SUPERINTENDENT ANNUAL REFLECTION 2020-2021
This publication serves as a summary of the accomplishments and successes of the Harris County Department of Education (HCDE) from October 2020 to October 2021. The purpose of this summary is to provide the Board of Trustees with a clear view of the Superintendent’s role within the organization as it relates to HCDE’s primary goals. This year’s reflection not only demonstrates that HCDE is effectively supporting public education in the county, but shows how the organization is meeting or exceeding the five goals set by the Board:

1. Impact education by responding to the evolving needs of Harris County
2. Deliver value to Harris County by utilizing resources in an ethical, transparent and fiscally responsible manner
3. Advocate for all learners by using innovative methods to maximize students’ potential
4. Provide cost-savings to school districts by leveraging tax dollars
5. Recruit and maintain a high-quality professional staff

As the Superintendent, it is my responsibility to ensure HCDE meets these goals by effectively managing the following areas of responsibility:

- Management of Administrative, Fiscal and Facilities Functions
- Organization Morale
- Personnel Management
- Community Relations
- Instructional Management
- Professional Growth and Development
- Organizational Improvement
- Board Relations

A message from THE SUPERINTENDENT

This year’s reflection is once again organized by topic, with each topic clearly demonstrating how it relates to the area of responsibility. In addition, each section provides precise, written communication of job performance in the past year. The topics are presented from the inside out, meaning they start with topics closer to the internal workings of the organization and move outward to those accomplishments that impacted the community as a whole.

Topics include:
- Team of 8
- The Standard Bearers
- Covid Agility
- Making History
- Student Success
- Community Stewardship
- # HCDE Proud
- Partnership and Outreach
- Brand Management

This is my sixth year at HCDE and I am very proud of the great strides the organization has taken under my leadership. We have grown our programs and services while reducing the tax rate and cementing HCDE’s reputation as a leader and advocate for public education. HCDE continues to grow and shift to meet the needs of our clients and I am eager to see that evolution over time as we prove we are the standard bearers in public education. We are well on our way to being an educational organization others aspire to be and I can attest that this year, we not only met our goals but exceeded them. This is why the impact of HCDE is becoming clearer not only locally, but across Texas as more people recognize just how valuable our services and programs are.
Board Retreat

This year, the dynamic between the Superintendent and Board was solidified through a retreat at the Houston Museum of Natural Science. During this day-long event, the group discussed many initiatives and projects as well as where the Board would like the department to go in the future.

Through a dynamic and positive relationship between the Superintendent and board members, HCDE continued to grow and thrive. In 2021 the Superintendent demonstrated effective communication strategies that kept board members updated on significant issues as well as ongoing events within the department. He responded to requests in a timely manner, providing information for board members and policy decisions.

Effective Communication

In his six years as Superintendent of HCDE, Mr. Colbert has implemented a variety of communication strategies and systems that provide trustees with information about events and activities around the department. Consistent communication with board members is critical to HCDE’s success, and Superintendent Colbert demonstrated commitment to this concept throughout the year.

Effective communications employed to keep trustees informed include:

• Weekly newsletter, The Connector, emailed to all trustees every Friday (except holidays)
• Weekly calls to Board members as needed regarding issues, concerns, activities
• Emails sent to Board trustees with information on a needed basis; emails from staff to Board members about meetings, events, agendas and committee meetings
• Regular and special called board meetings, committee meetings.
• Quarterly in-person updates with the Superintendent
• Board walks through campuses.
29 BOARD AND COMMITTEE MEETINGS
Positive Working Relationships

Superintendent Colbert recognizes that maintaining a positive working relationship with each board member and the Board as a whole is critical to his ability to do his job well and support HCDE success. This relationship is maintained through in-person meetings, phone calls, emails, quarterly updates, visits to campuses and an annual review.

In 2021, Superintendent Colbert met with board members individually to update them on projects, initiatives and the overall direction of HCDE. Mr. Colbert also hosted board members on a walk, visiting several campuses. When the pandemic restrictions started to lift around the county, Mr. Colbert reinstated his quarterly in-person updates with each board member. These conversations help ensure the Superintendent and Board are aligned in perspective and direction.

In January 2021, HCDE hosted Board Appreciation Month. Although COVID meeting restrictions prohibited a large in-person celebration with staff, trustees were presented a picture of an HCDE student along with Thank You cards from students and HCDE gear. This type of recognition is a means of honouring the Board’s commitment and dedication, which is critical to HCDE’s continued success.

