BakerRipley Community School Team Prepares for the 22-23 Academic Year

The BakerRipley Community Schools District Leadership Team worked through July to prepare for the 2022-2023 academic school year. Preparations included Collaboration Days which focused on - team building; unpacking high-quality instructional materials; assessment and accountability; curriculum design and unit preparation; and response to intervention and planning. The 2022-2023 school year teacher summit is themed “Reflect, Transform, SOAR!”

Additionally, our district leadership team delved into a book study series beginning with J. Gordon’s “The Energy Bus,” which takes readers on a journey that reveals 10 secrets for approaching life and work with the positive, forward-thinking that leads to true accomplishment.

Each district leadership team member has adopted a district team member to serve as a mentor to them throughout the 2022-2023 school year. The launch of the mentoring program for leadership will create sustainable retention efforts throughout our district.

Our team is focused on Positive Energy, Retention, Recruitment, and Support. Positive Energy will be a continuous phrase articulated throughout the year. With Positive Energy, we will SOAR.
Tackling Teacher Shortages for Student Achievement

The teacher shortage in America has hit crisis levels, and school district officials everywhere are scrambling to ensure that qualified teachers are in the classrooms as students return.

BakerRipley Community Schools welcomed more than 30 new teachers at new teacher orientation on July 29th. While teacher recruitment remains a high priority throughout many districts in Texas, with the addition of these new teachers, our district is 97% staffed. Only four open positions throughout the district remain, and a strong plan is in place to fill these vacancies.

“We know students suffered steep declines in academic achievement during the pandemic, especially in the communities BakerRipley serves. Now is the time to course-correct.” said Dr. Sylvia Thomas Superintendent of BakerRipley Community Schools. “We’re fortunate that on top of the COVID slide, our district doesn’t have a shortage of educators.”

BakerRipley’s People and Culture team facilitated the morning portion of new teacher orientation, highlighting the Four C’s of Onboarding: Compliance, Clarity, Culture, and Connection. In the afternoon, Superintendent Dr. Thomas and Assistant Superintendents Richard and Dr. Esch delved into the curriculum initiatives, priorities, and goals for the 2022-2023 school year. The upcoming school year promises to exude outstanding accomplishments as we Reflect, Transform, and SOAR using Positive Energy to facilitate our quest toward being a “High Performing Charter School System” that crushes inequities for our students and communities.

DACA Workshops Go Digital

On July 6th, the Immigration & Citizenship Program hosted its first Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) workshop, exclusively serving applicants who want to file their DACA renewals online, an option that only became available through the Department of Homeland Security on April 15. The team leveraged the new computer lab at the expanded Pasadena Campus to help 13 applicants file for renewal status.

This new online filing allows DACA applicants to get faster approval by submitting their applications online but it can be challenging to navigate. As a regional leader in DACA services, the Immigration & Citizenship Program quickly developed expertise in online filing and crafted an engagement plan that includes manning multiple digital DACA workshops this summer and offering pop-up workshops with partners who regularly interface with DACA recipients.

DACA applicant Judith Corrall said BakerRipley is a strong ally of the DACA community and she was happy that the attorneys have been able to help her with renewals multiple times over the years.
COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

Inaugural Young Leaders Academy

On July 8th, the BakerRipley Civic Engagement Program began its first Young Leaders Academy (YLA) at our expanded Pasadena Campus. The YLA Program has partnered with Creative Vida, a nonprofit partner specializing in helping first-generation college students learn networking techniques and supporting students as they navigate career pathways.

The YLA Program is a two-week leadership development course for 18- to 24-year-old high school graduates. In this inaugural program, students came from all over the region and represent a diverse group of aspiring community leaders from Pasadena, Deer Park, Milby, and South Houston High Schools. The course included an opening dinner with guest speakers and elected officials from the southeast Harris County region—including Pasadena ISD Trustee Crystal Davila and Pasadena Council Member Jonathan Estrada. The group spent two days attending workshops before hearing from elected officials and BakerRipley stakeholders at closing ceremonies.

