



Head Start Opens Doors to Future Professionals, Caregivers through San Jacinto College Partnership ► P.3

THE CONNECTOR

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

#TEAMHCDE CELEBRATES CAMPUS LEADERS WITH PRINCIPAL SPOTLIGHT SERIES ► P.6

PROCUREMENT SERVICES HONORED FOR EXCELLENCE, INNOVATION IN SERVICE BY NATIONAL ASSOCIATION ► P.7



► **SUPERINTENDENT JAMES COLBERT JR. JOINS MARKETING AND CLIENT ENGAGEMENT TEAM MEMBERS AT THE HCDE EXHIBIT AT TXEDCON.**

October is National Principals Appreciation Month. Every year I say it but it bears repeating: being a principal is one of the hardest jobs in public education today. Hands down principals bear the brunt of many of the challenges education faces daily.

So, at HCDE we like to honor our principals and the work they do in style. This year, HCDE will highlight one principal from each of our four special schools each week in October. These profiles will provide insight into why our principals believe in the work they do, how they approach leadership and their jobs, and their impression of the impact they have on students and the future of our communities.

We start this week with Jatata Hutton, principal of ABS West. I loved hearing how Jatata spoke about the work he does at West and the special calling he feels about the students and staff he supports daily. The fact that he says he “doesn’t shy away from difficult assignments” is one reason why Jatata is perfect for HCDE. I like to say my leadership team members are soldiers and Jatata is a perfect example of this. He faces challenges head-on and does so with a positive attitude and a smile. He believes his daily actions transform lives and I am proud to be Superintendent of an organization where people see how their work extends beyond the four walls of their office and into the school districts and communities we serve.

Principals have a super hard job and I appreciate all the time and effort they put into their jobs as well as the heartache they endure, as they make sure all our students can find success.

I started the week with ELT on Monday followed by standing meetings with ELT members about ongoing projects and initiatives. On Tuesday, I met with Leadership Team to receive division updates. On Wednesday, I met with a local superintendent before attending Agenda Review in preparation for the upcoming October board meeting. That night I hosted a dinner with Dr. LaTonya Goffney and Dr. Paula Patterson for superintendents from around the state. On Thursday, I spent time with many of those same superintendents as part of the txEDCON conference put on by the Texas Association of School Boards and Texas Association of School Administrators. I spent Friday and Saturday at the conference listening to breakout sessions about legislation, policy and governance issues impacting school districts.

Have a relaxing weekend.

JAMES COLBERT JR.
County Superintendent

HEAD START

HEAD START, SAN JACINTO COLLEGE PARTNER TO PREPARE THE NEXT GENERATION OF PROFESSIONALS AND LEARNERS



Diana Trevino was part of the inaugural “Pathways of Teaching Careers” program, a work-study partnership between Head Start and San Jacinto College North that gives students an opportunity to learn from educators while earning the 300 credit hours needed to graduate.

► **BEFORE FUTURE EDUCATORS AND NURSES CAN LEAD A CLASSROOM FULL OF STUDENTS OR CARE FOR A PATIENT IN NEED, THESE ASPIRING PROFESSIONALS MUST LEARN WHAT IT MEANS TO MEET PEOPLE AT THEIR LEVEL.**

San Jacinto College North Campus recently approached Harris County Department of Education’s (HCDE) Head Start program for a new partnership that gives students an opportunity to gain those lessons firsthand by working alongside Head Start professionals to build the skills, confidence and experience they will carry into their careers.

“We strive for excellence at HCDE, and we want to share that excellence with those who decide to enter the profession of early care and education,” Head Start Senior Director Venetia Peacock said. “I think our partnership with San Jacinto demonstrates a strong, trusting relationship. They know we are 100% committed, not only to our students, but to their students as well.”

Department leaders collaborated with San Jacinto College to create a two-fold program that allows students enrolled in early childhood development courses to participate in a work-study program that compensates them while earning the 300 credit hours needed to graduate. Those enrolled in the nursing program are welcome on campus during their clinical rotations to learn how to interact with young patients and their families.

Sheffield Head Start is the hub for the pilot program, entitled “Pathways of Teaching Careers,” where teachers

and administrators guide a handful of students throughout the semester, share knowledge gained over decades-long careers and create an environment where interns can ask questions.



Diana Trevino was hired as a teaching assistant at Sheffield Head Start, where she continues to learn classroom management techniques, instructional planning and content methodologies that engage young learners.