In addition, when a board member attends an HCDE event, he/she is publicly recognized. This was evident at the County Connections grant ceremony, in news articles about board support during the pandemic and board initiatives as well in the Convocation video where the Superintendent discussed how each board member brings a different talent to the organization and how they individually and collectively support HCDE and its students.
Board Policy

The Superintendent and legal counsel collaborate each year to advise board members about changes to board policy, most as a result of changes to state and federal laws. In 2021, several policies were updated based on actions from the 87th legislative session. A representative from the Texas Association of School Boards, which handles updates to board policies for school districts around the state, reviewed these changes along with proposed changes to employee compensation. Policy books, with red-lined changes that incorporated legal precedent, legislation or internal discussions, were delivered to the trustees for review prior to discussion. Revised policies were discussed at Policy Committee meetings and were given two readings at regular board meetings before being adopted.
Standard Bearers in any industry are those organizations that do what others wish they could and become the yardstick by which others are measured. Superintendent Colbert often likens this to the person who held the flag or the drummers during the Civil War. These were the people who were audacious enough to announce their arrival and take a bullet if needed. Likewise, standard bearers become the definition of exceptional.

To become standard bearers in education, an organization must have three things: dynamic programs, high-quality facilities and top-notch staff. In 2021, HCDE showed it is well on its way to being a standard bearer in education nationally.

The Department already demonstrated its ability to set the standard through an innovative campus for special needs children and a program that allows students with disabilities, those with behavior challenges and reluctant learners to grow and learn through interactions with horses. HCDE also boasts high-quality staff as demonstrated by low turnover and stellar credentials and is working diligently to improve all facilities.

**Dynamic Programs**

The Equine Center at Barrett Station, Operation Radical Reform and an ambitious capital improvement plan demonstrate that HCDE is willing to step outside the norm and fill necessary gaps in public education. These dynamic, flexible and pioneering programs showcase HCDE’s innovative mindset, which is critical to becoming a standard bearer. To be the epitome to which others aspire takes individuality and originality. It requires that an organization stand out and do something that has not been done before, do it in a new way or do it at such a high-level others can only marvel. Superintendent Colbert summed this up by saying that you can’t be exceptional if you do average things.

**The Standard Bearers**

- HCDE sets the standard
- Our facilities should too
  - AB East
  - Highpoint Middle School
  - Irvington Renovation
  - Coolwood Head Start
  - Adult Education
Leadership Demonstrating the Standard

During the 2020-2021 year, several members of the Leadership Team were called upon to present on various topics at both the state and national level based on their individual areas of expertise. In total, staff made 31 presentations at several prestigious Texas and national conferences. Topics ranged from procurement to leadership to integrated communications and marketing.

Below are the conferences HCDE staff presented at. Once again, one of the hallmarks of becoming a standard bearer is for HCDE to be recognized as an expert in a specific area and asked to present at the state and national level.

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31 PRESENTATIONS BY STAFF AT THE STATE AND NATIONAL LEVEL
HCDE has a history of being unique and innovative. This can be seen through the state-of-the-art Culinary Program at Fortis Academy, Equine Therapy for all students and a comprehensive sensory room and inclusive playground for students with disabilities at ABS West. These programs show that under Mr. Colbert’s leadership, HCDE is willing to not only do things that other school districts and educational service providers can’t conceive of, but do them masterfully and consistently.

When an organization achieves the standard bearer status, the evidence is in the reaction of others. Site visits from school districts and other organizations, requests for staff to present at state and local conferences and comments by local officials are all hallmarks that an organization is considered one of the best in their field. HCDE was on the receiving end of many of these in 2021.
The 2020-2021 school year started with COVID restrictions and protocols for staff, hybrid instruction at the campuses and predominantly online workshops for professional development. In August 2020, HCDE employees returned to work with several safety protocols including mandatory masks, social distancing at all meetings, sneeze guards at desks and capacity limits in rooms and elevators. In addition, staff continued to complete a daily health assessment and buildings closed by 4:30 p.m. to allow for evening cleaning. Later in the year, the department transitioned back to a more typical environment with masks and social distancing at meetings being optional and the elimination of daily health assessments. Masks and social distancing were reintroduced in August 2021 when COVID cases spiked again.

Programs

The 2021 school year was peppered with hybrid options for both students and staff. These included online and in-person learning in the classroom, where many teachers hosted students in both learning environments, tailoring instruction for students in both instances. CASE’s Ecobot Tournament, traditionally held at the Berry Center, was held virtually. However, ABS West hosted its own robotics tournament for the first time. As this event was later in the year, it was held in-person at the school. CASE Debates remained in the online environment but a team from Alief ISD represented Harris County and CASE at the national tournament in person. In addition, professional learning in restorative practices was held both virtually for staff and in-person for students.

HCDE’s annual Convocation, which occurs the Friday before school starts, was initially planned for an in-person event at the Berry Center. However due to rising COVID cases in the county, Superintendent Colbert decided to pivot and create a virtual option through a video. While not as dynamic or “awe inspiring” as having a horse trot around the arena in front of staff, the Convocation video was well received with many staff telling the Superintendent they appreciated his decision to hold it virtually as a safety precaution.

