

MRESCUpdate

MIDDLESEX REGIONAL EDUCATIONAL SERVICES COMMISSION

Cooperative, Cost Efficient, Quality Services

MRESC Service Awards

The MRESC Board of Directors and School Superintendent Mark J. Finkelstein acknowledged the following staff members for their years of service.

ACADEMY LEARNING CENTER

25 Years

Sophia Monchik

10 Years

Tina Giovannucci

Sharon Mechlowitz

Rachel Stern

20 Years

Susan Garbowksi

5 Years

Kathleen Delucia

Meera Subbaraman

BRIGHT BEGINNINGS LEARNING CENTER

10 Years

Dahlia

Burrell-Thompson

Srimathi Gotur

Ettie Luban

Elaine Riley

Kimberly Schaffer

5 Years

Janae Jefferson

Kate Johnson

Tracy Smith

CENTER FOR LIFELONG LEARNING

10 Years

Shashikala Gross

Janet Mikolajczyk

Mary Beth Renales

Michele Swenson

Ankhi Tapaswi

5 Years

Michele Crisitello

Christine Gerbereux

Denyse Gerages

Robin Gregg

Shira Hirsch

Denise Homan-

Dowdell

Ellen Horenburg

Doreen Laidlaw

Meghan Langan

Maria Lopez

Pauline Mendicino

Susan Merlino-

Gartstein

Kristin Policastro

Christine Rowland

Brian Traister

Marva White

Kathleen Wood

Nicole Zinger

CENTRAL OFFICE

5 Years

Renee Jara

Christine Zarate

(See **Service Awards** on page 2)

New Approach For Reaching At-Risk Students Off To Strong Start



Jessenia Juarez, pictured with Malachy Hamilton says she is much more productive this year as a result of the Hybrid Learning initiative.

Last year it was hard to concentrate," said Middlesex County Academy's (MCA) Jessenia Juarez, looking up briefly from her Google Chromebook while working on her Algebra 2 assignment.

"This year is great," she added. "I love it because I can focus on my work easier, there are fewer disruptions, and I can complete projects from home."

According to Jessenia, "this year is great" due to the new Hybrid Learning initiative introduced at the beginning of the 2014-15 school year at three MRESC schools, including MCA, Raritan Valley Academy (RVA) and NuView Academy.

While it's still early in the school year, the new program, which includes

distribution of Google Chromebooks to each student, and rotating to different learning stations throughout the day, Hybrid Learning is already earning rave reviews.

"I can't get enough of Hybrid Learning," said RVA student Nate Frazier. "This is my senior year, and I can already tell it's the best method of learning for me."

Hybrid Learning, which blends technology with traditional teaching methods, has actually been a common practice in many general education classrooms for over a decade. However, getting away from paper and

(See **New Approach** on page 6)

New Staff Members Learn About MRESC



Approximately 45 new employees attended the "New Staff Orientation" in August. Superintendent Mark J. Finkelstein provided a comprehensive overview of the MRESC and reviewed several new initiatives; RVA/MCA Principal Arthur E. Francis presented information about "Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect," and Coordinator of Communications David Sandler reviewed features of the new website. The orientation was coordinated by Director of Human Resources Lorraine Small, with assistance from Ms. Lisa Keefner and Ms. Luz Baerga. •

Batter Up At NuView



NuView Teacher Karen Polanski encouraged students to keep their eye on the ball during baseball practice.

PRDS Bell Choir



Mr. Eric Marozine, the new music teacher at PRDS, rehearsing some selections with the Bell Choir students.

Service Awards (Cont'd from page 1)

NONPUBLIC DEPARTMENT

(IDEIA-B Aide Awards)

10 Years

Kathleen Genovese Carol Mastrola
Jean Pirozzoli

NONPUBLIC DEPARTMENT

(Chapter 226 Registered Nurses)

10 Years

Alice Shaps

NONPUBLIC DEPARTMENT

(Nonpublic Teachers/IDEIA-B Teachers)

25 Years

DeWanna Glenn

5 Years

Rachel Castor
Kathleen Scognamiglio

10 Years

Barbara Avella

Edyta Kowalczyk

NUVIEW ACADEMY

5 Years

Patricia Burkhardt

PISCATAWAY REGIONAL DAY SCHOOL

30 Years

Brenda Berrios
Lisa Anne Melsopp
Raissa Ann Prus

25 Years

Terri Anne Thompson

10 Years

Lauren Amendola

Administrators Testify Before Task Force

ALC Principal Erik Solberg, and PRDS Vice Principal Phyllis DeLucia recently testified on behalf of the MRESC before a Special Education Task Force appointed by Governor Christie. The following are excerpts from their testimony.

