



Center for Lifelong Learning instructional staff collaboratively inventory and assess ELA curriculum in alignment with the 2025-2026 Professional Development Plan.

New ESCNJ Assistant Superintendent and Director Launch 2025-26 Professional Development Plan

This summer, the Educational Services Commission of New Jersey (ESCNJ) welcomed a new Assistant Superintendent, Ms. Kaitlin Jones, and promoted Ms. Kate Johnson to become Director of Collaborative Educational Services. Together, Ms. Jones and Ms. Johnson led development of the board-approved 2025-2026 Professional Development Plan (PDP), focusing on three core priorities: curriculum, professional learning communities (PLCs), and universal supports.

The board approved three PDP goals for this school year:

1. By June 2026, ELA curricula will be collected and collaboratively assessed to identify strengths and required revisions to ensure differentiation in service of ESCNJ student subgroups (e.g., autism, multiple disabilities, ERI).
2. By June 2026, 100% of ESCNJ certificated instructional staff will engage in professional learning communities in service of the district-wide curricular SMART goal and the needs of their building.
3. By June 2026, ESCNJ Autism, Multiple Disabled, and Preschool Disabilities (PSD) classrooms will demonstrate a 15% increase (as compared to their 2025 baseline) in effective implementation of Universal Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) Supports that promote positive student behavior, increase instructional engagement, and foster a consistent learning environment. (Continued on page 4)

Save the Date

Vendor EXPO - May 20, 2026

On The Inside

New Board Vice President p 2

New Assistant Superintendent p 3

Dr. Richard Labbe Named Vice President of the ESCNJ Board of Directors

Dr. Richard Labbe, who has served as Superintendent of the Sayreville Public Schools since 2014, is the new Vice President of the ESCNJ Board of Directors.

"We are very pleased to be working collaboratively with Dr. Labbe, who brings tremendous insight and experience to the Commission," said ESCNJ Schools Superintendent Nadia Romano.

"As we continue to expand our programs and grow the Commission, I know he will be a valuable asset in ensuring that every student receives the best education possible."

Dr. Labbe works closely with ESCNJ Board President and the Board of Directors to ensure that the ESCNJ programs and enterprises support high quality instruction and critical services that enhance the quality of education for all ESCNJ students.

He has extensive experience in public education and specialized services. Dr. Labbe served as an Assistant Principal and as a Principal in Edison Township for 14 years before going to Jackson Township to be the Director of Special Services for three years. After serving as Superintendent and Director of Special Services for Green Brook Township, he became Superintendent of the Sayreville Public Schools in 2014.

Dr. Labbe earned a graduate degree in Special Education and Teaching at Kean University in 2000 and another graduate degree in Educational Leadership and Administration from The College of New Jersey in 2001. He later completed his Doctorate in Education and Leadership from Florida-based Nova Southeastern University, which has a location in Fort Lauderdale-Davie, Florida.



ESCNJ Promotes from Within; Welcomes Kate Johnson as the Director of Collaborative Services

Kate Johnson, a long-time ESCNJ team member and BCBA who began as a teacher at the Bright Beginnings Learning Center, has taken on the role of Director of Collaborative Educational Services.

In her new role, Ms. Johnson is developing and expanding collaborative services, creating vital connections with parents, teachers, staff, and school districts throughout New Jersey. She is helping to strengthen ESCNJ's Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) and Compassionate Care programs, while expanding in-house initiatives that bring principals, teachers, and aides together for a more consistent and collaborative approach. In addition, she will coordinate parent workshops, leadership meetings, professional development, and other activities that help strengthen connections with families and staff across the ESCNJ community.

"Ongoing professional development programs and other trainings, in conjunction with Compassionate Care practices, benefit both the staff and the students at ESCNJ," Ms. Johnson explained. "The ongoing goal is to ensure that all students are learning to the best of their ability and that teachers and administrators have the tools they need to ensure success."

