



# MRESCUpdate

MIDDLESEX REGIONAL EDUCATIONAL SERVICES COMMISSION

Cooperative, Cost Efficient, Quality Services

## Five MRESC Students Honored At Annual Recognition Program



*Proud family members, educators, and students from the Middlesex Regional Educational Services Commission at the recent 28th Annual Student Recognition Program held at New Brunswick High School, which honored 65 Middlesex County junior and senior high school students often overlooked in traditional award ceremonies.*

Junior and senior high school students who are often overlooked in traditional awards ceremonies were recently honored at the 28th Annual Student Recognition Program at New Brunswick High School.

The Middlesex County School Boards Association, and the Middlesex County Association of School Administrators sponsored the annual event, recognizing "the unsung heroes who have not yet captured the headlines," said Dr. Frank R. Alfano, President of the Middlesex County

Association of School Administrators.

The Student Recognition Award recipients from MRESC were: Christopher Ofoegbu and Jeffrey Volante (Academy Learning Center), Guadalupe Saucedo (Center for Lifelong Learning), and Noelis Cabrera and Samir Pandya, (Piscataway Regional Day School).

A variety of factors are used to select students for the award, including their ability to overcome significant academic or personal challenges.

Catherine Sucher Greeley, President of the Middlesex County School Boards Association pointed out: "These are students who have had to deal with difficult issues and were able to persevere."

The Keynote Speaker for the event was MRESC Superintendent of Schools Mark Finkelstein. During his speech, Mr. Finkelstein praised the 65 Middlesex County student award recipients, noting: "Tonight is about recognizing you for your

(See **Students Honored** on page 6)

## Congratulations To Our 2013 Graduates!

### ACADEMY LEARNING CENTER

David Bocian  
Richard Dey  
Patrick Fay  
Nicolas Grant  
Doremus Jones  
Shawn Khanna  
Christopher Ofoegbu  
Michael Ofoegbu  
Kevin Osei  
Dominique Pearson  
Vincent Rojas

### CENTER FOR LIFELONG LEARNING

**HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES:**  
DeVahn Bassett

Jaleel Benjamin  
Edem Benson  
Dina Berman  
Brenen Lobelo  
Joseph Matayas  
**8TH GRADE GRADUATES:**  
Tanner Bell  
Jordan Jarusiewicz  
Dean Johnson  
Rianna Lita  
Evan Mackay  
Nikhil Maheshwary  
Jordan Mastropietro  
Drew Matthews  
Samuel Oliveira  
Derrick Osei  
Robert Pavlic

Lizbeth Perez  
Christian Petrocelli  
Danile Rivera

### MIDDLESEX COUNTY ACADEMY

Sean Clawges  
Jordan Gonzalez  
Christina Magee  
Muhammad Mustapha

### NUVIEW ACADEMY

**HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES:**  
Michael Bermudez  
Stephanie Cardona  
Joseph Creadle  
Jeremy Duval  
Nahzier Harper

### 8TH GRADE GRADUATES:

Jerry Arias  
Christopher Charron  
Richie Cook  
Felix Cortez  
Keith Hall  
Israel Oliver

### PISCATAWAY REGIONAL DAY SCHOOL

Hauson Benjamin  
Noelis Cabrera  
Adalberto Cerda  
Lucila Charles  
Douglas Chirdon  
Frances Coriano  
Tyrell Foster  
Faith Foy

Andre Jefferson  
Dylan Krops  
Sonu Kumar  
James Liptak  
Alyssa O'Brien  
Samir Pandya  
Monica Patel  
Mark Renaud  
Jelani Smith  
Will Henry Vaccaro  
Xavier Vargas  
Joel Wheeler  
Michael Zweibel  
**RARITAN VALLEY ACADEMY**  
Jeffrey Espinal

## MRESC Hosts 10th Annual ERIC NORTH Seminar



David Nash, ESQ., Legal Counsel, New Jersey Principals and Supervisor Association, discusses "Minimizing Liability Exercise: The Law" with attendees at the recent ERIC NORTH Training Seminar. Other seminars were led by Tony Jones, Loss Control Manager, New Jersey School Boards Association Insurance Group, and Nancy Richmond, Ed D., New Jersey Coordinator and Lead Trainer, Stronge and Associates. A "Lunch & Learn" session was led by Bruce W. Padula, Esq., Cleary, Giacobbe, Alfieri, Jacobs, LLC from the NEPHA Hotline. MRESC Business Administrator Patrick M. Moran, who is the ERIC North Chairperson, coordinated the "In an Age of Accountability" seminar.



