mental health practice, research, training and policy. ★



The Center for  
**Safe and  
Secure  
Schools**

# Board Briefs

## CIVIC ENGAGEMENT TEAM EXPLORES NEW BOOK OPTIONS FOR HEAD START AT LOCAL STORE



**TO BEST SERVE** Head Start students and connect young learners to civics and voting, Harris County Department of Education's Civic Engagement Team recently visited Blue Willow Book Store to find books for the upcoming grant year. Store employees

helped Civic Engagement Coordinator Avery Spranger, Specialist Arnaldo Sandoval-Guerrero and Intern Wilmer Guevara pull civics and elections books for consideration for the team's Head Start engagement with the young students. ★

## IN THE NEWS

## CASE FOR KIDS PARTNERSHIP GRANT WITH PASADENA ISD MAKES HEADLINES

**CITIZEN PORTAL AI**, which creates articles from public meetings with summaries designed to highlight government transparency through artificial intelligence, recently published an article from the Pasadena Independent School District regular board meeting on Nov. 18 which included an approved action of a Harris County Department of Education grant. Among actions approved was an HCDE Center for Afterschool, Summer and Enrichment for Kids partnership grant award of \$30,000 for Frasier Elementary School. The article also includes a link to the meeting. ★

**CITIZEN  
PORTAL**



TO SEE MORE  
OF THE STORY: [VIEW THE ARTICLE](#)

# In the Community



## ABS WEST STUDENTS GO SHOPPING, DELIVER 'BAGS OF THANKFULNESS' TO AREA HEALTH CARE CENTER

**IN HELPING SERVE** the Adult Transition Program, Academic and Behavior School (ABS) West staff recently took program participants on field trips to help them learn more about independent living and serving others. The program is built on the belief that with the right support, students with disabilities can lead independent, fulfilling lives.

On Nov. 20, staff took adult transition students on a shopping trip to a neighboring H-E-B. Students worked on reading nutrition labels and comparing similar products as they selected items.

The next day, program participants partnered with ABS West elementary students to visit and distribute "small bags of thankfulness" to patients and staff at Sugar Land Health Care Center. ★



## FORTIS ACADEMY STUDENTS SPEAK THEIR TRUTH IN POETRY READINGS



**TWO FORTIS ACADEMY STUDENTS** are embracing the opportunity to put their voices on display in front of a live audience. Jerry Garza and Crystal Leal were invited to Casa Ramirez on Dec. 4 to read poems they wrote through the campus' recent partnership with Nuestra Palabra: Latino Writers Having Their Say. Through the collaboration, students use writing to reflect on their journey to sobriety and perform their work publicly.

Garza's piece explores the weight of emotional exhaustion and loneliness while still striving to move forward. It illustrates the struggle of carrying pain in silence, masking emotions in public and fighting an internal battle that no one else notices, while highlighting one's determination and resilience in searching for purpose and wholeness. Leal's poem tells the story of someone whose childhood was quiet but filled with trauma, causing unspoken pain that followed into adulthood. Despite seeking comfort in harmful substances, she describes a journey of survival, healing and finding the strength to reclaim themselves.

Fortis Academy staff and HCDE's Director of Construction Joe Carreon, who serves as a mentor to those participating in the Nuestra Palabra program, attended the event to support the students. Through poetry, students are not only healing but also reclaiming their voice and power as they learn to speak their truth, connect with others and recognize their own resilience, one verse at a time. ★



FORTIS ACADEMY

# WELCOME TO HCDE

Please join us in welcoming HCDE's new hires for November! Eighteen new faces have joined our Adult Education, CASE for Kids, Center for Educator Success, Facilities, Head Start, Information Technology Services and Special Schools divisions.