The curriculum focuses on Appreciative Community Building, building power, working with decision-makers in their community, building a personal brand, navigating career goals, and public speaking.

Ripley House Beat the Heat! with Elected Officials and TXU

On July 28th, East End neighbors participated in the Ripley House monthly Food Fair, which included a special “Beat the Heat” event featuring box-fan giveaways. During the food fair, neighbors were able to speak with representatives from Kelsey Seybold, Harris County Public Health, and Community Health Choice. As a result, 205 families were served by the Houston Food Bank, and 194 households received box fans generously donated by TXU Energy. State Representative Ana Hernandez and State Senator Carol Alvarado helped hand out the fans. The “Beat the Heat!” program gives Houston residents some reprieve from the scorching summer weather.

This event and others hosted over the summer wouldn’t have been as impactful had it not been for TXU Energy, which has provided more than $30,000 for “Beat the Heat!” events this year. This generous investment in our community has allowed BakerRipley to distribute more than 800 fans to the community. Thank you to TXU Energy and BakerRipley Board Member Kim Campbell!
In 2019, Monica Cortez, a Houston native and mother of two, began serving coffee and tea out of the back of her jeep to supplement her income during the COVID-19 pandemic. Monica used her network in Houston’s Near Northside to learn the needs of her community and developed a business model that embodies hospitality.

In December 2020, after connecting at a summer pop-up shop, Monica partnered with the owners of The Big Kahuna Hut and opened “Cafe Guadalupe,” East Aldine’s first coffee bar. Working alongside her two daughters, Monica turned her passion for helping and serving into a full-time business, and Cafe Guadalupe was an instant hit with her East Aldine neighbors.

Over the next year and a half, Cafe Guadalupe hosted several networking events that allowed other entrepreneurs in the community to connect and exchange resources. Monica hosted “Cafe con CEOs” on April 2022 and connected with BakerRipley’s Entrepreneur Connection Program. In addition, she began working with her coach consistently to help scale the business.

In June 2022, Cafe Guadalupe, in partnership with SBA-Houston, BakerRipley, SBDC, and SCORE-Houston, hosted “Cafecito y Negocios,” a meet-up that provided resources and connections for Spanish-speaking small-business entrepreneurs. The event was a complete success with a turnout of 40 local entrepreneurs, and everyone enjoyed the delicious coffee, lemonade, and cakes!

Now on Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays you can find Monica and her daughters at 11902 Aldine Westfield serving their knockout Cafe con Canela y Agua de Mazapan, which are East Aldine staples.

Monica’s next chapter entails expansion. She is the proud owner of a 14x7 mobile trailer that will allow her to cater large events and is working with her BakerRipley coach on obtaining capital to help her renovate her trailer.

Monica shared: “I didn’t want just another paycheck job although I still did need to pay bills. It’s been 2 1/2 years since the journey began for Cafe Guadalupe and I am so excited to share that this business is no longer about just about paying bills. It’s so much more than that.”
TechBridge Student Finds a New Career

Guadalupe is a recent participant of BakerRipley’s TechBridge Program. Guadalupe was a full-time Houston Independent School District (HISD) teacher’s aide at Fleming Middle School. In that job, she often had the opportunity to help students in the computer lab and she was frequently called on by other teachers and school administrators to resolve minor computer problems. Guadalupe has always been interested in a career in technology and it was at Ripley House, where her son attends school, that she first saw a flyer for the TechBridge Program.

“I saw an opportunity to take my education a step further,” she said. “Here was a program where I could learn to code and earn a CompTIA certification. I knew this was how I would get a better job and be able to spend more time with my son.” So, she enrolled in the first cohort for the TechBridge and CompTIA A+ Program.

It was a lot of work, but I kept going,” Guadalupe said. She was persistent throughout the virtual program, even when she got sick with COVID-19—twice. “I never missed a day or an assignment,” she said. The program concluded in February 2022 and Guadalupe wasted no time searching for a new job aligned with her goals and her new tech skills.