### Autism Awareness Swim-A-Thon At MRESC Aquatics & Fitness Center

The Swim-A-Thon held on behalf of Autism NJ raised over \$2,500 in MRESC contributions and was "a real team effort on the part of MRESC for a great cause," said Academy Learning Center Principal Dr. Erik Solberg, who coordinated the effort. Pictured above from L to R are: Kathy Moore, ALC Principal Dr. Solberg, and Lori Frost, all members of Autism NJ Board of Directors.



### Hearing Loss Expert Assists Educators

Mrs. Karen Noble (standing), led a workshop at the Professional Development Academy on "Instructing Students with Cochlear Implants". Since school districts rarely have the in-house expertise to address student's hearing needs, the MRESC expanded its "Partnerships for Children with Hearing Loss/Itinerant Services" division with the addition of Mrs. Noble, a former NJ Department of Education Consultant for Deaf and Hard of Hearing. Mrs. Noble taught at the Katzenbach School for nearly two decades.



### ITG Donates iPads To CLL

ITG, a New York based independent execution and research brokerage firm, participated in the Center for Lifelong Learning's Field Day in addition to donating three iPads to the school.



### This Is How The Garden Grows

Piscataway Regional Day School students take advantage of the nice weather to learn some gardening skills.



## BBLC Science Fair Is Team Effort

**B**right Beginnings Learning Center students participated in a creative and thought provoking Science Fair recently.

"All of our classes were involved, and students worked on projects to learn more about the scientific process through functional application of their IEP goals," said Ms. Kate Johnson, who coordinated the event.

"Every teacher deserves recognition for all the work they put into the projects with their students," said Ms. Johnson.

The Science Fair exhibits covered a range of topics including: Sounds in the Environment; Lifecycle of a Butterfly (with a butterfly garden;) Lifecycle of Worms; Water Purification Ant

Farm; Clean Water Using the Sun; Bottled vs. Tap Water; From Seed to Plant: Journey of Vegetables on our Plate; Effects of Sandy on our Environment, and The Rain Cycle: Water's Journey.

The various exhibits were on display the entire day, while students also gave presentations for their fellow classmates and invited guests.

"Since all of our classes represent a diverse population of students, it is always great to see how creative the teachers are in adapting the material to fit the needs of their students," said Ms. Johnson.

"The science fair is a true collaboration of all of the BBLC Teachers, Occupational Therapists and Speech Therapists, resulting in a functional avenue to showcase the instructional goals we work on all year." •



*Describing the rain cycle are (L-R) Mrs. Maha Sridhar and Mrs. Tracy Smith with student Sakib Hasan.*



*The finer points of the food chain are presented by (L-R) Mrs. Karima Rizkalla, Tonya Shearin and student April Orellana.*



*An eggshell demonstration is described by student Emily Fernandez (C) while Ms. Lyuboy Lunin (R) looks on.*

## On The Job At ALC



*An Academy Learning Center bulletin board shared some of the ways students gain employment skills. As Principal Dr. Erik Solberg put it: "Working to learn and learning to work – ALC students get the job done."*

## Jeans For Troops Day



*Staff from the Center for Lifelong Learning raised \$255 through its participation in the G.I. Go Fund's nationwide "Jeans For Troops Day" fundraising drive. The funds raised go to support returning veterans in honor of Memorial Day.*

## News You Can Use: *Family Services Agency Renamed*

(Information compiled by Mr. Arthur Frances, Principal, Middlesex County Academy and Raritan Valley Academy)

**S**ome families may not be aware that over a year ago the New Jersey Department of Children and Families renamed its Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS), which is now called the Division of Child Protection and Permanency (DCP&P).

