



# ESC NJ Update

The Educational Services Commission of New Jersey

New Jersey's Leader In Shared Services

## Asst. Supt. Molenaar Named 2018 "Special Education Administrator Of The Year"

Assistant Superintendent Gary Molenaar has been selected the 2018 "Special Education Administrator of the Year." Mr. Molenaar received the award at the 36th Annual Spring Leadership Conference of the New Jersey Association of School Administrators and New Jersey Association of Pupil Services Administrators, the co-sponsors of the award. The ESCNJ also received \$500 from Frontline Education on behalf of Mr. Molenaar.

The selection committee considered "dedication to students and families, exemplary contributions to the field, respect of colleagues, and effective use of technology," to reach its decision. Recommendations from educators were also considered. The ESCNJ Superintendent Mark J. Finkelstein cited Mr. Molenaar's "immense knowledge-base, willingness to share information, and most importantly, his continued passion to improve the lives of students." Bergen County Special Services Superintendent Howard Lerner,



*Mr. Molenaar's priority is to always make decisions in the best interest of students.*

Ed.D. wrote that he "could not think of a more deserving, dedicated, motivated, knowledgeable, and honest colleague to receive this prestigious award." Incoming Fair Lawn Public Schools Superintendent Nicholas J. Norcia described Mr. Molenaar

as "a pillar in the special education community, whose passion to do what is best for students is commendable."

Mr. Molenaar has worked in the field for over 20 years and shared his perspective (See **Mr. Molenaar** on page 7)

## A "Shining Star" At ALC

The Academy Learning Center has a "shining star" after participating in the 7th annual "Music Through the Decades" talent show held by the Shining Stars Network at the Union County Performing Arts Center.

Andrew, an ALC student in Mr. Nick Richardella's class, was recognized as a shining star based on his performance of the song "Jitter Bug" by Wham!, the former English musical duo of the late George Michael and Andrew Ridgeley.

(See **STAR** on page 6)



*Andrew, an ALC student in Mr. Nick Richardella's class, was recognized during the Shining Stars Networks 7th annual "Music Through the Decades" talent show at the Union County Performing Arts Center, for his rendition of "Jitter Bug" by the group Wham!.*

## Dylan's Wings Of Change Presentation

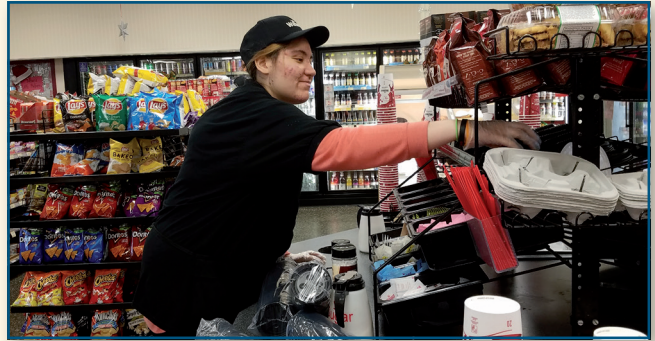
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## PAL Students At Work



**P**athways To Adult Living (PAL) students working at the Molly Pitcher Travel Plaza recently. The PAL program, based in Sayreville, includes students who have earned their high school diploma, but remain in district to



further strengthen their independent living skills. Contact Community-based Instruction Supervisor Raissa Prus, [rprus@escnj.k12.nj.us](mailto:rprus@escnj.k12.nj.us), or 732-777-9848 (Ext. 3020) for program information.

## Governor Educator Of The Year Recipients



**C**iting their "dedication to student achievement" ESCNJ Superintendent Mark J. Finkelstein introduced the 2017-2018 Governor Educator of the Year recipients, who then received plaques from board members at a recent Board of Directors meeting.

The ESCNJ's Governor Educator of the Year recipients are (L-R Front Row) Nonpublic Department – Nagasai Karee, Robin Garber; Piscataway Regional Day School – Susan McGrory; Bright Beginnings Learning Center – Alison Berkovits and Cristina Pallone; Academy Learning Center – Jeannine Preston; (L-R Back Row) Center for Lifelong Learning – Meghan Langan and Annette Padmore; Board President Dr. Dale Caldwell; Academy Learning Center – Colleen Hopfensperger. •

## Walk In Support Of Autism Awareness



*BBLC / Secondary students and staff walked on Piscataway Campus in support of Autism Awareness Month in April.*

## Vendor Expo



*Attendees during a workshop at the recent Vendor's Expo, coordinated by the Department of Nonpublic School Services.*



## New Collaboration With Rutgers University

Since November, Rutgers University Behavioral Health Care's master mental health clinicians have been onsite at NuView Academy and NuView Academy Annex to further strengthen the behavioral and emotional support for students.

