




Board of Education Recognitions

March 2025

| NAME/SCHOOL | RECOGNITION |
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| <p>1</p> <p>STEAM Tank Team Maplewood Middle School</p> | <p>If you tuned into last month's board meeting, you may have seen a fantastic group of students from Maplewood Middle School present a solution to traffic issues during dropoff and dismissals through a project challenge from the New Jersey School Boards Association's STEAM Tank Challenge.</p> <p>Thanks to their innovative thinking, Maplewood Township and Maplewood Police are implementing their proposal for a one-way traffic-calming plan during peak hours to enhance student safety.</p> <p>Well done to the MMS STEAM Tank students and their teacher, Ms. Zavocki!</p> |
| <p>2</p> <p>Maya Kaplan Columbia High School</p> | <p>Congratulations to CHS senior Maya Kaplan for being named Columbia's 2025 Unsung Hero by the Essex County School Boards Association and the New Jersey School Boards Association.</p> <p>Recognized for her dedication to supporting neurodivergent students, Maya has spent much of her free time working with Columbia High School's special education program, particularly with students in the Applied Behavior Analysis program.</p> <p>Earlier this month, Mrs. Bodnar presented the award to Maya and highlighted her empathy, loyalty, and commitment to inclusivity. Maya plans to pursue a career in special education, aiming to make a lasting impact on students with special needs.</p> |

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| <p data-bbox="191 285 553 348">Photography Students Columbia High School</p> <p data-bbox="321 390 488 443"><i>submitted by</i> Mr. James Manno</p> | <p data-bbox="613 285 1365 394">Congratulations to Columbia High School Maya Berkwitz and sophomore Abby Oettinger for receiving awards for their photography pieces at the Pingry School on February 28th.</p> <p data-bbox="613 447 1398 632">The twenty-ninth annual Pingry Student Photography Exhibition was on view in the Hostetter Arts Center Gallery through early March. Nearly two hundred digital and traditional film-based photographs showcased the best work of students from seven private and public high schools in the region.</p> |
| <p data-bbox="250 682 561 814">Violet Kessler Mrs. Elizabeth Petroccia Mrs. Nicole Josey Columbia High School</p> | <p data-bbox="613 682 1414 831">The Unsung “Sheroes” 2025 celebration at the South Orange Performing Arts Center last week honored remarkable women for their dedication to the community, and three individuals from SOMSD were honored.</p> <p data-bbox="613 884 1422 993">Columbia High School freshman Student Council President Violet Kessler was recognized for her leadership and advocacy for youth.</p> <p data-bbox="613 1045 1406 1113">CHS Counseling Secretary Ms. Petroccia was celebrated for her commitment to education and volunteerism.</p> <p data-bbox="613 1165 1430 1314">Ms. Nicole Josey, co-president of the SOMSD President’s Council, was honored for her tireless work in advancing inclusion and equity in SOMA. Their contributions continue to inspire and uplift the community.</p> <p data-bbox="613 1367 1195 1392">Congratulations and thank you for your service.</p> |
| <p data-bbox="191 1440 529 1503">AP Art Students Columbia High School</p> | <p data-bbox="613 1440 1422 1549">Congratulations to the Columbia High School’s AP Art students on the return of their annual showcase at the South Orange Performing Arts Center!</p> <p data-bbox="613 1602 1422 1711">This exhibition, running until April 26th, highlights their incredible talent across various mediums, from paintings to digital art.</p> <p data-bbox="613 1764 1390 1873">Under the guidance of visual arts teacher Ms. Cappucci, these students have worked tirelessly to refine their craft and share their creative voices with the community.</p> <p data-bbox="613 1925 756 1950">Great work!</p> |

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| <p>5</p> <p>South Orange Village Baird Community Center Columbia High School</p> <p><i>submitted by</i> Mr. Stanley Valles Director of School & Community Safety</p> | <p>This past winter, South Orange Village and the Baird Community Center helped our South Orange Middle School immensely during a successful evacuation and reunification exercise.</p> <p>We especially thank Chief Morillo and Sergeant Lonero from the South Orange Police Department, as well as community center director Matt Gray for their fast-acting support.</p> <p>Their flexibility and willingness to collaborate on such short notice ensured a smooth transition for students and staff, providing them stability and care during the security procedure.</p> <p>Thank you!</p> |
| <p>6</p> <p>Fencing Team Columbia High School</p> <p> CHS Student-Athlete ...</p> | <p>Congratulations to the Columbia High School Girls Fencing Team for securing an impressive second-place finish at the state championships, delivering many hard-fought spars throughout the seasons.</p> <p>Their dedication and perseverance throughout the season have been truly commendable, and we are very proud of their athletic integrity.</p> |

Special in-person recognitions:

Karissa Handler, Essex County Counselor of the Year – receiving certificate?

Fencing Team – receiving certificates