

HISD PRESS RELEASE

HISD 2019-2020 educators of the year announced during surprise home visits

May 8, 2020 – The 2019-2020 Houston Independent School District educators of the year were announced during surprise home visits, including visits by Interim Superintendent Grenita Lathan at the residences of the elementary and secondary teachers of the year and beginning teachers of the year.

The visits took place on Wednesday, May 6, and Thursday, May 7, during Teacher Appreciation Week and included yard signs, balloons, and gift baskets near the front doors of the educators who were asked to come outside for the announcements, in keeping with safe social distancing practices.

- **Rebecca Hiatt**, a seventh-grade science teacher at Baylor College of Medicine Biotech Academy at Rusk, is HISD's 2019-2020 Secondary Teacher of the Year.
- **Rebecca Busse**, a special education teacher at Bush Elementary School, is the district's Elementary Teacher of the Year.

"The commitment, ingenuity and proficiency of these educators have been evident all year and once the district moved to closed-but-instructing status, these teachers never wavered," Lathan said. "If anything, they took their performance to the next level."

The surprise visits took place in lieu of HISD's annual Educators of the Year banquet, which was canceled this year due to COVID-19.

"The board of trustees is truly grateful for your dedication to our HISD children," HISD Board President Sue Deigaard said. "You have each demonstrated exemplary service to ensure your students achieve their maximum potential. We are especially appreciative during this unprecedented COVID-19 crisis as you have risen to the difficult task of finding innovative ways to connect with and teach your students."

Hiatt and Busse received gift baskets courtesy of Raising Cane's and Kroger, \$2,500 appreciation awards, and a fully loaded 2020 Acura RDX SUV on loan to them for the summer, courtesy of Sterling McCall Acura, which is part of the Group 1 Automotive family.

Lathan and HISD's Interim Chief Academic Officer Yolanda Rodriguez also made surprise announcements at the homes of the 2019-2020 Beginning Teachers of the Year: **Ronni Molare**

of Cook Elementary School, **Tavaria Miller** of Baylor College of Medicine Biotech Academy at Rusk, and **Jennifer Simmons** of Wisdom High School, who entered the teaching profession after a 20-year career in the corporate sector.

Celeste Cooper of Meyerland Performing and Visual Arts Middle School was surprised at home with the news that she is HISD's 2019-2020 Librarian of the Year.

The Ann Sledge Instructional Specialist Awards went to **Chloe Dixon Batiste**, the districtwide instructional coach of the year, and to **Naomi Cruz** of De Anda Elementary School, the campus instructional coach of the year.

In February, the district announced HISD's principals of the year for elementary and secondary schools. They are **Zandra Aguilar** of Eliot Elementary School and **Carlos Phillips** of Washington High School. At that time, Phillips also learned he was a finalist in HEB's annual Excellence in Education Awards competition.

During a virtual HEB "Toast to Texas Teachers" this week, Phillips received the news that he won the grocery chain's 2020 Secondary Principal Award. He received a \$10,000 cash prize and a \$25,000 grant for Washington High School. Phillips was one of five finalists from across the state competing for the award.

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The Houston Independent School District is the largest school district in Texas and the seventh-largest in the United States, with 280 schools and more than 209,772 students. The 333-square-mile district is one of the largest employers in the Houston metropolitan area, with more than 27,000 employees.

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