

HISD PRESS RELEASE

Sam Houston MSTC teacher named finalist for national award in Career and Technical Education

Educator among 50 finalists for annual excellence award from national retailer Harbor Freight Tools

August 4, 2020 – Sam Houston MSTC Plumbing and Pipes Trades teacher Raul Ortega has been named one of 50 finalists from across the nation for the 2020 Harbor Freight Tools for Schools Prize for Teaching Excellence.

The award, which was started in 2017 by national tool retailer Harbor Freight Tools founder Eric Smidt, recognizes outstanding instruction in skilled trades in U.S. public high schools.

Ortega, a licensed plumber, is entering his ninth year at Sam Houston MSTC. Ortega's hands-on classroom includes bathroom and kitchen simulators where students learn to install fixtures and piping systems using curriculum from the National Center for Construction Education & Research (NCCER). Students enrolled in the program also perform basic plumbing repairs for homeowners in the Sam Houston MSTC community and learn directly from local employers who visit Ortega's classroom regularly to hire graduating seniors.

"We are incredibly proud of Mr. Ortega's accomplishment and dedication to his students," HISD Interim Superintendent Grenita Lathan said. "Empowering students to pursue careers through our various CTE offerings is a top priority in HISD. I am thrilled to see Mr. Ortega's work recognized at a national level."

Eighty percent of Ortega's students receive all three levels of their NCCER credentials after three years in the Plumbing and Pipes Trades program at Sam Houston MSTC. Half of his graduating seniors enter a plumbing or construction trade upon graduation.

Ortega now advances to a second round of competition, where he and other finalists will create innovative instruction ideas and teaching practices that would inspire students. Two rounds of judging by separate independent panels of reviewers will narrow the field to 18 winners and ultimately name three grand prize recipients.

"Mr. Ortega is very knowledgeable about all things related to plumbing and construction, and he builds great relationships with students on the way to preparing them for a career," Sam Houston MSTC Principal Alan Summers said. "Mr. Ortega has consistently produced students

who rank at the top of their field nationally and in Texas. I believe that this, along with his love for plumbing, makes him an excellent educator.”

The 18 winners will split \$1 million in prizes. Grand prize winners will each receive \$100,000, with \$70,000 going to their high school’s CTE or skilled trades program and \$30,000 to the individual teacher behind the winning program. The 15 additional winners will each be awarded \$50,000, with \$35,000 going to their high school’s program and \$15,000 to the teacher.

“I was stunned and humbled to learn that I was selected as one of 50 finalists in the nation,” Ortega said. “I am excited to continue my journey serving our children as they seek to enter rewarding, high-demand careers. I have a true passion for this work, so this recognition means a lot to me.”

All winners will be announced in late October. The full list of finalists is available [here](#).

HISD offers 163 career pathways in 70 schools. Over 52,000 HISD students were enrolled in CTE courses in the 2019-2020 school year, with over 3,800 high school students receiving certificates in their desired field.

You can learn more about HISD CTE programs at www.hisdcareerreadiness.org.

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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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