



the CONNECTOR

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



STAFF MEMBER'S GESTURE RESULTS IN LARGE BACK-TO-SCHOOL DONATION FOR ALL AB SCHOOL STUDENTS P.3



CES SHINES SPOTLIGHT ON NEWEST CERTIFIED TEACHERS WITH 'SNEAKER BALL' P.5



LEADERS SET STAGE FOR LANGUAGE ACCESS WITH VIP BRUNCH TO OPEN PTIC P.6

of Note

I often say HCDE seeks to fill the blind spots in public education. This is a difficult task because people don't typically see the things that aren't being addressed. That's why they are a blind spot.

So, when we identify a blind spot and create services and programs to address them, HCDE emerges as a thought leader in public education.

We see this idea come to fruition this week with the second annual Professional Translators and Interpreters Conference (PTIC). This two-day event, put on by our Marketing and Client Engagement division, is all about supporting language access for students in public education. From translation of documents and standard communications to interpretation of legal proceedings such as an ARD meeting, language access is an integral part of engaging parents and the community in a child's academic success.

At the PTIC VIP brunch today, I listened to a panel of experts, moderated by retired Spring ISD Superintendent Dr. Lupita Hinojosa, discuss the cost to school districts if they do nothing with language access and how translation and interpretation can be used as a financial strategy. The conversation about the ROI of language access with regard to fostering culture, climate and engagement was fascinating. I am proud HCDE is standing in the gap ready to help school districts meet this need and look forward to seeing the PTIC conference grow in scope and influence in the years to come.

I started the week with ELT on Monday followed by planning for convocation. On Tuesday, I met with staff from Moak Casey regarding our partnership followed by lunch with legal counsel and a meeting with the Harris County Sheriff's Office regarding contracts for our four schools. On Wednesday, I met with representatives from several credit unions about a potential partnership to benefit employees followed by a meeting with communications to finalize convocation details. Today, I welcomed representatives from school districts around Texas to the PTIC conference followed by more convocation planning.

Have a relaxing evening.



JAMES COLBERT, JR.
County Superintendent



Program Connections



Academic and Behavior School East staff members Vanessa Ausley, left, and Alicia Washington, right, pose for a photo with, from left, student Tremeshia Conley and her mother Lashonda at the Academy Sports + Outdoors corporate headquarters on July 28. Ausley helped secure a set of clothing and sports ball for all ABS East and ABS West students through the company's Day of Giving back-to-school donation event.

WORTH ASKING: ABS EAST EMPLOYEES' CARE FOR STUDENTS, ASSERTIVENESS HELPS GET STUDENTS CLOTHES FOR SCHOOL

THE SAYING GOES, "closed mouths don't get fed." In other words, if someone remains quiet about their needs or expectations, they will likely go unfulfilled. The saying embraces assertiveness and proactive communication.

That's a good way to describe Vanessa Ausley, a bus driver by title at Academic and Behavior School (ABS) East but someone who does a little bit of everything to support all students at Harris County Department of Education's (HCDE) four Special Schools.

Her latest gesture found her in Katy this week, filling drawstring bags with khaki pants, polo shirts and socks. Academy Sports + Outdoors held a clothing drive July 28 for its Day of Giving, collaborating with area families, child service agencies and organizations at its corporate headquarters to provide a set of clothing and a sports ball to children in need. Attendees "shopped" for items while employees were on hand to assist or lead the youngest shoppers in fun activities.

Ausley and campus secretary Alicia Washington – with the help of numerous Academy staff members – shopped for the more than 130 ABS East and ABS West students set to start classes on Aug. 24.

"I don't have a problem with asking," Ausley said as she wheeled another wagon filled to the brim to an HCDE van. "I'm not

ashamed about it. I ask because that's how you get things done.

"If you don't ask, it won't get done and you'll be left wondering, 'Where will I get help from?' Well, did you ask anybody?"



