



# FAIR LAWN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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

## **Fair Lawn Public Schools Announces the 2021-2022 Governor's Educator of the Year Award Recipients**

**Fair Lawn, N.J. (Jan. 21, 2022)** - Fair Lawn Public Schools is proud to announce the 2021-2022 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:**

**Ms. Brittny DeCotiis**, a kindergarten teacher, was named the **2021-2022 Educator of the Year**. She is a hard-working teacher who approaches each day with a positive outlook, smile on her face and ready to tackle any challenges that may arise. She consistently plans lessons to reach all the different levels of her students. Ms. DeCotiis has created mini resource boards and individualized behavior plans for her students and maintains a safe, healthy, and fun classroom environment. She continues to excel in the areas of organization, collaboration, and making connections with current and former students. In addition to her teaching responsibilities, Ms. DeCotiis is an active member of the New Jersey Association of Kindergarten Educators and attends regular workshops throughout the school year.

**Ms. Ashlee Schwartz**, a paraprofessional, was named the **2021-2022 Educational Services Professional of the Year**. Ms. Schwartz, who works with third- and fourth-grade language learning self-contained classrooms, is well respected by her students and colleagues as an educator who is always ready to offer assistance. She is frequently paired with students who struggle to regulate their emotions and control impulsivity. Ms. Schwartz is able to quickly establish rapport with her students and then works to help them with their struggles. She treats her students with respect, love and understanding. In addition to her social-emotional support, Ms. Schwartz is well versed in differentiating lesson activities to meet the needs of her students. Her students see her as a person they can trust and seek out for social and physical support.

### **Lyncrest School:**

**Ms. Ellen Jubelt**, a first-grade teacher, was named the **2021-2022 Educator of the Year**. Ms. Jubelt is in her 23rd year teaching and is considered a master teacher. She continuously brings new strategies and ideas into her first-grade classroom using technology and a variety of resources; she has the ability to keep learning fun and engage all learners. Ms. Jubelt goes above and beyond her classroom obligations and partici-

pates on a variety of school-based committees for the betterment of all learners in the school. She serves on the Character Education Committee, School Safety team, I&RS team, and the School Improvement (ScIP Committee.) This year, she is a cooperating teacher to a student teacher from Montclair State University. Without a doubt, Mrs. Jubelt has made a positive impact on the students and teachers of Lyncrest School!

**Mrs. Tara Zweig**, in her second year as a speech therapist at Lyncrest School, was named the **2021-2022 Educational Services Professional of the Year**. She is commended for the creative techniques used in her speech sessions. Despite the challenges mask wearing has created, she utilizes technology to enable her students to see the proper mouth formation for making sounds. Mrs. Zweig is often seen sharing strategies with teachers to implement in their own classrooms.

### **Milnes School:**

**Ms. Jessica Spaseska**, a fourth-grade teacher at Milnes, was named the **2021-2022 Educator of the Year**. Ms. Spaseska keeps her focus on the children that Milnes Elementary School exists to serve. She strives to make her classroom a safe space where all of her students will feel loved and cared about. Part of her deep understanding of Fair Lawn students is derived from the many positions she's held since joining the district in 2008: lunch aide, after care aide, substitute teacher, paraprofessional, and now elementary school teacher. Ms. Spaseska has put her Montclair State University degree in Family and Child Studies to good use in just about every facet of the elementary school experience. Her dedication includes serving on several school committees: the Girls' Club, Math Cadre, Read Across America, Spirit, and the Blue Ribbon Committee. She even works with district children over the summer as Director of Radburn Camp. She looks forward to finding new and creative ways to help her students in the years to come.

**Mrs. Susan Brosnick**, school psychologist, was named the **2021-2022 Educational Services Professional of the Year**. She graduated from Clark University with a B.A. in Psychology and Management. She continued her education at Montclair State University earning a M.A. in Educational Psychology before completing an additional 30 credits to earn her Certificate in School Psychology. In June 2006, she also successfully completed the requirements to become a Nationally Certified School Psychologist. Prior to working at Milnes School, Susan has worked at Edison School, Warren Point School and Radburn School, where she continues to conduct psychological evaluations.

