



# ESC NJ Update

The Educational Services Commission of New Jersey

New Jersey's Leader In Shared Services

## Remarkable Gift To PRDS From 'Lowe's Heroes'

**A** "Lowe's Heroes" grant from Lowe's Home Improvement has transformed the modest exterior of the Piscataway Regional Day School into a spectacular outdoor setting which also allows for educational use.

"It is a remarkable gift made possible as a result of the strong relationship we have had with Lowe's Piscataway store over the years through our Community-Based Instruction (CBI) program," said PRDS Principal Phyllis DeLucia.

For several years, PRDS students worked in the flooring, appliance and nursery departments of Lowe's Piscataway store as part of the school's CBI job sampling program, said Vocational Teacher/ Structured Learning Education Coordinator Raissa Prus.

"The Lowe's staff were excellent worksite mentors, helping our students develop their work skills as they transitioned into adult life," she said.

When a need for support to create a sensory garden and "Farm to Table" program for students arose, Ms. Prus contacted the Lowe's in Piscataway. She was encouraged by Lowe's Flooring Sales Specialist Gene Panzarino, who had previously worked with several CBI students, to apply for a "Lowe's Heroes," grant. This past August, Mrs. DeLucia received a letter from Piscataway Lowe's Store Manager Christopher Grettano that PRDS had been selected for a Lowe's Heroes Program grant in partnership with Lowe's Home Improvement Stores in Market 1230, NY/NJ Metro.

After touring the PRDS with Mrs. DeLucia, both Mr. Grettano and NY/NJ Metro Market Director Patrick Grant were so inspired by the students and staff, they decided



*"Lowe's Heroes," and PRDS staff after receiving an ESCNJ Board Resolution for their spectacular landscaping efforts at PRDS. (L-R) NY/NJ Metro Market Dir. Patrick Grant; PRDS Principal Phyllis DeLucia; Vocational Teacher/ SLE Coordinator Raissa Prus; Piscataway Lowe's Manager Christopher Grettano; PRDS Custodian John Howard, and Lowe's Flooring Specialist Gene Panzarino.*

to provide a donation far exceeding what was requested.

"The dedication and commitment of the staff to their students motivated us to do something more substantial than originally requested," said Mr. Grettano.

Over 100 employees from five stores in New Jersey and four in New York spent five days at PRDS creating an exquisitely landscaped exterior. Additional help came courtesy of Oldcastle Materials and Belgard, two Lowe's vendors.

The improvements were designed so sections could function as educational space, including a sensory garden. The flower

and garden beds were designed at varying heights to allow for wheelchair accessibility. A large patio was built, park benches donated, and a benchless picnic table installed to accommodate wheelchairs. Other features included: a vegetable garden, an oval garden bed with flowers surrounding the school sign, flowering shrubs, and assorted

(See **Heroes** on page 6)

### 'Open House' Attracts Sizable Number of Case Managers

See page 7



## Around The ESCNJ



Colorful umbrellas are good protection from the rain at ALC.



Students follow the tempo set by Mr. Braun at CLL.



BBLC Secondary enjoyed their Halloween celebration.



The drawing by PRDS student Jason Rauch (first column, second down), under the guidance of Art Teacher Audrey Roderman, was selected for the Art Educators of New Jersey 2017 Calendar.



Director of Nonpublic School Services Nancy Armbruster leading a workshop for new nonpublic school administrators.



CLL student is fully engaged in his art project.



## Full-Time Medical Director Working Onsite For NuView Students

**D**r. Nicole A. Zuber is now serving as the full-time, onsite Medical Director/Psychiatrist at NuView Academy and NuView Academy Annex schools. Dr. Zuber is affiliated with the Princeton House Behavioral Health which has had a collaborative relationship with the ESCNJ for over 15 years.

"Full-time, onsite psychiatric care is a service we have always wanted to offer, and to identify a practitioner of Dr. Zuber's caliber is a tremendous asset to help students further strengthen their decision-making and problem solving capabilities," said Superintendent Mark J. Finkelstein.

"As someone who has provided pharmacologic treatment and psychotherapeutic support to adults and children with mood, anxiety and behavioral difficulties for years, her skills are exactly what both schools need to further support students," he added.

A graduate of Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School in Piscataway, Dr. Zuber completed her residency training at Mount Sinai Beth Israel Medical Center, and her fellowship in Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at the Yale Child Study Center.

