

# the **CONNECTOR**

A Weekly Newsletter from the Superintendent of Harris County Department of Education



## ADULT EDUCATION STUDENT'S JOURNEY TO CAREER COMES FULL CIRCLE AT DIVISION KICKOFF EVENT **P.3**



IPASS COMBINES WORLD CUP THEMING, SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIPS THROUGH COLLABORATION AT 5TH ANNUAL EVENT **P.4**



IN FIRST YEAR, HCDE RAISES \$67,094 FOR EDUCATION FOUNDATION OF HARRIS COUNTY THROUGH BIRDIES FOR CHARITY **P.8**

# of Note

**THERE ARE MANY MOMENTS** in education when we see the impact of our work, but few are as powerful as when a student's journey comes full circle. This week, HCDE's Adult Education division prepared to celebrate those moments at Career Kickoff Day on June 13, where students are not only recognized for completing programs, but for the new paths they have created for themselves and their families.

Our Adult Education program is about more than earning a certification or finishing a class. It's about opening doors to new opportunities and helping people pursue better lives for themselves and their families. Students enter our programs with different challenges in their lives, often balancing work, family and unexpected circumstances. What they gain is more than a credential. They leave with confidence, stability and a clearer path forward.

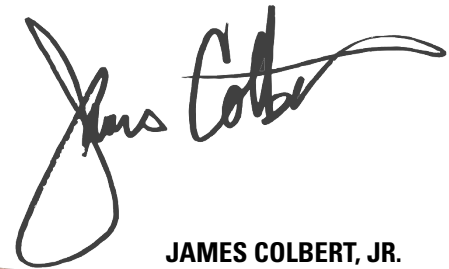
Career Kickoff Day recognizes not only the accomplishments of our students, but also the partnerships with employers who invest in our mission and help connect training to meaningful careers. These collaborations ensure that what students gain in the classroom translates directly into opportunities in the workforce, strengthening both individuals and our community.

At the same time, our work begins long before students reach adulthood. This week, we also welcomed families to our newest Early Head Start program extension at our Compton location. By serving children as young as six months old, we help build the foundation for lifelong learning, support families during critical early development years and ensure children have a solid educational foundation.

From early learning to career training, HCDE connects people to opportunities at every stage of life.

On Monday, I met with ELT to received updates and discuss ongoing initiative and projects. On Tuesday, I had a breakfast meeting with Trustee Dr. McGee. On Wednesday, I traveled to San Antonio for the Texas Association of School Boards (TASB) Summer Leadership Institute (SLI) alongside Board President Cantu and Trustees Duhon and Hinojosa, where we are joining colleagues from across the state to share ideas and explore strategies that strengthen how we serve students and communities. On Friday, we will connect as a team during dinner, and TASB SLI will conclude on Saturday.

Thank you for the care and support you give to our students, families and partners. Have a great weekend.



**JAMES COLBERT, JR.**  
County Superintendent



# Program Connections

## THE RIGHT TIME: QARDRIYYAH DAVIS FINDS HER PATH THROUGH ADULT EDUCATION'S CERTIFICATION PROGRAMS



*Qardriyyah Davis completed the Adult Education certified nursing assistant program and currently works at Tomball Rehab & Nursing.*

**IT'S BEEN MONTHS SINCE** Qardriyyah Davis set foot inside Harris County Department of Education's (HCDE) Adult Education Learning Center.

She'll join more than 50 Adult Education alumni on June 13 for the Division's Career Kickoff Day, which celebrates students who recently completed Adult Education workforce training, High School Equivalency (HSE, formerly known as GED) or English as a Second Language (ESL) courses. The ceremony not only honors students completing coursework and earning certifications, but also some of Harris County's top businesses for investing in HCDE's mission to change lives.

That's the case for Davis, despite her just turning 22 years old. After completing the certified nursing assistant (CNA) program, she landed a job at Tomball Rehab & Nursing in September.