Both schools focus on students ages 5-21 with significant behavioral and emotional challenges. The ESCNJ faculty continues managing the academic program, with Rutgers University Behavioral Health Program focused on psychiatric and therapeutic services.

Rutgers Program Director Sonia Rodrigues-Martó, manages and designs student clinical services.

"Our emphasis is the link between emotional wellness and academic success, which we personalize to meet individual student's needs since one size does not fit all," said Mrs. Rodrigues-Martó.

Student behavioral and emotional challenges include family violence, trauma, deportation concerns, life in homeless shelters, and many other issues, she said.

"We help students learn coping skills to manage life's challenges so they can stay in school and continue learning," said Mrs. Rodrigues-Martó, adding the services include a significant faculty and staff training component.

Mrs. Rodrigues-Martó said being onsite is advantageous to students because clinicians can respond to student needs immediately, as opposed to outpatient programs, where students or parents need to schedule appointments to meet with therapists.

The ESCNJ Assistant Superintendent Mr. Gary Molenaar, said the goal of the collaboration is to help students reach the point where they are psychologically and emotionally available to return to the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE).



*A recent presentation by NuView Academy students.*

"We ultimately want to return students to their local school's special or general education program," he said.

Both Mr. Molenaar and Mrs. Rodrigues-Martó, along with NAA Counselor Amanda Olexian appeared on ESCNJ's *Better Together* podcast, [www.teachertube.com/audio/11429](http://www.teachertube.com/audio/11429), hosted by Coordinator of Communications David Sandler.

Ms. Olexian said a major area of concentration is helping students strengthen their coping skills so they can remain in school.

"I meet with students whenever they need to talk," said Ms. Olexian.

"I also reach out to students to meet with when I sense they are having a bad day," Ms. Olexian added.

"A student still might be unable to concentrate on their work, but gaining the coping skills to remain in school and return to class is a significant accomplishment," she added.

In addition to personal issues, students need support processing horrors like school shootings and acts of terrorism.

"We offer an environment where students can work through their feelings," said Ms. Olexian.

When meeting in a group setting, Ms. Olexian said she sometimes takes a step back and lets students process their emotions peer to peer, "which helps them learn how to be there for each other," she added. •

## International Day At NAA



*NAA student engaged in an International Day activity.*

International Day was celebrated at NuView Academy Annex. The NAA Student Council coordinated the event with students and staff. Students researched the culture, geography, population and history of various countries. Students also made food representative of the different cultures, including (above), macaroons and cream puffs, representative of desserts served in France. •



*NAA students collaborated recently to prepare and donate food to the Ozanam Family Shelter.*



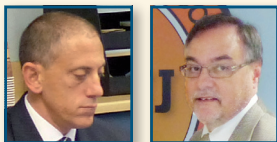
## New Construction Swings Into High Gear



*The 50,000 square foot addition on the Piscataway Campus is on schedule for its planned opening in September 2019. The additional space will be primarily used to help higher functioning classified students strengthen their ability to live independently.*

## Two ESCNJ Board Members Named County Superintendents Of The Year

**D**r. Scott Taylor, an Executive Committee member of the ESCNJ Board of Directors and Superintendent of the Highland Park Public Schools, was named Middlesex County Superintendent of the Year by the New Jersey Association for School Administrators. Dr. Taylor also chairs the Board's Finance Committee, in addition to serving on the Personnel Committee.



*ESCNJ Board Members Dr. Scott Taylor (L) and Dr. Stephen Genco were named 'Superintendents of the Year' in their respective counties.*

In addition, ESCNJ Board Member Dr. Stephen Genco, Superintendent for the Jackson School District, was named the 2018 Ocean County Superintendent of the year.

ESCNJ Board President Dr. Dale Caldwell said the recognition of both board members is well deserved.