ABS East secretary Alicia Washington helps load the HCDE van. Washington and Ausley secured more than 130 sets of clothing for students at both AB campuses.

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Program Connections



ABS East's Vanessa Ausley helps a parent find a pair of pants during the Academy Sports + Outdoors clothing drive. Each student received pants, shirt, a pair of socks and a sports ball.

Like many of her fellow staff members at HCDE's Special Schools, duties routinely go beyond the scope of their actual job description. Paraprofessionals and support staff are as vital to a student's success as his or her teacher.

Ausley is a former HCDE Employee of the Month (December 2022) for this very reason. With HCDE for five years, Ausley has decorated campus walls to celebrate monthly observances, driven buses for students at multiple campuses and simply built relationships to better everyone's experience at ABS East.

She connected with Academy's event through inspiration from her daughter, whose own philanthropic efforts propelled Ausley to reach out to Be A Resource. The organization works with child and family protective service departments and other agencies that provide services for children in need.

The initial contact led Ausley to Katie McGee, who oversees development and events for Be A Resource. She told Ausley about the Academy event.

Ausley explained hurdles for ABS families – lack of transportation or the sheer driving distance, to the inability to get work for the Tuesday event. She asked if she could pick up the items herself for all 130-plus students.

She was able to do so and everything worked out.

"It's awesome because the fact is if you don't open your mouth, you don't get fed," Ausley said. "So, I did."

Parents registered their students and indicated sizes.

Washington joined Ausley where they helped families in addition to packing their own bags.

A few AB parents made the trip to Katy, including Lashonda

Conley, who attended with daughter Tremeshia, an incoming senior at ABS East and Clear Creek Independent School District.

"This was very, very helpful and a great experience for her," Conley said.

After five trips to the van, Ausley and Washington filled the floor and all three rows of seating. They'll distribute the bags in the coming weeks, giving each family one less thing to worry about as classes begin. ★



More than 130 ABS East and ABS West students will each receive one set of school clothing and a sports ball through the Academy Sports + Outdoors back-to-school event.

Board Briefs

COMMUNITY PARTNERS CONNECT WITH ADULT EDUCATION ALUMNI SEEKING OPPORTUNITIES AT ALLIED HEALTH JOB FAIR

PART OF ADULT EDUCATION'S MISSION to Harris County families is not only offering workforce training and certification classes but also connecting its adult learners with job prospects and career opportunities. Such events include job fairs and Career Kickoff Day.

The division and its Career Navigator Team held their latest July 23 – more than 115 former Adult Education students attended the Allied Health Career Fair. Employers and partners in attendance included Gulf Coast Regional Blood Center; Assurance Homecare Services, Inc.; Caring Senior Service of Houston West; WorkFaith; Busy Bee Learning Academy; Wesley Community Center; and Harris Health. ★



TO SEE MORE
OF THE STORY:

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CENTER FOR EDUCATOR SUCCESS CELEBRATES NEW CLASS OF CERTIFIED TEACHERS



ON JULY 29, the Center for Educator Success (CES) welcomed a dozen professionals who worked tirelessly on their two-year journey to become alternatively certified educators in Harris County for a night of celebration. Harris County Department of Education (HCDE) leaders, family and friends gathered at the Adult Education Learning Center to honor cohort members for completing more than 300 coursework hours, 50 field-based experience hours and state testing requirements.