The core mission of the DCP&P remains one of ensuring the safety, permanency and well-being of children, and to support families. The DCP&P contracts with many community-based agencies throughout the state to provide services to children and families including:

- **Case Management**
- **Family Support Services**  
(parenting skills training, counseling, child care, etc.)
- **Substance Abuse Treatment**
- **Domestic Violence Services**
- **Mental Health Services**
- **Foster Care**
- **Adoption and Kinship Legal Guardianship**

DCP&P also provides services and support to adolescents under supervision until their 21st birthday. Services assist youth to become self sufficient as they transition to adulthood. Some of the services include life skills training, education, employment, financial assistance and housing. For more information about programs and services visit [www.nj.gov/dcf](http://www.nj.gov/dcf) or call:

Child Abuse Hotline: **1-877-NJ ABUSE**; or Office of Advocacy: **1-877-543-7864**.

(This summary is based on information from the New Jersey Department of Children and Families website, [www.nj.gov/dcf](http://www.nj.gov/dcf)). •

## Educators Share Best Practices For Transition Planning



Debbie Bussiere (L), Case Manager/Social Skills Teacher, leads a session on Community-Based Instruction, along with Raissa Prus, SLE, Pre-Vocational Teacher, and Marika O'Rourke, Community Education Teacher.

presentation was led by Ms. Elizabeth Manley, Director of the Division of Children's System of Care, Department of Children and Families.

Additionally, Piscataway Regional Day School's Case Manager/Social Skills Teacher Debbie Bussiere, Community Education Teacher Marika O'Rourke, and SLE, Pre-Vocational Teacher Raissa Prus, discussed the Community-Based Instruction (CBI) program, designed to help special needs high school students gain the workplace and social skills training necessary for independent living. •

**O**ver 60 special education professionals attended MRESC's recent "Best Practices In Transition Planning Workshop," coordinated by Academy Learning Center Vice Principal Stacy Rieger.

The workshop, offered through the MRESC's Professional Development Academy, was aimed at sharing recent changes in the state's approach to providing assistance to special needs students after they graduate. The

## Leadership Team Elected



Mr. Dale Caldwell (L), and Mr. Bill Petscavage were elected to serve as President and Vice President respectively for the 2013-2014 school year at the recent MRESC Board of Directors reorganization meeting. •

## MRESC Board Member Honored



Retiring MRESC Board of Director Dr. James Baker was honored for his service recently. Pictured (L-R) are Board President Dale Caldwell, Vice President Bill Petscavage, Dr. Baker, and MRESC Superintendent Mark Finkelstein. •

## RVA Students "Caught Being Good"



Whether it was asking probing questions in science or demonstrating strong team play during gym class, many Raritan Valley Academy students were acknowledged for their "caught being good" behavior. •



## BBLC Student Participates In Long Branch Half Marathon

**S**adhika Premkumar, an eight-year-old student with multiple disabilities at Bright Beginnings Learning Center, was pushed along in an adaptive stroller for 4.5 miles and assisted by a physical therapist to walk the final 20 feet to cross the finish line in the Long Branch Half Marathon and Relay, a part of the New Jersey Marathon at the Shore.

A day after the race, Sadhika's mother, Srilakshmi Premkumar said her daughter was delighted with the experience.

"Sadhika was so happy," said Mrs. Premkumar. "It went really well and she thoroughly enjoyed herself."

While practicing in her adaptive stroller on the MRESC campus two days before the marathon, Sadhika said: "I'm very excited to have a chance to do this."

In addition to supporting Sadhika, several therapists from BBLC, including Noa Elbaum, Rivka Jaffe, Gila Miodownik, Jen Wajngold and Devora Zinkin, also participated in the marathon in memory of Suri Granek, founder of LEBA Therapeutics. The firm places physical, occupational and speech therapists to help children with disabilities in various New Jersey schools, including MRESC schools. Mrs. Granek was 45 when she passed away from cancer in 2009.

