



Students at **Lillian Feinstein Elementary School** put on a winter concert for friends and family before the holidays.

CONNECTIONS

JANUARY 6, 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](#).

A new year is an exciting time to look at the opportunities ahead. There is a famous saying that goes, "What the new year brings to you will depend a great deal on what you bring to the new year." I think that's especially true for us in PPSPD right now.

We're in a time of growth and transformation in our District. Those are difficult and often uncomfortable processes. But they're also incredibly necessary if we want to deliver the education our students deserve. Will we get every decision right along the way? Absolutely not. The important thing is that we learn and use that new information to get better together.

That attitude is more important than ever with all of the changes taking place across PPSPD - from new schools being built, to new members joining the School Board, to new academic resources across the District. I hope we can all use the spirit of the new year and the new beginning it presents to re-dedicate ourselves to the work ahead for our students.



DR. JAVIER MONTAÑEZ
Superintendent

DISTRICT UPDATES

SCHOOL CHOICE INFORMATION SESSIONS

As part of the \$500 million plan to rebuild Providence Schools, two of the District's oldest and least utilized buildings will close next school year - the **Alan Shawn Feinstein School at Broad Street** and **Carl G. Lauro Elementary School**. The District is prioritizing a smooth transition for families and staff at these schools. Support sessions will be held on January 30, 31, and February 1, 2023, to support staff members who have questions about obtaining another position elsewhere in the District next school year.

Families of students at Broad Street and Lauro will be able to complete a preference form to choose schools for their children, and they will receive their school assignment as quickly as possible. There will be no service interruption to any family whose students are currently enrolled in specialized services such as Dual Language or Special Education programs at these schools.

In addition, in-person school choice information sessions will be held for Broad Street and Lauro families on the following dates:

- Carl G. Lauro Elementary family information sessions
 - Wednesday, January 11, from 5:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.
 - Friday, January 13, from 8:45 a.m. to 10:15 a.m.

Alan Shawn Feinstein at Broad Street family information sessions:

- Wednesday, January 11, from 9:45 a.m. to 11:15 a.m.
- Thursday, January 12, from 5:35 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

The District will follow up with additional information for all families at both schools for anyone who is not able to attend an information session.

EARLY RELEASE 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.

A HEALTHY START TO 2023

Please remember that we are now in the middle of the annual cold, flu, and COVID season. So remember to screen yourself or your children for the following symptoms before attending school:

- Fever
- Cough
- Chills
- Muscle pain
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Sore throat
- Loss of taste or smell

If you or your children have any of these symptoms, please stay home, contact your healthcare provider, and get tested. We also urge you to follow the latest Rhode Island guidance about COVID-19 here: <https://health.ri.gov/covid>

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has recently updated the COVID-19 community level spread level in Providence County to high. Health officials nationwide anticipated an increase in respiratory virus activity, including COVID-19, RSV, and flu, around the holidays. This increase in COVID-19 cases in Rhode Island is not expected to last long. However, prevention measures are still important.

While PPSPD is not currently mandating masks, we are making masks available to all staff and students per CDC guidance. Below is a list of some of the safety precautions planned for our return from winter break to prevent the spread of cold, flu, and COVID germs:

- Asymptomatic rapid testing in all schools during the week of January 3
 - A week of testing is planned after every school vacation week this year
- Masks available in all schools for any staff member or student who wish to wear one
- Staff in each building assigned to surface cleaning of high frequency areas
- Hand sanitizer provided in all schools
- Continued air filtration and purification in all schools

EQUITY IN PROVIDENCE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

On behalf of the Office of Equity and Belonging, I'd like to welcome everyone back from what I hope was a peaceful winter break. As we forge ahead into a new year, it's important that we continue to push for equity in education.

In our latest [Equity and Belonging Bulletin](#), you can learn why a focus on equity in education is so important, including the opportunities created for students and the impact that equity can have on the achievement gap for students who have been historically marginalized.

Educators and friends of education can also use our [latest bulletin](#) to learn several things they can do to promote equity in education, such as understanding, identifying, and addressing systemic issues that impact urban education, or creating opportunities and space for student empowerment and advocacy.

This is where the bulk of our work lies, and as the Office of Equity and Belonging continues to grow and evolve, this is the work to which we are committed. If you have a keen desire to work on some of these issues, please consider joining our Equity Advisory Council. Reach out to our office at equity@ppsd.org.

