



#TeamHCDE Helps Open Doors for Future Professionals, Supportive Allies through Internships ► P.3

THE CONNECTOR

A Weekly Newsletter From The Superintendent Of Harris County Department Of Education

CHANNELVIEW ISD LEADERSHIP SEES HIGHPOINT'S APPROACH TO STUDENT SUCCESS DURING VISIT ► P.6

EDUCATOR LUNCHEON BRINGS CES, DISTRICT PARTNERS TOGETHER TO BETTER PREPARE TEACHERS ► P.7



One of HCDE's core values is to support students in reaching their highest potential, often finding alternative ways to achieve that goal. We believe in providing experiences that will influence a student's future and give them the opportunity to excel in academics, their career and ultimately, life.

So it is fitting that HCDE would become a hub for college interns working to gain experience in preparation for their fulltime careers. This week we get an inside look at how providing quality internships to local college students is not just an HCDE program, it is an area where HCDE is a leader. The spirit of support is ingrained in many of our employees and this week we see how several HCDE staff got their start as interns. I am proud that we are able to provide these outstanding internship opportunities as we continue on our quest to find the blind spots in public education in Harris County and across the state and nation.

I started the week on Monday representing HCDE at the Golf Club of Houston Invitational Annual Tournament. Tuesday morning I attended a Meet and Greet at Dogan Elementary to kick off my

SuperMENTor volunteer duties after which I attended the Humble ISD State of the District Luncheon. On Wednesday I participated in a UIL State Executive Committee Zoom meeting, followed by standing meetings with ELT members to discuss ongoing projects and initiatives. On Thursday I recorded a video to launch our upcoming partnership with a credit union and today I met with staff at my NPO office.

Have a relaxing weekend.

JAMES COLBERT JR.
County Superintendent

EDUCATION FOUNDATION OF HARRIS COUNTY & CASE FOR KIDS

TRUSTED PARTNER: INTERNS SERVE VITAL ROLES, BECOME VALUABLE 'ALUMNI' FOR HCDE



Education Foundation and Partnerships Director Trina Silva, left, visits with Madison Rainwater, an intern with Harris County Department of Education during the fall semester. HCDE has served as a regular partner with the University of Houston's Civic Houston Internship Program since 2024.

► WITHIN JUST A COUPLE OF YEARS, INTERNS AT HARRIS COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (HCDE) HAVE BECOME COMMONPLACE AND A POSITIVE WORKING EXPERIENCE FOR BOTH THE SOON-TO-BE COLLEGE GRADUATES AND #TEAMHCDE.

It's worked out so well in fact, that word of mouth to neighboring school districts put one HCDE division – Civic Engagement – on the waitlist for an intern this go around instead of its regular guaranteed spot.

"It's probably my big mouth because I keep telling everybody how great it is," said Education Foundation and Partnerships Director Trina Silva, who has worked with an intern through the University of Houston since Fall 2024. "So, several other agencies and foundations now have interns because I told them about it. With the interns that are amazing, I can't sing high enough praises for them and this program."

College students serving internships at HCDE isn't new – the Center for Afterschool, Summer and Enrichment (CASE) for Kids partnered with UH's Graduate College of Social Work 10-plus years ago. Department and leadership pride themselves on being positive community partners and filling gaps within the education space.

Internships allow students to work with organizations to gain experience or in some cases, meet qualification requirements.

For HCDE, that means working with local colleges and universities, being visible to their needs and showcasing itself as a valued educational solution for students.

But truthfully, it's more than a partnership.

"We're all in this business because we believe in students," said Chief of Staff Danielle Bartz, who's intern experience with Harris County Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management eventually led to first job – campaigning for future Houston Mayor



HCDE intern Madison Rainwater is scheduled to graduate from the University of Houston in December with plans to attend law school. She joins three former Education Foundation of Harris County interns currently in law school.

CONTINUE ON P.4



Danielle Redhead, left, served as an intern for the Center for Afterschool, Summer and Enrichment for Kids during the 2025-2026 school year and totaled nearly 800 practicum hours.

Sylvester Turner. “We believe in the potential of the kids, and we absolutely believe in the value of these educational experiences.”

According to a 2026 report by Worldmetrics, nearly 90% of employers credit internships to help them identify full-time candidates, while more than 70% of interns reported their internship influenced their career path choice.

Fit is important when it comes to internships, as not every workplace, department or team has the time, work demands or administrative capacity to take on another staff member who in some cases may be working without compensation.

Two areas within HCDE that saw a recent need were the Education Foundation of Harris County (EFHC) and Civic Engagement. In the Fall of 2024, both partnered with UH’s Civic Houston Internship Program (CHIP) through the Hobby School of Public Affairs, which connects juniors and seniors with government offices, nonprofit organizations and campaigns.

CHIP interns join their respective organizations for an average of eight hours a week over the 15-week semester (they meet as a class four times). They learn about the ins and outs of each organization and how it connects within Harris County and beyond.

