

H-E-B EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION

Judges visit award-finalist Central Texas 4C

BELTON — On Wednesday, judges for the H-E-B Excellence in Education Award were in town looking at Central Texas 4C, a finalist in the

award for early childhood education. It's an honor to be recognized by H-E-B because they have consistently supported education in Texas, said Janell Frazier, executive director of Central Texas 4C. "To have early childhood recognized as an educational field is where we need to be if we're to change the trajectories of these families," she said.

Central Texas 4C operates 14 Head Start centers in Bell County and beyond and annually serves about 700 children. Head Start provides comprehensive early childhood education, health, nutrition and parent involvement services to low-income children and their families. Last week, after visiting a couple of Head Start sites, the judges for the H-E-B award met with 4C early childhood teachers, parents, the board president, community leader, collaborators and parent policy council president. A Spanish-speaking parent and mother of five explained to Consuela Casas, principal of Pharr-San Juan-Alamo Early Start pre-K in Pharr who is a judge and a past winner of the H-E-B award, that her youngest, an Early Head Start student, has a more extensive vocabulary and is more independent than her older children, who weren't in Head Start. Rubin Rodriguez, whose daughter is in the Head Start program at Meridith-Dunbar, said Head Start reinforces what he tries to model for his child at home. "The ladies my daughter sees at Head Start help in teaching about food, nutrition, politeness and courtesy, and that helps me a lot," Rodriguez said. Rodriguez said telling his daughter she shouldn't drink sodas doesn't have nearly as much influence as her teachers telling her. Anicha Nowlin, president of the Parent Policy Council for 4C, was a teen mother and her daughter attended Head Start classes. She later had a boy who attended Early Head Start. As a pre-K and kindergarten student, he's at the top of his class in reading and math, Nowlin said. Though her children are no longer in Head Start, Nowlin continues to volunteer with the group.

Leslie Hinkle, executive director of community development for the city of Killeen, told the judges that Killeen and Central Texas 4C have partnered on projects for a number of years. Killeen has funded a number of playgrounds for Head Start and one of the Head Start sites is in a city multi-use facility. "We've been a big supporter of Head Start," Hinkle said. "We know the research and understand it and what it does." There is cooperative spirit between Head Start and the school district, said Lynn Brock, Meridith-Dunbar Early Childhood Academy principal. If a child is registering for school but would benefit from Head Start, the parents are pointed in that direction and Head Start does the same, she said. "We're not looking at the children as yours or mine, we're looking at them as our children," Brock said. The Temple school district has an integration teacher at each Head Start site. "At Meridith, there are two ISD teachers in the Head Start classroom every day who actively plan with the teacher," she said. There are discussions from day one about the needs of the child, from the youngest on up, said Melissa Delgado, family advocate and center director for the Belton Central Early Head Start program. Each child entering the program is observed for about four weeks before education goals are set, Delgado said. "The staff will build on the abilities the child has," she said.

Bell County has about 10,000 children who are economically disadvantaged and Head Start serves about 700, 4C board President Farrell Maxwell said. "We know that we'll never be able to serve all of the children, but if we could add just



Rusty Schramm/Telegram
Lisa McCormick, toddler teacher at the Belton Center Early Head Start center, spends time Thursday morning reading to her young students. The center is part of Central Texas 4C, which is being considered for H-E-B's Excellence in Education Award.

10 or an additional 100 it would make a big difference,” Maxwell said. “Our goal is to keep growing. It’s an ongoing process, that’s for sure.”

Corrine Valdez, associate professor in the college of education at Texas A&M at Corpus Christi and judge, asked Lisa McCormick, toddler teacher at the Belton Central Early Head Start, why she chose to work for Head Start. McCormick said it’s amazing to watch as the children blossom from the beginning of the year until the end. As soon as children turn 3, they move to an upper-level Head Start class and are there until they enroll in kindergarten. “It’s fun to watch as the older 2-year-olds help the younger students who are new to class,” she said. “They become little teachers.”

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See adjacent article below.

Program has awarded over \$7M since 2002

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For 14 years, H-E-B has been recognizing those responsible for teaching young Texans. The Texas Excellence in Education Awards began in 2002 as a positive way to support public education in Texas. It has become the largest monetary program for educators in the state, spotlighting best practices and celebrating the passion and creativity of Texas educators.

"Our CEO really wanted an award that recognized outstanding educators," said Jill Reynolds, public affairs manager for H-E-B. "We started out recognizing educators."

Reynolds has been coordinating the Excellence in Education awards since its start.

Over the years, in addition to honoring educators, awards have been added to recognize principals, school districts, early childhood education and school boards. The program continues to add awards and since its start more than \$7 million has been awarded to educators and schools across Texas, she said.

H-E-B asks customers, employees and community members to nominate teachers, principals, districts, early childhood facili-

ties and school boards in Texas. Each nominee is sent an invitation to complete an application online and is asked about their professional experiences, educational philosophies and achievements both in and out of the classroom.

The judges who came to Bell County Thursday to look at Central Texas 4C, a finalist in the early childhood category, were all volunteers and have background in early childhood education.

Janell Frazier, executive director of Central Texas 4C, said when she saw the biographies of the judges who would be visiting the Head Start classes she felt confident.

"I knew they would know what they are looking at because they understand early childhood education and what's required to help children learn," Frazier said.

Texas State University doctoral students score the applications and come up with the semifinalists. The semifinalists' applications are sent to a panel of judges who determine the finalists.

Site visits are taking place to determine the winner of the early childhood center.

Winners will be announced in May.

"Any center that is a finalist is doing great things," Reynolds said.

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