As a school psychologist at Milnes School, Mrs. Brosnick serves as case manager for all of the special education students, including those who attend out-of-district programs. She also conducts psychological evaluations, counsels students, consults with teachers/parents to collaborate on behavioral, emotional, and academic interventions, ensures compliance with special education laws, teaches class lessons and provides crisis management. In addition to her duties on the Child Study Team, Susan serves as the school's Anti-bullying Specialist. Mrs. Brosnick serves on the following committees: Intervention and Referral Services, Character Education, and Safety and Equity Committee. She shared this adaptation of a Maya Angelou quote: "I've learned that children will forget what you said, children will forget what you did, but children will never forget how you made them feel." She enjoys working with the children, staff and families at Milnes School.

### **Radburn School:**

**Mrs. Melissa Cusumano**, a kindergarten teacher at Radburn School for the past six years, was named the **2021-2022 Educator of the Year**. She began her career as a paraprofessional in kindergarten and assumed her own kindergarten class the following year. Mrs. Cusumano is an alumna of Fair Lawn Public Schools and recently married her longtime boyfriend, Ryan, a Bergen County K9 Officer. In addition, last year she and a colleague, another Radburn teacher, were the first graduates from Radburn School to complete the Fair Lawn Citizen's Police Academy. Mrs. Cusumano also wears many hats playing a vital role in our school community as Radburn School's webmaster and chairperson of the school's Character Ed committee.

**Mrs. Christine Murphy**, a school social worker for the past 10 year at Radburn School, was named the **2021-2022 Educational Services Professional of the Year**. Her services are split between Radburn and H.B. Milnes School. Mrs. Murphy is an integral part of the Radburn Child Study Team, ensuring that her spe-

cial education students are receiving appropriate services, in addition to ensuring that the students and staff's mental health needs are being attended to properly. She is a wife to her husband, Paul, and they have a beautiful daughter, Veronica. She is well deserving of this honor and the school community is very fortunate to have such a caring individual on the Radburn team!

### **Warren Point:**

**Mrs. Deanna Kelly**, a special education teacher, was named **2021-2022 Educator of the Year**. Mrs. Kelly is an integral member of the Warren Point community and is able to recognize and serve her students based on their unique learning styles and situations. She is a role model to her students and colleagues. She serves on several committees including Character Education, ScIP and Sunshine. She is constantly working to better the school environment for all around her, this includes both the physical space as well as emotional support. Mrs. Kelly has been teaching for over 20 years, eight of which have been in Fair Lawn. In her free time, Mrs. Kelly enjoys shopping, cooking, working out and spending time with her husband and rescue dog Rocky.

**Ms. Melissa O'Carroll**, a learning disabled teacher consultant (LDTC), was named the **2021-2022 Educational Services Professional of the Year**. In her current role as LDTC, Ms. O'Carroll has gone above and beyond for her students and the school community. As the LDTC, Ms. O'Carroll wears many hats. She is case manager to dozens of students, completes classroom observations of students, CST evaluations and consults with teachers. She is dedicated, hard working and caring. She never hesitates to assist a staff member or student. Ms. O'Carroll is also a member of the school I&RS team and School Improvement (ScIP) Committee. She has also recently become a Board Certified Behavior Analyst. In her free time, Ms. O'Carroll enjoys traveling, reading and yoga.

### **Westmoreland:**

**Mrs. Lindsey Bonafede**, first-grade teacher for the past six years at Westmoreland School, was named **2021-2022 Educator of the Year**. Mrs. Bonafede is an outstanding teacher who goes above and beyond to ensure her students' success. She has created a dynamic learning environment in which her students feel challenged, valued and encouraged. She tackled virtual learning with ease and a smile. The challenges faced during the COVID-19 pandemic did not impact Mrs. Bonafede's attitude or instructional abilities. She located and shared digital resources to keep valuable small group instruction and meaningful assessments ongoing, and utilized innovative techniques and research-based best practices throughout her instruction each day. She is a mentor, role model and cheerleader for her peers and is always willing to try anything new to ensure her students' success. Mrs. Bonafede is most deserving of the Teacher of the Year title at Westmoreland School.