"Both Dr. Genco and Dr. Taylor have proven to be tremendous assets to our Board, and recognized leaders who always put the interests of students first," Dr. Caldwell said. •

## Transition Planning



**C**oordinated by ALC Vice Principal Stacy Rieger, the transition planning workshop focused on strategies to help students live independently. •

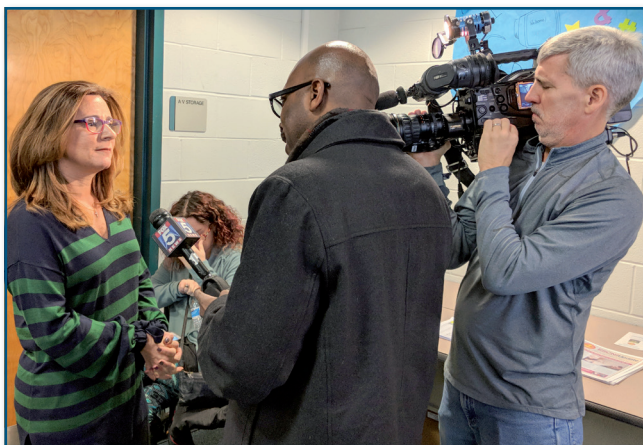


## Dylan's Wings Of Change Presentation

Nearly 100 educators attended a free "Social/Emotional Learning Framework for Schools" workshop at the Professional Development Academy. The workshop was led by Mr. Ian Hockley, founder of the Dylan's Wings of Change Foundation, whose mission is to "help children with autism and related conditions reach their full potential."

Founded in memory of Mr. Hockley's son Dylan, one of 20 first graders killed in the Sandy Hook Elementary School tragedy, the foundation includes a "Wingman Youth Leadership" component to inspire "all children to go above and beyond and create inclusive communities in their schools, sports clubs, dance studios and more."

"Dylan had autism, struggled to communicate, and had his own style of communicating," said Mr. Hockley.



*Board Member Dr. Susan Genco being interviewed following the Dylan's Wings of Change presentation.*



*(L-R) Business Admin. Patrick M. Moran, Board Member Beth Moroney, Mr. Ian Hockley, Supt. Mark J. Finkelstein, Board Member Susan Genco, and Executive County Supt. Ms. Yasmin Hernández-Manno following well received workshop.*

The Wingman Youth Leadership program was designed to help students with special needs participate "in sports, the arts and dance, to get them involved in activities other children take for granted," said Mr. Hockley.

Board member Beth Moroney was instrumental in coordinating the workshop.

"The more I learned about the program, the more I thought it would help students to become more empathetic," Mrs. Moroney said.

To learn more about the Dylan's Wings of Change Foundation, please visit [www.dylanswingsofchange.org](http://www.dylanswingsofchange.org).

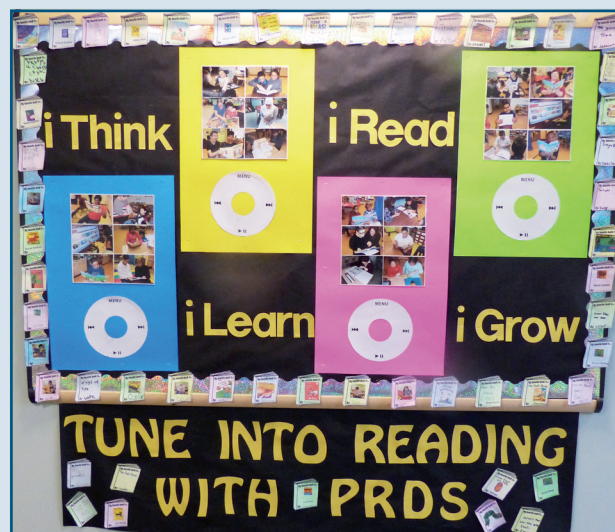
## Special Night For Students



Students and parents, along with ESCNJ administrators, faculty and staff attended the 35th Annual Student Recognition Program at Old Bridge High School. The awards dinner, honors "outstanding Juniors and Seniors in Middlesex County's High Schools" who continue achieving in school despite difficult challenges.

A record number of ESCNJ students were recipients this year including: ALC's Jason Cullen and Tanvee Patel; BBLC's Nnamdi Nnanna, and Adarsh Patel; CLL's Tyra Johnson and Kate Strong; NuView Academy's Edwin Adongo; NAA's Daniel Rosales; and PRDS students Nyle Gardner and Jason Rauch.