With the goal of applying to nursing school by the end of this year, Davis followed her CNA certification with another as a medication aide and is currently in a medical assistant program.

"I'm very thankful for Harris County Department of Education," she said. "Without this organization giving me the opportunity to take the CNA program, none of the other stuff would have even been a possibility."

After graduating high school in 2022, Davis spent a year in community college studying architectural engineering. She changed gears and spent a few years working fulltime until her hours were cut to the point where she couldn't cover her expenses.

Davis decided she needed a trade.

She started a CNA program at Houston City College last year but fell ill within weeks after starting. A trip to the emergency room uncovered ovarian cysts. More appointments conflicted with her studies, so despite having to step away, Davis knew she was in the right place.

"It just wasn't the right time," she said.

Over time her health improved and by the summer, she joined the CNA program at HCDE after hearing positive experiences. Flexibility made the difference – Davis could still work while attending classes in the evening. Davis excelled, was her class valedictorian and quickly found her job in Tomball.

"My job is very fulfilling," Davis said. "I work with a lot of different people, and I like being able to come to work and put a smile on my patients' faces, help them when they're having a hard day and just be there for them."

This week's Career Workforce Day is another step in her journey. Davis has stayed in contact with a few classmates through social media, but she said she's excited to see everyone again.

"This is a big accomplishment for a lot of people," Davis said. "I've been thinking about the moment where everybody could be celebrated, and this is that moment." ✨



*Qardriyyah Davis poses in front of the "Goddess of Grit" mural at Harris County Department of Education's Adult Education Learning Center.*

# Board Briefs



## BUSINESS OWNERS, ENTREPRENEURS AND VENDORS SCORE VALUABLE INSIGHT AT 5TH ANNUAL IPASS EVENT

**WITH FLAGS REPRESENTING NATIONS** around the world and soccer-inspired decorations, the Irvington Conference Center was filled with the spirit of teamwork as the fifth Internal Procurement Annual Supplier Showcase (iPASS) proved successful partnerships, much like championship teams, are built through collaboration. Inspired by the global soccer tournament coming to Houston this summer, HCDE's Business Services and Procurement teams transformed iPASS into a celebration of connection and community engagement, creating a backdrop for small business owners, entrepreneurs and vendors seeking opportunities to grow their impact throughout Harris County.

Industry experts led informative sessions on navigating procurement opportunities funded through local and federal dollars, while business owners gained insight into topics such as grant writing, public-private partnerships and strategies for sustainable growth. Director of Procurement Dr. Edna Johnson highlighted how vendors can leverage HCDE's partnerships with local school districts and charter schools to streamline processes and expand their reach and success in the public sector.

A new addition to this year's showcase further strengthened those connections through a panel discussion featuring representatives from several HCDE divisions, including the Center for Safe and Secure Schools, Records Management and

the Education Foundation of Harris County. Panelists provided an inside look at the programs and services their divisions offer while discussing opportunities for businesses to collaborate on projects that benefit the community.

Additional speakers from the U.S. Small Business Administration, Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts, Stellar Bank and more shared tools and resources designed to help attendees thrive. By combining practical procurement guidance with meaningful networking opportunities, iPASS continued its mission of connecting vendors with the knowledge, relationships and resources to strengthen both their business and the communities they serve. 🌟



[▶ TO SEE MORE OF THE STORY: VIEW OUR VIDEO](#)



## ASPIRING EDUCATORS GET UNDERWAY WITH CENTER FOR EDUCATOR SUCCESS' SUMMER INTENSIVE

**SEVENTEEN** alternative teacher certification candidates began their journey toward leading their own classrooms, as the three-week Summer Intensive cohort got underway June 8. Orchestrated by the Center for Educator Success (CES) at the Adult Education Learning Center, the initiative includes daily lessons and a full slate of instruction to prepare district educators prepare for content exams, which candidates must pass before

continuing in their respective certification programs. Themed, "Heroes in the Classrooms," intensive topics include instructional planning and delivery, content methodology and classroom management. On the final day (June 25), cohort members will showcase their newfound knowledge and skills in a comprehensive presentation to colleagues, CES staff and school district representatives. ★