OFFICE OF EQUITY & BELONGING EVENTS

Equity Advisory Council, second meeting - January 12th - please email equity@ppsd.org.

emPOWER - a meetup for PPSPD Educators of Color - January 19th - [RSVP here](#).

Teachers! We will be launching 2 new equity-based professional learning opportunities. Look out for announcements beginning next week.

Students and teachers! Have an equity-based school group, committee or club? Would you like to start one? Are you interested in funding to support your school-based equity work? Please fill out [this form](#).

We've updated [our website](#) with additional resources, information and events. Check it out!



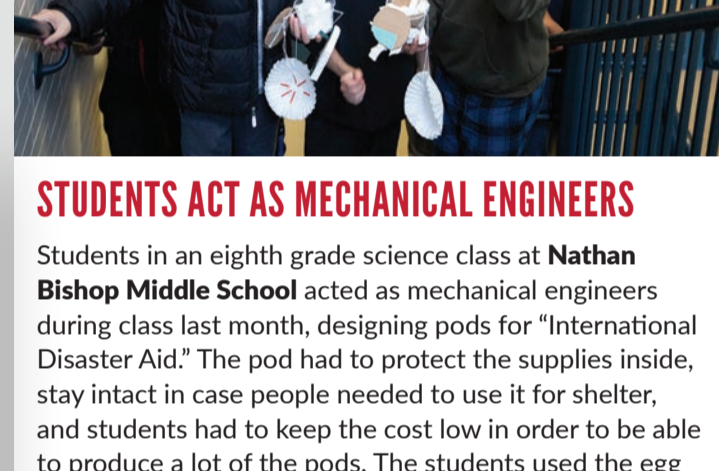
CELEBRATING STUDENTS

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



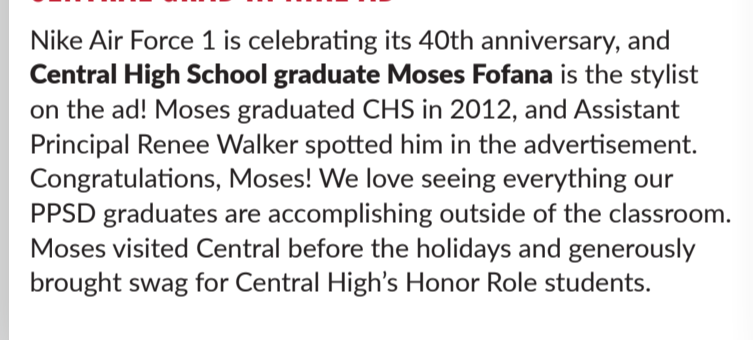
LILLIAN FEINSTEIN WINTER CONCERT

Students at **Lillian Feinstein Elementary School** put on a winter concert for friends and family before the holidays. Students in the chorus sang different Christmas carols, while the band played different tunes that everyone could sing along to. Special thanks to the faculty, staff, and the school's amazing music program for making the winter concert such a huge success!



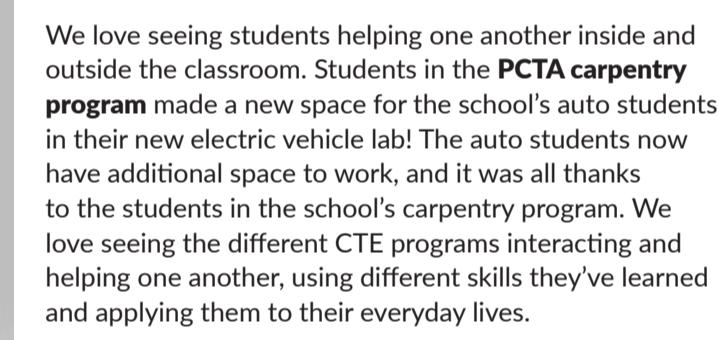
STUDENTS ACT AS MECHANICAL ENGINEERS

Students in an eighth grade science class at **Nathan Bishop Middle School** acted as mechanical engineers during class last month, designing pods for "International Disaster Aid." The pod had to protect the supplies inside, stay intact in case people needed to use it for shelter, and students had to keep the cost low in order to be able to produce a lot of the pods. The students used the egg drop model to help them design their pods. It was such a creative lesson, and students really enjoyed the task!