In conjunction with Sadhika's participation, the BBLC has been working to raise \$2,500 to purchase a "Kidwalk"

gait trainer, so children with significant physical disabilities such as cerebral palsy can walk independently.

Donations in any amount can still be made, payable to Bright Beginnings Learning Center at 1660 Stelton Road, Piscataway, NJ 08854. •



*(L-R) Speech Therapist Noa Elbaum, Physical Therapist Devora Zinkin, Speech Therapist Gila Miodownik, and Occupational Therapist Rivka Jaffe with Sadhika celebrate after finishing the Long Branch half marathon.*

*(L-R) Therapists Rivka Jaffe, Devora Zinkin, Gila Miodownik and Noa Elbaum, giving it their all in supporting Sadhika during the race.*



*Sadhika's mother, Srilakshmi Premkumar, along with Occupational Therapist Rivka Jaffe reviewed paperwork at BBLC on the Friday prior to the Marathon. Although the minimum age for entering is 14, officials gave special permission to Sadhika 8, in order to allow her to participate.*



## Transportation Contractors Work Together At MRESC

**"W**e are all competitors, yet coming together for this type of meeting is a way to make us more collegial and stay informed about student transportation issues," said one attendee at the recent Transportation Contractors Meeting held at the MRESC.

Facilitated by Transportation Coordinator Chris Zarate, the meeting covered a range of transportation related issues including: delayed opening procedures; bus idling rules; harassment and anti-bullying training; laws regarding cell phone use; wheelchair securement; effective ways to communicate via email and phone, and transportation route bidding procedures.

"Getting together like this helps us better appreciate the decision making process," said Sami Ibrahim, from Transys Transportation in Sayreville.

City Line's Faisal Elsheikh added: "This type of meeting is great for eliminating misunderstandings and gaining new information."

Ms. Zarate said reviewing changes in school bus idling laws and the bidding process were particularly helpful.

"Rules and regulations change, so we like to meet as a group to share relevant information," she said.

"We all want the same result, safe and efficient transportation for students, and these meetings help everyone meet that goal." •



*Participants in the Transportation Contractors Meeting included: (L-R) Superintendent Mark Finkelstein, Transportation Contractor Wael O'Hamed, MRESC Transportation Coordinator Chris Zarate, Middlesex County School Business Administrator John Nemeth, and Transportation Contractors Faisal Elsheikh and Sami Ibrahim.*

## Excerpts From Student Recognition Keynote Speech

The following are excerpts from the speech presented by keynote speaker Mark Finkelstein, who chaired the committee that founded the Student Recognition Program in 1985, while serving on the New Brunswick Board of Education.

...Clearly, our Student Recognition Program has come a long way since 1985 when we had 125 students, parents, staff and board members here.. Tonight we have over 300 people, and have recognized nearly 2,000 students over 28 years...

...The late author Joseph Campbell, said: "The job of an educator is to teach students to see vitality in themselves." That strikes me as being at the heart of what we educators do... recognizing the human dignity inherent in every student, and helping them make the most of their gifts, to the best of their ability... The parents and extended family members also deserve an enormous amount of credit for teaching the young men and women in this room tonight about personal responsibility...

...Tonight's students exemplify what the late Robert F. Kennedy meant when he said: "The purpose of life is to contribute in some way to making things better." ... Tonight is about honoring a student who lost his father at a young age, and whose mother, due to illness, can no longer work. However, this young man continues doing well in school, often works 40 hours a week to help make ends meet, is captain of his school's varsity wrestling team, and is thinking of becoming a guidance counselor to help others... tonight is also about honoring a young woman who has lived in hotels and with relatives since a fire destroyed her home last year. Nevertheless, she continues getting excellent grades, sings in her church choir, and is a member of the 4-H sign language club. One final example... is about a typical high school student who one day was eagerly shopping for gowns for her junior prom, and the next day learned she had a serious medical condition. Still, this young woman has maintained a positive attitude, continues to excel in school, and works in her community.