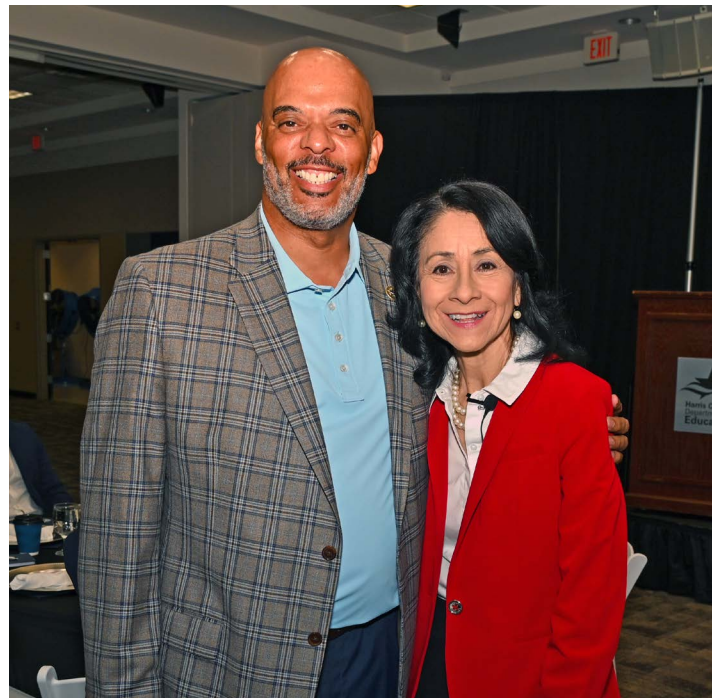
"Fully certifying another CES cohort is incredibly meaningful for our team," Senior Director Andrea Segraves said. "Each class represents our continued commitment to producing high-quality teachers who strengthen the Harris County educator pipeline. Seeing candidates reach this milestone is a powerful reminder of the impact our division has on classrooms and communities across the region."

HCDE partners with Districts of Innovation, like Spring, Aldine and Cleveland independent school districts, to recruit employees with bachelor's degrees who lack teacher certification to join the program. Cohort members then work with the CES team throughout the certification process to learn about classroom management, instructional planning and content methodologies while shadowing educators within their district.

As graduates, they will move into their own classrooms at the start of the 2026-2027 academic year, where they will continue to receive support from the CES team as they settle in. The celebration marked more than the end of a two-year journey but signaled the start of new opportunities for students, schools and communities that will benefit from the graduates' dedication and passion for teaching. ★

Board Briefs

LANGUAGE ACCESS COMMUNITY KICKS OFF CONFERENCE WITH LEADERSHIP BRUNCH, MASTERCLASSES



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THE PROFESSIONAL TRANSLATORS AND INTERPRETERS CONFERENCE (PTIC) expanded to two days in its second year, and community members supporting the growing spotlight on language access services in education answered the call to action. Held July 30-31 at the Irvington Conference Center around 130 are expected to attend PTIC.

Of those, more than 40 educators and stakeholders came together for the inaugural VIP leadership brunch and panel discussion. Led by moderator Dr. Lupita Hinojosa, former Spring Independent School District superintendent and last year's PTIC keynote speaker, brunch attendees

listened as the panel dove into meaningful access for language services professionals, the vital role of leadership to open doors and how stronger communities positively impact overlooked populations.

Joining Hinojosa as panelists were Mireya Pérez, creative director of Brand the Interpreter; Ludmila Golovine, founder of MasterWord; Nora Díaz, AI educator and interpreter; and Néstor Wagner, founder and director of Southern California School of Interpretation. Pérez and Díaz later led 2 or 5 masterclass sessions to close out Day 1. 🌟

CROSBY ISD STUDENTS GAIN REAL-WORLD EXPERIENCE THROUGH CASE FOR KIDS' LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

CROSBY INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT students spent the summer stepping into the workplace for the first time, building professional skills and discovering what their futures could look like. On July 30 – National Intern Day – CASE for Kids leaders celebrated their summertime accomplishments for work in the Leadership Academy as paid camp counselors at the County Connections-funded site, Barrett Youth Enrichment Summer Camp. The initiative is a community-based college and career readiness program that prepares more than 100 Crosby Middle and High School students for life after graduation through career exploration,

leadership development and real-world experience.

During the recognition ceremony, more than 30 high schoolers were honored alongside the employers, volunteers and community partners who helped make the program possible as more than 75 family members, educators and supporters looked on. The celebration also marked year two of expanded opportunities and meaningful workplace experiences, recognizing not only the interns' achievements but also the community that invested in their success through the resources provided.