**Mrs. Kathy Lang**, a paraprofessional at Westmoreland School, was named the **2021-2022 Educational Services Professional of the Year**. As a dedicated professional of Fair Lawn Public Schools for the past 14 years, she has spent countless hours helping the students with whom she works to master grade-level concepts and to feel successful and motivated while doing so. Mrs. Lang is positive, upbeat and truly loves the students she works with. Mrs. Lang understands the developmental levels of her students not only academically, but emotionally and socially as well. This understanding and knowledge allows her to support her students in a wide variety of settings. In addition to the many contributions of both time and effort that she has made to the students of Westmoreland School, she continues to demonstrate what it means to be a consummate professional and lifelong learner as she strives to perfect the craft of being an outstanding member of our academic support personnel. Westmoreland School is thrilled to call Mrs. Lang the Educational Specialist of the Year at Westmoreland School.

### **Edison School:**

**Mr. Matthew Moore**, special education preschool teacher, was named the **2021-2022 Educator of the Year**. Mr. Moore began his teaching tenure in Fair Lawn at the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year as a first-grade teacher at Warren Point. He began teaching in Edison's Stepping Stones Program in July 2021 during the Extended School Year Program and made an immediate positive impact to the program. Over the

summer, he spent countless hours in his new classroom to organize, prepare and set up a classroom that is welcoming and friendly to preschool children.

Mr. Moore utilizes baseline data and creates an individualized curriculum for each student based on the student's goals and objectives. He collaborates well with the paraprofessional staff, which promotes success for his students. Another main ingredient for his success is his relationships with the related service providers and students' parents. A welcome addition to the Edison team, his colleagues have remarked that "Matthew went out of his way to introduce himself and become a team player as soon as he started" to "Matthew is making a difference in the lives of each of his students and emits an energy that his colleagues admire and mirror" and "the positive energy in Matthew's classroom is palpable!"

**Mr. Scott Shansky**, a speech therapist, was named the **2021-2022 Educational Services Professional of the Year**. Mr. Shansky began as a paraprofessional in the Stepping Stones Program and has been a speech therapist in the Fair Lawn School District for the past 17 years. In addition to being a vital member of Edison School and the preschool program, he also works each year in the district's Extended School Year Program during the summer, completes student evaluations and continues to work with some of our most fragile students who are homebound.

As a speech therapist at the preschool level, Mr. Shansky works with students who have varying levels of need. He collaborates with the parents, classroom teachers and staff to ensure carryover of speech skills across all settings. Mr. Shansky has also utilized assistive communication devices for countless students giving many children an alternate way to communicate.

His colleagues describe him as a team player "who is always willing to assist any coworker and has made a positive impact on the lives of countless preschool students." Another colleague remarked, "The district is lucky to have a speech therapist as caring and supportive as Scott!"

### **Memorial Middle School:**

**Mrs. Lisa Levchak**, teacher of math (grades 7-8), was named the **2021-2022 Educator of the Year**. Mrs. Levchak has been a dedicated Mathematics and Dynamic Applications teacher at MMS for the past 18 years. She earned her B.A. degree in Mathematics from Rowan University and holds two Master's Degrees – Educational Technology from Ramapo College and Educational Leadership from Montclair State University. Mrs. Levchak has enriched her classroom experiences over the years with technology and hands-on learning to create an engaging classroom environment for her seventh- and eighth-grade students. She is known to help create a bright and welcoming school environment through her hallway bulletin boards, meaningful club advisor contributions and sincere efforts to help the students and staff enjoy the MMS experience to its fullest. When Mrs. Levchak is not with her husband and two young children participating in sports, Scouts and martial arts, she can be found camping and doing her best to be one with nature.

**Ms. Arlene Mitchell**, social worker, was named the **2021-2022 Educational Services Professional of the Year**. She has served as a social worker for Fair Lawn Public Schools for the past six years and is committed to supporting students' emotional, social and academic needs at Memorial. Ms. Mitchell earned her B.A. degree in Psychology from Montclair State University and then went on to earn her Master's Degree in Social Work from Rutgers University. Before Fair Lawn, Ms. Mitchell worked as a Licensed Social Worker working with children and their families in the mental health field for over ten years. In addition to her role as a Social Worker, Ms. Mitchell is a co-advisor of the Arts and Crafts Club. Outside of Fair Lawn, Ms. Mitchell is a mother of two teenage girls and a dog. She enjoys painting, reading and is currently learning to roller skate.

