Board of Education Recognitions

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November 2026

NAME/SCHOOL	RECOGNITION
Naviya Vadlamani Junior Student Columbia High School	Naviya Vadlamani recently received a High Commendation in the Science and Technology category of the prestigious John Locke Essay Competition for her essay exploring the ethics of how we treat artificial intelligence (AI). Her submission ranked among the top 3% of more than 100,000 entries from over 150 countries, an extraordinary accomplishment that reflects her critical thinking and thoughtful engagement with an important and timely topic. Congratulations, Naviya, on this outstanding achievement!
Teagan Fineman Junior Student Columbia High School	Teagan Fineman received a Commendation in the Law category from the John Locke Institute for her essay examining retributive philosophies in the U.S. legal system. This distinction is awarded to approximately 5–10% of applicants. Teagan's achievement is especially noteworthy given that the 2026 competition received approximately 100,000 submissions from around the world. Congratulations, Teagan, on this wonderful accomplishment!
Jhasi Mtume Junior Student Columbia High School	Jhasi Mtume has been named the 2026 Junior Olympic Amateur Boxer of the Year by the New Jersey Boxing Hall of Fame. This prestigious recognition celebrates Jhasi's dedication, hard work, and accomplishments in the sport of boxing. We are proud to celebrate this outstanding achievement and congratulate Jhasi on this well-deserved honor!

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Columbia High School Marching Band	The Columbia High School Cougar Marching Band has been busy celebrating an outstanding season! On Saturday, October 31, 2026, the band earned the 2026 USBands Group 5A New Jersey State Championship with a score of 90.1, placing first among nine schools. The band also received awards for Best Overall Effect and Best Color Guard. Adding to their accomplishments, seven students were accepted into Rowan University's 2026 WindFest Honor Bands: • Abby Keller (French Horn) • Julien Khaw-Briot (Clarinet) • Kyle Kuperman (Euphonium) • Kaya Masucci (Oboe) • Nina Rose (Tenor Saxophone) • Luli Sippie-Okoshi (Flute) • Jacinto Trujillo-Gomez (French Horn) Congratulations to all of our talented musicians and to the band staff: Director Peter F. Bauer, Assistant Director Kaelyn Rajmohan, Color Guard Instructor D'Sherrick Williams, and Percussion Instructor Max Winters!
Dara Gronau, Principal South Mountain Elementary	South Mountain Principal Dara Gronau has been selected for the 2027 cohort of the Women of Color Education Collaborative. This national fellowship program, affiliated with Morgan State University's National Center for the Elimination of Education Disparities, is designed to foster community, connection, and professional learning among women of color who serve in educational leadership roles. Recognizing that women of color bring unique perspectives and experiences to leadership, the program provides an affinity space that supports their continued growth and development. Ms. Gronau's participation reflects her commitment to ongoing learning, self-reflection, and advancing issues of equity that are important to our school community and district. We congratulate her on this well-deserved opportunity!

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Teresa Quick, Media Specialist Delia Bolden Elementary	On November 16, 2026, Delia Bolden Elementary School Librarian Teresa A. Quick was a featured panelist at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture's Next Century of Black Studies Conference. Held in the historic Aaron Douglas Reading Room as part of the Center's centennial celebrations, the panel, titled *"School Librarians and Expanding Students' Accessibility to Black Studies,"* explored the important role K–12 school librarians play in connecting students with diverse literature, historical archives, and primary sources. Drawing on nearly two decades of experience in public education, Quick joined fellow library leaders to share strategies for developing inclusive collections and expanding students' access to Black history and culture through school libraries. During the discussion, Ms. Quick highlighted how school libraries serve as essential spaces for developing digital literacy, critical thinking, and a lifelong love of reading. She emphasized the importance of ensuring students see themselves reflected in the books and resources available to them while having opportunities to explore diverse perspectives and histories. The conference brought together scholars, educators, archivists, and cultural leaders to celebrate 100 years of the Schomburg Center's impact and explore the future of Black Studies in academic and community spaces.