



ESC NJ Update

The Educational Services Commission of New Jersey

New Jersey's Leader In Shared Services

State Board Unanimously Approves MRESC's Name Change Request The Educational Services Commission Of New Jersey

With a vote of 11-0, the New Jersey State Board of Education recently approved MRESC's Board of Directors' request to change its name to The Educational Services Commission of New Jersey (ESC NJ), making it the first shared services provider to be formally recognized for its statewide support to school districts and government agencies.

"The unanimous vote is a clear sign that the State Board recognizes and appreciates the shared services we provide statewide to New Jersey's most vulnerable students," said Board President Dale Caldwell.

"The acronym ESC NJ could also stand for Every Student Counts in New Jersey, which is the motto our organization lives by every day," Mr. Caldwell added.

The name change request was motivated by the need for a name reflective of MRESC's growth from an organization established in 1977 with two trailers in Piscataway, serving a handful of Middlesex County school districts, into the state's largest service provider with a presence in all 21 counties, said Superintendent Mark J. Finkelstein.



As a result, the MRESC Board "made a conscious decision" to embrace the New Jersey Legislature's and State Board's recommendation to concentrate on forming shared services relationships to cost-effectively maintain quality education for students, said Mr. Finkelstein.

"We have approached our role as a shared services provider with an entrepreneurial mindset, demonstrating flexibility, and anticipating needs," Mr. Finkelstein said.

"As the ESC NJ, we now have a name reflective of our statewide status, which also eliminates any confusion among the many constituents we serve outside of Middlesex County," he added.

Board Vice President Bill Petscavage also appreciated the State Board's decision.

"Having watched us expand the number and variety of services we offer to all 21 counties in the state, I am grateful to the State Board of Education for recognizing our proactive commitment to improving the education of students with disabilities, and meeting the needs of other school districts, municipalities, and public and private entities," said Mr. Petscavage.

Among the statewide services the ESC NJ provides are:

(See **Name** on page 4)

"We now have a name reflective of our statewide status."

"This is a milestone for everyone associated with our Commission, one which should be looked upon with enormous pride," Mr. Finkelstein said.

"Our family has earned this special recognition, and we thank Commissioner Hespe and the New Jersey State Board of Education members for affirming our statewide status."

Mr. Finkelstein also pointed out that New Jersey service providers are responsible for maintaining their own fiscal viability since they do not receive state or federal aid, and constituents are under no obligation to use their services.

**Students
Learning To
Buy Items
Electronically**

See page 8



Honoring Unsung Student Heroes



Students, families and staff were delighted to attend the 31st Annual Student Recognition Program, which honors juniors and seniors in Middlesex County High Schools who were able to overcome difficult circumstances. The student's selected from ESCNJ this year were Shika Ashie, Piscataway Regional Day School, Michelle Podolski, Academy Learning Center, and Anthony Vargas from the Center for Lifelong Learning.

New Shirt At NAA



NuView Academy Annex's Terrence Hall is all smiles about the new shirts students are now wearing.

Focused Player At NuView Academy



NuView Academy's Devin Ramirez demonstrates excellent form during physical education as Teacher Karen Polanski and Brian Rodriguez look on.

Annual Birthday Tribute To Dr. Seuss



Superintendent Mark J. Finkelstein (left) and recently retired BBLC Secretary Betty Dorazio were among the many staff and community volunteers participating in the March 2 Read Across America activities throughout the district.



School Club Participation Benefits ALC and BBLC Students

Research has confirmed what many already assumed: participation in school clubs benefits students on several levels.

Numerous studies over the past decade cite good attendance, appropriate classroom behavior, increased academic achievement and improved physical fitness as some of the positive outcomes for students who participate in school clubs.

"The BBLC Secondary Clubs help students identify new interests, engage with classmates and teachers in different ways, and learn additional skills," said Vice Principal Cindy Borell.

At ALC, Principal Erik Solberg adds that school clubs provide Secondary 1-7 classes opportunities to "share common interests, and work together on projects and activities."

The BBLC Secondary Clubs are: Culinary, Robotics, Art, Photography, Dance and Music.

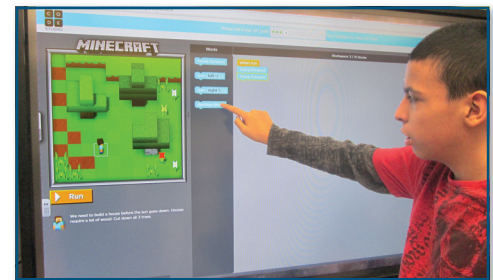
The ALC Clubs include Cooking & Baking, Sports, Sewing, Crafts, Drama, Scrapbook and Girl Scouts. •



BBLC Culinary Club members learn to follow recipes, cook and bake.