Operations

Many programs and events were held virtually in the 2021 school year due to ongoing COVID restrictions and space limitations. The Early Childhood Winter Conference, the second largest PreK conference in Texas, was held virtually with more than 1,000 attendees from around the country and world. Online professional learning workshops for educators were also held online through 2021 along with online Adult Education classes and a virtual School Safety Summit. Choice Partners sponsored an exhibit booth at many trade conferences both in person and virtually.

Financial Incentives

To compensate employees for their hard work during the COVID-19 pandemic and their willingness to be flexible and adapt to a changing educational landscape, the Superintendent proposed a financial longevity bonus for eligible employees in August 2021. The bonus, $250 for eligible part-time employees and $500 for eligible full-time employees, was distributed with the August 30 paycheck to more than 600 employees.

In late 2021, Superintendent Colbert proposed a healthy habits stipend for those employees who showed proof they were already vaccinated against the COVID-19 virus or could show proof of full vaccination by Jan. 7, 2022. The $300 stipend was designed to promote continued implementation of healthy habits to ensure HCDE remained a safe working environment.
The 2020-2021 school year marked a pivotal and historic time for HCDE. The Board approved a $51 million capital improvement plan that called for four new buildings, critical maintenance and necessary renovations to administrative buildings.

The plan, financed with revenue bonds and maintenance notes, is the largest construction and maintenance plan HCDE has undertaken in its history.

ABS East

The capital plan replaces the current ABS East building with a new facility on the same site. The new campus will feature the same innovative features as the new ABS West building including rounded corners, a calming color palette, a comprehensive sensory room and an inclusive playground. Several school districts have commented they are looking forward to seeing the new building, which is designed specifically for students with multiple disabilities. Ground broke on the new school in October 2021 with plans to open in 2022.
Adult Education

The capital improvement plan calls for a $15 million new adult education building, at the same location as current Adult Education classrooms just north of the Irvington building. The new complex will feature new offices for Adult Education administration, classrooms, a computer lab and a state-of-the-art community outreach room that can be used for local events and gatherings including job fairs. The new facility is scheduled to break ground in late 2021 and open in fall 2022.

Highpoint Middle School

Middle school students at HCDE’s alternative school will move into a new building, just behind their current campus. The new school will replace the current facility and bring the middle school to the same level in terms of the building as the high school. The middle school will begin construction in 2022 and open for the 2023 school year.

Irvington Renovation

HCDE’s administrative offices have not been renovated since the early 1980s. Superintendent Colbert often says that you cannot be considered exceptional if you do average things. The Superintendent believes that the organization’s facilities contribute to HCDE’s reputation in the community and need to accurately reflect the quality of programs and services provided. The capital improvement plan calls for a wholesale renovation of the Irvington building including code updates, a new Board Room and redesign of office space to accommodate both current and future staff. However, these renovations have been put on hold until 2022 to allow for budgetary considerations.

$51 MILLION - CAPITAL INVESTMENT PLAN (3 NEW BUILDINGS)
The hallmark of any educational institution is student success, and HCDE is no exception. Superintendent Colbert is a stalwart supporter of high expectations and believes HCDE can be and should be the best educational service provider in the country. With this in mind, in the 2021-2022 year, HCDE celebrated several student-success stories that are the result of the support HCDE provides to its students and local school districts.

On the National Stage

HCDE had two programs that saw local students shine on the national stage. The CASE debates program celebrated its fourth year in 2021 by bringing home a national trophy. Students from an Alief ISD high school, that participated in debate tournaments thanks to grants from HCDE’s CASE program, not only won the local city championship, but won the World Schools Debate event at the 2021 National Speech and Debate Championships. Approximately 206 students from 15 Harris County schools participated in CASE debates in 2021.

In addition to CASE Debates, HCDE provided the opportunity which lead to a Houston ISD high school student being named the National Youth Poet for the Southwestern region by Scholastic. Each year, HCDE facilitates the regional Scholastic Art & Writing Contest, judging thousands of entries from local youth artists and writers. Winners of the local contest advance to the national competition where they can win Gold and Silver Key awards. In 2021, HCDE entries garnered more than 80 national awards. But that is not all. In Spring 2021, HCDE was notified that Kechi Mbah from HISD was selected as one of five national student poets based on the poem she entered for the Scholastic contest. Kechi will now travel around the region encouraging other students to get into poetry.

Student Success

ABS East Groundbreaking
Success at the Schools

HCDE’s four schools are very specialized, serving unique student populations. While HCDE students attend the AB campuses, Fortis or Highpoint, they are still considered students in their home school. As such, when they graduate, they are eligible to participate in their home school’s primary graduation ceremony.

