



FAIR LAWN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

CENTRAL OFFICE • 37-01 FAIR LAWN AVENUE • FAIR LAWN, NJ 07410

Contact: Liz Wellinghorst, Community Relations Liaison, 201-794-5500 ext. 7006

mwellinghorst@fairlawschools.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

A STATEMENT FROM MR. NICHOLAS J. NORCIA, SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

Fair Lawn Public Schools Announces the 2020-2021 Governor's Educator of the Year Award Recipients

Fair Lawn, N.J. (Dec. 15, 2020) - Fair Lawn Public Schools is proud to announce the 2020-2021 Governor's Educator of the Year and Educational Services Professional of the Year.

The awards are part of the state's Educator of the Year Program, which recognizes the hard work of outstanding teachers and educational services professionals. Schools across the state are invited by the Department of Education to participate by selecting one teacher and one educational services professional to be recognized at the school level.

The list of recipients will attend a countywide recognition event in the spring.

Forrest School:

Mrs. Jenette Tavaglione, a LLD teacher for third and fourth grade, was named the **2020-2021 Educator of the Year**. She is an outstanding educator that inspires her students to achieve, leads them by example, is supremely dedicated to their well-being, and is always looking to create new and innovative ways to teach. She has gained the respect and admiration of her colleagues, students, and parents. Her classroom is collaborative, inclusive, and most importantly fun. Mrs. Tavaglione is commended for her calm demeanor and patience when dealing with challenging students and situations. She comes to work every day with a smile on her face and a positive attitude that carries into her classroom. In addition to her teaching responsibilities, Mrs. Tavaglione is also a member of our Kindness and Slide Show Committee's.

Ms. Tracy Sayegh-Hessami, school nurse, was named the **2020-2021 Educational Services Professional of the Year**. During these unsettled times, Ms. Sayegh-Hessami continues to be a leader in providing up-to-date and informed medical support to our students, staff, and community. The safety and well-being of our students and the Forrest School staff is always at the forefront of her decisions. The school nurse role has taken on additional responsibilities in the past year that none of us could have imagined. With that said, Ms. Sayegh-Hessami has met those challenges head on and continues to be an invaluable resource for our school and community.

Lyncrest School:

Ms. Jordana Verile, second grade teacher, was named the **2020-2021 Educator of the Year**. Ms. Verile is in her fifth year teaching at Lyncrest, and earned her tenure this fall. Ms. Verile is adored by both students and staff. Her calm, reassuring demeanor makes all learners feel welcome and supported in her classroom. Ms. Verile is a whiz with data, and able to track student progress efficiently throughout the year. Outside of her classroom responsibilities, she leads our school's Character Education Committee. Through her efforts, we are able to hold schoolwide monthly character assemblies, where students are

recognized for positive character and character traits are taught directly.

Mr. Brian Walker, paraprofessional in the district for five years, was named the **2020-2021 Educational Services Professional of the Year**. He is hard-working, and very dedicated to the students that he works with. Mr. Walker has demonstrated a unique ability to connect with each of his students because he takes the time to get to know them. He uses what he knows about students' interests to motivate them in school. Mr. Walker is a team player, and will always do what is necessary to help students in any way possible.

Milnes School:

Mrs. Katie Chazen, a fourth grade teacher, was named the **2020-2021 Educator of the Year**. She is a Kutztown University graduate with degrees in both Elementary Education and Psychology. Mrs. Chazen began working as a paraprofessional in Milnes and later worked as an ancillary teacher in Westmoreland. This is her sixth year teaching fourth grade at Milnes School. Mrs. Chazen created the Girls' Club, an after school social club, encouraging girls to interact with each other in positive and meaningful ways. She has served on several committees such as the Anti-Bullying and Character Education, School Spirit, Read Across America, and the Blue Ribbon Committees. Mrs. Chazen is also the Affirmative Action Officer at Milnes. She looks forward to many more dedicated years of teaching at Milnes School. She goes above and beyond for her students. We are lucky to have her as part of our Milnes family!

Mrs. Cheryl Zimmerman, paraprofessional, was named the **2020-2021 Educational Services Professional of the Year**. Mrs. Zimmerman began her 29 years of service in 1992 as a paraprofessional, at what was formerly known as the T.J. Annex. In 2018, she was assigned to H. B. Milnes, where she has worked in the upper grades and resource rooms. She is a true professional advocating and supporting students in a variety of ways. Mrs. Zimmerman is an exemplary paraprofessional and a valued member of the Milnes School Staff.

Radburn School:

Miss Sydney Weisser, third grade teacher, was named the **2020-2021 Educator of the Year**. Miss Weisser made the decision at a very young age - while attending Warren Point Elementary School - that she wanted to become a teacher. She quickly developed a passion for helping children grow. She went on to study at Rowan University and obtained her B.A. in Early Childhood Education and certification as a Teacher of Students with Disabilities. Sydney began her teaching career at Radburn School, covering a first-grade maternity leave. She then spent one year as a reading intervention teacher before transitioning to third grade. She is now in her third year of teaching third grade. At the moment, Sydney is also working toward her Master's Degree in Autism Spectrum Disorders. She strives to make sure every student feels valued and loved. She teaches with an enthusiastic approach, keeping her students smiling and engaged along the way.

