



## SuperMENTors Connect Young Readers with Male Role Models

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# THE CONNECTOR

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

CES SHOWCASES LEADERSHIP  
AT STATE CONFERENCE

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HCDE PROCUREMENT DIRECTOR  
ELECTED TO STATE BOARD

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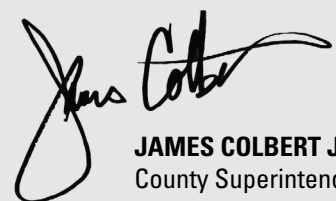
► Superintendent James Colbert Jr. and Special Schools leadership recognize HCDE's principals at an appreciation dinner on Oct. 14.

One of my favorite things to do every month is to read to Head Start students as part of my SuperMENTor volunteer duties. Walking into the classroom and seeing the students' little faces light up as they call out to me and tell me about their week makes my day. I enjoy listening as they tell me things like, "Mr. Colbert you have no hair!" or "Mr. Colbert you sure are tall." But my absolute favorite thing is getting hugs from the entire class.

I know this is a feeling that is shared by many of my fellow SuperMENTors. So it was gratifying to read this week about a community partner who reads to students through this initiative. I enjoyed learning about the personal reward this volunteer gets every time he reads to students and how he values the opportunity to pour back into children in his local community. This initiative is still looking for volunteers so please spread the word to friends and family in our community. This initiative has a huge impact on our young students while providing our community supporters a way of giving back and getting joy in return. I look forward to reading at Dogan Elementary next month and seeing this program continue to grow and flourish.

I started the week on Monday with ELT followed by meetings with staff to discuss ongoing projects and initiatives. On Tuesday, I continued my staff meetings and on Wednesday, I attended the Principals Appreciation Dinner in celebration of National Principal Appreciation Month. Yesterday, I attended the Education Foundation of Harris County board meeting followed by meetings with staff.

I look forward to seeing you at the board meeting next week. Have a great weekend.



**JAMES COLBERT JR.**  
County Superintendent

## PLANTING A SEED:

# MALE ROLE MODELS INSTILL THE LOVE OF READING TO HEAD START STUDENTS WITH SUPERMENTORS



Josh Villegas poses with his La Porte Head Start students after reading. SuperMENTors visit their class once a month from October through April to read and students get copies of the books to build personal libraries.

## ► UNTIL RECENTLY, JOSHUA VILLEGAS HAD NEVER HEARD OF SUPERMENTORS, A PROGRAM WITHIN THE HEAD START SIGNIFICANT MALE INITIATIVE TO BRIDGE MALE ROLE MODELS IN THE CLASSROOM WITH YOUNG STUDENTS – SPECIFICALLY THROUGH LITERACY.

An avid reader, Villegas credits his mother and many of his elementary school teachers for instilling that love at a young age. He's also worked as a paraprofessional and knows the importance of putting books in the hands of students.

So, when the opportunity presented itself this school year to get back to pouring into young students – especially those in his La Porte community – Villegas didn't hesitate.

"It's great and something needed to build our communities," said Villegas, adding he's even contemplating getting back into education. "Who knows – maybe I'll be a teacher one day. It was the most fulfilling job I ever had. Working with the kids and seeing their energy is amazing."

Villegas is among eight new SuperMENTors for 2026-2027, all but two being community volunteers or business partners. The program features 40 mentors with current openings at Baytown, Compton, Humble, JD Walker and Sheffield.

SuperMENTors began in 2002, a program done with intentionality to bring positive male role models into the classrooms with students – in this case across Harris County Department of Education's (HCDE) 12 Head Start centers.

It's not that fathers aren't present in dropping off and picking up their young children, or even actively volunteering or participating in Head Start's policy council.

But for most young learners in Head Start centers across communities in north and east Harris County, women are the more present adult figures they'll see throughout the day.

According to a 2025 USAFacts.org study, only 22.4% of pre-K-12 teachers were men. That figure drops to 19.9% for elementary and middle school and just 2.5% for preschool and kindergarten.

U.S. Census Bureau data as recent as 2024 shows more than 35% of households with children in Harris County are calculated as single-parent household families. Data from 2020 also shows an overwhelming majority of non-married family households are led by a female.