Both AB Campuses traditionally hold a small graduation to commemorate any student who is moving on. This year, Fortis Academy held its first graduation celebration. Roberta Vasquez attended Fortis Academy starting the second year it was open. Over the next three years, while she struggled and sometimes slipped, Roberta always returned to Fortis as a way to overcome her addiction. In June 2021, that perseverance paid off as Roberta graduated. In her commencement speech, Robert said Fortis improved her mentality and helped her mature. She remains a cheerleader for the recovery high school.

Michael Carly, a former student at ABS East, is also a avid supporter of HCDE schools. The 16-year-old Huffman student attended the school for students with multiple disabilities for four years, eventually returning to his home campus. While at ABS East, Michael was introduced to chess as a way to control his behavioral outbursts and keep his mind engaged. That engagement continued even after Michael left ABS East and culminated when Michael was certified as a US Chess Federation Level 1 Certified Chess Coach. Michael continues to play in chess tournaments and helps other students get involved with the strategic game.

Superintendent Colbert, an enthusiastic chess player himself, engaged in a game with Michael a few years ago and then at this year’s Annual Schools Chess Tournament. While he was a good match for Michael last time, the Superintendent lost in 2021 to the former HCDE student.

Superintendent Colbert is a believer that by engaging students in non-traditional activities that support their learning and behavior goals, HCDE schools can help students be successful not only academically, but in life as well.
Community Stewardship

Each year, Superintendent Colbert presents the Board with a balanced budget that meets the needs of the organization while providing high quality programs and competitive compensation. In the last six years under his leadership, HCDE has not only increased its budget and the scope of services, but reduced the tax rate consistently.

In 2021, revenue sources continued to diversify while expenditures were examined for efficiency and relevance. HCDE continued to receive state and national recognition for solid financial practices, maintaining its prestigious Moody’s rating and continuing to receive many state and national awards for excellence in financial practices.

Sound Financial Practices

HCDE is considered a model for the quality of its financial practices and is often sought after for advice and support for school financial operations. In 2021, HCDE continued to host CFOs from around the state for monthly School Finance Council meetings. The nationally acclaimed budget process was part of HCDE’s financial operations this year with each division providing a SWOT analysis, GAP analysis and risk assessment.

HCDE models transparent operations, reporting on financials monthly to the board and posting documents on the website. The Texas Comptroller’s Office awarded HCDE three stars for financial transparency in 2021.

Awards and Recognitions

- Certificate of Excellence in Financial Reporting Award, Association of School Business Officials, 17th year
- Certificate of Achievement Award of Excellence in Financial Reporting, Government Finance Officers Association, 18th year
- Award of Outstanding Achievement in Popular Annual Financial Report, Government Finance Officers Association, 14th year
- Meritorious Budget Award, Association of School Business Officials, 12th year
- Distinguished Budget Presentation Award, Government Finance Officers Association, 12th year
- Government Treasurer’s Association of Texas Certification for investment policy, 2nd year
- Unmodified opinion on 2020 Audit
- Purchasing Award, Texas Association of School Business Officials, 11th year
- Purchasing Award, NIGP Institute for Public Procurement, 5th year
- Pinnacle Award for Innovation in School Construction and Financing

Competitive Compensation

HCDE is consistently among the top paying school districts in the county. In 2021, Superintendent Colbert remained committed to this designation, once again being at the top of the pay scale with a starting teacher salary of $62,800.

HCDE also became one of a handful of companies in the region to offer a $15 minimum wage for all employees. This new floor compensation, along with a 2% raise for all employees, continued to put HCDE at the top of the region in terms of employee compensation.

$44M IN GRANTS RECEIVED (MULTIPLE YEAR AWARDS)

Community Stewardship Community Stewardship

Moody’s AAA RATING

Tax Rate


$44M IN GRANTS RECEIVED (MULTIPLE YEAR AWARDS)
Superintendent Colbert is proud that under his leadership HCDE has emerged as a favored place to work. In addition to competitive salaries, HCDE hosts events throughout the year for employees as a means of fostering a positive work environment.

In 2021, the pandemic continued to limit what activities could be held within the buildings, but HR coordinated the following creative activities:

- Holiday gift bag for all employees
- Breast Cancer Awareness Month
- Go Texan Day
- National Donut Day
- College Colors Day

Convocation
In 2021, HCDE was named one of the Top Workplaces in the greater Houston area for the third consecutive year. Sponsored by the Houston Chronicle, this prestigious designation recognizes only a handful of large organizations each year.

In the spring, HCDE employees fill out a survey about the culture and climate at HCDE. The results of this survey are used to determine if HCDE is a Top Workplace. In 2021, 77% of employees responded with many favorable comments and answers.

Superintendent Colbert and ELT reviewed the results and discussed them with their teams, using the annual feedback as a tool to enhance the organization and each division. The Houston Chronicle will recognize HCDE, along with the other Top Workplaces, in late November.

Each year, HCDE staff comes together on the day before school starts to fellowship, honor employee service to the department and hear the Superintendent discuss the direction of the organization.