BBLC Dance Club members also get some exercise in.



BBLC students learn computer coding and problem solving strategies.



ALC Drama Club members rehearsing for annual spring performance.



ALC Sewing Club members made an autism awareness ribbon blanket for a PTO Tricky Tray event.

Good Attendance For BBLC's Annual "Grandparent's Day"

Approximately 20 grandparents took advantage of the chance to visit their grandchildren recently at BBLC's annual "Grandparent's Day."

Grandparents received mini-tours of the school and visited their grandchild's classroom.

Grandparent's Day also included a roundtable discussion with the BBLC's occupational and physical therapists, speech/language specialists, and social workers, to share information and answer questions about the various services.

"We had a strong turnout, and the day is always a rewarding experience for our students and their grandparents," said BBLC Principal Wendy Eaton. •



About 20 grandparents turned out for the annual event.



Teacher Stephanie Marrone encouraged class participation during Grandparent's Day.

Participation With The ESCNJ Saves Revenue Statewide

Shared Services relationships with school districts and government agencies statewide saves millions of dollars for taxpayers annually. Cost saving highlights include:

Special Education Tuition

Based on Private Special Education tuition costs reported by the NJDOE's Division of Administration and Finance, the average savings to districts using the ESCNJ's Special Education services averaged approximately \$20 million annually for the 2011-2014 school years. Tuition savings for the 2015 school year were \$23.3 million.

NJDOE Collaboration

As part of the management of the NJDOE's New Jersey Digital Readiness for Learning and Assessment Project, the ESCNJ helped approximately 200 schools save \$89 million in high-speed bandwidth charges in 2014-2015.

Cooperative Bidding

The ESCNJ's Co-op Pricing System's 1,000 members, representing all 21 counties in New Jersey, have saved millions of dollars in equipment, services and commodities. Recent examples include:

- \$18.6 million in FY 2014 & 2015 on purchases from CDW-G, a leading provider of integrated information technology solutions.

- \$12.5 million aggregate savings on electricity from 2009-2014.
- \$8 million aggregate savings on natural gas from 2012-2015.

Transportation

Approximately 275 schools in 12 counties saved approximately \$19 million in transportation costs from 2010-2015. •



Special education tuition at the ESCNJ is 15-30% lower than private special education charges.

Name (Cont'd from page 1)

- Operating seven special education and at-risk schools currently attended by students from 12 counties.
- Managing the Co-op Pricing System, a cooperative buying program for equipment and supplies at reduced costs for school districts and government agencies, which has grown to over 1,000 members, representing every county in New Jersey.
- Coordinating a Department of Nonpublic School Services, offering specialized, auxiliary, and remedial Chapter 192 and 193 services.
- Overseeing the transportation of approximately 14,000 special education, general education, public, nonpublic and vocational-technical students to and from approximately 275 schools in 12 counties.
- Establishing Shared Services relationships with 21 Charter Schools statewide.
- Providing Itinerant Services for Deaf & Hard of Hearing students in 16 counties to date.
- Working with school districts in all 21 counties as a service provider for the Department of Education's Digital Readiness for Learning & Assessment Project (DRLAP).
- Offering a Post 21 program for young adults who have aged out of their public school program.
- Operating an Administrative Search Service to help Boards of Education identify and hire Superintendents, School Business Administrators and Special Education Directors.

An additional service is the Collaborative Educational Services (CES) program. With CES, districts maintain quality education, reduce tuition by as much as 30 percent compared to private



The ESCNJ's annual Vendor's Expo attracts vendors and Co-op Pricing System members statewide. This year's Vendor's Expo is May 20th at the New Jersey Convention and Exposition Center in Edison.

special education schools, and keep more students in district rather than bussing them to costly out of district programs, said Mr. Finkelstein.

"By 2005, we had productive shared services relationships with 75 school districts in 11 counties," Mr. Finkelstein said, prompting the Board at that time to request and receive unanimous State Board approval to change its name from the Middlesex County Educational Services Commission, to the Middlesex Regional Educational Services Commission.

"The transition to the ESCNJ is an exciting and challenging undertaking which will take time," Mr. Finkelstein said, adding that most aspects of the transition would not be implemented until at least September 2016. •

Officials Review Nonpublic School Transportation Concerns

A statewide Nonpublic Transportation Conference was recently co-sponsored by the ESCNJ and the New Jersey Department of Education to focus on the challenges involved in the transportation of nonpublic school students.

Attended by nearly 100 transportation officials, the conference was convened as a result of numerous nonpublic school transportation issues that arose over the 2014-2015 school year.