That's what makes SuperMENTors so unique. The program connects children as young as three years old to male figures who connect with them on a regular basis and invest in their educational growth at this early stage before moving on to kindergarten.

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It also helps young children become more comfortable around adults.

"They're less fearful when they see men and not as nervous when the men come in," La Porte Manager Traci Houston said.

In addition to HCDE leadership and staff, mentors represent community partners such as Harris County Public Health, Covestro LLC, OnPoint Utility Designs and Construction, Prosperity Bank and Harris County Office of the County Engineer.



Director of Construction Joe Carreon is among numerous HCDE leadership and staff members that serve as SuperMENTors.

They commit to monthly visits at their respective campuses, beginning in October through April. Students receive a copy of the books read each month to build their personal home libraries. Many join the program after hearing someone else's experience.

That was the case with Villegas after speaking with Karl Eddy, now in his third year reading at La Porte Head Start. The two work together at a nearby business and Eddy had nothing but positives to share from his experience.

"When the opportunity arose. I jumped on it, and I was completely addicted to the kids," Eddy said. "They seemed so receptive to the books, to the reading and to the learning. I told him how amazed I was – how during the course of the school year, you could see from the first month to the last month the growth in the kids."

After just one visit, Villegas has the same excitement. He's looking forward to sharing his love for reading – a feeling planted years ago by his mother and teachers.

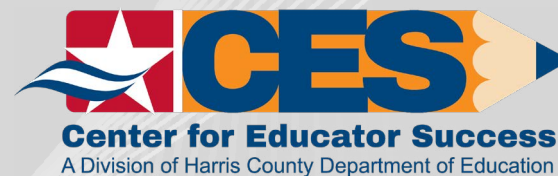
"If I wasn't exposed early maybe I wouldn't be as interested in reading or reading different kinds of books," he said. "But if it peaks their interests, you can let them know that a book can open up a world to you and teach you things you never knew."

"That's something that helps grow the community and keeps people going. I didn't know any of these people before today, but now I know they're doing wonderful work and it's great to be a part of it." ★

**"THEY SEEMED SO RECEPTIVE TO THE BOOKS, TO THE READING AND TO THE LEARNING... YOU COULD SEE FROM THE FIRST MONTH TO THE LAST MONTH THE GROWTH IN THE KIDS."**



Karl Eddy reads to students at La Porte Head Start as part of the SuperMENTors program. Eddy is in his third year and helped bring on colleague Joshua Villegas as a mentor this school year.



## CES TEAM SHOWCASES EXPERTISE IN TEACHER CERTIFICATION WITH SIX PRESENTATIONS AT STATE CONFERENCE

With six total presentations, Harris County Department of Education's (HCDE) Center for Educator Success (CES) was at the forefront of showcasing itself as an industry leader in educator preparation, teacher candidate support, instructional coaching, assessment success and innovative program design at this year's Consortium of State Organizations for Texas Teacher Education Conference (CSOTTE).

Held Oct. 11-13 in Denton, CSOTTE serves as the state's voice for educator preparation and certification.

CES having six presentations selected for CSOTTE highlights the team's impact and commitment to excellence in preparing and supporting classroom-ready educators.

Session topics included redesigning field supervision to accelerate candidate growth, building a community in hybrid preparation programs, using data-driven coaching to build strategic test takers, and building a high-touch support system from recruitment to certification. ★

## CSSS HOSTS PEER PLANNING WORKSHOP THROUGH HOUSTON URBAN AREA SECURITY INITIATIVE

With a seat at the table to help the Houston area prepare for, protect against, response to and recover from catastrophic incidents, Harris County Department of Education's (HCDE) Center for Safe and Secure Schools (CSSS) hosted a workshop this week for agencies across the region to better understand leveraging technology for better planning.

The annual workshop is part of the Houston Urban Area Security Initiative, established in 2003 after the greater Houston area was considered by the Department of Homeland Security to be among the highest threat urban areas in the nation. The designation qualifies the area to receive funding through the DHS Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) grant program – Houston is among 45 cities designated as high-risk urban areas.

CSSS School Safety and Security Officer Robert Marquez represents the division and HCDE with the initiative. He served on the workshop's planning team and joined representatives



from the La Porte Office of Emergency Management, Harris County Universal Services and Houston Office of Emergency Management for a panel discussion on exploring the power and influence of AI in emergency planning.