### **TJ Middle School:**

**Ms. Pam Polster**, Language Arts teacher, was named the **2021-2022 Educator of the Year**. A teacher in the Fair Lawn School District for the last 13 years, she started her career at FLHS and now calls TJMS home. During her time as an English teacher, Ms. Polster has taught all grades and currently teaches seventh

-grade enriched literature connections and Language Arts. Enhancing her lessons is always a top priority for her. She prides herself on continually researching and implementing innovative tools in order to reach all students in her classroom. Ms. Polster likes to share her lessons and resources with her department, and she has been instrumental in developing, creating and revising curricula. Additionally, making an impact outside of the classroom is important for Ms. Polster. For many years she was co-advisor for the school newspaper, **The Knightly News**. Currently, she co-advises the literary magazine, **The Knight Writers**. She is also Head Association Representative for the Fair Lawn Education Association. Ms. Polster is very proud to be a member of the Fair Lawn school community and each day she is inspired by colleagues who share her passion for education. Ms. Polster feels privileged to be recognized by her colleagues as TJMS's 2021-2022 Governor's Educator of the Year.

**Mrs. Angela Levitan**, paraprofessional, was named the **2021-2022 Educational Specialist of the Year**. She has been a dedicated paraprofessional for over 25 years, spending 10 wonderful years working with the Radburn preschool children before coming to TJMS. Mrs. Levitan has served her students with different abilities at TJMS for the past 18 years with confidence and compassion. Furthermore, she makes sure her students feel safe as well as secure. Mrs. Levitan wears multiple hats throughout her day as advocate, coordinator and counselor for her students. She goes above and beyond her responsibilities, often providing one-to-one instruction when needed, helping to implement a behavioral plan within the classroom setting. She is capable of providing instructional support in a small group as well. Additionally, she has been a respected and appreciated member of the Character Counts!, Jackson Strong, FLASE and a valued member of Fair Lawn Access For All Committee, a volunteer community organization. She is Access for All's recording secretary and is dedicated to their mission. Mrs. Levitan and her husband, Fred, reside in Fair Lawn and have two sons who went through Fair Lawn Public Schools.

#### **FLHS:**

**Ms. Gina Vantuno**, teacher of English/Language Arts at Fair Lawn High School (FLHS), was named the **2021-2022 Educator of the Year**. Ms. Vantuno has been a teacher for the past 22 years, 20 of them spent at FLHS. She currently teaches AP English Language and Composition, Honors Senior Topics and Film Study and Production, as well as serves as the Head Coach of the Spring Boys Track and Field Team. She is a certified yoga instructor, teaching Gentle Yoga for staff and collaborates with Physical Education teachers to better inform their yoga instruction. Ms. Vantuno is a member of SGOVerdrive, a faculty rock band that performs to raise scholarship money for FLHS seniors. From 2015-2018, she co-led "Live to Laugh," a stand-up comedy show featuring student and staff performances that raised money for Project UROK, was the Marching Band Woodwinds and Drill instructor from 2003-2007, and the advisor for Scarlet Letters (FLHS Literary Magazine) from 2002-2006. She began her career as an educator teaching English in France.

**Mrs. Victoria Russo**, transition coordinator at Fair Lawn High School (FLHS), was named the **2021-2022 Educational Services Professional of the Year**. In her three years as transition coordinator for the self-contained 18- to 21-year-old special education population, Mrs. Russo has built this program from the ground up, even in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. FLHS students are now placed in jobs throughout our community, and they are learning valuable life skills under the guidance of Mrs. Russo and her staff.

Mrs. Russo continues to find innovative ways to mainstream these students into the life of the school. Her first notion was to create a coffee delivery service called the **Busy Bean Coffee Shop**. This rolling coffee cart has served scores of staff members with a smile, keeping an extra bounce in the faculty's step!

Since taking over the **Cutter Corner** school store, Mrs. Russo has coordinated the sale of merchandise both online (during remote and hybrid learning) and now in person. From bracelets to soap, greeting cards to holiday gifts, the school store is selling! Each sale gives one of the Transition students a chance to interact with a peer schoolmate, building critical social skills.

From her previous experience as a social worker and child study team member, Mrs. Russo is able to inform every programmatic recommendation and action with the best interests of the whole child in

mind. Her work is a true asset to FLHS, and the school staff and students are lucky to see her vision realized in the school's Transition Program every day!

In so many ways, Mrs. Russo is a staff member thoroughly committed to FLHS and the community, and she takes an active role every day in ensuring its excellence. Fair Lawn High School is very proud to put her forth as the ESP of the Year!

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