Ms. Sandra Colombini, paraprofessional, was named the **2020-2021 Educational Services Professional of the Year**. Ms. Colombini has worked in the special education field for 14 years and eight of those years have been at Radburn School. She has worked in every grade level and has a fundamental part in assisting the teacher with all of the students' needs. She is a dedicated and enthusiastic member of the staff involved with activities inside and outside of the school day. There is nothing Sandra loves more than coming to school every day and having the students share a part of their day with her. She helps guide them while they work and enjoys hearing them share special moments. Ms. Colombini has a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology and is the proud mom of two children: Jaclyn, 26 and Jason, 19.

Warren Point:

Ms. Kristen Ruehl, a fourth grade teacher, was named **2020-2021 Educator of the Year**. Ms. Ruehl has been an integral part of Warren Point, serving on various committees such as Character Ed and ScIP. She is also the school webmaster. In prior years, she has devoted her time to students with special needs in her classroom while differentiating for her top students. She is an advocate for her students and continually goes

and above and beyond to work with parents and specialists in order to ensure her students' success. Ms. Ruehl has also helped in the hiring process and mentoring of our new grade-level colleague. She has also been involved in working with administration as a liaison to work on remote and in-class learning models. Ms. Ruehl is an exceptional teacher and a role model for her students and colleagues.

Ms. Rose Redfern, a paraprofessional in a fourth grade classroom, was named the **2020-2021 Educational Services Professional of the Year**. Ms. Redfern is in her fifth year with the district and has been in the fourth grade for the past several years. She provides invaluable support for her students as they work on their personal goals. Ms. Redfern collaborates with the classroom teacher, parents and other colleagues in order to ensure her students' success. Not only is she an integral part of the fourth grade team, she is a valued member of the Warren Point Community. Ms. Redfern is also a resident and active member of the Fair Lawn Community.

Westmoreland:

Miss Kelly Sietsma, first grade teacher, was named **2020-2021 Educator of the Year**. The positivity, patience and skill with which **Miss Sietsma** has handled these last few months has been extraordinary. Her dedication to ensuring that every single student is engaged and thriving is apparent each day. Miss Sietsma is flexible in light of changing conditions due to COVID-19. Whether she is teaching students in the classroom, online, or a combination of both (simultaneously!), she is able to maintain control over the entire classroom. She demonstrates an amazing ability to help support the social and emotional well-being of the students. She has been able to foster confidence in her students, both in the classroom and on screen, making participation fun and comfortable. Miss Sietsma has provided her first-graders with a welcome sense of stability and normalcy in a year that has been otherwise unpredictable and challenging for all. Her ability to connect with students, whether they are sitting at home or in the classroom, is amazing. Perhaps most remarkably, she has done it all with a smile on her face and a positive energy that has proved contagious at a time when we all need it most.

Mrs. Dana Tartaglia was named the **2020-2021 Educational Specialist of the Year**. Mrs. Tartaglia has been in the field of education for 33 years. She pursued her love of working with students with disabilities and became an LDTC, a job she has known and loved for the past 29 years. Throughout this time, she has been a caring and dedicated advocate for children. She goes above and beyond her assigned duties to support her students, parents and colleagues. Mrs. Tartaglia works tirelessly on each of her cases, reaching out to parents via phone or email weekdays, weekends, and even some very late nights! She is extremely dedicated to her profession and a true collaborative team player. She never waivers in her effort or professionalism as she continues to ensure appropriate programming for her students. During the pandemic, Mrs. Tartaglia took on additional cases and continued to not only provide endless support to classroom teachers, but to parents as well, providing advice and guidance during the challenge of remote learning. We are grateful for her dedication and years of service. We wish her well in her retirement!

Edison School:

Ms. Samantha Kay, preschool teacher, was named the **2020-2021 Educator of the Year**. Ms. Kay is in her second full year teaching at Edison School. In her short time here in Fair Lawn, Ms. Kay has proven to be a caring, dedicated and collaborative teacher. Ms. Kay has been commended and honored by her colleagues for "stepping up" when the pandemic hit, sharing and training other staff members to utilize on-line platforms to educate virtually. Ms. Kay taught during our ESY program and ensured colleagues were updated on new virtual teaching platforms. Ms. Kay has taken on a leadership role in the preschool and both staff and students are benefiting from her dedication.

Mrs. Michele Sonye, paraprofessional in the district for almost 27 years, was named the **2020-2021 Educational Services Professional of the Year**. Mrs. Sonye has worked as a paraprofessional in Forrest, Warren Point, Milnes and currently Edison School. Mrs. Sonye has been a staple in our autism and preschool

programs. Ms. Sonye is a dedicated, organized and compassionate educator who has shared her talents with so many teachers and 27 years of students have benefited from her expertise.

