



Board of Education Recognitions

somsdk12.org/board/recognitions

December 2025

NAME/SCHOOL	RECOGNITION
Donna Friedrich Vanessa LaForest Seth Boyden Elementary School	<p>We want to send a shout-out to Ms. Donna Friedrich and Ms. Vanessa LaForest for leading our excellent 5th-grade Safety Patrol students in celebrating Ruby Bridges National Walk to School Day! The morning kicked off with a wonderful community walk to school, made even better by joining forces with the fantastic Seth Boyden Bike Bus. Later that afternoon, all grades attended a truly inspiring school assembly.</p> <p>Our 5th graders did an incredible job, sharing heartfelt poems and uplifting words of inspiration to honor Ruby Bridges' immense bravery and courage. We would like to give a special commendation to Mrs. Friedrich and Mrs. LaForest for their genuine dedication and commitment to making this important day an annual, meaningful tradition here at Seth Boyden. Thank you for inspiring our students!</p>
Katelyn Chan Ms. Meng Columbia High School	<p>Congratulations to Katelyn Chan, who received the Youth Leadership Award at the New Jersey Chinese Teachers Association Award Presentation Ceremony on December 13. Nominated by Ms. Meng, Katelyn was honored for her exceptional leadership and dedication to promoting Chinese language and culture. As Co-President of the Chinese Honor Society at Columbia, she has demonstrated strong organizational and collaborative skills, including co-chairing the annual induction ceremony and leading peers in recognizing academic excellence and cultural learning.</p> <p>We also congratulate Ms. Meng for being nominated for the 2025 NJCTA Educator of the Year award. Ms. Meng proudly represented Columbia High School and the SOMSD Chinese teaching team at the NJCTA ceremony.</p>

NAME/SCHOOL	RECOGNITION
<p>Columbia High School Band Members</p>	<p>We are proud to recognize CHS students who were selected to the 2025–2026 North Jersey Area Symphonic Band after competitive auditions held on December 6th. Their selection reflects months of hard work, dedication, and commitment to their music.</p> <p>Congratulations to: Kaya Masucci playing English Horn; Julien Khaw-Briot playing clarinet; Luke Witt on the tuba; Ella Levy playing the timpani; and Max Ginsberg as battery percussion.</p> <p>We would also like to recognize sophomore Levi Vitale, who demonstrated strong musicianship and effort throughout the process.</p> <p>These students will represent Columbia High School as members of the ensemble, and their first concert will be on January 17th at Mount Olive High School.</p> <p>The Columbia High School band program is full of talent, and we extend our thanks to the band families and music educators who have supported our classmates.</p>
<p>Ms. Karissa Handler Columbia High School</p>	<p>Congratulations to Ms. Karissa Handler on being named the 2026 New Jersey Counselor of the Year by our state's School Counselor Association. On behalf of the students of Columbia, we are proud to recognize Ms. Handler for the care, dedication, and leadership she brings to our high school community.</p> <p>Ms. Handler is known by students for always being there and making sure her students feel supported. From creating opportunities such as college visits and the Perseverance Breakfast to expanding support for multilingual learners and assisting with the CHS Yearbook, her work has made a difference in students' lives. Ms. Handler is being honored for what her students experience every day: a counselor who truly believes in them and helps them succeed.</p>