In June, with newfound confidence and skills, Guadalupe applied for an IT position within HISD and was immediately scheduled for an interview. “I knew I did well,” she said. “The hiring manager asked many technical questions, all of which I could answer. Because of BakerRipley and my mobility mentors, I got training and help with my resume. My mentor walked me through how to apply for jobs that I wanted, and she coached me on what questions to be ready for in an interview.”

The following day, Guadalupe got a call. “I got the job! And it feels so good! I’ll be making way more money than in my previous job, and the school I’ll be working with is close to my son’s school, so I’ll be able to take him to school and spend more time with him,” she said.

HEAD START

Ready. Set. Go!

It is “Ready, Set, Go” time for our Head Start Division as we kicked off the 2022-2023 school year with our annual welcome-back event. This year, we had the pleasure of hosting Paula Harris, Senior Vice President of Community Affairs for the Houston Astros and the Executive Director of the Astros Foundation as our keynote speaker.

In addition to Ms. Harris, our more than 500 staff members received inspirational messages from our CEO Claudia Aguirre, and our Chief Program Officer Rene Solis. With our enrollment rising and a high percentage of our students demonstrating that they are ready for kindergarten, it was time to celebrate! We enjoyed a festive pre-service event at NRG Center featuring great food, fellowship, and fun with fantastic raffle-prize drawings and educational vendor displays. Our Head Start team is ready to GO!
HEALTH AND WELLNESS

BakerRipley Leader Presents New Initiative

On July 19th, Tanya Treece, BakerRipley’s Senior Director of Health and Wellness, was asked to speak at the Texas Aging Network Statewide Summit, a conference dedicated to understanding and supporting the needs of adults over 60 and their caregivers. More than 100 colleagues, partners, and community advocates were in attendance along with the Bureau Chiefs for 28 Texas Area Agency on Aging offices. Tanya spoke on Congregate Meal Innovations and highlighted our BR Morning Perk project.

BakerRipley continues our advocacy work for congregate meal programs that support a higher quality diet, greater food security, and increased socialization for our seniors and their caregivers. In September, we will present on the BR Morning Perk at the National Conference.

TXU Helping to Cool Things Down

BakerRipley wants to thank TXU Energy for their generous donation, which made it possible for our Health and Wellness Division to purchase 62 portable AC units for our homebound seniors. In the center of the photo is Rosa Maria Martinez, 87. Rosa attends our Denver Harbor Senior Health and Wellness Center. On Rosa’s left is Angie White, Senior Manager of Senior Health and Wellness Centers. On Rosa’s right is Kim Campbell, Senior Manager, Customer Advocacy with TXU Energy.

PROGRAM RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

Public Resource Development Update

In July, Program Resource Development (PRD) collaborated on submitting four proposals totaling $29,823,539, with potential program impacts for BakerRipley Community Schools, Economic Initiatives, and Workforce Divisions.

These funds could help us provide science textbooks, curriculum support, and small business education and training. It will also provide additional funding for supportive services for veteran families.
Creating a “Space of Possibility” for Students

On July 26th, Public Resource Development worked with current and prospective partners to maximize our volunteer engagement efforts. Specifically, the Chevron SOMOS Employee Network—a group of Chevron employees committed to supporting the success of the Latin American and Hispanic workforce at all levels of Chevron—volunteered at the BakerRipley East Aldine FabLab on the “Summer Cleanse.”

This annual event helps prepare our makerspace for our neighbors following a busy summer of youth and adult makerspace programming. From clearing out table space in our electronics bay to reorganizing and refitting our glass fusion materials, delegating space for fabric scraps to relabeling and taking inventory of youth programming supplies, our volunteers really stepped up to the challenge and got it done!

These efforts supported our commitment to keeping the FabLab a safe and clean space for more efficient future workshops.