## HARRIS COUNTY TEEN ARTISTS RECOGNIZED AT NATIONAL SCHOLASTIC ART & WRITING AWARDS CEREMONY

**MORE THAN 30 STUDENTS** across the greater Houston area (seven area school districts, five private schools and four private art and writing schools) were honored at the prestigious Carnegie Hall in New York City on June 10 as part of the 103rd Scholastic Art & Writing Awards National Ceremony. These young creative artists joined more than 2,500 national medalists from across the country, a notable achievement stemming from a field that started with over 335,000 submissions in December.

Harris County Department of Education serves as the second-largest regional affiliate for the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards and champions these talented students throughout their journey. Regional winners were announced in January and honored with two ceremonies at the Wortham Center in March. In between, exhibits showcasing many pieces were held at the Houston Public Library and Texas Art Supply. ★



# Board Briefs

## HEAD START RECRUITS TOP CANDIDATES FOR UPCOMING ACADEMIC YEAR

**AS HEAD START CONTINUES** its recruitment efforts for the upcoming school year, the division welcomed more than 20 aspiring educators and support professionals to its job fair on June 6. Candidates interested in teaching, campus administration and support staff positions participated in on-site screenings to assess their qualifications and eligibility. Those who met the required certification requirements could fast-track the hiring process. Representatives from #TeamHCDE were on hand to share information about employee benefits, professional development opportunities and the supportive workplace culture that makes HCDE a rewarding place to build a career. Head Start will host another job fair on June 25 at the Irvington Conference Center, providing additional opportunities for talented professionals to join the team and make a difference in the lives of young learners. 🌟



 **Head Start  
Job Fair**

June 25, 2026 | 9 a.m. - 3 p.m.

## COMPTON OPENS DOORS AS HCDE'S NEWEST EARLY HEAD START CAMPUS

**THE SECOND WEEK OF JUNE** marked the start of the summer session for all Harris County Department of Education (HCDE) Early Head Start campuses, which includes Compton as the newest – and seventh total – facility to offer services to Harris County students from ages six months to 36 months. Campus Manager Merevonna Ross-Daniel said the first day on June 8 was exciting for students, families and staff.

Compton expanded with an Early Head Start for the first time this summer. The campus joins Barrett, Baytown, Coolwood, Humble, La Porte and Tidwell as centers that offer Early Head Start and Head Start (students ages 3-5) services. 🌟

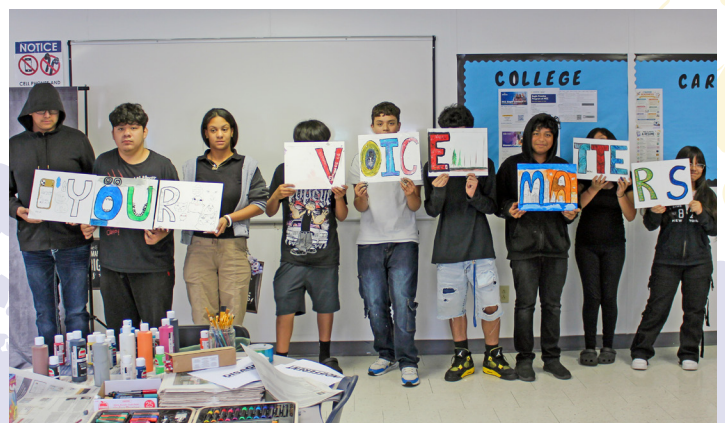


## CIVIC ENGAGEMENT TEAM BRINGS SUMMER ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES TO CASE FOR KIDS SITES

**THE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT TEAM** is already busy this summer connecting with students at various Center for Afterschool, Summer and Enrichment (CASE) for Kids locations and keeping topics like civic responsibility, elections and media at the forefront of conversations.