"One out of 10 students in New Jersey attends nonpublic schools, so we've got to find solutions to the issues that are causing problems," said New Jersey Department of Education Assistant Commissioner/Chief Innovation Officer Evo Popoff.

The state is responsible for transporting both public and nonpublic 9-12th grade students who live beyond 2.5 miles of their high school, and preschool-8th grade students living within two miles.

Coordinating the different schedules between public and nonpublic schools was identified as a complex challenge by Executive Middlesex County School Business Administrator John Nemeth.



NJDOE's Assistant Commissioner Evo Popoff; Nonpublic Transportation Officials Greg Fera and Jessani Gordon; Executive Middlesex County School Business Administrator John Nemeth; NJ Catholic Conference Director for Education George Corwell and Nonpublic Transportation Official Greg Kocher.



The Nonpublic Transportation Conference attracted nearly 100 transportation officials statewide.

"Many problems arise because the start times, half-days, and vacations often vary between public and nonpublic schools," said Mr. Nemeth.

"It is a complex, stressful situation, so good communication is required from everyone," he added.

Compounding the situation is the cost differences involved in transporting nonpublic and public school students. There are considerably more public than nonpublic school students at any given bus stop, so the per student transportation cost is considerably less for public school students.

However, as ESCNJ Business Administrator Patrick M. Moran said:

"All students, whether they attend public or nonpublic schools, are members of families who are homeowners and pay property taxes. It is important for public and nonpublic school officials to avoid working in a vacuum, and collaborate more to resolve the issues."

Superintendent Mark J. Finkelstein said the conference demonstrated "the efforts to find solutions and ensure the safe and efficient transportation of nonpublic and public school students. •

Yoga Helps Students



BBLC's Cristina Tropeano (L), and Stephanie Marrone gave a Board presentation on how students benefit from Yoga.

New ESCNJ Board Members



Vice President Bill Petscavage (L), welcomed Ms. Merrill Lunt, a member of the Metuchen Board of Education, and Dr. Michael Kozak, Superintendent of the Monroe Township School District, as the newest members of the ESCNJ Board of Directors.

NuView Academy Participates In National Puzzle Day

If you blinked on January 29th, you may have missed National Puzzle Day.

Reportedly established in 1995 by U.S. game companies to recognize the puzzle-solving passion many people have, students in NuView Academy Teacher Nicole Elmini's class were among this year's participants.

The logic required to identify patterns to complete a puzzle, in addition to the opportunity for self-expression, and social skill building, prompted Mrs. Elmini to have her class work both independently and collaboratively to create a class puzzle.

"Each student received a large, blank puzzle piece, and were encouraged to decorate it in a way that appealed to them," said Mrs. Elmini.

Students expressed themselves by drawing a variety of shapes including stars, hearts, stick figures and basketballs. Upon completion, students worked together to fit the puzzle pieces together, successfully forming a rectangle approximately 10 feet long and 2 feet wide.

"The students were engaged and seemed to enjoy being part of National Puzzle Day," said Mrs. Elmini. •



NuView Academy students making their puzzle pieces for National Puzzle Day.

NuView Academy Teacher Nicole Elmini working with her students to complete a puzzle shaped in a rectangle, approximately 10 feet long, and 2 feet wide, as part of a National Puzzle Day activity.



ALC Food Drive

Tom Ellison of M.C.F.O.O.D.S. picks up the ALC food donations which totaled over 400 pounds. The food collected will be distributed to local food pantries and soup kitchens. •



Summer Registration

Registration for the ESCNJ's Old Bridge High School Summer Program takes place from 8:30am – 2:00pm on June 28 and June 29 at the Old Bridge High School GNC Library 4205 Rt. 516 Matawan, NJ 07747. Please use the link below for additional information. •
http://www.mresc.k12.nj.us/pages/Middlesex_Regional/What_s_New_At_MRESC/Registration_Open_for_Old_Brid

Academic and Clinical Support Available

Academic programs and onsite clinical support services for students' functioning at or near grade level is the focus of both the NuView Academy and the NuView Academy Annex. Please contact Asst. Supt. Gary Molenaar at gmolenaar@mresc.k12.nj.us or (732) 777-9848, Ext. 5010 for more information. •



PRDS Students Celebrate Spring

Students at PRDS created a bulletin board placed in the Central Office foyer welcoming in spring. •



CLL Students Are “Green” Thumbs Up About Greenhouse

Although the greenhouse has been part of the Center for Lifelong Learning since its inception in 2009, second year Principal Mary Beth Conley felt it was an underutilized educational resource for students, which led to Vocational Teacher Regan Beeler establishing a 10 member Greenhouse Committee.