For other volunteer opportunities scan the QR code:

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REGIONAL INITIATIVES

Texas’ Sun Heats Up Electricity Bills

With the temperatures in Texas continuing to rise, BakerRipley is expanding outreach and enrollment opportunities for our Utility Assistance Program. The program helps support families struggling to pay their utility bills. On July 9th and 23rd, the Utility Assistance Team held in-person outreach drives where 29 team members assisted 375 neighbors with completing their Utility Assistance applications. These events helped make it possible for neighbors with limited technology capabilities to join us in person and have a program team member walk them through the application.

“Our Utility Assistance Program reaches Brazoria, Galveston, and Harris County,” said BakerRipley Utility Assistance Program Operations Manager Glynniece Herron. “We take our work to heart. We don’t want anybody’s electricity cut off. We don’t want anybody’s gas cut off.”

BakerRipley has around $15 million in federal funds available, which can help cover electricity, gas, propane, water bills and A/C and heater repairs for neighbors in need.

You can find the application for the Utility Assistance Program online on BakerRipley’s website. The application is available for download in both English and Spanish.
**REGIONAL INITIATIVES**

**Neighbor Tax Services Demand Remain Strong Following Tax Day**

On June 23rd, BakerRipley and our partner organizations, Taxpayer Advocate Service and Houston Volunteer Lawyers, hosted our virtual “Taxpayer Problem Solving Day.” In its sixth year, this event focuses on more complex tax-related issues, like back-taxes debt, audit inquiries, and identity theft. It aided more than a dozen neighbors in navigating these urgent concerns with a volunteer tax professional.

Following the Tax Deadline, Neighborhood Tax Centers have prepared an additional 644 tax returns totaling $1,022,848 in net refunds at our three community center locations (Gulfton, Pasadena, and East Aldine campuses). Our priority during this time is to support neighbors who need to amend a tax return prepared incorrectly elsewhere, and neighbors looking to file for prior years. Additionally, we helped with the application or renewal of 61 Individual Tax Identification Number (ITIN) numbers, which was critical for neighbors that need them to file a tax return because they don’t have and don’t qualify for a Social Security Number.

We will begin our 2023 tax season volunteer training late summer through the fall of 2022.

**Volunteers are a crucial part of our ability to serve our neighbors. Anyone interested in volunteering for the upcoming tax center can register at [https://volunteer.bakerripley.org](https://volunteer.bakerripley.org).**

**BakerRipley Neighbor Featured in the NY Times**

As an article by The New York Times highlighted on June 14th, Houston is leading the effort to eradicate homelessness with an innovative focus on collaborative action. We can’t be happier to be a part of it through our Rapid Rehousing and Diversion programs which aim to achieve both quick and sustainable housing solutions to increase long-term self-sufficiency.

Our client featured in the story, Terri Harris, makes us proud, as do all the other neighbors we are privileged to work with who have overcome formidable obstacles to rebuild their lives with grit and strength. Because of their determination and the help of our amazing partners, we were able to rapidly rehouse 152 cases in about a month, on average. In addition, we found long-term housing solutions for 305 neighbors from January 2021 to March 2022. You can read more by scanning the QR code to the right.
Program Impact Newsletter

AUGUST 2022

WORKFORCE INITIATIVES

Workforce Solutions Contract Renewed

BakerRipley is excited to announce that the Gulf Coast Workforce Board met on August 2nd and approved for renewal the BakerRipley Financial Aid Payment Office (FAPO) and Career Office contracts.

Investing in Child Care Teachers

In July, the Capital Area Child Care program awarded over $1M in stipends to 270 teachers from the Jeannette Watson Wage Supplement program. Wage supplements are awarded to professionals who have achieved a certification or higher education in early childhood-related studies and have met experience requirements. Payments ranged from $2,300 to $4,400 per teacher, depending on education and time in the classroom. This program is working to decrease turnover at early education centers, helping children maintain a stable relationship with an education caregiver.

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