Excerpts From Dr. Solberg's Testimony

...I have worked for 40 years in special education, 18 as a Principal for the MRESC, where I began the Academy Learning Center in 1996. I served on the NJDOE Autism Task Force in 2003-2004, developing Autism Program Quality Indicators to guide schools on effective autism programs. I am also an Autism New Jersey Trustee.

The MRESC's \$90 million budget is derived through direct education and business services, as we receive no state aid. We operate seven schools, which include severely disabled students, and offer vocational programs, life skills training and professional development. Our business services include transporting over 14,000 students a day. We run New Jersey's largest Co-op Pricing System, helping 750 members save on electricity, natural gas, security equipment, vehicles and furniture.

I want to address the impression we received when reading the Task Force letter inviting testimony — that public schools spend roughly the same amount of money sending special needs students to out of district public special education schools, as they do when using private special education schools. Certainly costs to support students with autism, cognitive impairments, brain injuries, and other disabilities are significant. These costs are driven by the intensity, expertise and experience of teachers and therapists, specialized busing, and year round services.

Nevertheless, based on NJDOE figures, MRESC's tuition is typically 30 percent less than private special education schools. For FY 14, we estimated tuition savings to districts using MRESC at \$20.6 million; transportation services at \$4.2 million, and Co-op Pricing System savings at \$12 million.

Perhaps the most telling difference

between MRESC and private special education schools is our close relationship with local public school districts. We are often invited in to critically review and improve programs, consult with students, and implement our specialized curricula in over 14 subject areas.

MRESC staff has coordinated self-contained classrooms for several districts, including Edison and Sayreville, transferring the classes to district operations when they are ready to assume the responsibility. Our commitment to students being in their home district whenever feasible has resulted in MRESC returning 150 students to their neighborhood schools over the past eight years.

As the Task Force members know, students attend MRESC when the public school does not have the staff, expertise, or physical space to meet a student's educational needs, within the state's requirement, to provide a thorough and efficient education in the least restrictive environment.

At MRESC, we focus on developing the student's functional skills, language and communication skills, as well as academic, social and vocational skills, to increase independence and transition to post graduation life. Our students use adaptive equipment for physical education, eat together and participate in community based activities like trips to restaurants, movie theaters and sporting events. Students



(L-R) Task Force Coordinator, Professional Development, Paul Fogarty; PRDS Vice Principal Phyllis DeLucia; NJDOE Director of Special Education Programs Peggy McDonald and ALC Principal Erik Solberg. (Not pictured is Barbara Grant, an ALC parent who testified at a similar Task Force meeting in Essex.)

I will conclude by stating what I hope is obvious: The MRESC already exists as a less restrictive and more cost effective placement model for the Task Force to cite with respect to the delivery of quality, cost effective Special Education services, than private special education schools...

Excerpts From Ms. DeLucia's Testimony

...I have worked in special education for the past 29 years, as a speech-language specialist with the NJDOE, and for the past 12 as an administrator at the MRESC.

attend Extended School Year programs, blending academics with seasonal activities like picnics and swimming. Families receive support through workshops and home visits.

Most MRESC students require a systematic approach to learning in order to progress behaviorally, socially and academically. Through our community education program, students receive supervised experiences using public transportation, making purchases in department stores and grocery shopping.

Many students participate in our

(See **Testify** on page 4)

The 2014-2015 Board Of Directors



Members of the 2014-2015 Board of Directors and Central Office team gathered for a group photo following the first meeting of the new school year. •

Testify (Cont'd from page 3)

Community-Based Instruction program, (CBI) acquiring practical living skills and job sampling opportunities. We offer what is arguably the most comprehensive student job sampling program in New Jersey. Students are exposed to many workplace experiences to identify preferences to further strengthen social and work skills. These opportunities would not be possible without the longstanding support from area employers including Robert Woods Johnson Hospital, Rutgers, ShopRite, Lowe's, TD Bank, the U.S. Post Office, and numerous small businesses.

The CBI program is also open to special needs students from other districts, and I would point to Edison, Highland Park, South River and Roselle as districts taking advantage of that opportunity.

Our program is also valuable in raising community awareness to the fact that people with disabilities can be productive members of society.

