



Mount Pleasant High School Band and Chorus students perform side by side with the Rhode Island Wind Ensemble!

CONNECTIONS

JANUARY 20, 2023

SUPERINTENDENT'S CORNER

Welcome to the latest edition of the Providence Public School District (PPSD) bi-weekly newsletter! If you or someone you know misses any of our newsletters, you can find past editions on the [District's website in multiple languages](#).

I'd like to start this edition of our newsletter with a heartfelt thank you to three School Board members whose appointments are ending later this month. Board President Kinzel Thomas, Vice President Diagneris Garcia, and Board member Jesus Núñez have been fierce advocates for the PPSD community.

The good thing is that we know this is not a goodbye, because each of these Board members will continue to be present and active in the District. We know they will hold all stakeholders accountable for creating the PPSD our students, families, and educators deserve.

We also look forward to welcoming new School Board members and their perspectives and experiences next month. Change is part of growing and making progress, and I look forward to working together to make our community's Turnaround Action Plan a reality. This collaboration is especially important as we transition the District into an exciting new period of investment in our schools.

As Governor McKee highlighted in his State of the State address this week, PPSD is poised to go from just 5% of students in high quality buildings all the way to 50% in the coming years. Change like that is rarely easy, but it's never been more necessary for our students.



DR. JAVIER MONTAÑEZ
SUPERINTENDENT

DISTRICT UPDATES

EARLY RELEASE DAY JANUARY 25

This is a friendly reminder that **all schools** will have their next monthly two-hour early dismissal on **Wednesday, January 25**, for teacher professional development. Middle school families should note that this is different from the regular Wednesday dismissal time for middle school students. This allows buses to run on time for other schools that are also dismissed early that day. Families should also remember to double check the schedules at local recreation centers, as some may not open until 3 p.m. because of staffing.

EARLY CONTRACT HIRING FAIR

PPSD is now offering early hiring contracts for our hardest-to-fill positions for the 2023/2024 school year. You can learn more about the program here tinyurl.com/ppsdearly23. Selected candidates will be eligible for hiring incentives and bonus packages for serving in these hard-to-fill areas. Candidates will also have the opportunity to hear from PPSD's network staffing managers. Candidates can register at tinyurl.com/PPSDeearlyHiring.



IMPORTANT REMINDER TO FILL OUT HOUSEHOLD INCOME SURVEY

All PPSD students are eligible to receive breakfast and lunch at school at no charge. However, each year families in the District must fill out the confidential Household Income Survey to ensure these benefits. Families who have not filled out the Household Income Survey will receive reminders from the District to do so via Kinvo text message and communications from their school. Family information is confidential and will not be shared. If you have not done so, please complete the survey and return it to your child's school so that students can continue to receive breakfast and lunch at no charge. Thank you!

DUAL LANGUAGE PROGRAM EXPANSION

Providence Public Schools is expanding Dual Language program options across the District in grades Pre-Kindergarten through 12. In an effort to build community knowledge of the program models and provide opportunity for input, the Office of Multilingual Learners would like to personally invite you, a valued member of the Providence Public Schools community, to participate in an upcoming survey. The data from the survey will support the decision-making process for the future of Dual Language programs in PPSD. [Click here to access the survey: https://rezed.io/1NLVOT](https://rezed.io/1NLVOT)

EQUITY IN PROVIDENCE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Check out the latest news on the website in the [Equity Bulletin here](#) >

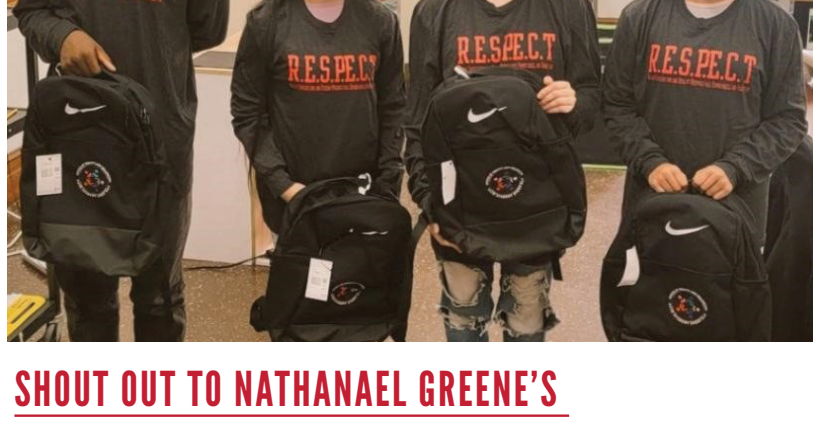
SPOTLIGHT ON ONE OF OUR PPSD FAMILIES

Brian Johnson is a 31-year-old Rhode Island Special Olympics athlete. Brian has been selected to attend the **Special Olympic World Games** in Berlin, Germany for 17 days in June 2023. Brian will be playing bocce with his unified partner. Brian was the only athlete from Rhode Island selected to participate in the games. Attending the games will be 7,500 athletes and unified partners, representing 170 countries! Special Olympics USA will be sending a team of approximately 225 from all over the United States. This is a huge honor for him!