Attendees also heard case studies from the Fort Bend Office of Homeland Security & Emergency Management and the National Weather Service, while representatives from the Houston Police Department and Mayor's Office of Public Safety and Homeland Security presented regional technology systems such as ArcGIS Online and the Community Lifeline Support Tool. ★



## SUPT. COLBERT CELEBRATES PRINCIPALS' IMPACT AT APPRECIATION DINNER

Leadership that changes lives deserves to be celebrated. In honor of National Principals Month, Superintendent James Colbert Jr. invited Travita Godfrey, Jatata Hutton, Courtney Waters and Trent Manuel to dinner at The Palm Downtown on Oct. 14 to recognize their dedication to students, staff and families across Harris County Department of Education's four Special Schools. The evening offered an opportunity for Colbert to express his appreciation for their leadership while sharing a meal and celebrating their impact across the organization. The principals discussed campus highlights and innovative initiatives, including dual-credit courses with local universities and inaugural events designed to create new opportunities for student success. Dinner was just one of several ways HCDE is showing appreciation for their leadership during National Principals Month. ★

## TRAVITA GODFREY HELPS STUDENTS FIND A WAY FORWARD THROUGH ADDICTION

**Travita Godfrey** was set to enter the medical field nearly 30 years ago when she joined the Big Brothers Big Sisters program and life suddenly changed. She became an advocate for her little sister's education, was exposed to the impacts of addiction for the first time, decided to join Teach For America, and says, "the rest is history."

Now in her sixth year as Principal of Fortis Academy, Godfrey works with teens who struggle with alcohol and substance abuse by providing individualized, non-clinical support to help Harris County teens gain and maintain sobriety. Her commitment to supporting students' recovery, academic success and transition into adulthood is unmatched, making herself available for questions, college applications, practice job interviews and more.

Godfrey says it's all part of the effort to reduce stigma and challenges related to addiction.

"There's a big stigma around mental health, substance use and what somebody struggling with addiction looks like," she explained. "I've learned how to be a better advocate throughout my career. Not just for students, because I love doing that, but also advocating for their parents, various resources and community support they need to be successful."

In honor of National Principals Month, the Communications and Creative Services team sat down with Godfrey to learn more about her leadership, the school culture she's built around trust and consistency, and the longer impact Fortis and HCDE have on students' lives. ★



▶ VIEW VIDEO

*Congratulations*



## HCDE PROCUREMENT DIRECTOR ELECTED TO STATE ASSOCIATION'S BOARD OF DIRECTORS

To help elevate Harris County Department of Education's (HCDE) presence within the public procurement community, **Dr. Edna Johnson** was recently elected to serve on the Texas Public Procurement Association (TxPPA) Board of Directors for the 2026-2027 term.

The statewide association is dedicated to advancing public procurement through education, collaboration, legislative awareness and the promotion of best practices.

Johnson, who was named HCDE's procurement director in 2023, has helped position the Department as a leader in procurement across both Texas and nationwide.

HCDE was recently among 251 organizations to receive the prestigious 2026 Achievement of Excellence in Procurement Award by the National Procurement Institute. ★

## 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



**James Colbert, Jr.**  
Superintendent

► I have challenged all of our divisions and leaders to not simply attend conferences and seminars, but to present as a means of demonstrating why HCDE is a leader in education. It's true HCDE has a lot of expertise to share ranging from best practices in school safety to procurement procedures, therapy services and records management.

But with that expertise and regard comes the responsibility to pay it forward and support public education. It is great to see our teams standing "Front and Center" at conferences and being rewarded for their knowledge in their field. These are just a few reasons we invest in training and building up #TeamHCDE and encourage leaders to teach others. So it was a pleasure to see the CES team selected to make six presentations this week at CSOTTE 2026, the state's umbrella association for educator preparation and certification providers. These sessions touched on areas such as data-driven coaching and consistent support systems, showcasing the division's expertise and level of commitment in prepping and supporting classroom-ready teachers.

Thank you again to our leadership team for accepting the charge and to every staff member who presents or leads professional development. As we continue sharing what works best for HCDE in supporting Harris County students and families, other districts and organizations across the state and nation will benefit as will the students they serve. ★