In closing, I want to mention a new initiative, the Piscataway Career Center, a Post 21 program being done in concert with the Middlesex ARC. This program will enable graduates to continue receiving support services as adults...•

Board Presentation On Individualizing Student Instruction



Veteran PRDS Teacher Brenda Berrios gave a well received presentation at a recent board of directors meeting entitled, *A Fluid Process: Individualized Instruction for Students with Significant Disabilities*. Ms. Berrios shared information on identifying students' individual learning styles, making adjustments based on their progress, and the importance of finding teachable moments each day to help students learn and reach their full potential. •

Congratulations!

Board Member Dr. Brian Zychowski, who serves on the Personnel Committee, and is the Superintendent of the North Brunswick Township Schools, was elected President of the New Jersey Association of School Administrators. •

New Administrators Welcomed To CLL

The new administrative team is off to a strong start at the Center for Lifelong Learning.

"We have both had a great beginning," said Principal Mary Beth Conley.

Both Ms. Conley and new Vice Principal Michael Kane said they have been warmly received by CLL students, staff and parents.

"It has been a pleasure getting to know the students, family members, and staff," Ms. Conley added.

"It's also been helpful to receive so much support from our MRESC colleagues."

Ms. Conley comes to MRESC with 20 years experience in special education. She began her career as a Speech Language Pathologist, and quickly moved into administrative roles, serving as the Principal of one of the largest special needs receiving schools in New Jersey.

Vice Principal Michael Kane joins MRESC with 10 years administrative experience in special education, ranging from supervisor of related services, to acting principal of a special needs receiving school.

Mr. Kane said: "I have been impressed by the strong curriculum, the behavior management skills demonstrated by staff, and the Case Manager's commitment to CLL stakeholders. I'm excited to be at CLL." •



The new administration at CLL is Vice Principal Michael Kane, and Principal Mary Beth Conley.

Special Recognition For Two BBLC Artists

MRESC Art Teacher Audrey Roderman was clearly excited upon receiving an email from the Art Educators of New Jersey (AENJ), informing her that two of her BBLC student's art work had been selected for special recognition.

"Guess what!!," Mrs. Roderman wrote in an email to BBLC Principal Wendy Eaton.

"I just got this email!! Nigel's painting was selected for the AENJ Calendar! And Sasha's was chosen for display at the NJPAC Fall Exhibit!!!!"

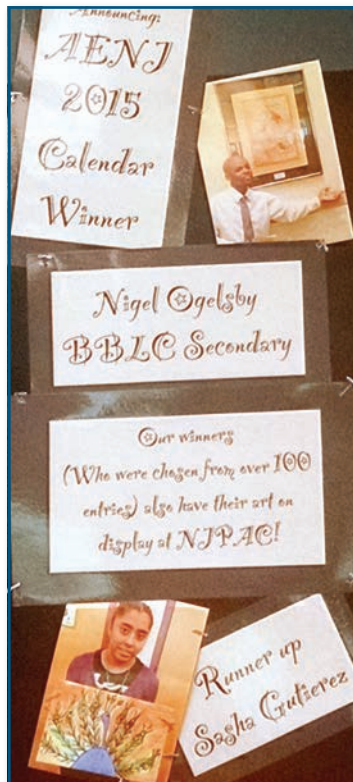
Mrs. Roderman was referring to Sasha Gutierrez and Nigel Oglesby.

Sasha's painting was chosen for the NJPAC Exhibit. Nigel's painting was selected for use in the AENJ Calendar, and will also be on display at the NJPAC Fall Exhibit.

It was indeed an honor to have two students selected, given that over 100 pieces of art from across the state were submitted for consideration in the calendar and NJPAC Fall Exhibit, according to AENJ/NJPAC Chair Jennifer O'Brien.

"Selecting only 12 pieces for the calendar, and 18 pieces for the NJPAC Fall Exhibit was a difficult task for the committee," wrote Ms. O'Brien.

Congratulations to Nigel, Sasha and Mrs. Roderman. •



A portion of a display put together by MRESC Art Teacher Audrey Roderman in honor of BBLC students Sasha Gutierrez and Nigel Oglesby, whose work was recognized by the Art Educators of New Jersey.

MRESC Receives 20K Safety Grant

The Middlesex Regional Educational Services Commission has received a \$21,924 Safety Grant from the New Jersey Schools Insurance Group (NJSIG).