## Strong Readers At PRDS



*A bulletin board regarding the emphasis PRDS teachers place on reading was displayed recently in the Central Office foyer.*



## \$12,000 From 6th Annual 'Autism Awareness' Fundraiser

For the 6th straight year, The Educational Services Commission of New Jersey's Annual Autism Awareness Swim & Play fundraiser on behalf of Autism New Jersey was a great success. Total funds raised were approximately \$12,000, as a result of pledges for laps completed, T-shirt sales, and families participating in arts and crafts activities.

The event received additional support from 13 volunteers from the Rutgers Athletics Women's Tennis, Field Hockey, Swimming and Diving teams.

"The partnership we are building with Rutgers University will continue to help with our own outreach and community involvement, and provide continued awareness and education about Autism Spectrum Disorder," said Kate Dauphinee, coordinator of the event, and site director of the ESCNJ Aquatics & Fitness Center. Autism New Jersey is the largest statewide network of parents and professionals dedicated to improving lives of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

This year's event was particularly special in light of the ESCNJ being named Autism New Jersey's Ambassador Program representative for the week of April 20-27, said Superintendent Mark J. Finkelstein.

"We are grateful for all the volunteers, and the involvement of students from Rutgers Athletics Women's Tennis, Field Hockey, Swimming, and Diving teams," Mr. Finkelstein said.

This year's winner was the Center for Lifelong Learning's Kristen Policastro, who completed 138 laps (two miles) and individually raised \$900 for the event. •

*ESCNJ staff members and students from the Rutgers Women's Athletics Tennis, Field Hockey, Swimming and Diving teams all helped to coordinate the event.*



*The ESCNJ's 6th Annual Autism Awareness Swim & Play fundraiser raised approximately \$12,000 on behalf of Autism New Jersey.*



## 3D Printing Taught At NuView Academy

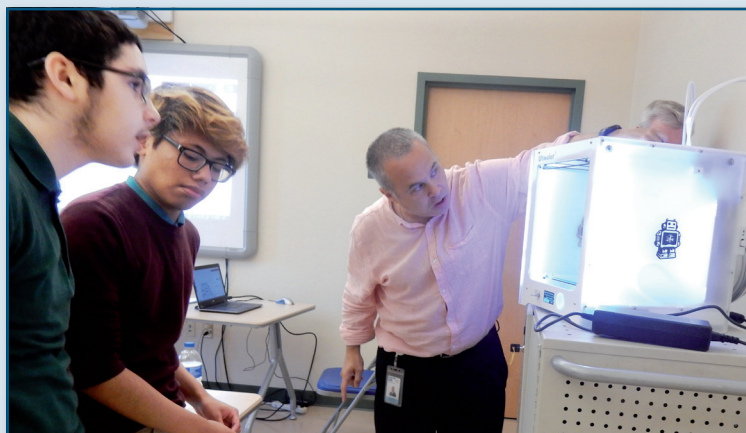
Tec Incorporated's Professional Development Trainer Robert Abraham visited NuView Academy recently to work with students and staff on 3D printing. It was the third visit to NuView Academy from Tec representatives.

Principal Bill Walsh is pleased students are getting exposed to the rapidly emerging world of 3D printing.

"Our students are enjoying learning the process, steps and techniques entailed with 3D printers," he said.

The 3D process involves the use of various materials to join or solidify under computer control to create three dimensional objects.

Mr. Walsh credited Information Technology Coordinator Robert Reinke, along with Mr. Michael Gritz for help in selecting the appropriate 3D printer and staff development package. •



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

"Andrew did an excellent job," said Mr. Richardella, who, along with several other ALC faculty and staff attended the show.

The program for students with special needs included dance, singing and instrumentals aligned with musical numbers from the 1920s to now.

"It was amazing how hard Andrew and each performer

worked on their routines, and great to see how proud they were to receive a standing ovation from the audience," Mr. Richardella added.

The Shining Stars Network is dedicated to "shining a light on the special needs community by providing opportunities for students with and without special needs to come together," according to the organizations website. •



**Mr. Molenaar** (Cont'd from page 1)

tives on various special education issues in the following interview.

**Q: Who are some people who have been particularly influential in your career?**

**A:** Bergen County Special Services Board President Gary Lentini, my first mentor, Dr. Learner, and Mr. Finkelstein have all had strong influences on me. Their professionalism and shared philosophy that you cannot go wrong as long as you make decisions in the best interest of the student, have had a tremendous impact on me and is a philosophy that I embrace.

**Q: How has the special education field evolved over the years?**

**A:** Technology has played a tremendous role in our ability to serve the special education population. However, teachers and administrators are still critical factors in the implementation of any initiative.