Coordinator Austen Ross-Yorko and Specialist Arnaldo Sandoval-Guerrero began summer workshops June 2 at Clear Creek Intermediate School and held workshops again this week at Sanchez North Charter School (June 8) and BakerRipley Ripley House (June 9).

They taught media literacy at Clear Creek, with activities such as games on determining news authenticity and a sticker creation session for HCDE's "Your Voice Matters" competition. Sanchez and Ripley House students created banners from



multiple blank canvases – each participant individualized his or her canvas before everyone came together to unveil the "Your Voice Matters." 🌟

## SPECIAL SCHOOLS EDUCATORS GROW THROUGH SUMMER ‘LEARNING LAGNIAPPE’

**THIS WEEK** opened the first of five “Learning Lagniappe” summer professional development opportunities for Harris County Department of Education (HCDE) teachers, educational aides and paraprofessionals. The optional, off-contract learning sessions will help enhance student engagement and the love for learning at Academic and Behavior School East and West, Fortis Academy and Highpoint School East.

Special Schools hosted a two-day event this week at the Adult Education Learning Center, moving away from virtual options and allowing educators to collaborate with colleagues across the four campuses. Up to six sessions were offered during four separate blocks each day, with Schools personnel presenting in addition to experts from the Center for Educator Success (CES), Center for Safe and Secure Schools (CSSS), Information Technology Services and School-Based Therapy Services.

Participants may exchange up to two days for workdays during the 2026-2027 school year, specifically Nov. 2, 2026,



TO SEE MORE OF THE STORY: [VIEW OUR PHOTO GALLERY](#)

and Feb. 12, 2027. Other learning opportunities include the School Safety Summit (June 18) and Professional Translators & Interpreters Conference (July 30-31). ✨

## SUPT. COLBERT, BOARD MEMBERS EXPLORE STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT HARRIS COUNTY COMMUNITY



**TASB**

**SUPERINTENDENT JAMES COLBERT JR.** traveled to San Antonio on June

10-13 for the Texas Association of School Boards (TASB) Summer Leadership Institute. He was joined by Harris County Department of Education Board President Richard Cantu and Trustees Amy Hinojosa and Andrea Duhon as they explored various tools and strategies to support student success through effective government and policy. The event also fostered networking and learning opportunities as attendees participated in sessions focused on legislative updates, equity in education, board sessions, superintendent collaboration and strategies for fostering student achievement. ✨



# In the Community

## #TEAMHCDE RAISES OVER \$67,000 FOR EDUCATION FOUNDATION THROUGH HOUSTON OPEN'S BIRDIES FOR CHARITY

**THROUGH THE** Texas Children's Houston Open and its Birdies for Charity program, Harris County Department of Education (HCDE) staff helped raise more than \$67,000 to support the Education Foundation of Harris County (EFHC).

The fundraising campaign ran from September to March, and area nonprofit organizations used the city's professional golf tour stop as leverage to generate donations. A 5% match was guaranteed through the program, but due to #TeamHCDE's generous giving and a sponsorship from Chevron, the Astros Golf Foundation was able to increase the match to 14.7%.

Total funds raised equaled \$58,561.75 through EFHC in its first year in the program and \$8,532.45 through the bonus match, marking a grand total of \$67,094.20. HCDE Chief of Staff Danielle Bartz and EFHC Director Trina Silva attended the Houston Open Celebratory Luncheon on June 9 at Union Station at Daikin Park. 🌟



## HCDE, EDUCATION FOUNDATION JOINS COMMUNITY PARTNERS IN EVENTS LEADING UP TO WORLD CUP IN HOUSTON

**WITH THE** 2026 FIFA World Cup beginning June 11 and matches starting in Houston three days later, Harris County Department of Education (HCDE) Chief of Staff Danielle Bartz and Education Foundation and Partnerships Director Trina Silva were given the opportunity for a behind-the-scenes tour of the local site and attended a mural unveiling to celebrate the world's largest sporting event.

