

Survey Results Shed Positive Light on District Performance



A Piscataway parent and community survey, conducted and summarized by the Monmouth University Polling Institute, gave high marks to the Piscataway School District in the areas of education, facilities, safety and security, counseling services, and communication.

The survey results summarized the opinions of more than 1,000 respondents selected by the Institute in a scientific sampling of district parents and township residents without children in school.

Highlights of the survey results show that:

- 95% of parents are satisfied with the school district, as compared with 92% in a similar survey conducted by Monmouth University in 2008. Non-parents who ranked Piscataway schools as “excellent” or “good” showed a significant approval rating increase of 5% in the recent survey.
- There was an 11% increase in general satisfaction among parents of Piscataway High School students over 2008 results. The current survey findings emphasized the fact that Piscataway schools are highly rated academically and are well-regarded throughout the state.
- An appreciation and respect for the district’s rigorous academic program was validated, with 88% of parents acknowledging that a Piscataway education provides the knowledge and skills necessary for their child to succeed in the future.
- Survey respondents in all demographic groups agree that the diversity of the student population in Piscataway schools is an asset.
- 94% of district parents feel that their child is safe at school, up from 87% in 2008.

Parents overwhelmingly approved of the district’s efforts to keep them informed, and

non-parents reported their sources for staying on top of school district updates:

- 96% of parents are satisfied with the Global Connect notification system, an automated phone call program utilized by the district to provide advance information of district events, or to communicate special information, such as snow day school closures.
- Parents find a variety of information sources useful to stay apprised of district news, primarily referring to teacher e-mails, phone calls and conferences, Global Connect, school and district newsletters and websites, special events, and Genesis Parent Module, an online tool for parents that provides access to their child’s grades, homework, and attendance information. Non-parents rely on the district’s *Know Your Schools* newsletter sent to all households in Piscataway, the website, and local newspapers.

In other areas:

- Families appreciate an improved enrollment process, with 96% of parents expressing satisfaction with convenient, time-saving online “pre-registration” via the district’s web site.
- Satisfaction rates in the areas of counseling and health care services increased as well; parents who strongly agree that the school nurse is responsive to their child’s needs rose 11% since 2008, while approval for school counselor support services rose by 6%.

The results of the survey will be used as the Board of Education develops a new Strategic Plan in the coming year. Strategic planning is used by the Board to define the goals that will steer the educational and budgetary focus to meet the needs of the district over the next five years. The process involves participation at various levels by the Board, administration, staff, parents and community members. 🍎

Piscataway Schools Designated “High Performing” by New Jersey Department of Education

The Piscataway School District has once again been designated “High Performing” by the New Jersey Department of Education.

The designation as a “high performing school district” reaffirms the Board of Education’s efforts to provide the necessary tools for learning, with strict budgetary guidelines and oversight.

The New Jersey Department of Education conducted Piscataway’s district performance review, commonly known as QSAC, last spring. QSAC evaluates how the school district functions in five key areas: instruction and program, fiscal management, governance, personnel, and operations. The evaluation process is a stringent one, designed to help districts monitor compliance with state and federal regulations, and to recognize district effectiveness in providing a thorough and efficient education. 🍎

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Moving Forward with Technology Initiatives: iPads and *Project Lead the Way*

Keeping in step with hi-tech advancements, students in Piscataway schools will reap long-term benefits via two new district initiatives that invest in technology and “hands-on” learning.

All hands on the iPads

A new iPad project was launched in November, opening the creative door to 24/7 learning experiences for all 6th grade students. They will make use of the tablets throughout their middle school years.

Use of the iPads is providing both teachers and students with increased capability to work collaboratively and creatively. For example, students who are working on group projects are connecting with each other using the iPad for online editing or video conferencing after school hours. They are also using the iPad’s camera feature to gather and record data from scientific experiments conducted at home and in class.

Teachers are creating online interactive lessons where students are able to simulate a virtual tour of an ancient civilization. The iPads also expand teachers’ ability to provide individualized instruction to small groups of students.

Exploring with *Project Lead the Way*

Project Lead the Way is a new science, technology, engineering and mathematics, or “STEM” program, designed to help students develop a greater understanding of math and science skills as they are applied in everyday life. Students are performing hands-on experiments that blend creative problem solving, collaboration, and “real world” testing experiences.