Ms. Johnson started her career as a teacher and case manager at Bright Beginnings Learning Center (BBLC). She later moved to Future Foundations Academy (FFA), where she held the position of Vice Principal. In 2022, she was promoted to principal at BBLC.



ESCNJ Hires Kaitlin Jones as an Assistant Superintendent

With twenty-five years of experience in education, Kaitlin Jones joins ESCNJ as the new Assistant Superintendent of Educational Services.

In her new position, Ms. Jones works closely with the ESCNJ administration, the Director of Collaborative Educational Services, principals, teachers, and staff to oversee educational programs and professional development, while also promoting and enriching the services and programs provided to students. She supervises all educational programs: ALC, BBLC, CLL, FFA, NuView, PAL, PRDS, Partnership for Children with Hearing Loss, Collaborative Educational Services, Children's Specialized Hospital as well as county diagnostics and home instruction.

"Ms. Jones is already a valuable asset to our administrative staff; her knowledge and experience play a key role in enhancing the current programs and implementing new programs that will benefit the students and staff at ESCNJ," said ESCNJ Superintendent of Schools Nadia Romano. "Her expertise in staff development is essential as we continue to implement new programs that will be beneficial to the Commission."

Ms. Jones holds an M.Ed. from Harvard and a B.A. in English and Psychology from Georgetown University.

Prior to joining ESCNJ, Ms. Jones served in various public education leadership roles in Newark, Chicago, Boston, New York City, and Caldwell, where she most recently served for seven years as, Assistant Superintendent of Schools. As Assistant Superintendent, Ms. Jones led the district toward significant gains in student achievement in alignment with the board's five-year strategic plan, successfully developed and implemented the district's Comprehensive Equity Plan, and established effective systems for districtwide professional development, curriculum, technology integration, data analysis, and high-impact, responsive student supports. Before serving in this role, Ms. Jones served as Deputy Executive Director in the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE), the largest school district in the country. In that role, Ms. Jones worked alongside senior leaders to provide an aligned teacher support and evaluation system that was consistent with its policies and contained quality programs and resources to train and develop teachers, principals, district staff, and superintendents.

Prior to her work as a district leader, Ms. Jones served as a New York City Principal, where she led significant



school-wide improvement in student achievement, growth, and organizational culture, ultimately moving the school from a 'C' to an 'A' rating within just two years. Before becoming Principal, Ms. Jones served as the Chief of Staff in the Office of Assessment and as Lead Senior Instructional Coach of the Common Core Pilots for NYCDOE, where she led a team working across 100+ schools to inform strategy for citywide adoption of new standards. Prior to that, Ms. Jones was a Director of Curriculum & Operations, Vice Principal, Department Chair, Grade Level Chair, and English Teacher.

Ms. Jones is thrilled to lead and learn alongside such student-centered, skillful ESCNJ educators!

ESCNJ Welcomes New Staff Members for 25-26



(Continued from page 1)

Collaborative PLC's Dive into ELA Curriculum & Best Practices

Curriculum and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs):

Across the district, instructional staff have launched PLCs focused on the English Language Arts curriculum revision cycle. During the October half-day professional development day, building-based PLCs met to organize for their year-long work focused on evaluation of the current ELA curriculum, using a co-constructed digital inventory designed to promote collaboration and ultimately districtwide coherence. Throughout the year, principals and members of the ESCNJ Curriculum Committee will meet monthly to design and debrief PLC sessions to ensure successful completion of related PDP goals.

With the long-term goal of providing curricula that meet the diverse needs of ESCNJ's student subgroups, the team is thrilled to see such a successful start to the 2025-2026 professional development plan.

Universal Supports:

In addition to curriculum and PLCs, Ms. Jones and Ms. Johnson are leading the district toward its third PDP goal centered on ensuring consistent implementation of universal supports within classrooms serving students with autism, multiple disabilities or preschool disabilities.

Over the past few years, ESCNJ instructional staff engaged in professional learning centered around universal applied behavior analysis (ABA) supports to promote positive student behavior, increase engagement, and foster a consistent learning environment.