Memorial Middle School:

Mrs. Lindsey DeBellis, science teacher, was named the **2020-2021 Educator of the Year**. After graduating from Montclair University with a degree in Biology and Education, Mrs. DeBellis went on to TCNJ to earn her master's degree in STEM Education. Mrs. DeBellis has been a valued member of the MMS school community for the past six years. In addition to teaching science, this year, Mrs. DeBellis has been invaluable in designing and teaching our new Innovations Lab course to fifth- and sixth-grade students. A graduate of Fair Lawn Schools and a resident of Fair Lawn, Mrs. DeBellis is passionate about the environment. She consistently does her part by not using single-use products, recycling, and repurposing. She enjoys hiking and always brings a little garbage bag to pick up any garbage she finds along the way. Mrs. DeBellis lives by the motto: *Leave the Earth better than you found it.*

Mrs. Christy Murphy, paraprofessional, was named the **2020-2021 Educational Services Professional of the Year**. Mrs. Christy Murphy began her career in the Fair Lawn Public Schools in 1996 as a lunch aide at Radburn School. When Fair Lawn launched its Stepping Stones program in 1999, Mrs. Murphy knew it was her calling to work with children with autism. For the next 21 years, Mrs. Murphy devoted herself to these students and their families. Without hesitation, Mrs. Murphy followed her passion for working with children with autism, even if that meant changing schools. After spending one year at Edison School and 15 years at Milnes, Mrs. Murphy moved to middle school. Since 2015, Mrs. Murphy has been a role model to all who had the pleasure of working with her; as a paraprofessional, she is a true professional. A 37-year resident of Fair Lawn, Mrs. Murphy has a genuine interest in her students, their progress, and their well-being.

TJ Middle School:

Miss Kaitlyn Forsythe, seventh grade teacher, was named the **2020-2021 Educator of the Year**. Miss Forsythe began her career 10 years ago teaching science at Macopin Middle School in West Milford, N.J. After three years, her heart led her to Fair Lawn, where she worked for the past several summers as a head counselor and a teacher at Camp FLAIR. Since arriving at TJMS, Miss Forsythe has taught at all grade levels. Currently, she specializes in teaching general education, supported, and enriched science classes. Miss Forsythe is always searching for new and innovative ways to reach all of her students and strives to extend their learning outside of the four walls of her science classroom. Throughout her seven years in Fair Lawn, she has developed various curricula and served on many committees at the department, school, and district level. Miss Forsythe is member of the Fair Lawn Access for All Committee, whose mission is to enhance the lives of individuals with various different abilities and to remove barriers and obstacles that hinder their everyday activities. She also serves as Treasurer of the Fair Lawn Education Association, and is the Assistant Director of Camp FLAIR.

Mrs. Irina Lombardo, ancillary teacher, was named the **2020-2021 Education Specialist of the Year**. Mrs. Lombardo has been teaching for 22 years, beginning her career in Elizabeth, N.J., where she taught fourth grade. In 2002, Mrs. Lombardo took a position as an ancillary teacher in her hometown of Fair Lawn. Mrs. Lombardo's dedication and commitment to her students is demonstrated through her love of teaching and her awareness that all children learn differently. She especially enjoys working in small group settings, getting to know each student and encouraging each individual learner to succeed. Mrs. Lombardo is proud to be an active member of the TJ family, collaborating with students, parents, colleagues, and administrators.

FLHS:

Ms. Kristin Burke, teacher of Social Studies (currently AP Psychology and US History II), was named the **2020-2021 Educator of the Year**. A teacher for 17 years, all at Fair Lawn High School, Ms. Burke

has served on many committees outside the classroom. She is Co-Advisor of the Interact Club, engaging in many community service endeavors such as Relay for Life and the yearly holiday gift-giving visit to Paterson School 13. She is spearheading the effort to install outdoor and indoor remembrances for FLHS alumni who have served or plan to serve in our armed forces as a member of the Military Tribute Monument Committee. Ms. Burke is a former advisor for Helping & Remembering Troops (HART) Club and member of the ScIp Committee. In 2009, she received a citation from the Bergen County Department of Human Services – Division of Disabilities Certificate of Commendation and General Assembly and the Office of Bergen County Sheriff Inspirational Champions Award. Ms. Burke has held various FLEA positions and is a Fair Lawn Rotarian, recognized with the Walter D. Head and Paul Harris Fellowships.

Ms. Jennifer Bauman, library media specialist, was named the **2020-2021 Educational Services Professional of the Year**. Ms. Bauman has been in the district for 21 years, serving six at the high school as a library specialist and 16 years as an ELA teacher, mostly TJMS. She is an advisor of the Student Tech Squad, Assistant Varsity Swim Coach, and team member of Future Ready Schools. Ms. Bauman is a former advisor of the EMT Club, TJMS Advisor of the Newspaper Club (1999-2002), Yearbook Club (2002-2006), and Literary Club (2011-2013). Ms. Bauman was the TJMS Affirmative Action Officer from 2011-2015. She has held various FLEA positions.

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