CONTINUE ON P.4



College students often assisted students in learning centers that promote exploration, social skills and school readiness through dramatic play, construction and writing activities.

"This program has been so welcoming for our students, and they feel that they are part of HCDE's Head Start community, which has allowed them to maximize this experience," said Caresal Bolds, the program director for child development at San Jacinto College.

Diana Trevino was part of the inaugural cohort in the spring. She visited Sheffield several times a week, working with educators to learn classroom management techniques, instructional planning and content methodologies that engage young learners.

"I enjoyed getting to work with different teachers, learn about their classroom experience and ask them for wisdom," Trevino said. "They've seen different students, different classrooms and ages, and there are lessons in all of those

experiences that I want to just be a sponge for."

Helping people learn has always been something Trevino enjoyed, but when her younger brother was diagnosed with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), she knew it was her calling.

"I would help him complete his homework and see how much he struggled," she recalled. "I want to help kids be successful in their academic careers, and getting a chance to start early with these Head Start students is a really cool opportunity."

The intern teacher was placed in a 3-5-year-old classroom, where she often assisted students in learning centers that promote exploration, social skills and school readiness through dramatic play, construction and writing activities. Students are grouped by developmental skills, where Trevino was forced to adapt her teaching methods to meet each student's individual needs.

Beyond those skills, San Jacinto students also received the opportunity to witness how educators lead parent discussions about their children's key challenges and milestones or identify families who might need individualized attention.

"The chance to work with diverse learners from various cultural backgrounds, linguistic or socioeconomic status is priceless," Bolds said. "Watching how these teachers engage with families helps our students learn to create inclusive environments for children and families, and you don't get that from other programs. That's what makes this partnership with HCDE so valuable."

Coolwood, Channelview and Compton Head Start facilities also welcomed nearly 30 San Jacinto nursing students like Sarah Perez, who rotate among campuses to help provide nutrition and health services to Early Head Start and Head Start students, which are part of the program's core values.

As the oldest of five siblings, Perez was born to immigrant parents and raised in the North Shore community. She saw at an early age the disproportionate resources provided to low-income families compared to those provided to wealthy families and wanted to make a difference.

"I've always taken care of people and loved learning how

CONTINUE ON P.5



Sarah Perez, a nursing student at San Jacinto, is one of 30 students who rotate throughout HCDE campuses. She learned to be more attentive to nonverbal cues, since young learners aren't always able to fully express themselves.



▶ VIEW VIDEO

the human body works, so nursing seemed like the best path,” she said. “I believe God put me in this program for a reason because I know this is where I’m supposed to be learning these skills. I see the less fortunate being helped and given so many opportunities. Everything feels like it’s falling into place.”

Nursing students complete various clinical rotations in a traditional health care setting before they are placed on a Head Start campus, where they can assist with feeding, potty training and supporting health and wellness activities. Future professionals also help conduct vision screenings and monitor children’s growth and development. The experience gives them a chance to put their clinical training into practice while learning to recognize and respond to their patients’ needs. Unlike other rotations, Head Start students require nursing candidates to be more attentive to nonverbal cues, since young learners aren’t always able to fully express themselves.

“THIS OPPORTUNITY IS REALLY A TWOFOLD BLESSING FOR HEAD START BECAUSE WE KNOW THE MORE ADULTS IN AN EARLY CHILDHOOD CLASSROOM, THE BETTER”

“Working alongside children gives our students the opportunity to see if nursing is a true fit for them,” explained Dr. Tyra Rideaux, the department chair of nursing at San Jacinto College. “They have to gain the knowledge and skills to work with someone of various developmental levels or understanding because talking to a three-year-old, a 30-year-old and an 85-year-old with dementia are all very different.”

Added Perez: “You have to learn how to accommodate. Sometimes you can distract them, talk to them or try to show them something, but it can change on a dime. You have to be patient with them, gentle in your communication and use simple vocabulary. All those skills have been helpful throughout this rotation.”

While collegiate leaders and students are focused on the skills learned through internships and clinical hours, Peacock says Head Start staff are excited about the opportunity to invest in the people who will carry their newfound knowledge into classrooms, clinics and the local community for years to come.

The educators program has already welcomed a new handful of students for the fall and a new cohort of nearly 30 nursing students will participate in orientation this November.