Staff adapted the University of Florida Center for Autism and Related Disabilities tool to create the ESCNJ Universal Supports Walkthrough Checklist, a tool designed to provide support and consistent application of related professional learning across ESCNJ classrooms.

Indicators within the tool include items like professional knowledge, instructional planning, instructional delivery, assessment of/for learning and learning environment. The long-term goal is that by June 2028, 100% of ESCNJ autism, multiple disabilities, and pre-school disabilities classrooms will effectively implement Universal Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) supports to promote positive student behavior, increase instructional engagement, and foster a consistent learning environment.

In order to attain this long-term goal, building-based baselines were needed. During monthly Instructional Leadership Team meetings, Ms. Jones and Ms. Johnson collaborated with principals to draft, field test, and launch implementation of the ESCNJ Universal Supports Walkthrough Checklist, ultimately capturing baseline data across the tool's twenty-four indicators. By June 2026, each school aims to increase by at least 15% the classrooms demonstrating consistent implementation of these universal supports.

Additionally, differentiated professional learning opportunities are now underway to support the achievement of these goals. In collaboration with the Behavior Supports Teams, Ms. Johnson and Ms. Jones analyzed trends in walkthrough data to then provide multiple workshops on the district's October half-day professional development day. Seven Behavioral Support Team members, including four BCBA's, led targeted trainings for 185 instructional aides. Topics included: rapport building, individualized student schedules to support student transitions, using reinforcement schedules during non-IEP work times (e.g., recess, lunch).

Feedback so far has been overwhelmingly positive about this new tailored approach to professional learning in support of student success!

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR 2025 GRADUATES

Academy Learning Center:

Joussef Amin
Jaydin Baureko
Rachel Beer
Carol Binen-Sokol
Maggie DeGroat
Dev Dutta
Amir Fida
Karen Johnson
Judy Kellner
Randy Levine
Rosa Mariano-Brandao
Lanie Mindlin
Trinity Poole
Marcos Quito
Ny'aja Williams

Center for Lifelong Learning:

Chrismary Acevedo
Kayla Boykin
Jeremiah Brunson-Hyatt
Tyler Dowd
Justin Gonzalez
Emily Kavanaugh
Alexander McNelly
David Monte de Oca
Alexander Pagdon
Chad Rihacek
Parth Shah

Future Foundations Academy:

Angel Arriaga
Derex Carter
Worlassie Gadzanku
Jose Guillermo
Sandra Jones
Justin Lee
Ordaniel Quinones
Siya Patel
Husani Salinas
Amelia Tavares

NuViewAcademy:

Jasmine Juarez-Vasquez
Jerry Lee-Smith
Erick Suastegui-Mata

Piscataway Regional Day School:

Yasier Anderson
Kalvin Christie
Rachel Cohn
Jahvon Davis Coleman
Britney DelCampo
Kaitlyn Hart
Andrew Louis
Ranbir Mahey
Bryan Martinez
Hany Patel
Dilenia Rodriguez
Danny Roman

Students from Pathways to Adult Learning Completion Ceremony



Zachary Kittell (Middle)



Ann-Nottie Charlestin (Middle & Left)

Students from Bright Beginnings Learning Center are Moving Up



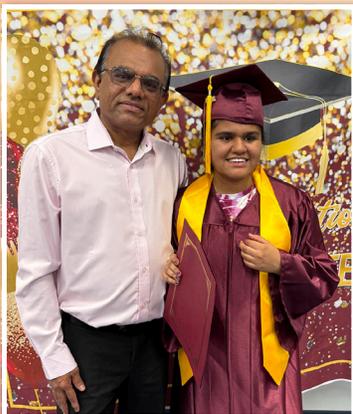
ESCNJ HONORS CLASS OF 2025!



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HIGHLIGHTS FROM SPRING AND SUMMER 2025

Participants from the ACS program enjoyed every drop of summer.