Students keep a journal, and the course grade is also determined by a term paper and assessment from the respective office supervisor. The internship course counts as three hours of upper-level political science or public policy credit.

This fall, Silva welcomed Madison Rainwater, a political science major scheduled to graduate in December. Her previous internships included with Congressman Vicente Gonzalez and the Transportation Advocacy Group. Those experiences helped shape her career trajectory and ultimately land her with HCDE.

“I wanted to find out what I liked, and I realized pretty soon that my niche was children,” she said. “One way I feel children can be helped is through education, so education policy became something I really cared about once I started doing internships and learning about it.”

In working with EFHC and Civic Engagement, interns are able to experience HCDE’s push to support students across Harris County, whether it’s meeting with community partners or leading talks on voter information.

EFHC interns have played vital roles in planning and executing events such as the Heart of Education Luncheon and Topgolf Tournament. Civic Engagement interns helped plan presentations and in Spring 2025, assisted on Austin trips for Fortis Academy students where they visited the Capitol and Rep. Lauren Ashley Simmons’ district office.

For Fall 2025, HCDE welcomed four interns across three divisions, including the first for CASE for Kids in at least a dozen years. Danielle Redhead worked with CASE for Kids through two semesters before extending her practicum into the summer.

By summer’s end, Redhead

CONTINUE ON P.5



HCDE intern Madison Rainwater, left, shows off student artwork to Chief of Staff Danielle Bartz, center, and Education Foundation and Partnerships Director Trina Silva ahead of the Donor Appreciation Breakfast. The art was used as part of the certifications of appreciation.



Zahra Imam, left, served as the Education Foundation of Harris County intern during Spring 2026. She poses with Chief of Staff Danielle Bartz following the Heart of Education Luncheon in May.



Saron Regassa, left, served as an intern for the Civic Engagement team during Spring 2025. One of her duties was helping plan a trip for Fortis Academy students to Austin where they visited Rep. Lauren Ashley Simmons' district office.



Education Foundation of Harris County intern Sophia Rodriguez, right, checks in guests at a community breakfast event on Jan. 31, 2025.

"I NEVER ASSUME OUR INTERNS ARE GOING TO COME TO WORK FOR US OR DIRECTLY IN EDUCATIONAL POLICY OR FOUNDATION FUNDRAISING, BUT I'M VERY, VERY CLEAR THAT **WHATEVER THEY LEARN HERE WILL OPEN SOME DOORS"**

completed nearly 800 practicum hours.

Interns collaborate with other divisions and assimilate to HCDE's culture. Building a network can lead to future opportunities.

"I never assume our interns are going to come to work for us or directly in educational policy or foundation fundraising, but I'm very, very clear that whatever they learn here will open some door," Bartz said.

Bartz interned with Sylvester's office during his last session as a state representative before joining his campaign in Houston. She then stayed on to work in the mayor's office.

Silva interned with the East End Chamber of Commerce Education & Workforce Foundation and 13 years later, is still connected and currently serves as board secretary. She's hoping HCDE's interns can do the same for the Department in the future.

"Traditional school districts have a built-in alumni base and we don't have that," Silva said. "So, who are the

people who would want to support HCDE, the foundation and our initiatives? One is the employees, two are the foundation scholarship recipients and now, our interns.

"They are our alumni and hopefully they come back and participate in different ways, whether it's volunteering, donating, speaking at our events or maybe even becoming a board member or trustee. They know what we do and can become ambassadors for us." ★

HIGHPOINT SCHOOL SHARES RESTORATIVE APPROACH WITH CHANNELVIEW ISD LEADERS



Sometimes, changing student behavior starts with changing how people think about it. Special Schools leadership and Highpoint School Principal Courtney Waters welcomed members of Channelview Independent School District leadership on Sept. 22 to showcase the campus' approach to helping students reset their behaviors and return to their home districts prepared for success.

Channelview ISD Superintendent Dr. Tory Hill, Deputy Superintendent of Campus & Administrative Supports Dr. Atina Young and Board Members Shumona Collins and Hector

Martinez learned how staffing levels and low student-to-teacher ratios create an environment in which students can receive more individualized support, while also discussing the difference between punitive and restorative practices. The conversation extended beyond the classroom as district leaders met with staff and observed classroom instruction. The visit offered Channelview ISD leaders a closer look at how Highpoint uses a comprehensive approach to help students make positive changes and build a path toward success. ★



CES, DISTRICT LEADERS WORK TOGETHER TO STRENGTHEN THE EDUCATOR PIPELINE

One of the most common causes of teacher attrition is the need for improved support. The Center for Educator Success (CES) is working to address that challenge by implementing measures before educators step into the classroom. On Sept. 23, the Lead the Pipeline Partner Luncheon brought together district leaders from Channelview, Cypress-Fairbanks and Spring independent school districts for an in-depth conversation about strengthening the connection between teacher preparation and the needs of today's schools.