In 2021, Superintendent Colbert planned for Convocation to resume as an in-person event at the Berry Center in Cypress. The theme was set for Let’s Rodeo as a nod to the new Equine Center initiative the Board approved earlier in the year. Plans were made for Superintendent Colbert to learn to ride a horse and become a real cowboy through traditional western gear including a rodeo style belt buckle, cowboy boots and a hat. His “mentor” Clint Eastwood, would make a cameo appearance to help him put on his new duds and look the part. The program would culminate with Superintendent Colbert riding a horse around the arena, telling staff all about the new equine program.

However, a week before the August 20 event, COVID cases began rising in the county. As a safety precaution for staff, Superintendent Colbert switched the event to virtual.

The Superintendent, in collaboration with the communications team, quickly devised a new plan for the program. A video would feature him talking to staff about the prior year’s accomplishments while driving around the county to the locations where new buildings would be constructed courtesy of HCDE’s $50 million capital improvement plan. A script was written, taped and edited in less than five working days. On August 20, HCDE released the Let’s Rodeo video, effectively capturing the essence of the event theme while also informing HCDE staff of the department’s accomplishments and upcoming initiatives.
The video started with a surprise visit at the office from Superintendent Colbert’s longtime mentor “Clint Eastwood.” After introducing Clint to the Board of Trustees, whose pictures were mounted on “Wanted” posters, Superintendent Colbert discussed some of HCDE’s accomplishments before finding his new boots and hat and making sure the iconic cowboy approved of his attire. Superintendent Colbert then hopped in his cowboy truck and drove around Harris County, visiting places that would be impacted in the coming year through the capital improvement program. He discussed many of the prior year’s achievements including a legislative session where no bills about HCDE were heard, raises for staff, a new $15 minimum wage and the construction plan for three new buildings. Animated renderings were inserted into the video to give staff an idea of what the buildings would look like. The video culminated with Superintendent Colbert arriving at the proposed site of the new Equine Enrichment Center in Barrett Station and discussing the program and future of HCDE with two “real cowboys,” one of which is a long-time community leader. While many staff were disappointed that the in-person event was cancelled, Superintendent Colbert received several emails and comments thanking him for cancelling it as a safety precaution for staff. Even though the message was delivered virtually, staff still received the swag from the event including a custom Let’s Rodeo lanyard, bandana and mask.
Ongoing Professional Development

With the return to work in August 2020, Superintendent Colbert lifted the travel restrictions for staff regarding professional development. As a firm believer in the power of being a life-long learner, Mr. Colbert continues to hold employees to high performance standards and encourages staff to stay abreast of new trends in their respective fields. During the 2020-2021 school year, HCDE staff participated in more than 250 in-person conferences in Texas and across the nation. This does not include the hundreds of conferences staff attended virtually. In addition, from January to September 2021, HCDE provided 40 virtual internal professional development trainings for staff during the workday. Learning ranged from information about using Microsoft Office products to use of internal software systems as well as instructional use of technology. Special Munch N’ Learn luncheon conversations started in the summer, featuring a champion - usually an ELT member, promoting a skill or business idea and then chatting with staff after viewing a LinkedIn Learning video. Superintendent Colbert hosted a Munch N’ Learn in September 2021 on Emotional Intelligence which was attended by nearly 150 staff members.

A strong supporter of ongoing professional development for staff, Superintendent Colbert knows that when employees grow their knowledge and expertise, the entire organization benefits. This philosophy, which fosters an environment where learning and growing is not only encouraged by emphasized, allows staff to showcase knowledge and skills across divisions and support improvement in all areas of HCDE.

To attend this session, please click here.

For more information, contact Cindy Tan at IT-Training@hcde-texas.org or 713-696-1325.

SEPTEMBER 29, 2021
11:30 A.M. -12:30 P.M.

Come munch and learn with Mr. James Colbert Jr., HCDE Superintendent, as he shares one of his favorite videos on LinkedIn Learning. Door prizes will be available for attendees.

It is the policy of Harris County Department of Education not to discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, limited English proficiency, or handicapping condition(s) in its programs.
In 2021, HCDE continued to foster positive partnerships in the community through existing programs and resources while forging paths for new initiatives. The department continued to partner with the local business community for the Head Start SuperMENtors program and Bates car giveaway as well as for the new Tools for Teachers supply program.

HCDE started what looks to be a long-term partnership with Harris County with the development of an Equine Center in the Barrett Station area. This project is designed to not only support HCDE students and students from local ISDs, but the local community as well.

Harris County Commissioners also funded a new program with HCDE’s CASE division, supporting more than $600,000 in grants to 50 non-profit organizations, to provide summer enrichment programs for local youth. The program assisted more than 2,000 families thanks to the new partnership. This program is similar to the long-standing partnership with the City of Houston for an afterschool initiative within the city limits.