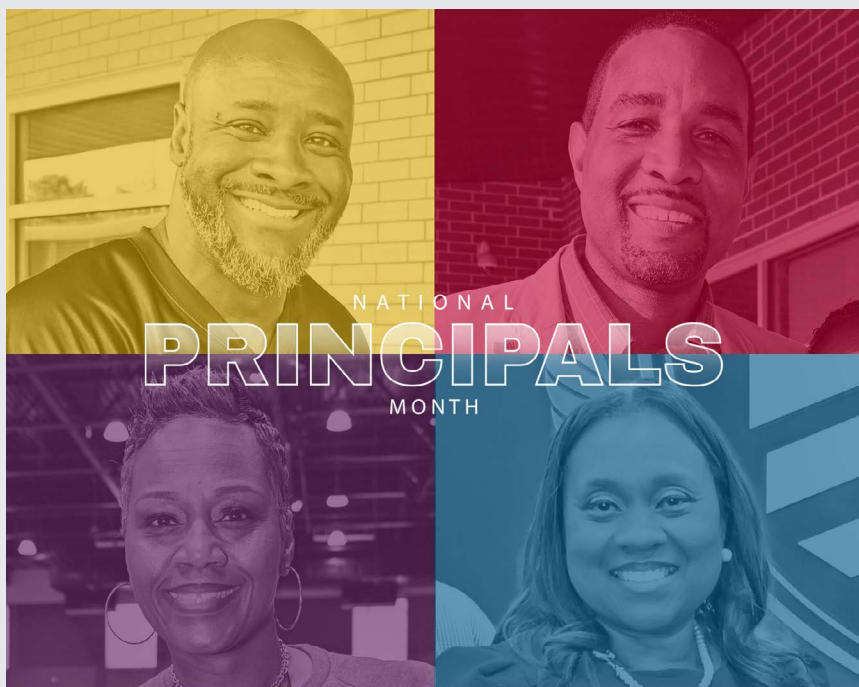
“This opportunity is really a twofold blessing for Head Start because we know the more adults in an early childhood classroom, the better,” Peacock said. “These students come out of the classroom and can immediately see what they learned in action. We are helping San Jacinto create a high-quality workforce, and at the same time, they’re helping us create high-quality environments for young learners.”

That investment is already paying off in some ways. Trevino still has about a year before she gains her bachelor’s degree, but she recently joined #TeamHCDE as a teaching assistant at Sheffield Head Start. She credits the skills she gained throughout her internship and the months of building relationships with students, educators and administrators for her new position.

“I think I’m always going to be a pretty shy person, but the Pathway of Teaching Careers program definitely helped me become more confident in my abilities,” she said. “I know I can handle being in the classroom with a dozen toddlers before I graduate. Now I get to continue working alongside the teachers here, I’m just grateful.”

“This partnership ties into the mission of Head Start, which is to promote and to grow people to their full potential,” Peacock said. “I hope that it’s one we can continue and grow over the next few years.” ★





JATATA HUTTON LEADS WITH EMPATHY, POSITIVITY AND A DEEP UNDERSTANDING OF HIS STUDENTS

Now in his fourth year as Principal of Academic and Behavior School (ABS) West, Jatata Hutton starts every day the same way. He puts on a smile, greets his students upon arrival and encourages his staff members to do their part in changing Harris County lives for the better.

"Every morning, my approach is positivity," he said. "No matter what I walk into, I see positivity and no limit for my students or staff. I don't shy away from difficult assignments. I want the job no one else wants because I believe in investing in the lives of children, because I feel like, if I don't, who will?"

The Mississippi native began his career as a corrections officer with the Jackson County Sheriff's Department, working

with adjudicated youth, but found his calling for education while working as a substitute teacher to earn extra money. Throughout his near 25-year career, Hutton has drawn on his experience as a former athlete and self-dubbed "class clown" to gain insight into what students need from educators while retaining his ability to command respect from students through relatable and engaging interactions.

In honor of National Principals Month, the Communications and Creative Services team sat down with Hutton to learn more about his childhood adoption, academic challenges and unexpected life events that led him to Harris County Department of Education. 🌟

COLBERT WELCOMES TEXAS SUPERINTENDENTS TO HOUSTON AHEAD OF TXEDCON



Superintendent James Colbert Jr. helped nearly a dozen superintendents across Texas build connections beyond the conference room. On Oct. 7, he welcomed district leaders to Georgia James Steakhouse ahead of txEDCON, the largest gathering of Texas public education decision-makers. District leaders networked, exchanged perspectives and

discussed shared challenges facing educational agencies across the state. The dinner also offered an opportunity for superintendents to strengthen relationships and compare ideas before joining education leaders at the annual conference on Oct. 8-11 at the George R. Brown Convention Center. 🌟

Please Join Us!