"We have seen this program grow from just around a dozen students in year one, and we believe that's reason to celebrate," said Tineka Rentie, a CASE for Kids program coordinator who has been instrumental in the creation and expansion of the Academy. "We have watched these students build essential communication, teamwork and problem-solving skills that will also help them discover their strengths while reducing uncertainty about life after high school."

High schoolers gain firsthand experience throughout the paid internship, leading activities, mentoring campers and developing the confidence that comes from taking on responsibility in the workplace. In turn, middle school students begin their own college and career exploration, creating a pipeline that introduces students to postsecondary opportunities early and supports everyone as they prepare for life after graduation. [★ READ MORE](#)



TO SEE MORE
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#TEAMHCDE JOINS GLOBAL EDUCATION DIALOGUE AT OXFORD UNIVERSITY ROUNDTABLE

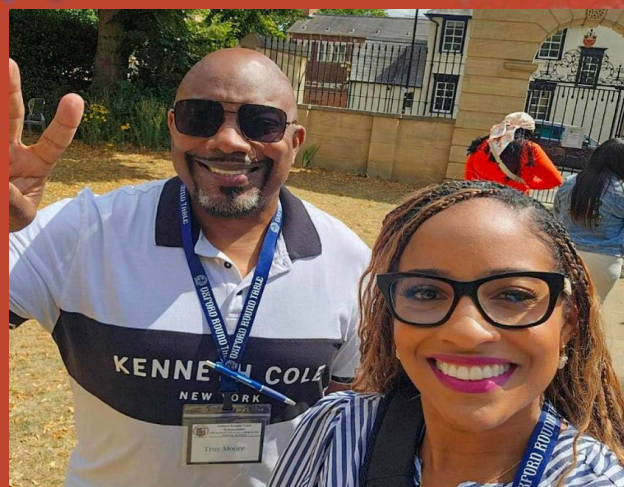
TWO MEMBERS OF #TEAMHCDE recently traveled across the pond to discuss educational challenges at the Oxford Roundtable Symposium in England. Troy Moore, assistant principal at Highpoint School, and Johanna Sanchez, officer of elementary education for the Center for Educator Success (CES), were invited to share their respective research as doctoral students in the educational leadership program at Abilene Christian University. They joined more than a dozen professionals from the United Kingdom, Africa and Brazil in embracing the symposium theme, "Redefining Education in a Changing World," on June 10-16 to discuss similarities across educational landscapes and present best practices to overcome challenges.

Sanchez presented her proposed research entitled, "Understanding the Impact of Teacher Attrition on High Poverty Title I Schools in Texas: How School Leaders are Responding." She explored the growing challenges districts face in maintaining a stable educator workforce and how campus and district leaders are implementing innovative approaches to better support teachers, reduce turnover and improve student outcomes in historically underserved communities. Follow-up discussions served as a worldwide reminder that the CES mission at home remains paramount in teachers' overall development.

Moore's research, "Leading Through Trauma: Principals' Emotional Support After School Violence," examined school leaders' critical role in helping students, staff and families recover in the aftermath of a tragedy. He highlighted how compassionate leadership practices, like

those utilized at Highpoint, foster trust, promote healing and support the emotional well-being of the school community.

As education continues to evolve, opportunities like the Oxford Round Table Symposium allow Harris County Department of Education leaders to contribute to and learn from global conversations, ensuring the organization remains at the forefront of research-informed leadership and innovation. [★ READ MORE](#)



In the Community

EDUCATION FOUNDATION PARTNERS WITH FORMER HCDE TRUSTEE TO PREPARE STUDENTS FOR SCHOOL YEAR



TO HELP HARRIS COUNTY STUDENTS for the upcoming school year, the Education Foundation of Harris County

(EFHC) is partnering with community stakeholders and organizations to deliver EFHC-branded backpacks and give families one less item to worry about.