...In closing, let me say that tonight is one of the most personally rewarding nights of the school year for me, because it is a night in which we all have an opportunity to share and delight in the success of our students. •



*Academy Learning Center Principal Dr. Erik Solberg (L), and Keynote Speaker, MRESC Superintendent Mark Finkelstein, greet Jeffrey Volante, a student at ALC and his father Ralph.*

## Students Honored

(Cont'd from page 1)

work ethic, your strength of character, your ability to respond to whatever obstacles life has thrown your way, and to find the strength to successfully meet those challenges head on."

Dr. Alfano pointed out that "while there are many worthwhile events recognizing students who excel in academics, athletics, or community service activities, there is something special about the quiet strength demonstrated year after year on the part of these students."

Approximately 300 students, parents, and educators attended the program. •

## RVA Celebrates Poetry Month



*Raritan Valley Academy Class B-3 (Grades 6-8) celebrated poetry month in April by incorporating different styles of poetry, including Shape, Acrostic, and Cinquain, that they learned about in class. Students were encouraged to use their imagination and reflect upon personal experiences, thoughts, feelings, and interests as a way of expressing themselves. •*

## CLL Grads Give Back



*The B60 Graduating Class, donated a bird bath as their way of giving back to CLL. Pictured (L-R) are Danielle Chryssikos, Supervisor, Debra Nappi, Principal and Teacher William Schussler. •*

## Teacher Recognition Award Winners

*The 2012-2013 Teachers Recognition Award Winners, honored for their "outstanding contributions to the teaching profession," display the plaques they received at a recent Board of Directors meeting. Pictured (L-R) are: Ms. Amy Woodward (ALC), Ms. Jennifer George (CLL), Ms. Gisele Bretan (Nonpublic Department), Ms. Traci Yuhas (PRDS) and Ms. Kate Johnson (BBLC). •*





## Vendor Expo Helps Schools and Municipalities Make Cost Effective Purchases

"It's all here," remarked Tyler Tribelhorn, Certified Educational Facilities Manager for Warren Township.

Or as Frank Gripp, Business Administrator from Rumson-Fair Haven Regional High School said: "It's a very hands on experience. Much better than going through a catalogue."

What both officials are referring to is why they attended the Middlesex Regional Educational Services Commission's "Co-op Vendor Expo" recently.

Among the Vendor Expo features were: A 42" High Definition, LCD interactive SMART Table, from SMART Technologies; chain saws, hedge trimmers, and power washers from C.A. Power Equipment; the Smithco "Sweep Star 60" a hydraulically driven, 3-wheel sweeper, with easy maneuverability around schools or municipal buildings, and promising efficient cleanup of playing fields, ("goose droppings [will] be gone,"), along with transportation services from City Line Trans. Several educational workshops on topics ranging from Energy Procurement and Proactive Mold Management, to Economics of the Cloud, and Two Faces of Disaster, were also part of the program.

"The Co-op Vendor Expo is an excellent way for the people making large purchases for school districts or municipalities to receive timely information about products and services so they make informed, cost effective decisions," said MRESC School Business Administrator Patrick M. Moran.

According to Mr. Gripp: "I can spend an entire day driving somewhere just to look at one or two products. I came here because I can see so much and be up to date on any changes in the field in just a few hours."

Approximately 55 vendors were on hand to share information with representatives from schools and municipalities, including the River Dell Regional and Nutley Public School Districts, Clementon, Howell and Neptune Township Boards of Education, Willingboro Township and the Borough of Wallington.

Nutley Board of Education Purchasing Bookkeeper Donna Brady said she particularly enjoyed "learning about new technologies" directly from the vendors.

Nutley Business Administrator Karen Yeaman, said, "I want to go back to school," after seeing how the SMART Table could engage students of all ages through its customized "activity packs," and collaborative learning software.

