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## Five Texas companies honored for volunteer activities in public schools

AUSTIN – Five Texas companies have been named recipients of the State Board of Education’s Employers for Education Excellence (EEE) Award.

Three companies were honored with the highest award level – Gold, one with a Silver level award and one with the Bronze level.

Designed to promote more community involvement in the public schools, the EEE Award recognizes employers who implement policies that encourage employee involvement in school activities.

“I would like to congratulate these companies and businesses that have taken the time and effort to encourage and support their employees who participate in their children’s school activities,” said Barbara Cargill, chair of the State Board of Education. “I would especially like to thank those firms that also provide mentoring and partnerships to Texas public schools.”

The EEE Awards are given in three categories – Gold, Silver and Bronze.

Winners in the Gold Award category have implemented policies that encourage and support employees who attend parent-teacher conferences, who implement policies to encourage employees to volunteer in school activities, and who support employees who participate in student mentoring programs.

Gold recipients for 2011 are:

### **Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP – Dallas**

Since 2005, the Dallas office of Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP has partnered with James W. Fannin Elementary School in the Dallas Independent School District through the district’s Partners in Education Program. Staff are permitted to take part in school volunteer activities and participate in student mentoring activities during work time.

The firm supports both staff and students by providing tutoring, clothing and supply drives, chaperoning field trips, holding a teacher appreciation breakfast, sponsoring a program on physical fitness and conducting a library book drive. The firm’s employees also organize a holiday gift drive for the students, coordinate a third grade-spelling bee, present cultural arts and social skills programs and much more.

The firm also sponsored a music workshop for second and third graders where students write, record and perform songs.

Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP was founded in Dallas in 1945 by Richard A. Gump and Robert S. Strauss. Akin Gump Dallas is home to many of the firm’s key practices, including corporate finance, mergers and acquisitions, investment funds, private equity, tax, litigation, intellectual property, financial restructuring, labor and employment, real estate and finance, real estate financial services and environmental.

## **Behringer Harvard – Dallas**

In 2009, Behringer Harvard, a commercial real estate firm in Dallas, launched a partnership with Jerry R. Junkins Elementary School in the Dallas ISD. The mentoring program is based on the premise that education is important to a student's success in the future, as well as to the success of our communities, businesses and the next generation.

In April 2011, the Dallas ISD presented the company with its "Outstanding Business Partner" award for their exemplary record for encouraging and supporting employee participation in school activities. The mentoring program involves 30 to 33 employees each year and in total, the company has donated more than 1,000 hours to the mentoring program.

Behringer Harvard is a commercial real estate company investing in assets domestically and internationally. The company creates and manages strategic real estate investment program opportunities across a wide spectrum of investment styles for retail investors, as well as domestic and international institutions, through its real estate investment trusts, partnerships, joint ventures, and proprietary program structures.

## **International Bank of Commerce (IBC bank) – Laredo**

International Bank of Commerce in Laredo has been mentoring and partnering with the Laredo ISD for 15 years. The company encourages its more than 3,700 employees in Texas and Oklahoma to serve on boards and to volunteer. IBC Bank has taken action to bring financial education to new heights through the creation two financial education programs: Money Buzz and Money Smart.

Money Buzz offers child-friendly financial lessons to kindergarten through fifth-grade students and Money Smart targets high school students and teaches about personal finance and savings.

In October 2010, IBC Bank Laredo employees taught a total of 738 high school students from both the Laredo ISD and United ISD financial and credit management techniques as part of the American Bankers Association "Get Smart About Credit" program.

IBC was founded in 1966 to meet the needs of small businesses in Laredo. Today, it serves as the flagship bank of International Bancshares Corporation. IBC now serves 107 communities throughout Texas and Oklahoma. In 2010, Hispanic Business Magazine ranked IBC as the number one Hispanic-owned financial institution in the nation. The bank was also the number one Hispanic-owned business in Texas and fourth nationally.

## **SILVER**

Businesses recognized with a Silver level award have policies that not only support employees who attend parent-teacher conferences, but also implement a policy to encourage and support employees who volunteer in school activities.

Receiving a Silver level award is:

## **O'Connell Robertson – Austin**

O'Connell Robertson is a comprehensive architectural/engineering firm that specializes in education facility planning and design. More than 50 percent of the firm's employees regularly participate in school activities, serving as campus volunteers, mentors, job shadowing and intern hosts, organizing school supply drives and serving as campus and district committee members. In addition, the firm has donated more than \$50,000 in financial support over the last decade to many districts and campuses in the Central Texas region.

The firm's architects and engineers regularly participate in curriculum connecting activities that provide real world design opportunities to involve students in the firm's school design work. Another unique program for the company is a teacher externship – where teacher shadow the engineers at

O'Connell Robertson to gain insight into the business of engineering and use that insight in the classroom.

Employees volunteer at schools as science fair judges, career day speakers, and participate in campus beautification projects. Staff have organized and collected donations of clothes, toys and volunteer annually in a school supplies donation distribution.

Established in 1950, O'Connell Robertson has a strong history of practical innovation. From basic renovations and expansions to complex multi-million dollar structures, the firm has completed over 1,000 health care, K-12, and higher education projects all over central Texas.

## **BRONZE**

### ***Brackett News Weekly* – Brackettville**

The *Brackett News Weekly* is being honored with a Bronze level award for allowing its employees to participate during work hours in any school activity involving the employees' children. The newspaper also provides newspapers each week to the local schools to encourage community children to read.

The *Bracket News Weekly* is a weekly newspaper in Kinney County.

The Bronze level recognition is for an employer that implements a policy to encourage and support employees who attend parent-teacher conferences.

The awards are valid for three years. At the end of three years, a business may reapply for the same level of recognition or for a higher level if they meet the criteria.

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