"I want to reduce the stigma of mental health services, and integrate complementary and alternative medicine as



*Dr. Nicole Zuber works full-time and onsite with students at NuView Academy and NuView Academy Annex.*

it relates to mental health treatment," she said.

Dr. Zuber said her perspective towards her work is captured in the quote: "Your present circumstances don't determine where you can go; they merely determine where you start," by Nido Qubein, President of High Point University.

Dr. Zuber belongs to the American Psychiatric Association, is board certified in adult psychiatry, and board eligible in child and adolescent psychiatry. •

## No Shortage Of Happiness At CLL

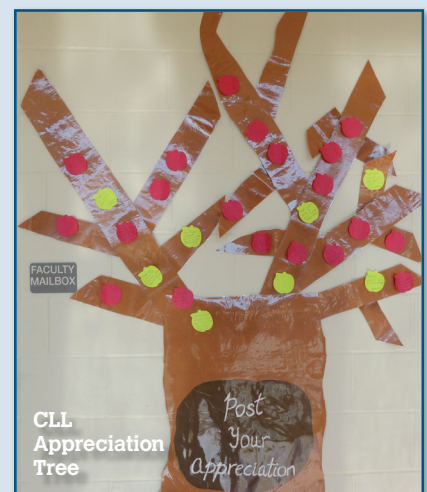
**A**mazon.com acquired online retailer Zappos for \$1.2 billion, and CEO Tony Hsieh wrote the bestseller *Delivering Happiness*, citing happiness at work as a key to his success. CLL Principal Mary Beth Conley read the book and met with Vice Principal Michael Kane and Supervisor Meena Pasupathy to find ways to promote happiness to staff.

The result was to expand the Sunshine Committee's role from primarily coordinating holiday parties, to promoting school values like teamwork and respect. The committee in turn established a "Hero of the Week," honor; organized before school volleyball and basketball activities; posted inspirational

quotes on the Morning Board; distributed candy bars to staff on their birthday, and maintained the "Appreciation Tree." Appreciation Tree comments have included, "thank you Richie for checking if we needed anything;" thanks Joann for the bulletin boards," and, "thank you Denise for going the extra mile preparing the handouts."

"The staff has been on board with the additional positive practices which is contributing to the positive environment in our school," said Mrs. Conley.

This year's Sunshine Committee includes Teachers Gina Damiano, Rachel Wurmbrand, Hannah Elowson, and Angela Pento. •



## Co-op Pricing System Growth Drove Name Change Request

Guests on a recent *Better Together* podcast said growth in the Middlesex Regional Educational Services (MRES) Co-op Pricing System by school districts and government agencies from all 21 New Jersey counties, was the primary reason for requesting permission from the New Jersey State Board of Education to change its name to the Educational Services Commission of New Jersey (ESCNJ).

"We were providing educational services and some staff development outside of Middlesex County, but it was the growth of our Co-op Pricing System that motivated our Board of Directors to request permission to change our name to the ESCNJ," said Superintendent Mark J. Finkelstein.

The State Board of Education unanimously approved the request earlier this year in March.

The *Better Together* podcast can be heard by visiting ESCNJ's home page at [www.escnj.k12.nj.us](http://www.escnj.k12.nj.us) and clicking "Rebranding Committee Featured on *Better Together* Podcast," under "News From ESCNJ."

In addition to Mr. Finkelstein, who chaired the ESCNJ Rebranding Committee, *Better Together* guests included Business Administrator Patrick M. Moran, Purchasing Agent Teresa Gerstacker, Coordinator of Technology Bob Reinke, and Coordinator of Communications and *Better Together* Host David Sandler.

taxpayer funds," said Mrs Gerstacker.

"Ultimately, the name change request was driven by our Board of Directors, led by Mr. Dale Caldwell, who believed it was necessary since our Co-op had members in every county in New Jersey," said Mr. Finkelstein.

"Regardless of our name, organizations were joining the Co-op Pricing System because of its ability to identify the lowest prices, and excellent customer service," said Mr. Finkelstein.

"The name change simply reflects our statewide presence as a service provider," he added.

Having operated as the ESCNJ for several months, Mr. Moran said he was pleasantly surprised with how smoothly the transition has gone.