The working lunch provided an opportunity for CES to explain how the LASO Cycle 5 Alternative Preservice Pathway, a preparation software approved by the Texas Education Agency (TEA), can provide financial support for districts, teacher candidates and educator preparation programs. Attendees engaged as small groups discussed how to strengthen teacher preparation and clinical experiences within districts. Conversations also allowed district leaders to share insights that will help shape the direction of future CES partnerships and program offerings.

Continued collaboration between CES and district representatives demonstrates their shared goal of not just filling open positions but also the importance of developing teachers who are prepared for the realities of the classroom and more likely to build lasting careers in education. ★

VIEW VIDEO



LANGUAGE-ACCESS PROPONENTS COME TOGETHER FOR HCDE CONNECTS LUNCHEON

Harris County Department of Education's (HCDE) Marketing & Client Engagement team welcomed nearly 20 language-access professionals and translators on Sept. 22 to the latest HCDE Connects: A Multilingual Network. Hosted by Translations Coordinator Wendy Utterback, the quarterly meetings bring together school district personnel, industry staff members and like-minded professionals who serve English as a second language stakeholders and populations who speak languages other than English.

The meeting allows attendees to network and share insights and strategies. They focused on "The Human Touch," which emphasized how body language and cues can play a vital role in communications where language might be a barrier. They also discussed how identities, culture and emotions can offer better understanding and a clearer picture to a message.

HCDE Connects is a year-long initiative held between the Professional Translators and Interpreters Conference. ★





GRANTS, PROCUREMENT TEAMS HELP LOCAL BUSINESSES FIND PATHS TO GROWTH

From helping businesses pursue funding to opening doors to public-sector opportunities, #TeamHCDE shared its expertise with local entrepreneurs and organizations at the Self-Made Houston Experience Business Brunch & Growth Labs, hosted by Reaching Houston and YaLife Media and Marketing. The Center for Grants Development team offered practical guidance on the grant writing process and what goes into a strong proposal. Procurement specialists helped businesses get a better understanding of public-sector purchasing, contracting and opportunities to compete for HCDE business. The teams demonstrated how industry leaders' expertise can help organizations navigate funding and procurement, strengthen their operations and create new opportunities for growth. 🌟

CHIEF OF STAFF REPRESENTS HCDE AT QUARTERLY EDUCATION FOUNDATION ASSOCIATION MEETING

Harris County Department of Education Chief of Staff Danielle Bartz represented the Department and the Education Foundation of Harris County at the Greater Houston Area Association of Education Foundation quarterly meeting. Hosted by Lamar Consolidated ISD on Sept. 18, the group meets across the region to network with colleagues and share insights and best practices for fundraising campaigns, community initiatives and other aspects related to education foundations. 🌟



HCDE SUPPORTS HUMBLE ISD AT INAUGURAL STATE OF THE DISTRICT



Members of #TeamHCDE recently attended Humble ISD's State of the District, where they listened to Superintendent Roger Brown share updates, key priorities and progress from across the district. The event offered attendees the opportunity to hear directly from district leadership while connecting with partners and community members.

Humble ISD partners with HCDE through the Center for Safe and Secure Schools (CSSS) Harris County Safe School Commission among other initiatives. District schools and staff have also received Education Foundation of Harris County (EFHC) grants and funding through Tools for Teachers and Partners in Education. 🌟

UPCOMING EVENTS

OCTOBER

8-11

TASA/TASB txEDCON

21

Board Meeting

22

Choice Partners Nutrition Show

23

Healthy Minds, Healthy Families Conference

NOVEMBER

3

Election Day

18

Board Meeting

BOARD OF TRUSTEES



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DYNAMIC STRATEGY: FRONT & CENTER WORLD-CLASS FACILITIES



► Part of filling the gaps of education is seeing those opportunities across Harris County and being proactive in finding solutions instead of sitting back and waiting. One of the greatest compliments HCDE receives is when district leaders and community partners visit our campuses. Rather than repurposed facilities and outdated methodologies, they see thoughtfully designed environments and innovative programs tailored to the unique learners and educators we serve.

This week, Highpoint School welcomed Channelview ISD leaders to see firsthand how intentional staffing, low student-to-teacher ratios and comprehensive supports help students reset behaviors and successfully return to their home districts. The visit gave district leaders a closer look at HCDE's specialized approach to supporting students and helping schools address complex behavioral and educational needs.

The next day, the Center for Educator Success convened leaders from Channelview, Cypress-Fairbanks and Spring independent school districts to discuss strengthening educator preparation and certification. Together, these partnerships highlight how HCDE helps school districts meet student and workforce needs through innovative programs, collaboration and a shared commitment to improving outcomes across Harris County.

As HCDE continues to position itself as an industry leader and valuable partner, thank you again to division leadership for seeking solutions and pushing forward. I'm proud that #TeamHCDE works daily to best serve students of all ages. 🌟



James Colbert, Jr.
Superintendent