



CONNECTIONS

April 1, 2022

SUPERINTENDENT'S CORNER

Hello PPSD community, and welcome to our bi-weekly newsletter! Improving communication across the District is a top priority for me, so I want you to have frequent updates on our policies, get to know our amazing staff better, see some of the great things happening in our schools, and be aware of upcoming meetings and events.

March was full of exciting news at PPSD, but one of my favorite updates has to do with hiring. Because building and retaining a talented team of educators is critical to our success, we stepped up our efforts by posting jobs earlier than ever. I'm excited to announce that we have already made 17 early hires for hard-to-fill positions next school year.

PPSD is also providing improved support for our current staff with new teacher ambassadors in every building and up to \$8,000 per teacher towards their ESL certification. I have also filled several positions in my leadership cabinet, and I'm excited to see this team hit the ground running. You can get to know my leadership team [here](#).



DR. JAVIER MONTAÑEZ
Acting Superintendent

DISTRICT UPDATES

MASKS IN SCHOOLS

The District's rate of positive COVID-19 cases is at its lowest point this school year, with roughly five cases per day. Vaccination rates are also rising thanks to the efforts of our terrific PPSD Cares team. And according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), Providence County now has a [low rate of community spread](#) of COVID-19.

Because of these positive trends, **Providence Schools is seeking your feedback on plans to make masks optional in early April for all PPSD students and staff** in school buildings, outdoors on school grounds, and on school buses. Please fill out [this brief survey](#) to indicate your comfort level with making masks optional.

Under this policy, individual students and staff members could still choose to wear masks, though they would not be required to do so. Individual schools may need to go back to wearing masks for a certain period if there is a spike in positive cases.

Please remember that masks are just one layer of PPSD's mitigation strategy for COVID-19. The District will continue providing access to vaccinations and

boosters, provide students and staff with free rapid tests, provide in-school testing for students with consent forms, maintain increased indoor ventilation, and continue monitoring for any outbreaks.

2022 RICAS TESTING

This month, students will begin taking the [Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System \(RICAS\)](#). Please note that all students in grades 3 through 8 taking RICAS will do so online. The only exception is for the following individual students who are eligible for paper-based testing:

- Students with disabilities with an accommodation listed in their IEP or 504 Plan that requires a paper test administration,
- EL students who require a paper test administration.

The testing window for English Language Arts (ELA) runs from March 28, 2022, through April 29, 2022. The testing window for math runs from April 27, 2022, through May 29, 2022.

CELEBRATING STUDENTS

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



CHESS CHAMPS

Classical High School's Chess Team won the 2022 R.I. Scholastic State Chess Championship this month. They will move on to the High School U.S. National Tournament in Memphis next month! **Central High School** placed third in the event. Way to go to all of our students!



POETRY OUT LOUD

Kudos to **Classical High School's Mariama Bandabaila**, pictured from left, who became the state finalist and **Central High School's Johanny Duran** who placed second in the 17th Annual Poetry Out Loud Statewide High School Recitation competition Sunday, March 6.



ROBOTICS MASTERS

Congratulations to the **Mount Pleasant High School Robotics** team for taking home 2nd place at the 2022 RI FIRST Tech Challenge Championship at the NE Institute of Technology! And shout out to junior **Andreina Sanchez** for being a Dean's List Finalist for outstanding leadership and commitment!



STAFF SPOTLIGHT

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

Amy Mello Messenger, LICSW

Project AWARE Grant Coordinator
Located in: Fortes Lima Elementary
Joined PPSD in: 2015

How would you describe your role in PPSD?

I coordinate two large grants that support mental health and build teachers' knowledge of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) through professional development and training. This helps our students reach their fullest potential. I'm also

responsible for a grant to support the recruitment and retention of counselors, social workers, and school psychologists who support our students and staff.

Teachers, students, and parents all understand how important mental health is right now.

What's the best part of your job?

Seeing when my colleagues feel validated, and when they feel like they have a voice. It's been very encouraging to see administrators, teachers, and parents all understand how important mental health is right now. I've seen many students seek out services who may not have done so prior to the pandemic, and that goes such a long way towards early intervention.

What are some of the ways you've seen your work impact schools and students?

The number of risk assessments we've been completing has gone way up. We've been able to improve teaming between school based mental health professionals. With this improvement, we've been able to service students earlier, which is critical to avoiding a crisis. I've also seen professionals who have been here for 25 years or longer getting new resources and support. The other social work leads and I are also hoping to help shape the future of the District by working on an improved process for how interns come into PPSD and working with local colleges to create a pipeline of local talent.

What's something you wish more people knew about your job?

I think there's a growing awareness of the depth of services PPSD provides, but I want people to know that our support systems have evolved far past the old-fashioned notion of guidance counselors providing career advice. We have such a better understanding of the importance of mental health and Social Emotional Learning, and we're ready to help!

IT'S GOOD NEWS: PPSD IN THE PRESS

- **Providence schools accelerate hiring process**
Providence Business News, March 15, 2022
- **Centro de llamadas en español en Escuelas de Rhode Island busca dispar dudas sobre el COVID**
Telemundo, marzo 15, 2022
- **Providence schools offer sign-on bonuses for teachers in early hiring process**
ABC 6, March 10, 2022
- **Spanish-language COVID call center available Tuesday evening**
WPRI, March 14, 2022

MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

DISTRICT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT DAY

Wednesday, April 6, 2022

Distance Learning Day for students

PARENT ADVISORY COUNCIL

Tuesday, April 12, 2022

GOOD FRIDAY

Friday, April 15, 2022

No School

SPRING BREAK

April 18, 2022 - April 22, 2022

SCHOOL BOARD MEETING

Wednesday, April 27, 2022

6:30 p.m.

797 Westminister Street, 3rd fl, Providence

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.

Providence
Schools