Joseph Valentini, an Educational Specialist for Keyboard Consultants, said the SMART Table was attractive to many



*C.A. Power Equipment representatives provided product information to school and municipal officials.*

school districts because it provided a more interactive experience for students.

"It can be loaded with activities that will appeal to preschoolers all the way through high school, and it's mobile, so it can be moved and used in different classrooms," he said.



*Joseph Valentini, a MRESC Co-op Vendor and Educational Specialist for Keyboard Consultants, helps Nutley Business Administrator Karen Yeaman (C) and Purchasing Bookkeeper Donna Brady learn about the interactive technology available in the SMART Table.*



*Approximately 55 vendors were on hand for the MRESC Co-op Vendor Expo to share information with representatives from schools and municipalities who came from all parts of the state.*

The MRESC Co-op, the largest of its kind in New Jersey, regularly surveys its membership to identify items most needed by schools and municipalities. Being part of the MRESC Co-op increases buying power, resulting in savings when districts and municipalities make purchases. There is no fee or obligation to join the Co-op.

Additional information about the Co-op can be provided by contacting Mr. Moran at 732-777-9848, Ext. 3120 or pmoran@mresc.k12.nj.us. •

## Patriots Recognize Autism Awareness Month With CLL Student Singing Star Spangled Banner

**E**rne Small normally spends his day receiving classroom instruction for Autism at the Center for Lifelong Learning. But recently Ernie was given a chance to walk onto the TD Bank Ballpark in Bridgewater to sing the Star Spangled Banner prior to the game between the Somerset Patriots and the Sugar Land Skeeters.

The opportunity presented itself when the CLL's Physical Education Teacher Gina Damiano asked the Patriots if anyone was scheduled to perform the Star Spangled Banner before the game that CLL students and staff were planning on attending.

According to Patrick McVerry, President/General Manager of the Somerset Patriots Baseball Club, the Patriots were delighted to accommodate the request.

"We were delighted to give Ernie the opportunity to sing the National Anthem," said Mr. McVerry.

A third year student at CLL, Ernie is a talented singer who has sung the National Anthem at many events, including the Rahway High School graduation ceremony.

According to CLL Supervisor Danielle Chryssikos, Ernie had no problem rising to the occasion.

In addition to singing, Ernie, who has



*The Center for Lifelong Learning's Ernie Small singing the Star Spangled Banner prior to the game between the Somerset Patriots and the Sugar Land Skeeters at TD Bank Ballpark in Bridgewater.*

musical aspirations for the future, is active with CLL's job sampling program, working at a local Best Buy.

"We are proud and excited for Ernie, and our students and staff enjoyed being there to cheer him on," said Ms. Chryssikos. ●

## MRESC's Graduate Update

**Featured this issue:** Mike S.

**School:** Academy Learning Center **Year Graduated:** 2012

**Current Status:** Mike attends STEP (School to Employment Program) sponsored by Community Options, a non-profit organization in Princeton, five days a week. Funded by the Self-Directed Day Services of the NJ Division of Developmental Disabilities, STEP arranges for unpaid internships with job coaches. Mike has interned at Robert Wood Johnson Hospital-Hamilton, University Medical Center of Princeton, Hinkle, Fingles & Prior law firm, TJ Maxx, Hamilton Public Library, and the Hamilton YMCA. Mike enjoys clerical tasks and likes STEP because "I learn new things and work with friends and job coaches." The STEP staff is currently helping Mike apply for employment in the Princeton area.

**Hobbies/Interests:** Mike enjoys working on 3-D puzzles, participating in Special Olympics and attending dances.

**Thoughts on ALC:** Mike likes helping out at home by using some of the skills he learned at ALC such as cooking and cleaning.

**Parent comments:** Mike liked the Voc-Ed room, in-school jobs, and the community job-sampling program. The teachers and staff focused on the functional skills Mike needed to be successful in the workplace, including social and communication skills. Mike learned to take responsibility and complete a task. Thanks to ALC, he loves working and looks forward to finding a paid position. ●

*Mike at work at the Hamilton Public Library.*



### Middlesex Regional Educational Services Commission

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