"I think our new logo, which shows the state behind the letters ESCNJ has really helped clarify our statewide status, along with the excellent work of the Rebranding Committee, and others in the organization," he added.

Both Mrs. Gerstacker and Mr. Moran went through a previous name change process in 2005 when the board at that time successfully appealed to the State Board of Education to change its name from the Middlesex County Educational Service Commission to the Middlesex Regional Educational Services Commission.

"Fortunately, Mrs. Gerstacker had created a terrific roadmap in 2005, so we had a template to work from," said Mr. Moran.



*Members of the ESCNJ Rebranding Committee during the recording of the Better Together podcast were: (Clockwise, L-R) Business Administrator Patrick M. Moran Purchasing Agent Teresa Gerstacker, Coordinator of Technology Bob Reinke; Superintendent Mark J. Finkelstein and Coordinator of Communications and Better Together Host David Sandler.*

By 2014, the cooperative had grown from 65 members in 2008, to approximately 1,000 members, with representation from all 21 counties, said Mr. Moran. More Co-op members meant lower prices for necessities like office and custodial supplies, security equipment, vehicles, electricity, carpet, and flooring, saving millions of dollars annually for taxpayers, said Mr. Moran.

However, the growth created some confusion to those outside Middlesex County.

Mr. Moran and Mrs. Gerstacker frequently took calls from school districts and government agencies who did not understand why the lower prices offered by the MRES Co-op Pricing System were not available from service providers in their own area.

"I would explain that our size, expertise, and familiarity with laws enabled us to get the best prices, which would in turn save

As Coordinator of Technology, Mr. Reinke had to make sure people using the internet were properly redirected from MRES to the ESCNJ website, along with managing the changeover of more than 1,000 email addresses, and coordinating communication with vendors.

"So far we have not experienced any significant disruption in service," Mr. Reinke said.

To allow for statewide representation, the ESCNJ Board of Directors has added five out of Middlesex County districts. Board meetings are now broadcast via webinar to accommodate out-of-county members who otherwise would face significant travel time to attend.

"They can hear everything, make comments, and vote on issues, just like other board members," said Mr. Reinke. •



## First ESCNJ Board Meeting



Board members and administrators after the first meeting of the newly constituted Board of Directors, which has expanded from 24 to 29 members. The new 2016-17 representatives are: Dr. Howard Lerner, Bergen County Technical Schools/Special Services; Mrs. Barbara Makoski, Cape May County Special Services; Mr. Tony Trongone, Pemberton (Burlington County); Dr. Frances Wood, Somerset Hills (Somerset County), and Mr. Raymond Brosel, Voorhees (Camden County).

## Welcome Aboard



Ms. Yasmin Hernández-Manno, the new Middlesex and Mercer Executive County Superintendent, appears with Superintendent Mark J. Finkelstein (L) and Board Vice President Bill Walsh, after attending her first ESCNJ Board of Directors meeting.

## "Save The Date!"



**2017 ESCNJ "Vendor Expo"**  
**Save the Date!**  
**Friday, May 12, 2017**

- Free CEU's
- Free Lunch
- Free Registration

**Garden State Exhibit &  
 Convention Center, Somerset, NJ**

[www.escnj.k12.nj.us](http://www.escnj.k12.nj.us)



## Students And Staff Work With 'Lowe's Heroes,' At PRDS



### **Heroes** (Cont'd from page 1)

annuals and perennial flowers. Lowe's also donated a Rubbermaid storage shed filled with: a pressure washer and flower tiller; assorted hand tools; hoses, garden hats and gloves.

Many students had a chance to work with Lowe's volunteers, digging up soil and planting shrubs and flowers.

"By being involved, our students really connected with the project," said Mrs. DeLucia.

Lowe's Store Manager Grettano said the project was designed to require

minimal maintenance in the future.

"We had so much help from PRDS Custodian John Howard, that we certainly didn't want to leave him and the staff with a project that would significantly add to their workload," said Mr. Grettano.

Mr. Grettano said the cost of the project "easily amounted to tens of thousands of dollars when accounting for all of the labor costs."

"Lowe's believes it has a greater purpose, and that is to help people love where they live, and be part of something bigger than us," he said.

Principal DeLucia described the

project as "truly remarkable," adding:

"Certainly our exterior met our needs, but what Lowe's did was extraordinary," she said.