The committee visited the greenhouse at the East Brunswick campus of the Middlesex County Vocational School, courtesy of Horticulture Instructor Lisa Ann Moschera, whose students recently won the floral design championship at the New Jersey State FFA Horticultural Exposition.

“We left very inspired by the visit, and appreciated Ms. Moschera donating succulents, pots and soil to help us get started,” said Greenhouse Committee Member Shashi Gross, who holds a master’s degree in agriculture.

Ms. Gross and Occupational Therapist Annie Padmore, whose passion for horticulture has resulted in transforming her backyard into a “park like setting,” further developed the initiative, and student participation has blossomed.

“Gardening is a life skill and a great way to reduce stress,” said Ms. Gross, adding that students also benefit by working collaboratively and learning gardening skills that could lead to future employment.



CLL students have learned to use assorted gardening tools, and successfully planted tomato and basil seeds, along with spider plants.

Students have enthusiastically participated in the greenhouse work, learning to use assorted gardening tools, and successfully planting tomato and basil seeds, along with spider plants.

“The students were able to sell quite a few items to parents at our spring and winter concerts,” Ms. Padmore said during a presentation to the ESCNJ Board of Directors.

Future projects include identifying grant opportunities to further enhance the greenhouse.

The CLL was the first special needs school in the country to receive “Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Platinum

Level Certification,” the highest of four LEED Certification levels, from the U.S. Green Building Council. •



Students were able to sell many of their greenhouse plants at school concerts.

Boggs Center Conference Focused on Employment



March was Developmental Disabilities Awareness month, and The Boggs Center on Developmental Disabilities held its 25th Annual Conference to highlight best practices in supporting people with disabilities in the transition from school to work. The closing Keynote speaker was Temple Grandin, PhD, a leading autism advocate, author of *Helping Different Kinds of Minds Find Careers*, and the focus of a 2010 Emmy Award winning film. Pictured with Dr. Grandin at the conference are (L-R) CLL Teacher Jessica McGurr, CLL Case Manager Stephanie Shamin, and (far right) PRDS Principal Phyllis DeLucia. •

ALC Students Learning Electronic Payment Skills

The Academy Learning Center may be a bit ahead of the curve in its ongoing commitment to equipping students with the functional skills necessary to navigate independently.

That's because students are learning how to operate Ziosk tablets, an e-menu of sorts already being used in more than 1,500 restaurants in America, including all Chili's and Olive Gardens.

A Ziosk is essentially a 7-inch, networked Android tablet which allows diners to place their orders when they want to, as opposed to when a waiter appears. The tablets are also equipped to allow customers to pay at the table when they are ready, rather than having to catch the server's attention.

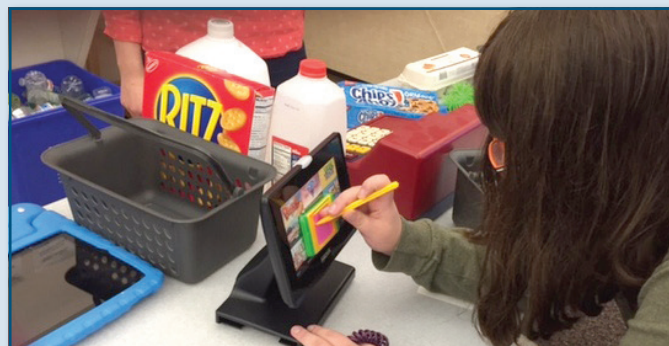
Teacher Ronnie Dolinsky reached out to a contact at Ziosk about students learning to use the tablet, and the firm donated eight inactive machines for students to practice with. The firm also donated eight charge cards, signed by Ziosk employees for students to use.

"One of the goals for our Secondary classes has been to teach functional skills to prepare students for community life," said ALC Principal Erik Solberg.

"We have been successful having them practice paying with cash for items like postage stamps, lunch

at a fast-food restaurant, or a family gift, but replicating the use of debit, credit and gift cards has been a challenge. Thanks to Mrs. Dolinsky and the generosity of Ziosk, our students can learn to make electronic payments, which have increasingly become the norm for consumers.

Since the machines are inactive, students can practice "swiping" for the purchases made in the school's mock grocery store that was established



Electronic payments are the norm for most consumers.

several years ago.

Mrs. Dolinsky gives students a list of items to shop for, after which they return to their classroom to complete the purchasing process with a cash register and the Ziosk. •

Happy 'Chinese' New Year



The Chinese New Year - The Year of the Monkey, began on February 8th, and was celebrated by NuView Academy Annex students, who created the above display, which was placed in the Board Conference room.



The Educational Services Commission of New Jersey

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