The funds will go towards additional safety film for doors and windows to further strengthen school security, said MRESC Business Administrator Patrick M. Moran.

Established in 2009, the NJSIG grant program, which is awarding \$5 million to member districts in 2014, promotes proactive risk management, and provides funding that districts would otherwise not have to invest in safety-related projects, according to NJSIG Executive Director Marty Kalbach.

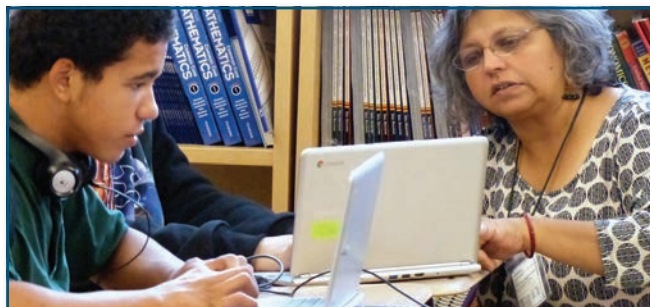
"The school safety grant program, which started in 2009, continues a tradition of cooperation between our organization and our member districts that contributes to a strong safety culture in our New Jersey school district community," said Mr. Kalbach. •

New Approach (Cont'd from page 1)

pencil in favor of computers has been problematic with At-Risk students, because staff has had to dedicate so much time managing a myriad of behavioral issues.

Given an increase in the number of At-Risk students in Middlesex County, "we felt it was time to try something new," said Mr. Gary Molenaar, Assistant Superintendent for Learning/Educational Services.

"Today's students are digital natives, so it is critical to offer a classroom experience reflective of their world," said Mr. Molenaar.



NuView Teacher Rashna Madon works on a project with Christian Reyes.

"When used appropriately, Hybrid Learning affords more options for teachers when presenting information, enabling them to limit classroom lectures, and offer more personalized instruction to students."

When the Hybrid Learning initiative was presented to the MRESC Board of Directors as a new approach to strengthen student education at three schools, it received unanimous support.

During a typical day, students rotate among three learning stations in the Hybrid Learning classroom, including:

- Direct Learning — Small group instruction with their teacher.
- Collaborative Learning — Project-based learning with two to four classmates.
- Independent Learning — Independent work with students progressing at their own pace, utilizing digital resources to practice, or enrich their learning experience.

Mr. Arthur E. Francis, Principal of MCA and RVA, said Hybrid Learning helps students discover talents they may not be aware of, in addition to positively impacting classroom behavior.

"We are already seeing stronger student engagement with their assignments, and an improvement in student's social skills when dealing with staff and classmates," Mr. Francis said.



NuView Teacher Phyllis Lewis incorporating Hybrid Learning with students.

Chromebooks are distributed for use during school hours, and returned at the end of the day. However, students can access assignments from computers at home to complete unfinished work. Each student uses a Chromebook with their name on it to instill a sense of ownership, and for security purposes. Teachers and aides closely supervise computer use, and content is filtered based on Federal guidelines.

Maha Youssef, a veteran MCA teacher has no doubt that the new approach is working.

"Students are clearly more engaged," she said. "Students are working well together in small groups, and independently. When working independently, students are also recognizing what it's like to learn independently," she added.

Head Teacher Richard Grillo said the element of variety in Hybrid Learning, combined with students moving from station to station, helps them maintain greater focus in class.

"I think it is a very positive step for our students," said Mr. Grillo.

All staff members involved in the effort were trained in Hybrid Learning instruction, which included a comprehensive two-day workshop in August led by Dellicker Strategies.

NuView Teacher Phyllis Lewis pointed out that integration of Hybrid Learning will expand during the year.

"We were advised during our training to introduce the English and math curriculum initially, then science and history as the year progresses" she said.

"The students like this approach, and their behavior is much improved."

NuView students Chris Lopez with Savanagh Grubb also favor the Hybrid Learning initiative.

"I've got a PC and a Mac at home, so it's good being able to work on a computer in class more," said Chris.

"I like typing much more than handwriting because I can go so much faster," said Savanagh. "The day really moves along," she added.

"We're definitely off to a good start, and we will regularly measure and monitor the impact the Hybrid Learning methodology is having on our students, and make modifications as needed," said Mr. Molenaar. •



Edison High School Counselor Arlene Rosenthal observes Edwin Galindo while attending a recent Raritan Valley Academy Open House.