Superintendent Mark J. Finkelstein characterized the effort as a "once in a lifetime project."

"There is no way we could have justified spending taxpayer dollars for a project of this magnitude," said Mr. Finkelstein.

"But through the generosity of Lowe's, we now have an exterior that is both beautiful to look at, and works for educational purposes as well," he said. •



## Open House Presentations Engage Case Managers

Given heavy caseloads and significant role case managers play in student placement decisions, ESCNJ principals strive for meaningful Open House programs so attendees leave with relevant information for guiding parents, and required Professional Development Certificates. Along with school tours at all schools, case managers received information about:

- ALC's approach to student transitions from: 'Advising Parents About the Transition to Adult Services: Overview for Case Managers of Students with Severe Disabilities.'
- 'Sexuality and Safety for Students with Developmental Disabilities,' at CLL from guest speaker Bobbie J. Gallagher, of POAC Autism Services.
- 'Community-Based Instruction;' 'Social Skills – The Ripple Effects Program; 'Differentiated Instruction for MD Students; and 'Educating Medically Fragile Students.' at PRDS.
- How schools incorporate robots to teach students computer coding at BBLC.

The NuView Academy Open House is 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. on Dec. 1, and the NuView Academy Annex Open House is 12:30 to 2:30 p.m. on Dec 8. •



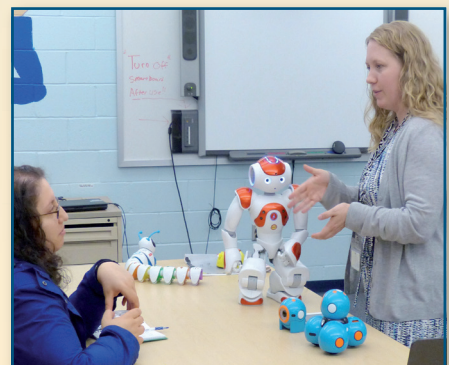
*Dr. Solberg (center) shows case managers the skills students learn in Vocational Education.*



*PRDS offered four programs and school tour, including a visit to the Vocational Education room.*



*Bobbie J. Gallagher from POAC Autism Services spoke at CLL on 'Sexuality and Safety for Students with Developmental Disabilities.'*



*BBLC's Kate Johnson had the attention of a case manager while demonstrating how students work with robots to learn computer coding.*



## Computer Coding Approach Featured At NJSBA Convention

"This is fun," remarked one of over 40 participants attending ESCNJ's "Running Robots! Computer Coding and Special Education," Action Lab, at the recent New Jersey School Boards Association Convention in Atlantic City.

Workshop participants were given opportunities to do some of the computer coding ESCNJ students are learning to experience the impact it has on the movement and speech of the NAO Robots (pronounced "now"). When programmed correctly, the 23 inch, 9.5 pound NAO Robot—compatible with Windows and Mac, can speak, identify objects, help students with homework, walk, tell jokes, and even sing and dance.

"Using robots makes it easier to engage students in learning the complexities of computer coding," said ESCNJ Superintendent Mark J. Finkelstein, who facilitated the Action Lab with Teacher Naomi Glassman, and Case Manager Kate Johnson.

The Robotics Elective is offered to students at ESCNJ's NuView Academy, NuView Academy Annex, and as a supplement to the Bright Beginnings Learning Center's Computer Coding Club members.

"There is a need for more people with computer coding skills in the workplace, and introducing



*Participants were engaged by ESCNJ's "Running Robots! Computer Coding and Special Education," Action Lab at the recent NJSBA Convention in Atlantic City.*

students to the field makes them more employable in the future," said Gary Molenaar, Assistant Superintendent for Learning/Ed. Services, who coordinated the presentation.

Aldebaran Robotics, based in Paris, France, developed the NAO Robot. Approximately 5,000 NAO Robots have been distributed worldwide by Teq, an educational, technology and professional development firm based in Huntington Station, New York. •



*ESCNJ Board President Dale Caldwell working with an Action Lab participant at the NJSBA Convention.*



### The Educational Services Commission of New Jersey

1660 Stelton Road  
Piscataway, New Jersey 08854  
(732) 777-9848  
[www.escnj.k12.nj.us](http://www.escnj.k12.nj.us)

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**Mr. Bill Petscavage, Vice President**

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