Brian has been participating in the RI Special Olympics since he was in high school. In addition to bocce he plays a variety of sports including softball, flag football, soccer, volleyball, basketball, croquet, and bowling. He has earned several Gold, Silver and Bronze medals!

Brian's mother, Ms. Jane Johnson, is a retired Social Worker who is currently serving as a Substitute Teacher at **Gilbert Stuart Middle School (GSMS)**. In 2021, Brian came to GSMS and spoke to several classes about the Special Olympics and the importance of inclusion for special needs individuals. Brian explained to the students how hurtful it is to use the "R" word. He was warmly received by the students and made several friends during his visit.

Brian's brother, Mr. Dan Johnson, has been a Special Education Teacher in Providence, for 17 years. Dan is a strong supporter of his brother! Brian pledges to represent Rhode Island and the USA to the best of his ability. His goals are to bring home a Gold Medal and make some new friends!



SHOUT OUT TO NATHANAEL GREENE'S R.E.S.P.E.C.T. TEAM

Students from **Nathanael Greene's Equity & Leadership team** have been working hard on their equity projects. Looking forward to seeing them and the rest of our middle and high school student teams at our February 2nd Conference.

CELEBRATING STUDENTS

Our hardworking, talented students are doing amazing things every day. Here are just a few examples.



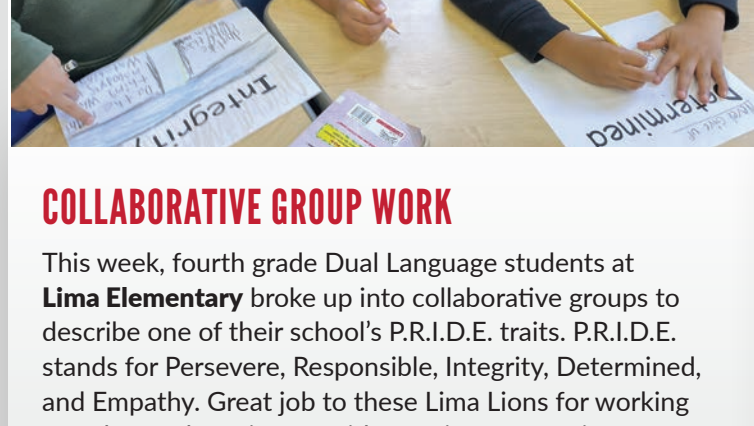
HARRY KIZIRIAN STUDENTS VISIT FRIARTOWN

Students from **Harry Kizirian Elementary** got the chance to go to a **Providence College Women's basketball game** last week. They were very excited to be on campus, to see the school, and of course they had a great time at the game! Some of the students even spoke about wanting to go there for college. Special thanks to the staff at Harry Kizirian for making this event possible for the students, and the PC Friars for having them on campus.



GAME DESIGNERS SHINE AT E-CUBED

Students from **E-Cubed Academy** participated in a game design contest with their peers in the PTECH program after a recent event at the school. Technology teachers chose the four best games and presented them to teachers, students and guests. The adults then were asked to test the games and vote for their favorite. Congratulations to the four coders and a huge kudos to Jeffery Juarez, a ninth grade student, who won the competition with his game that even featured hand-drawn digital graphics! Check out his game here : <http://ow.ly/bF1550Mv6Bv>



COLLABORATIVE GROUP WORK

This week, fourth grade Dual Language students at **Lima Elementary** broke up into collaborative groups to describe one of their school's P.R.I.D.E. traits. P.R.I.D.E. stands for Persevere, Responsible, Integrity, Determined, and Empathy. Great job to these Lima Lions for working together and coming up with creative ways to incorporate their school motto!



CHESS CHAMPS

Congratulations to all of the PPSD students who participated in the **3rd Classical Chess Tournament** last week! Students from across the District came to participate. A special congratulations to the following students who placed in the tournament:

- Henry Eberman, 1st place, Classical
- Benjamin Giller, 2nd place, Classical
- Jermaine Alston, 3rd place tie, PCTA
- Pascal Kim, 3rd place tie, Classical



STAFF SPOTLIGHT

Get to know the amazing people who work with our students every day!