Come gather with your **TABSE superintendent colleagues** for dinner and fellowship as we catch up on all things education in Texas and welcome new superintendents to the fold.

Hosted by:



James Colbert, Jr.
Superintendent, Harris County
Department of Education



Dr. LaKisha Gaffney
Superintendent, Harris County
Department of Education



Dr. Paula Peterson
Superintendent, Harris County
Department of Education

October 7, 6 p.m.
Private Room at Georgia James
3503 W. Dallas,
Houston TX 77019

RSVP by September 23:
<https://www.hcde-texas.org/tabse-dinner>





SUPERMENTORS 2026-2027 CAMPAIGN BEGINS, MALE ROLE MODELS READ TO YOUNG LEARNERS

SUPERMENTORS



Nearly 40 community male volunteers across greater Houston officially kicked off the 2026-2027 SuperMentors campaign, positively impacting Harris County's youngest learners.

As part of the Head Start Significant Male Initiative, SuperMentors began in 2002 and connects male role models with students at Harris County Department of Education's Head Start centers. Mentors commit to visiting their respective centers monthly. Reading dates are scheduled for the second Thursday of each month from October through May.

In addition to dozens of community volunteers and business partners serving as mentors, Superintendent James Colbert Jr., all three Executive Leadership Team male staff members and various division directors also read across the 12 campuses. ★

PROCUREMENT SERVICES EARNS TOP-LEVEL ACHIEVEMENT OF EXCELLENCE AWARD

As an industry leader in financial operations, Harris County Department of Education's (HCDE) Procurement Services Division was recently recognized for its excellence in serving with transparency and integrity. It was among 251 organizations to receive the prestigious 2026 Achievement of Excellence in Procurement Award by the National Procurement Institute at its annual conference this week in Frisco. The award acknowledges organizational excellence in public and non-public procurement.

The recognition highlights HCDE and Procurement Services as standard bearers that exceed the highest marks in innovation, professionalism, productivity, e-procurement and leadership attributes of the procurement organization. HCDE is among 56 honorees from Texas, second only to California.

"The 2026 Achievement of Excellence in Procurement Award reflects the extraordinary commitment of procurement professionals who are driving performance, accountability and strategic value for their agencies," Award officer Carrie Mathes said of the recipients. ★



UPCOMING EVENTS

OCTOBER

20

Civic Health Symposium

21

Board Meeting

22

Choice Partners Nutrition Show

23

Healthy Minds, Healthy Families Conference

NOVEMBER

3

Election Day

13

2nd Annual EFHC Topgolf Tournament

BOARD OF TRUSTEES



Richard Cantu
Board President



Dr. Erica Davis
1st Vice President



Dr. John McGee
2nd Vice President



Andrea Duhon
Position 2, Precinct 4



Eric Dick
Position 4, Precinct 3



Amy Hinojosa
Position 1, Precinct 2



Silky Joshi-Malik
Position 7, At-Large

DYNAMIC STRATEGY: EXCEPTIONAL PROGRAMS FRONT & CENTER



► One of the benefits in finding the gaps within public education is when an outside organization recognizes what we're doing at HCDE and wants to partner with our divisions and teams. When outside organizations look to HCDE for our expertise, resources and innovative solutions, it reinforces our reputation as a trusted partner and positions us as a leader in addressing the evolving needs of public education.

This week, we highlight a unique partnership between Head Start and the San Jacinto College North Campus. The two-pronged work study allows students enrolled in early childhood development courses to complete the 300 credit hours needed to graduate at our Sheffield center, while those in San Jacinto's nursing program work at Coolwood, Channelview and Compton campuses during their clinical rotations. The "Pathways of Teaching Careers" program is building future caregivers and educators, especially in a community where this type of opportunity can truly change futures.

Thank you to San Jacinto College leadership for trusting Head Start in helping prepare their students. We're already seeing this investment pay off – program participant Diana Trevino recently joined the staff at Sheffield as a teaching assistant while she works toward her bachelor's degree.

While HCDE continues to serve students and families across Harris County, thank you again to all the community and business partners who work with our divisions as we continue to provide solutions to fill the gaps in education. ★



James Colbert, Jr.
Superintendent