Collaborations

HCDE partnered with several organizations to enhance public education in the region in various ways including:

- SuperMENtors (Head Start)
- Harris County Commissioners Court (CASE County Connections)
- Harris County Precinct 1
- Houston Urban Debate League (CASE Debates)
- Houston Endowment (CASE)
- City of Houston (CASE City Connections)
Giving Back

This year, Superintendent Colbert worked with the Board to expand the department’s financial allocation to the Education Foundation of Harris County to benefit local school districts and educators. The department continued to give $400,000 for grants, scholarships and sponsorships benefiting local ISDs and started a new program to support teachers with classroom supplies. The first round of grants, totaling more than $200,000, was distributed in April 2020.

The second round of grants again supported dozens of local school districts with both COVID-19 related projects and traditional curricular programming. In spring of 2021, more than $200,000 was distributed to 17 school districts for projects ranging from instructional materials to science equipment to drones for STEM projects. In addition, the foundation sponsored various school district functions including golf tournaments, state of the schools addresses and other fundraising events.

The Tools for Teachers program, a board initiative originally proposed by Trustee Andrea Duhon, awarded thousands of local teachers with a $100 coupon to buy classroom supplies through an online catalog. The registration, open to all K-12 public school teachers in Harris County, was filled within hours of opening and the wait list was full by the first night. The initiative originally funded 2,000 coupons. But seeing the popularity of the program, the Board of Trustees voted to increase the funding to include the 1,000 people on the waiting list for a total investment of $300,000.

Ambassador for HCDE

As Superintendent, Mr. Colbert serves as the face of the organization in the community. He represents HCDE on a variety of boards including:
• Good Reason Houston
• Northwest Assistance Ministries (NAM)
• University Interscholastic League (UIL) Executive Committee
• Men on a Mission
• Texas Academic Decathlon Committee
• Education Foundation of Harris County
• Journey of Faith United Methodist Church

Superintendent Colbert also makes many presentations each year, promoting HCDE programs, services and resources at the local, state and national level. In 2021, Superintendent Colbert further enhanced HCDE’s standing in the community through various presentations and discussions including:
• TABSE Conferences (2)
• TASA Mid-Winter Conference
• Region 13 Principal’s Academy
• Educator Certification Principals Academy

Scholastic Art & Writing

Each year, HCDE facilitates the regional Scholastic Art and Writing Showcase, sending dozens of students onto the national competition. This year, artwork was not showcased locally due to COVID restrictions, but was presented virtually via HCDE’s website. In 2021, HCDE received more than 8,000 entries from public, private and charter schools around Harris County. Out of these entries, thousands of Gold Key Awards were given, garnering more than 80 awards at the national competition in New York. In addition, HCDE was proud to have one of five national poets in the country be from a Harris County school. The poem by Kechi Mbah from HISD was selected out of 300,000 total submissions from around the nation.

The Scholastic Art & Writing competition is a national arts competition for high school students, sponsored by the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards program. The competition is open to high school students across the United States, and recognizes creative works in traditional and non-traditional media categories. The competition is divided into several categories, including drawing, painting, photography, sculpture, and mixed media. The winners are chosen by a panel of professional artists and art educators, and their works are displayed at local, regional, and national exhibitions. The competition aims to celebrate the creativity and talent of young artists and provide them with opportunities to showcase their work to a wider audience.
Scan the URL code to watch the superintendent’s special messages to staff.

HOLIDAY MESSAGE

SPRING BREAK

INTRODUCING OUT OF THE BOX

CONVOCATION ANNOUNCEMENT

CONVOCATION GOING VIRTUAL

VACCINATION STIPEND
The 2020-2021 school year saw the continuation of HCDE's brand awareness campaign, See the Impact. The campaign, designed to help the greater community understand how HCDE positively supports education and the local community, featured one key message: HCDE makes a large impact on the community through its programs and services. Advertisements featured HCDE students and focused on the department's five student-based programs: Special Schools, Head Start, Adult Education, School-based Therapy Services and CASE afterschool programs.

The hallmark of the campaign was a mailed brochure and two inserts into Community Impact newspapers. The mailer, sent to approximately 900,000 households throughout Harris County, featured an overview of HCDE and its AB campuses and information about the foundation grants to school districts. The subsequent insertions, which were inserted in Community Impact newspapers that were delivered to more than 1 million households, focused on the schools, Scholastic Art and Writing, Head Start and Adult Education. HCDE received positive feedback on all the publications.