CENTRAL GRAD IN NIKE AD

Nike Air Force 1 is celebrating its 40th anniversary, and **Central High School graduate Moses Fofana** is the stylist on the ad! Moses graduated CHS in 2012, and Assistant Principal Renee Walker spotted him in the advertisement. Congratulations, Moses! We love seeing everything our PPSPD graduates are accomplishing outside of the classroom. Moses visited Central before the holidays and generously brought swag for Central High's Honor Role students.



PCTA STUDENTS GET CREATIVE

We love seeing students helping one another inside and outside the classroom. Students in the **PCTA carpentry program** made a new space for the school's auto students in their new electric vehicle lab! The auto students now have additional space to work, and it was all thanks to the students in the school's carpentry program. We love seeing the different CTE programs interacting and helping one another, using different skills they've learned and applying them to their everyday lives.



STAFF SPOTLIGHT

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

Melanie Laurito

Manager of Specialized Instructions and Services, Middle School

Located in: Administration Building

Joined PPSPD in: 1993

What made you want to work in Special Education?

I went to Providence College and I was a volunteer at Providence Schools while I was there. I just sort of fell into Special Education. My mother was a teacher in Providence. She taught at what is now Kizirian Elementary School. It was then Camden Avenue School. I began with Providence Schools in 1993 as a substitute for one year before being hired at Mount Pleasant High School as a Special Education teacher. I was there for 19 years and then moved into Special Education administration.

It is very different to be in an administration environment. I miss the piece of not knowing the kids as well as I used to know them. You also have to try harder to connect with students.

So I make a point to meet and connect with the kids.

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

A lot of what I do now is a lot of compliance-based tasks - ensuring that IEPs are being followed and done on time. It is a supervisory role where I am working with the teachers and training staff. I work to make sure that Providence students are getting all of the support that they need; that they are getting what has been outlined in their IEPs. I work with teachers around what needs to be a part of a student's IEP and what they may need to support a student. An IEP is not just a cookie cutter form. We have to make sure that the individuals match the needs of the individual child.

Another part is being an advocate and making sure that the rights of the students are being met. And that a child is not being penalized for something that is not a disability.

Keep in mind that when you are explaining to a parent that your child has significant needs, it is hard for them to hear. Though there may be some limitations, we need to look at their strengths. Parents need to look at a child's progress on the IEP and how their individual child is improving. They should not compare their child to others. I also share, when appropriate, that I have a child with an IEP, so I understand the process from their viewpoint. We need the parent's input in making student plans since it is key the child best. Lastly, we make sure that everyone is in agreement on the supports for that child, and if not, I ensure parents are not aware of their rights and what they can do if they are not in agreement. It doesn't mean that a child can't achieve things. There may be hurdles, but let's focus together to get that child what they need, and celebrate that child's achievements.

"There may be hurdles, but let's focus together to get that child what they need, and celebrate that child's achievements."

What do you wish more people knew about being a Special Education teacher?

That Special Education students are still students first. We need to break the cycle and realize that Special Education services are making an education accessible to all and making it equal. I wish people really knew what differentiation really was.

For example, a student may need to look at a math equation another way to get the end result, but they still arrive at the answer.

Also, I wish people had a better understanding of what a disability actually is, and what it's not. Just because a child has a behavior issue, doesn't mean they have a disability. It's understanding what special needs are. Special Education isn't a place, it's a service.

What have been some highlights this year so far?

One of the things I am really proud of is when a child leaves Special Education. They are learning strategies to not need services and that is a success. It is so exciting to see a student accessing different things. Recently, I moved a new student into a new classroom, and to see some of the children take this new student under their wing was great.

One big highlight for me is the extended school year program because I get to be with the kids more. On Fridays, they have themes and I love watching them perform and get involved. The students get so excited. The joy and smiles on their faces makes me so happy to be a part of the program.

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

Dr. Connolly has increased the Special Education administrative staff, so now there is staff for compliance, and staff for instructional classroom support. I'm excited for the team to really build and provide better support to students and to better collaborate with teachers and parents. Dr. Connolly really has tried to think it through, and she really understands Special Education. We've done some really great things in our middle schools, and now clusters are being programmed by grades.

I am working to bring more programming for classes to support students with social emotional needs. I don't like fitting kids into boxes, and want to offer students programs and supports to meet their unique needs.

I have to say, in middle school, it's my specialists, collaborative coaches, and middle school principals who are all awesome. We work together really well. They understand that we are all working together for the kids. I am so lucky to work with the principals, specialists, and collaborative coaches. As we continue to work together, I hope we can build more capacity.