Catherine M. Anderson (aka Mx. A)

9th Grade ELA and Writing Development Teacher, Freshman Teacher Leader, Equity Board Member for Providence Public Schools, Member of the Teach for Black Lives Cohort

Located in: Hope High School

Joined PPSD in: 2019

What made you want to work as an ELA teacher?

In first grade, I had a teacher who chose a story that I wrote from the turkey's point of view about dreading Thanksgiving to share with the class. Her praise, and the joy she expressed in my plot twist and word choice was palpable. In middle school, my eighth grade ELA teacher asked me if I would join the poetry club she was forming, at a time where I was socially isolated and distressed. I still have the first (and last) "published" collection of poems, a disjointed group of word nerds and her took great pride in co-creating. Then in high school, during an extremely tumultuous time for my family, my humanities teacher came to my house to remind my parents that my strengths would shine in a collegiate setting, and that getting away from them was what I needed. I was on the dean's list in my first semester in college. These events nurtured in me a belief that these insightful and caring teacher who can really see and hear you can change a person's trajectory at so many points along the way, (of course I also believe the opposite is true for many who had the opposite experience that I did, and who may have lost their belief in their own voice). My privileged upbringing in Washington, DC/Northern Virginia provided me with so many memorable experiences, such as live theater performances, museums, public libraries, and being surrounded by so many family friends from all over the world who deeply valued their ability to express themselves, all converged into my love of language, education, and the importance of learning from people with life experiences different than my own.

How would you describe your job to people who don't work in education?

I could not have a higher respect for my colleagues who taught during the pandemic (and who remained or chose not to) which necessitated continuous reinvention, compassion, and patience. On any given day today, being a teacher means continuously responding to the impact of the last three years on students, their families, and communities. From an academic lens we need to be preparing at least three iterations of every lesson; one for the students who are able to attend school regularly (as in they have access to reliable transportation, are not expected to get a sibling to school, or go to work to help support the family, etc.), one for the students who could not come for the last few classes for all the reasons listed above and others, and one for the student who is only able to cross that threshold to school every few weeks, but is still coming. Each of those categories requires accommodations for special ed identified and multi-language learning (such as assignments that have additional embedded supports like a different version of a text with leveled vocabulary, or just enhancements, or repeated verbal cues). These are visual building blocks of my recent lesson. Then we need to consider what supplemental text we can and will include that meet the same standards addressed but provide students with culturally responsive materials. For example, in the most recent unit that featured a poem by Mary Oliver and Robert Frost from the curriculum, my colleague and I taught an additional poem by a Cuban poet in Spanish and English that conveyed a similar theme and additional poetic elements. We listened and read the poem in Spanish and English.

What do you wish more people knew about being an ELA teacher?

Being an ELA teacher is about creating an environment where all students feel that their stories, their background,

their aspirations, and challenges are mirrored back to them and acknowledged appropriately. Students need to feel safe, celebrated, and seen the moment they walk in my room. Being an ELA teacher is also the classroom water cooler, the plants, the sectional couch with the coffee table books featuring artists of color, the quotes by other students about each other's success displayed on the board and our community agreements. Being an English teacher is having the private check-ins in the hallway the day after a child shared about an anxiety attack, heartbreak, or a sick family member. Some days it is knowing when to take a break and break out

"Students need to feel safe, celebrated, and seen the moment they walk in my room."

the dad jokes or take a few laps around the track. At the beginning of the year, it meant putting my own vulnerability on display first—naming my mistakes and sharing my preference to be called "Mx" over "Ms." because like them, I am a mix of identities. It is all of these things that being a TEACHER is on any given day. The ONLY difference in what I do over what my colleague does down the hall with a calculator,

beaker, charcoal to pencil, metronome, map, or gym mat is that my endgame is to have my students be able to point to ways in which they progressed as readers and writers while becoming a little more curious about who they are, and who you are along the way.

What have been some highlights this year so far?

Every day that I am in a classroom and see a student smile without reservation is a highlight. Pandemic teaching and learning depleted and impacted everyone in their own ways—some of which we have not yet begun to unpack. So for me, being able to see a student's face light up at an "ah ha" moment in their learning, or at a story that a friend shared, or a moment when a peer just finished reading a poem in front of the class is a miracle every time. We hadn't seen each other's faces in person for almost two years. Recently, watching basketball games, wrestling matches, and our girls volleyball team experience success has been a great joy. Our awesome English department has been infused with four impressive and compassionate new teachers and four top notch Brown University Masters in Education candidates who energize and inspire us daily. Learning that significant growth and proficiency in ELA over the last year was one of the reasons our school was recently recognized was yet another high point for everyone.

What are you looking forward to for the rest of the year?