**Q: Has public perception of students with special needs changed much since you began?**

**A:** Absolutely, and I think it is a result of greater enforcement of Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) laws. More students with disabilities work alongside general education students when feasible, which enhances awareness and acceptance of this population. The situation today is not perfect, but we are moving in the right direction.

**Q: How do you remain current with respect to best practices in special education?**

**A:** Participation in professional development and sharing information with colleagues is essential. Nobody has all the answers, so collaboration is a critical component to meeting the needs of students.

**Q: What are some initiatives that you have brought to ESCNJ in your six years as Assistant Superintendent?**

**A:** We launched the Pathways to Adult Living (PAL) program last September for students 18-21 who have fulfilled their high school requirements but require more life skills support. PAL students meet at a building in the heart of downtown Sayreville, and work at various jobs in the community, access

public transportation regularly, clean, cook and shop.

Another initiative is the personalized learning students receive in conjunction with being provided their own Google Chromebook for use during the school day. We have also introduced robotics and computer coding, an idea that originated with two of our teachers.

We also started a Special Education Review Service for districts statewide who are preparing for state monitoring, or simply want a fresh set of eyes on their program so they can make any necessary adjustments. Also, our collaboration with New Brunswick Public Schools will expand to three classes this September and be led by ESCNJ teachers. That means many New Brunswick students will have their special education needs met in their home district rather than being bused to costly out-of-district private special education schools.

**Q: What are some characteristics you look for in people who want to work in the special education field?**

**A:** Certainly, they must have an unconditional positive regard for all students, excellent communication skills, and problem solving abilities. For example, if the person encounters an area of concern, you want them to come to you with at least some preliminary thoughts on how to solve the issue. Ultimately, the individual must be a tireless, dedicated educator who can manage complex and potentially litigious situations in a professional manner, and continuously strive to do what is in the best interest of students. •



*Mr. Finkelstein, Mr. Molenaar (C) and Mr. Moran shown with Special Education Administrator of the Year plaque.*

## CLL's Annual Spelling Bee

**C**LL's 4th Annual Spelling Bee was a spectacular event, with over 80 participants (nearly double from last year), showcasing their exceptional literacy skills.

Students spelled words in a variety of ways, using communication devices, hand-writing, smart TV's, or using the alphabet board.

"The collaborative efforts of our speech department, teachers and instructional aides was evident, based on our student's outstanding performances," said Principal Mary Beth Conley, adding one student spelled "pneumonoultramicroscopicsilicovolcanoconiosis," the longest word in the dictionary. •



*All participants were winners in CLL's 4th Annual Spelling Bee.*

## The 2018 Annual Vendor Expo



*About 600 people, including over 270 Co-op Pricing System members and 100 vendors, took advantage of ESCNJ's Annual Vendor Expo.*



## Good Job Lead Part Of PRDS Visit To Wegmans

Several Community-based Instruction (CBI) students had a productive afternoon and potential leg up in finding future employment as a result of a visit to Wegmans in Woodbridge, thanks to Culinary Instructor Maureen Hollywood Hodroski, and Aide Connie O'Grady.

"I spoke with CBI Supervisor Raissa Prus and Principal Phyllis DeLucia about Connie and I taking students on a tour of Wegmans and they were both supportive of the idea," said Mrs. Hollywood Hodroski, who manages Frank's Cafe.

"Since Mrs. O'Grady has her CDL, we were able to transport all the

students at the same time. Of the 12 student participants, five graduate in June, so we felt the timing was good," Mrs. Hollywood Hodroski added.

The PRDS group were greeted by Wegmans Food Markets New Jersey Recruiter Matt Sneider, who led them on a tour of the Woodbridge facility. Students and staff visited the Produce Department and learned about pricing; the Cheese Department to learn slicing techniques, along with the Bakery Department, Meat and Seafood Departments.

The tour concluded with a Power-Point presentation by Mr. Sneider

about employment at Wegmans and educational funding opportunities. Students were given employment applications by Mr. Sneider who said he would give them special attention.

Students returned to school full of excitement and a good job lead for future employment, said Mrs. Hollywood Hodroski. •



## Dinner Dance For BBLC/ BBLC Secondary Students



*The recent Dinner Dance was organized primarily by parents, and was a huge success, said BBLC Supervisor Cindy Borell.*



### The Educational Services Commission of New Jersey

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