

Press from:

The New Providence School District
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Subject: **New Providence School District honors their Teachers of the Year**

The four New Providence School District recipients of the Union County Teacher Recognition Program award were honored at the Board of Education meeting on Thursday, March 27, 2025. One teacher from each school was selected from a record number of nominations collected from students, parents and staff.

New Providence High School recognized Mrs. Brenda Avila, a teacher of ESL/ELL (English as a Second Language/English Language Learner), who is in her 5th year in New Providence. New Providence High School Principal, Mr. Brian Henry, described some of her accomplishments. "As an ELL/ESL teacher, Ms. Avila has truly transformed the way we approach language learning, not just as a subject, but as an essential tool for building bridges and creating a sense of belonging in our school community. Ms. Avila has led the implementation of a student-led tutoring program in collaboration with our Bilingual Honor Society students. She has developed and led professional development for our staff through a Teacher Training Workshop on ML Support for Mainstream Teachers during the start-of-year professional development sessions. This workshop equipped our faculty with the knowledge and tools they need to better support our diverse learners, ensuring that all students feel seen, valued, and understood in all of their classes. Additionally, Ms. Avila coordinates and oversees all of the WIDA testing to ensure our multilingual students are receiving the right supports. Ms. Avila has also worked closely with other multilingual teachers in the district to organize and present at Multilingual Family Nights to support new multilingual families in our community." He concluded "It's clear that Ms. Avila embodies the qualities of a Teacher of the Year in every sense, through compassion, leadership, and a deep commitment to the success of all students."

Mr. Brandon Hilf was recognized by New Providence Middle School. Mr. Hilf, a special education teacher, started his teaching career in New Providence five years ago teaching at both the Middle School and High School prior to moving full-time to the Middle School.

Mr. Hilf was also introduced by Mr. Brian Henry, Principal at New Providence Middle School, who stated "Anytime you walk into a classroom in which Mr. Hilf is teaching, you see positivity and support in all aspects of his teaching. You see the way he connects with his students, the way he motivates them to achieve successful results, while supporting and guiding them on their academic journeys. Mr. Hilf genuinely cares about

his students' success and their experience in his class. Through his steadfast support, students feel appreciated, valued, and inspired to perform at the highest levels. Mr. Hilf's commitment to student success extends far beyond the classroom though and into every aspect of our students' lives including coaching at the High School, advising through a club, or creating opportunities for personal growth for our students." In addition to his time in the classroom, Mr. Hilf also serves as the sprint coach for the Track and Field teams, the Model UN club advisor, and the new middle school Esports program, and on many professional committees.

Allen W. Roberts Elementary School honored Mrs. Bonnie Cabezas with this recognition. Mrs. Cabezas, a fourth-grade teacher, has been a dedicated teacher at AWR for more than 17 years. Principal of Allen W. Roberts School, Mr. Jay Richter, stated "Engaging, creative, and funny are words that you'll hear when people speak about Mrs. Cabezas. Her sense of humor not only helps gain the students' interest during class, but also brings positivity to the busy work environment of our school. It's hard not to laugh when speaking to Mrs. Cabezas as she is always making jokes and even making herself laugh. With that laugh and her energy and enthusiasm, she creates a positive, engaging, and supportive learning environment for her students. She has clear expectations, provides positive reinforcement, and is encouraging and respectful when corrective feedback to students is needed. She models respect, kindness, and fairness. Her positive reinforcement grids and We Are Family puzzle posters bring visibility to the actions and themes that she knows are important for the students in her class." He added "Parents have continually commented about her effective communication and true partnership with them to support their children." Mrs. Cabezas has also actively participated in extra-curricular and professional activities including being a STEM Club advisor and mentoring new staff.

Ms. Kristin Salsberry, a third-grade teacher in her sixth year in New Providence, was honored by some very special guest speakers, students from her class at Salt Brook School. Eleven students joined the presentation and shared a special original poem for Ms. Salsberry. Salt Brook School Principal, Mrs. Jean Drexinger, began with "Through their words, you will hear how Ms. Salsberry makes learning fun, how she turns challenges into opportunities, and how her kindness leaves a lasting impact on each student. From imagining her as a superhero to sharing their favorite classroom memories, her students paint a vivid picture of a teacher who not only teaches lessons but also touches lives." Mrs. Drexinger concluded with "Their words capture the spirit of who Ms. Salsberry is not just as a teacher, but as a role model and a source of kindness, creativity, and inspiration. It is clear that her impact extends far beyond the classroom, shaping her students in ways that will stay with them for years to come. Ms. Salsberry, on behalf of the entire Salt Brook community, thank you for your dedication, your compassion, and the countless ways you make learning meaningful and joyful. Tonight, we celebrate you not only for the incredible educator you are but for the difference you make in the lives of every child who is fortunate enough to be in your classroom."

The Union County Teacher Recognition Program acknowledges educators for their commitment to their students and their profession. All four teachers received Golden Apples, a certificate and lapel pin from the district, and will also join their Union County colleagues for a special ceremony through Kean University in May. [More information on the New Providence School District recipients of the Teacher of the Year award can be found on the district website.](#)

L-R – Amanda Marano (BOE Member), Dr. Lauren Zirpoli (Superintendent of Schools), Bonnie Cabezas, Brenda Avila, Kristin Salsberry, Brandon Hilf, Jean Drexinger (Principal of Salt Brook School), Jay Richter (Principal of Allen W. Roberts School) and Brian Henry (Principal of NPHS/MS)