**Ndeye Ndiaye Samba**  
*Sub Teacher*  
ABS West



**Christina Cao**  
*Career Navigator*  
Adult Education



**Anteniece Hodges**  
*Career Navigator*  
Adult Education



**Adriana Martinez**  
*Aide*  
Adult Education



**Leon Shirley**  
*Afterschool Program Specialist*  
CASE for Kids



**Bianey Bustamante**  
*Administrative Assistant to Director*  
Center for Educator Success



**Osmar Maury Ortiz**  
*Utility Craftsman II*  
Facilities



**Lisa Ash**  
*Non-Instructional Aide*  
Head Start



**Kendra Bates**  
*Non-Instructional Aide*  
Head Start



**Marva Bryant**  
*Assistant Campus Manager*  
Head Start



**Sinthia Castillo**  
*Non-Instructional Aide*  
Head Start



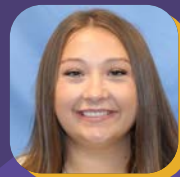
**Lisa Johnson**  
*Campus Manager*  
Head Start



**Yanett Martinez**  
*Teacher*  
Head Start



**Ella Mason**  
*Teaching Assistant*  
Head Start



**Hannah Nichols**  
*Non-Instructional Aide*  
Head Start



**Dayzjah Pennywell**  
*Teaching Assistant*  
Head Start



**Anjelica Wright**  
*Assistant Campus Manager*  
Head Start



**Anthony Ortega-Delatorre**  
*Help Desk Field Technician*  
Information Technology Services

# SYSTEMIC ACHIEVEMENT: WITH PURPOSEFUL INTENT THIS WEEK, THE FOLLOWING BOARD EXPECTATIONS WERE MET:

## SUPERINTENDENT OBJECTIVE F: ORGANIZATIONAL IMPROVEMENT

- Oversees procedures to ensure effective and timely compliance with all legal obligations, reporting requirements, and policies.



*Cesilia Pereira has excelled as a family services coordinator for Harris County Department of Education's Head Start division, mentoring family services providers and serving students and their families.*

**FOR MANY EDUCATORS**, including myself, there's something to be said about daily interactions with students and young learners. Even as teachers grow in their careers and move into administration and managerial roles, I believe we should all regularly spend time on our campuses and early learning centers to remember our "why" and see the impact we have on young learners and their families. That's the case with December's Employee of the Month, Cesilia Pereira. She spent five years as a family services provider, directly working with Head Start students and families, before becoming a coordinator in 2015. Pereira still visits campuses and works with families, but as a coordinator she's able to coach and support our providers and help them grow professionally. Pereira's work ethic and passion for serving others was instilled in her by her mother and her experience working with an afterschool program. She saw a gap between school programs and family engagement, and joined Head Start, which bridges both and allows her best serve families. Congratulations to Pereira and I look forward to seeing her continued impact at HCDE.

The end of the year is always a time to tie up loose ends and prepare for a fresh start. One initiative our Information and Technology Services division successfully conducted last month was identifying and disposing nearly 90,000 pounds of outdated

and unused electronic equipment. Ensuring these effective and timely procedures paves the way for new technology and aligns with HCDE's obligations and policies to Harris County taxpayers and stakeholders. With enough outdated equipment to fill three semi-trucks, HCDE is implementing a more centralized asset management system that improves security and transparency, and sets the stage for a better long-term vision. Thank you again to IT Services for taking care of our team members.

Finally, the holiday season is a time for serving and giving and I'm proud to say HCDE is already doing its part in serving Harris County families from every corner of our organization. From ELT members down to Head Start staff across our dozen centers, staff members are looking out for others and those in need. Even our students are stepping up. Participants in our Academic and Behavior School West Adult Transition Program and their elementary classmates recently distributed "bags of thankfulness" to patients and staff at Sugar Land Health Care Center. These small tokens go a long way and show how HCDE supports others.

By assessing risks and determining appropriate actions using sound business judgement to provide programs and resources that support educational opportunities, I am meeting the expectation of developing and implementing a clear vision for the Department. ★



## HCDE BOARD

**Board President**  
Amy Hinojosa

**1st Vice President**  
Richard Cantu

**2nd Vice President**  
Dr. Erica Davis

**Board Members**  
Eric Dick  
Andrea Duhon  
Silky Joshi-Malik  
Dr. John McGee

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**December 10**  
Holiday Reception – NPO  
Bates Car Giveaway –  
Baytown

**December 11**  
Bates Car Giveaway –  
Channelview

**December 17**  
Holiday Reception –  
Irvington  
Board Meeting

**December 23 - January 1**  
Winter Break (HCDE Closed)

**January 19**  
Martin Luther King Jr. Day  
(HCDE Closed)

**January 21**  
School Board Recognition  
Reception  
Board Meeting