Previously, a typical learning activity might have taught the basic elements of designing a balsa wood airplane; the *Project Lead the Way* curriculum lets students simulate space travel using internet-based lessons, while others may use 3-D architectural design software to create an “environmentally friendly” home that uses solar power or natural materials.

Project Lead the Way at the middle school level intertwines scientific elements with the student’s imagination to explore energy, environment, robotics, and other STEM-related topics in practical applications. Students use software currently utilized by companies like Lockheed Martin, Intel and Sprint to unlock

new discoveries and expand their potential to create a better world.

Recently, teams of middle school students were given an assignment to create three-dimensional furniture pieces to fill a computer generated “room” of a given size. Students designed the furnishings, and then calculated the specific dimensions of each component to be placed in the room. The project blended the use of math and engineering skills, along with students’ individual creativity, to turn their vision into reality.

The goals of the program are to pique student interest, and develop critical reasoning and problem solving skills.

The iPad project is being funded through a lease/purchase agreement, while *Project Lead the Way* is supported with funds obtained through the Perkins Act administered by the U.S. Department of Education. ♡



Creativity and experimentation know no bounds with the district’s new iPad project.

A Message from Teresa M. Rafferty, Interim Superintendent of Schools

When I began serving in the position of Interim Superintendent of Schools in October following the retirement of Superintendent Robert L. Copeland, I embraced the challenge of ensuring that the district’s educational objectives would continue uninterrupted, and I looked forward to maintaining our well-established, productive community relationships.



Little did I know that the first real challenge we would face during my tenure would be Hurricane Sandy, and its ensuing impact on the students and families of Piscataway.

Immediately following the storm, our goal was to return students to their classrooms as soon as possible, which would provide a stable atmosphere and a sense of normalcy. This was easier said than done, considering the magnitude of the storm’s devastation, including damaged homes and lack of electricity.

The majority of students were able to return to school after seven days, sooner than many other school districts in our area. While the process of returning children to their

schools was not perfect, it reinforced the dedication of district administration and staff, who, in conjunction with the Piscataway Board of Education and other officials, used every possible means of communication to keep district families and the community informed, every step of the way.

Our school community responded to the needs of those impacted by the

storm; elementary and middle school students and staff conducted food and blanket drives, and members of the Piscataway Chiefs football team assisted at the Piscataway Township Relief Effort.

Now, as we enter the new year, we are excited about several innovative programs that drive the educational advancement of our students, Piscataway’s future leaders. Our new iPad initiative, which you can read about in this newsletter, is underway, and students are actively engaged in hands-on academic experimentation, artistic creativity, and athletic prowess. Visit the district website at www.piscatawayschools.org to learn more about what’s happening in our schools. ♡

“Junior Engineers” After School Program Creates Gliders, Cars and Catapults

A new after school “Junior Engineers” club is building excitement in the Arbor and ML King After Care programs, with budding scientists creating airplanes, cars powered by rubber bands, catapults and small-scale amusement



Students in the Piscataway After Care Program test design applications in the new “Junior Engineers Club”

park rides. The activity uses “Design It,” an engaging science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) program designed specifically for after school.

Over the course of the year, student teams will draw up plans, test, and modify six different engineering projects, with the goal of creating the most functionally effective design.

The Junior Engineers program includes materials and instructional support for 130 students in grades four and five who are enrolled in the district’s After Care program. The after school activity was implemented this year in support of district initiatives that encourage hands-on experimentation and help prepare students for tomorrow’s technological advances.

The “Design It” program, offered by the New Jersey Partnership for Afterschool Science and Engineering, provides staff training, curriculum guides and supplies, and was paid for by a grant from the Office of Community Education. 🍷

Piscataway Student Wins National Braille Writing Contest

Writing a short story isn’t always as easy as it seems – especially when you are using a typewriter that only has six keys.

Mohammed Shalabi, a third grader at Knollwood School, was up to the challenge, and wrote “The Hulk to the Rescue,” which won First Place in the National Federation for the Blind’s 2012 Youth Braille Writing Contest Elementary Stories category. For his First Place winning selection, Mohammed’s story was recognized in the National Federation for the Blind’s newsletter and website, and he received a \$30 prize.

Mohammed incorporated two of his favorite cartoon characters, “The Hulk” and “Mario,” as part of a creative writing project assigned by Jessica Umhoefer, Piscataway’s Teacher of the Blind and Visually Impaired. He was required to write the story in Braille, using a Braille “typewriter” provided by the school district.