Ads also appeared in various mediums including:
- Radio spots
- YouTube videos/Google Ads
- Facebook Ads
- Rotating Billboards

Advertising campaign effectiveness is measured in various ways:
- Impression: a metric quantifying the number of digital views or engagements of a piece of content. This is the number of times someone had the opportunity to see the ad
- Reach: the number of people that likely saw the ad
- Click: when someone engages with a digital ad and the link takes them somewhere specific (typically a webpage)
For the 2020-2021 fiscal year, the See the Impact campaign garnered nearly 6 million impressions on social media through Google and Facebook ads. Ads reached 517,000 individual users, with more than 464,000 video plays, 63,000 clicks (which took viewers to the HCDE website) and 20,000 individual engagement activities (likes, shares, comments).

In June 2021, HCDE again paused the traditional campaign to focus on teacher recruiting. This campaign focused on social media ads, garnering 133,000 impressions and nearly 5,000 individual clicks. The video was viewed more than 25,000 times. Human Resources noted HCDE had a solid candidate pool for teaching jobs with many applicants ultimately being hired.

HCDE supplemented the awareness campaign with traditional public relations strategies including media coverage of HCDE events and stories, outreach through presentations at conferences, visibility via HCDE and Choice Partners exhibits at conferences and internal communications to ensure staff knew about the campaign and could act as brand ambassadors in the community.
Programs and Services

Below are the programs and services HCDE provides to students, school districts, educators, local government and non-profit organizations on a daily basis.

Instructional Support Services
- AB School East
- AB School West
- Fortis Academy
- Highpoint Middle School
- Highpoint High School
- School-based Therapy
- CASE afterschool support
- CASE Debates
- CASE Ebot Challenge
- Early Childhood/Winter Conference
- English Professional Development
- Math Professional Development
- Restorative Practices Coaching and Professional Development
- Scholastic Art & Writing Contest
- Leadership Speakers Series
- Head Start
- Early Head Start
- Adult Education ESL Classes
- Adult Education GED Classes
- Adult Education Workforce Development Courses/Certificates

Operational Support Services
- HCDE Business Plus
- Records Management
- REI Dashboards
- Safety Audits
- School Finance Council
- Emergency Preparedness Training
- Administrator Certification
- Teacher Certification
- Choice Partners Purchasing Cooperative
- IMPACT
- Fiscal Point
- Partners in Education Grants
- Tools for Teachers
- Grants Development
- Foundation Sponsorships

Projects in Development
- Equine Center
- JJAEP
- Early Head Start Expansion
- Highpoint Middle School Construction
- AB School East Construction
- Adult Education Construction
- Irvington Renovation
- Coolwood Head Start Construction
- Humble Head Start Construction
- Barnett Station Head Start Construction
- La Porte Head Start Construction
- Partners in Education Student Scholarships
A. Management of Administrative, Fiscal, and Facilities Function

As a conservative financial leader, look for ways to improve programs and services without greater expenditures and with concern for cutting expenses and costs to public schools for service without sacrifice to high quality services. Recommend the annual budget to maximize resources and manage the budget while exercising prudent judgment.

Elements of Performance:

1. Oversees a budget development process that results in recommendations based on Department priorities and available resources.
2. Oversees budget implementation in a way that ensures appropriate expenditure of budgeted funds and provides for clear and timely budget reports.
3. Ensures the Department investment strategies, risk management activities, and purchasing practices are sound, cost-efficient, and consistent with policy and law.
4. Implements and oversees a planning process that results in goals, targets, or priorities for major areas of operations.
5. Monitors effectiveness of operations against appropriate benchmarks.
6. Recruit and maintain high-quality, professional staff at all levels.

B. Organization Morale

While treating every person with respect and dignity, implement effective management practices ensuring all policies are supported by effective procedures. Direct administrators to accomplish the mission, goals and objectives of the Department, monitor progress, evaluate staff performance and hold staff accountable as appropriate. Effectively delegate authority with responsibility and monitor staff to ensure support programs and services are cost effective and high quality.

Elements of Performance:

1. Creates an open and positive environment for sharing resources and exchanging ideas to improve organizational climate.
2. Seeks systematically to improve the climate by obtaining and utilizing feedback from employees of the Department.
3. Models and supports responsible risk-taking so that all employees can be innovative and try new ideas.
4. Celebrates accomplishments and acknowledges excellence.
5. Ensures fair and equitable management practices.
7. Demonstrates quality management through delegation of authority, team building, consensus development, leadership development, and self-management.
C. Personnel Management

Establish a culture among the staff so that all strive to achieve excellence and do not accept mediocre performance. Ensure all supervisory staff administers personnel practices with consistency and fairness with respect for the individual. Monitor the salary grid to ensure equity in the compensation program. Ensure an effective backup plan is in place for all functional areas in the event of absence of personnel, especially key personnel. Conduct a review of jobs vs. performance plans to ensure parity.

Elements of Performance:

1. Ensures that the system for recruiting and selection results in personnel recommendations based on defined needs, goals, priorities and candidate credentials/qualifications.

2. Oversees a performance appraisal process for staff that reinforces a standard of excellence and assesses deficiencies; ensures that results are used in planning for improvement.