The latest partner is former Harris County Department of Education (HCDE) Board Trustee David Brown, who conducted his Seventh Backpack Giveaway & Charity Basketball Game on July 25. Held annually at Attucks Middle School, EFHC donated 60 backpacks for the giveaway to help students and families better prepare for the start of classes in the coming weeks. ★



SAVE BIG ON SCHOOL SHOPPING DURING TAX-FREE WEEKEND



THE NEW SCHOOL YEAR is fast approaching, which means back-to-school shopping and saving a little money during the Texas sales tax holiday. On Aug. 7-9, parents and guardians can buy clothing, backpacks and various school supplies without paying sales tax, as long as the items are less than \$100. Items can be purchased online; however, the sale must be completed and all charges processed through the payment processor by midnight on Aug. 9 to be exempt. A full list of tax-free items is on the Texas Comptroller's website. ★

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

SUPERINTENDENT OBJECTIVE E: INSTRUCTIONAL MANAGEMENT

- Ensures that appropriate data are used in developing recommendations and making decisions regarding the instructional program and resources.



To help Academic and Behavior School families heading into the 2026-2027 school year, ABS East's Vanessa Ausley worked with Academy Sports + Outdoors to secure more than 130 sets of clothing and sports balls to students through the company's Day of Giving back-to-school donation event.

WHEN IT COMES TO back-to-school planning and preparing, students and families are often left balancing many plates, and for some, that might be overwhelming. So, when someone steps up and steps in to help – even if it's one small gesture – that can change a family situation for the better. This week, we look at a member of #TeamHCDE who took it upon herself to better the situation of our students. Vanessa Ausley is technically a bus driver at ABS East, but she does a little bit of everything, especially when it comes to helping children. Through the 'Be A Resource' organization, she connected with Academy Sports + Outdoors, which held a clothing drive July 28 for the company's Day of Giving. Ms. Ausley coordinated donations for 130-plus students at both ABS East and ABS West, with each student receiving pants, a shirt, socks and a sports ball. One set of clothing is meaningful to some families, and I'm glad HCDE is able to give these students one less thing to worry about as classes begin in a few weeks. Thank you, Ms. Ausley, for your caring heart and pouring into our students.

In two years, the Barrett Youth Enrichment Summer Camp has quickly become an initiative that positively impacts more than 100 Crosby Independent School District middle and high school students and prepares them for life after graduation. CASE for Kids leadership celebrated the more than 30 program participants on July 30 in conjunction with National Intern Day and their accomplishments through the division's

Leadership Academy. These individuals worked as camp counselors at the County Connections-funded program, gaining firsthand experience, mentoring campers and developing the confidence that comes from taking on responsibility in the workplace. Camp participants began exploring their college and career opportunities, which helps shape their high school experience as well. Kudos again to the Leadership Academy students for their impactful work and thank you to the Crosby and Barrett Station communities for supporting these programs.

Finally, CES celebrated a dozen educators who completed their two-year journeys to become alternatively certified teachers. The moment is extremely meaningful because of the journey, which includes completing state testing, more than 300 coursework hours and 50 field-based experience hours. CES is committed to producing high-quality teachers not only ready to step into the classroom but excel from their first day. Good luck to this cohort as these graduates enter the classroom for the 2026-2027 school year. CES will still be there to support these teachers on their journey, and I look forward to hearing success stories and testimonials as they settle in. Thank you again to our partner school districts for entrusting CES to help grow future teachers.

By identifying learning needs of students, I am meeting the expectation to ensure that the learning goals of students are met or exceeded. 🌟



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UPCOMING EVENTS

July 30-31
Professional Translators
and Interpreters Conference

August 3-4
CASE for Kids Houston Out
of School Time Conference

August 7
Convocation

August 17
Head Start
First Day of School

August 19
Board Meeting

August 24
Special Schools
First Day of Classes

September 7
Labor Day
(HCDE Closed)

September 16
Board Meeting