“I was immediately impressed by how creative his story was and how much effort he was putting into it,” notes Ms. Umhoefer.

Mohammed has a rare condition known as “Peters anomaly,” which causes blurred or hazy vision due to clouding of the cornea. He was also diagnosed with glaucoma, and has undergone more than 10 surgical procedures, including a corneal transplant, to improve his vision.

Two years ago, when Mohammed arrived as a first grader in Piscataway, he knew few words in Braille, a situation that limited his ability to keep pace with other students on his same grade level. Piscataway’s Office of Pupil Services provided him with in-class resources, such as closed circuit television to enlarge reading material, and training in the use of a Braille writing machine.

In the past, students with visual impairments were educated in specialized, out-of-district schools, not with other Piscataway students and often at great expense. “Piscataway tries to include all children in a traditional mainstream setting, where he has been provided with the tools to grow, learn and become more independent,” says Mohammed’s mother, Randa Assaf.

Mohammed has made great strides in expanding his ability to master every day skills that come easily to other students. Today, Mohammed’s Braille vocabulary has increased over 80% since his arrival two years ago. He entered third grade at Knollwood Elementary School, with confidence knowing that he can complete his class work and homework on schedule with his peers. More importantly, his new Braille skills have greatly expanded his ability to read, write and communicate. 🍷

Investing in our Infrastructure: Roof and Lighting Update

The Piscataway Board of Education makes it a priority to monitor progress of facility repairs and improvements throughout the district. Over the past several months, advances were made on a variety of scheduled building renovations:

- Passersby may have noticed workers on the roofs of several school buildings, as Phase One of roof repairs began at Piscataway High School, Conackamack and Quibbltown Middle Schools, and Arbor and Randolphville elementary schools. This phase included replacement of roof sections which have deteriorated over the years, and preparation for installation of solar panels, scheduled to take place while school is closed during late winter and early spring breaks of the current school year.
- Phase Two of the roofing/solar project is anticipated to be conducted over the summer of 2013 and during the December 2013 winter break. This will include similar work at Knollwood and Grandview Schools. A timeline will be established for completion of the roofing and solar projects at King, Eisenhower and Schor Schools.
- Energy efficient lighting improvements that are expected to save \$270,000 per year in energy consumption have been made at all K – 8 schools, including new fixtures and indoor/outdoor light sensors.

Motion activation sensors in such areas as gymnasiums and bathrooms, used in conjunction with energy efficient fixtures, reduce energy costs when areas of the building are not in use. Previously completed efforts to reduce district energy consumption resulted in savings of \$600,000 over the past five years. The savings funded educational programs, such as the middle and high school science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) programs. 🍷

Board of Education Welcomes New Members

Piscataway voters elected two incumbents and two new members of the Piscataway Board of Education on Tuesday, November 6. Margaret King and Robert Opitz return to the Board, joined by newcomers Ira Stern and Dr. Atif Nazir. They will be installed at the board's Reorganization Meeting on Thursday, January 3, 2013.

The option for school boards and municipalities to move school elections from April to November was a part of Senate Bill 3148, signed by Governor Chris Christie in early 2012. The Piscataway Board of Education unanimously voted to move elections to November in order to increase voter participation. 🗳️

Pway 5K Run/Walk

SAVE THE DATE! PWAY 5K

Sunday, May 19, 2013 · 9 a.m. · Piscataway High School

Get a "head start!" in the Pway 5K race! Register today to run or walk in the Pway 5K benefitting the Piscataway High School Class of 2013 and the Piscataway Education Foundation. Proceeds support Project Graduation in June 2013, and innovative and creative school programming. Early-bird online registration is now available at www.pway5k.com. Save \$15 if you register by January 31st!

COMMUNITY EDUCATION WINTER SESSION OFFERS NEW CLASSES AND TRIPS - REGISTER TODAY!

Learn to be an amateur magician! Master the art of juggling! Take a tour of Titanic artifacts on our bus trip to the Franklin Institute!

The Winter Session of Community Education classes for adults and students will begin on Saturday, February 2, 2013. Visit the district website at www.piscatawayschools.org and click on *Community Education* to view course descriptions and schedules. Online registration is now available with your Visa, MasterCard, Discover or bank debit card. Call 732-572-4688 for information.

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