Principal of Special Projects Tia LaPiana, shares Google Chromebooks with teachers who will implement the new Hybrid Learning methodology.

Special Projects During Extended School Year At Academy Learning Center

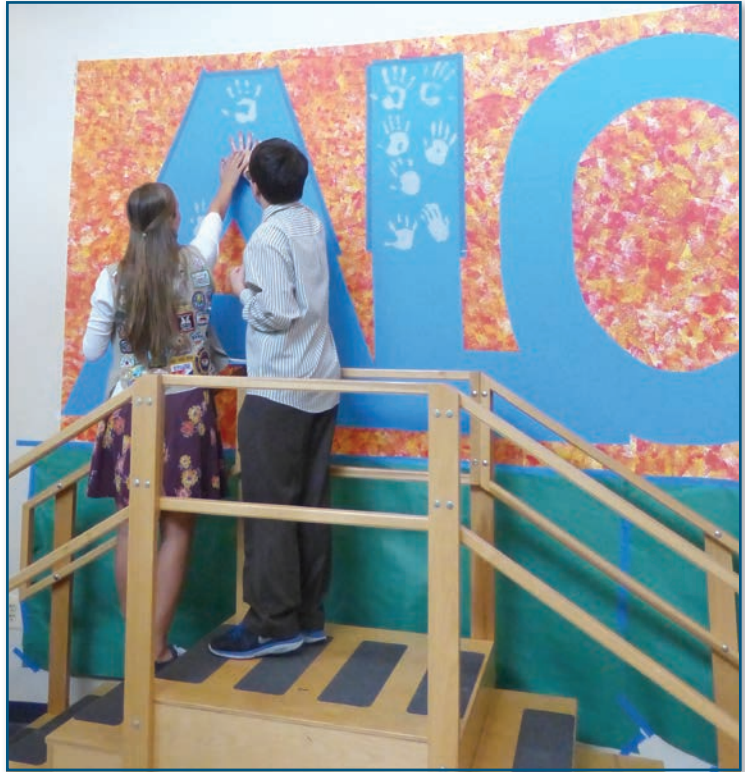
The Academy Learning Center offered some special programs to further engage students attending school over the summer,

According to ALC Principal Erik Solberg, one project was created between Robbinsville High School student Hope Beyer, in collaboration with ALC Art Teacher Audrey Roderman. As a Girl Scout, Hope received approval to pursue her "Gold Award" and developed a project where she led 10 sessions of art classes for four different groups of ALC students. The culminating project was a student created school mural for the front lobby.

Another activity, Sibling Day, included information about disabilities, personal sharing/support/strategies for living with a person with autism, observation time in the classroom, and a joint activity with brothers and sisters. About 20 siblings of students with special needs participated in Sibling Day.

Dr. Solberg added that "Special Person's Day" a program where family members of students visited ALC, joined students in the classroom, toured the facility, and learned more about the curriculum, was also well received. •

Robbinsville High School student and Girl Scout Hope Beyer worked with ALC students on a school mural as she pursued her "Gold Award."



Former PRDS Student's Memory Lives On



Andrea Rennie, (2nd from left) mother of PRDS student Anthony, was overwhelmed after receiving a \$6,600 check from William Zuppa, who heads the OneManOneBikeOneChild not for profit organization. Mr. Zuppa has raised funds for a modest-income PRDS family for 19 years, ever since his nephew, Georgie Caunt, a former PRDS student, passed away at 14 in 1995. Pictured are (L-R), PRDS Case Manager Debbie Bussiere, Mrs. Rennie, Mr. Zuppa, recently retired PRDS Social Worker Nancy Michaels, Anthony Gordon, and teacher, Joanna Abney.

It's The Time Of The Season At NuView

Secondary and primary class students at NuView recently collaborated to create a variety of Fall art projects. •



Secondary student Christian Rosario (L), provided Anthony Rollins and Brian Rodriguez with some help on their art project.



Angel Torres (L) worked on his Acorn/Hershey Kiss art project under the watchful eye of Secondary student Maurice Foster.



Classroom Teacher Rashna Madon worked with Primary student Jayla Cobb, and Secondary student Felix Cortez as the two classes collaborated on creating Fall Halloween and Acorn/Hershey Kiss projects.



Ivy Hercules-Canales shared some tips with Primary student Sohan Patel.



Zymirr Tyrell (L) and Brian Daum were proud of their nearly completed Halloween project after working with some of the Secondary students.



Middlesex Regional Educational Services Commission

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