I am someone who tries to stay in today (teaching requires this as a practice in my opinion). But I certainly am looking forward to both the Hope graduation (as many of the students in my first classes at Hope in 2019 will be crossing the stage), and that of my own son from The Met. These are bittersweet moments of course as we all know when our students and children move on that we no longer feel that we have the same ability to advocate and encourage them once they fly. It is also a source of immense joy to witness them step into the larger world in ways they, or you, could never have imagined four years prior. I will complete my MLL graduate certificate program at Roger Williams University around the same time. I am looking forward to helping my students prepare for their public Spring Salon (a multimodal presentation and celebration of work they are particularly proud of from the year) and of course hollering it up at spring sports (they love it, even if they pretend they don't!). But mostly, I am looking forward to showing up tomorrow and seeing another smile, or watching another student share their superpowers with a peer as they figure something out together.

IT'S GOOD NEWS: PPSD IN THE PRESS

- [Shanell Smith-Akpan is The Providence Journal Girls Basketball Player of the Week](#)
Providence Journal, January 13
- [E-Cubed Academy, Providence High School Receives National Award From Code.Org](#)
Coalition Radio, January 12
- [Local teacher shares her experience aboard URI's Endeavor](#)
WPRI, December 8

AROUND THE DISTRICT



PPSD ATTENDANCE HEROES

Beth O'Day-Hall is a Senior School Community Specialist at **Providence Career and Technical Academy**. She establishes relationships with students and their families to ensure that students come to school each day. [Click on the video here](#) to learn more about this Attendance Hero, and how you can get involved!



E-CUBED WINS \$10K COMPUTER SCIENCE GRANT

Congratulations to **E-Cubed Academy** for winning a \$10,000 grant toward computer science education! E-Cubed was the only school in Providence to receive the grant, and just one out of three schools in the state to do so. Special thanks to Code.org for recognizing E-Cubed with this prestigious grant, and E-Cubed World Language teacher Ivelisse Sabater for helping the school to win this award. You can [read more about the grant on the PPSD website](#).



SCHOOLS CELEBRATE 80TH DAY OF SCHOOL

Schools across the District showed off their '80s pride recently to help celebrate the school year's 80th day of school. Students and staff got into the spirit of the day by wearing crazy outfits and hairstyles. Staff at **Fogarty Elementary School** is just one example of the many colorful outfits seen. Check out art teacher Mr. Lundgren!

STUDENT SAFETY TIPS

Student safety is always the number one priority in Providence Public Schools. Families are encouraged to read the safety reminders below from our Campus Security team and discuss them with students. These safety tips focus specifically on students who are walkers, but look for additional safety tips in this section of the newsletter from time to time in the future. Children tend to feel comfortable in places they frequently visit and do not always pay full attention to their surroundings. With that in mind, here are some talking points to discuss with your student if they walk to school.

SAFE ROUTES

- Choose a school route that is well lit and in a busy area
- Walk the route with your child/children so you are both aware of the route to and from school

WALK WITH FRIENDS

- Try to walk in a group rather than alone
- Make sure friends stick together and not separate when walking to and from school

SAFE ZONES

- Point out shops or familiar houses where friends/family live that are on the route or nearby

TECHNOLOGY

- Avoid having a phone on display, as this can be a distraction and a potential target for theft
- Avoid having earphones/headsets in, as it can distract you from your surroundings and also be a potential target for theft

"CLEVER NEVER GOES" RULE

- Children shouldn't go anywhere with ANYONE – even if they know them – if it hasn't been agreed to in advance by a parent or guardian
- Politely avoid anyone asking for help that takes them away from where they currently are. Examples could be asking to help look for a lost dog, help needed moving something, or your parents said it's ok for me to pick you up.

USE YOUR VOICE

- In self-defense the use of your voice can be a powerful tool. If your child feels unsafe with someone approaching them, they should shout to bring attention to the situation and also deter the person making them uncomfortable.

MAKE NOTES

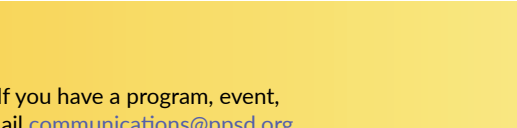
- If anyone witnesses or sees anything untoward, make notes and take down as much information as they can and report to parents/teachers. Make notes of the person involved, location, time, the car they are in, and take down as much information as you can.



MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

- EARLY RELEASE DAY**
Wednesday, January 25

- EARLY CONTRACT HIRING FAIR**
Thursday, January 26
9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.
Administration Building



Staff meetings are happening across the District, and we want to get the word out! If you have a program, event, terrific member, or student with an amazing story that you'd like to highlight, please email communications@ppsd.org.