Bartz and Silva joined fellow Houston East End Chamber of Commerce members on June 2 for an exclusive behind-the-scenes tour of NRG Stadium (renamed Houston Stadium for the World Cup). Led by Harris County Sports & Convention Corporation, the group saw different areas in the stadium while learning the infrastructure enhancements and innovative technologies implemented, in addition to gaining insight into the planning and coordination to host a global event.

Later that evening, Bartz and Silva were on hand to unveil a World Cup-inspired mural created by local artist Alex Roman, known as Donkeeboy Art. The piece is displayed at Space City Credit Union (3103 Harrisburg Blvd.) and depicts six hands holding a Houston sign with the city skyline and a soccer ball in the background. 🌟



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

## SUPERINTENDENT OBJECTIVE E: INSTRUCTIONAL MANAGEMENT

- Ensures that goals and objectives form the basis of curricular decision-making and instruction and communications expectations for student achievement.



*Qardriyyah Davis completed the Adult Education certified nursing assistant program and currently works at Tomball Rehab & Nursing. She joined more than 50 former students who were celebrated at the Division's Career Kickoff Day on June 13.*

**CELEBRATING STUDENTS** who complete certification training and other programs through HCDE's Adult Education division is meaningful and something I'm glad leadership has taken to the next level. What started as a signing ceremony has quickly grown into this weekend's Career Kickoff Day, where students will not only be honored for their accomplishments but do so into front of loved ones and Department staff. To help preview the event, we shared one student's journey. At only 22 years old, Qardriyyah Davis has dealt with adversity and having to make tough decisions. She turned to the medical field and eventually Adult Education's CNA program for a solution – and excelled. Davis credited the support and flexibility (she took evening classes to not miss work) from Adult Education to helping her land a job at Tomball Rehab & Nursing. She's now adding other certifications – Davis is in a medical assistant program currently – as she works toward the goal of applying for nursing school. Congratulations to Davis and the many others who HCDE will celebrate and thank you again to the many business partners who invest in our students and see the value in Adult Education's programs.

The Business Services team welcomed more than 100 purchasing professionals across the region and statewide to the division's fifth annual iPASS event this week. This opportunity allows small business owners

and partners to gain the exposure and resources needed to grow their businesses while addressing various topics. Event participants were introduced to Department divisions and learned the value HCDE affords school districts and agencies through its internal procurement network. Thank you to those who attended iPASS to expand their reach and learn more about K-12 procurement.

Finally, our Special Schools division is busy even as classes are out for the summer months. The first of many "Learning Lagniappes" professional development opportunities were held this week over at the Adult Education Learning Center. The optional, off-contract training featured numerous sessions by not only Schools personnel but experts in other divisions including the Center for Safe and Secure Schools and Information Technology. Educators who attend the training are able to exchange up to two days for workdays during the upcoming school year. Other training is available, including next week's School Safety Summit and the Professional Translators & Interpreters Conference in July. I appreciate all the teachers and educational aides who took advantage of the training to better serve our students and communities.

By maintaining involvement in the community with stakeholders, I continue cultivating and working relationships between HCDE and its various community partners. ★



## HCDE BOARD

**Board President**  
Richard Cantu

**1st Vice President**  
Dr. Erica Davis

**2nd Vice President**  
Dr. John McGee

**Board Members**  
Amy Hinojosa  
Eric Dick  
Andrea Duhon  
Silky Joshi-Malik

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**June 10-13**  
TASB Summer Leadership Institute (San Antonio)

**June 13**  
Adult Education Career Workforce Day

**June 17**  
Board Meeting

**June 17-20**  
TASB Summer Leadership Institute (Fort Worth)

**June 18**  
School Safety Summit

**June 19**  
Juneteenth (HCDE Closed)

**June 26-30**  
Annual Recovery Schools Conference