3. Administers a compensation and benefits plan for employees based on clearly defined goals and priorities and ensures consistency in all personnel practices.

4. Encourages, oversees, and participates in staff recognition activities.

5. Assigns, defines the duties, transfers, and dismisses/recommends for dismissal any and all employees of the Department. Establish backup plans for all functional areas to ensure a continuum of performance and service.

D. Community Relations

Function as the primary ambassador for the Department. Present a positive, professional image of yourself and of the Department in all venues—community, political, educational, business and board. Maintain visibility and involvement in the community with ISD Superintendents, elected officials, community leaders and the HCDE board. Be open to their ideas and needs, listen and accept criticism, and be willing to seek advice and counsel when necessary. Determine the appropriate course of action to address issues.

Communicate the needs and accomplishments of the Department in a variety of formats: through written reports, communication with the media, community, school districts, political arenas and public meetings. Represent HCDE by attendance at events and speak professionally. Make professional presentations to all audiences in all arenas. Listen and take into account differing viewpoints of various constituencies using good judgment to discern the best decision and action for the Department.

Elements of Performance:

1. Establishes and maintains a program of public relations to keep the public well-informed of the activities of the Department, affecting a wholesome and cooperative working relationship between the Department and community.

2. Works with other governmental entities and community organizations to meet the needs of students and the community in a coordinated way.
E. Instructional Management

In coordination with the home ISD, identify learning needs of students and develop a process that ensures each student’s learning goals are met or exceeded. Ensure feedback process is implemented to communicate effectively with the home ISD and parents. Investigate best practices for student achievement and utilize effective practices that maximize achievement of student potential within HCDE schools. Implement data archive and retrieval system to capture best practices for student learning and publish to public schools.

Elements of Performance:

1. Establishes effective mechanisms for communication to and from staff in instructional evaluation, planning, and decision making.
2. Oversees annual planning for increased student learning and conducts periodic assessments of the effectiveness of the planning process.
3. Ensures that goals and objectives form the basis of curricular decision making and instruction and communicates expectations for student achievement.
4. Ensures that appropriate data are used in developing recommendations and making decisions regarding the instructional program and resources.
5. Establishes a system for regular evaluation of instructional programs to meet student instructional needs and to attain desired student achievement.

F. Organizational Improvement

Develop and implement a clear vision for the Department. Develop and foster an entrepreneurial spirit and understand HCDE’s role in the changing educational environment. Work with the Board of Trustees to set the vision, mission, goals and objectives for the Department, and then manage the day-to-day business ensuring that the objectives are achieved.

Assess risks and determine appropriate actions using sound business judgment to provide programs and resources that support educational opportunities. In the event of an emergency, work in conjunction with county and city and other authorities to provide resources and services ensuring the safety of Harris County students and HCDE staff.

Elements of Performance:

1. Ensures that key planning activities within the Department are coordinated and consistent with board policy and applicable law, and that goals and results are communicated as appropriate.
2. Organizes the central administration in a manner consistent with Department priorities and resources and monitors administrative organization at all levels for effectiveness and efficiency.
3. Oversees procedures to ensure effective and timely compliance with all legal obligations, reporting requirements, and policies.
G. Professional Growth and Development

Each staff member should be evaluated annually and informed of progress or needs for improvement and expectations. Staff development opportunities should be communicated to and available to employees. Assess any new and effective development tools available and determine their applicability to HCDE staff.

Elements of Performance:

1. Oversees a performance appraisal process for instructional staff that reinforces standards of excellence and assesses deficiencies; ensures that results are used in planning for improvement.

2. Ensures that appropriate staff development is available and monitors staff development for effectiveness.

H. Board Relations

The Superintendent is the primary public face of HCDE. The Board expects the Superintendent to maintain a highly visible and positive profile in the Harris County community. As elected officials, members of the board must be prepared to respond to their constituents and the general public regarding HCDE. The information flow between the Superintendent and the Board is essential so that Board members are knowledgeable and sensitive to critical issues. As CEO of the Department’s operations, the Superintendent evaluates risks and innovative programs and advises the Board of the pros and cons of various issues relating to policies, structure, image, politics, community, potential problems, as well as accolades and recognition of the Department or its programs. The Superintendent is expected to use good judgment regarding critical or emergency issues. Due to potential media attention, the Superintendent will promptly inform the Board President, and then follow alerting all board members in accordance with Board policies and procedures.

Elements of Performance:

1. Keeps the board informed of significant issues as they arise, using agreed-upon criteria and procedures for information dissemination.

2. Responds in a timely and complete manner to board requests for information that are consistent with board policy and established procedures.

3. Provides recommendations and appropriate supporting materials to the board on policy issues and matters for board decision.

4. Interprets and supports board policy and decisions to staff and community.

5. Maintains a positive and professional working relationship with the board.