AROUND THE DISTRICT



FACE HOLIDAY DONATIONS

The **Hard and Community Engagement (FACE)** team was hard at work during the month of December, ensuring that hundreds of Providence's [McKinney Ventro families](#) received much-needed items to celebrate the holidays. Items collected included toys, clothing, hats, gloves, coats, and personal care items for students from Pre-Kindergarten all the way through 12th grade. A huge thank you to everyone for their generous donations, to **CAPP RI** for providing over \$5,000 of grocery gift cards, and to **Patricia LaSalle, Janet Pichardo**, and the entire **FACE team!** Your hard work made the holidays brighter for many of our students.



ATHLETIC DIRECTOR RECOGNIZED BY NIAAA

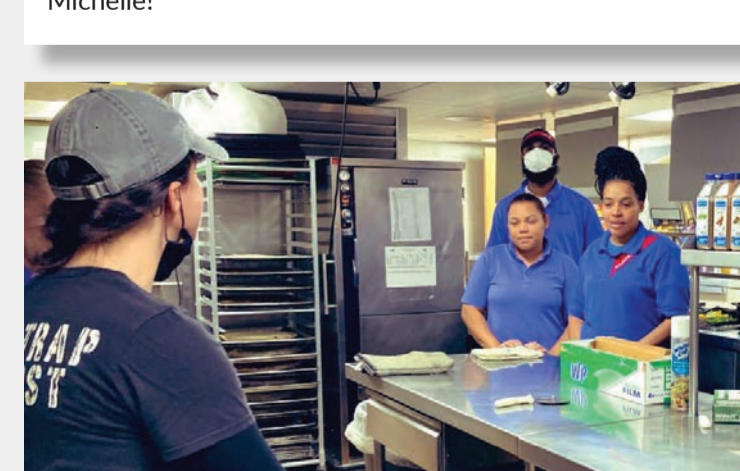
Michelle Rawcliffe, the Athletic Director for both **Central High School** and **Providence Career and Technical Academy (PCTA)**, was recently recognized by the **National Interscholastic Athletic Administrators Association (NIAAA)** as a Certified Athletic Administrator. In order to earn this distinction, Michelle demonstrated the highest level of knowledge and expertise in the field of interscholastic athletic administration. The voluntary certification process included a thorough evaluation of Michelle's educational background, experience, and professional contributions, as well as a rigorous, comprehensive written examination. Congratulations, Michelle!



Pictured left to right are Jim Hendrickson, MEP coordinator; Jon Miles, project manager; Frank Spaziano Jr., and Brody Roy, project engineer.

FRANK SPAZIANO JR. HELPING REBUILD SPAZIANO ELEMENTARY

Rebuilding **Frank Spaziano Elementary School** is a family affair. The foundation for the building was poured with concrete supplied by the **Baccala Concrete Corporation**, which is supervised by **Frank Spaziano Jr.**, son of the school's namesake, Frank Sr. Providence's Laurel Hill Elementary School was renamed in 2009 in honor of the late Frank D. Spaziano, who dedicated 30 years to Providence Public Schools. Frank Jr. says he feels privileged to be part of the construction of the new school. Special thanks to **O&G project team, Downes Construction Company, Tecton Architects, P.C., and Marguerite Concrete Inc.** for their contributions to the building construction.



SODEXO COMPOST TRAINING

Sodexo is teaching kitchens at Providence Schools how to do more composting with their food products to recycle food waste and improve sustainability across the District. In recent weeks, seven more Sodexo school kitchens in the District had their compost training. Special thanks to **Carla at Bootstrap Compost** and the **RI Schools Recycling Club** for helping to make this project possible.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

CTE FAMILY NIGHT

Thursday, January 12
6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.
PCTA

MLK DAY (NO SCHOOL)

Monday, January 16

EARLY RELEASE DAY

Wednesday, January 25

SCHOOL CHOICE INFO SESSION FOR CARL G. LAURO ELEMENTARY PARENTS

» Wednesday, January 11, from 5:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

» Friday, January 13, from 8:45 a.m. to 10:15 a.m.

SCHOOL CHOICE INFO SESSION FOR ALAN SHAWN FEINSTEIN AT BROAD STREET ELEMENTARY PARENTS

» Wednesday, January 11, from 9:45 a.m. to 11:15 a.m.

» Thursday, January 12, from 5:35 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

JANUARY SCHOOL MENU



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