BBLC students enjoying summer festivities with friends.



FFA students participated in a "hands-on" introduction to the historical coastal lifestyle of New Jersey's natives, the Lenape tribe. The program involved students in problem-solving exercises and teamwork through an exploration of Sandy Hook's marine environment from the perspective of the native people who once camped there in summertime. By focusing on coastal community life, students gained insight into the Lenape lifestyle, organization and deep, cherished traditions.

During ESY, students from CLL were able to explore a hands-on experience of the lifecycle of butterflies. Students watched each day as the butterflies went through a complete metamorphosis. Once they were fully grown, the butterflies were then released into the courtyard.

FFA ESY 2025 HIGHLIGHTS AND HAPPENINGS

ESY HIGHLIGHTS

Theme Weeks
Our classes have participated in theme weeks including Fourth of July, Outer Space, Camping and National Parks, and Shark Week! We are looking forward to our upcoming Themes of Superhero Week and preparation for the end of ESY Variety Show.

Community Based Instruction:
Students have been participating in a multitude of CBI trips, including swim, bowling, the movies, and local restaurants and places of business. Application of positive and appropriate social, behavioral, and community skills is of the utmost importance.

Transition Practice:
ESY provides an opportunity for our students to practice the very difficult skill of transition. During ESY we change classes and use the time and opportunity to get used to new friends and Teachers so our learners feel comfortable and ready to learn in September.

COMMUNITY BASED INSTRUCTION	ESY ACTIVITIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Restaurant Bowling Swim 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Space week Edible Constellations & Fruit Moon phases
TRANSITION SUPPORT	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FFA Staff Volleyball Team Wally Play Wednesdays Garden Care 	

Some Staffers Support Transitions to new experiences

An ESY summer update of all the fun and learning that took place this summer at FFA.

CLL's Got Talent - Staff and students participated in this year's talent show.



The rain didn't dampen the ALC field day spirits. Staff and students had a great time indoors participating in all the great activities that the gym teacher, Mr. Kyle, planned for the day.



HIGHLIGHTS FROM SPRING AND SUMMER 2025



Pathways to Adult Living (PAL) was selected to present at the 11th Annual PCAST Innovation Swap Meet. The event was sponsored by the New Jersey Department of Education's Office of Special Education, in partnership with Rutgers-The Boggs Center on Developmental Disabilities in Piscataway. The Trenton-based event offers a platform for PCAST Cohort Districts to highlight person-centered initiatives in education.

PAL students delivered a presentation titled "Create Your Goals, Plan Your Future, Live Your Life," which showcased their individual strengths, personal goals, and future aspirations.



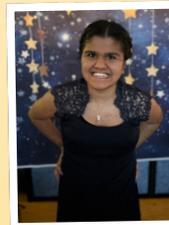
Students at Piscataway Regional Day School enjoyed a field trip to the Piscataway Magnet School on Suttons Lane for a day of beauty in preparation for their big graduation dance!

FFA Students participated in the NJTIP Rutgers travel training program. The mission of the New Jersey Travel Independence Program @ Rutgers (NJTIP) is to increase the independence and self-sufficiency of people with disabilities, older adults, and others by empowering them to use the public transit system safely and independently.

Staff, students, family and friends enjoyed a memorable night filled with great entertainment at this year's CLL Prom - Sea Cruise.



Everyone enjoyed "A Night Under The Stars," at this year's FFA prom. So many amazing photos!



BBLC celebrated all of our great Dads, Grandfathers, and Caregivers at their Father's Day BBQ. It was a memorable day for everyone.



Meet the ESCNJ Administration Staff



Central Administration Staff



Academy Learning Center



Adult Community Services



Bright Beginnings Learning Center



Center for Lifelong Learning



Future Foundations Academy



NuView Academy



Non-public School Services



Pathways to Adult Living



Piscataway Regional Day School



Transportation Coordinator



Director of Collaborative Educational Services



Security and Buildings and Grounds



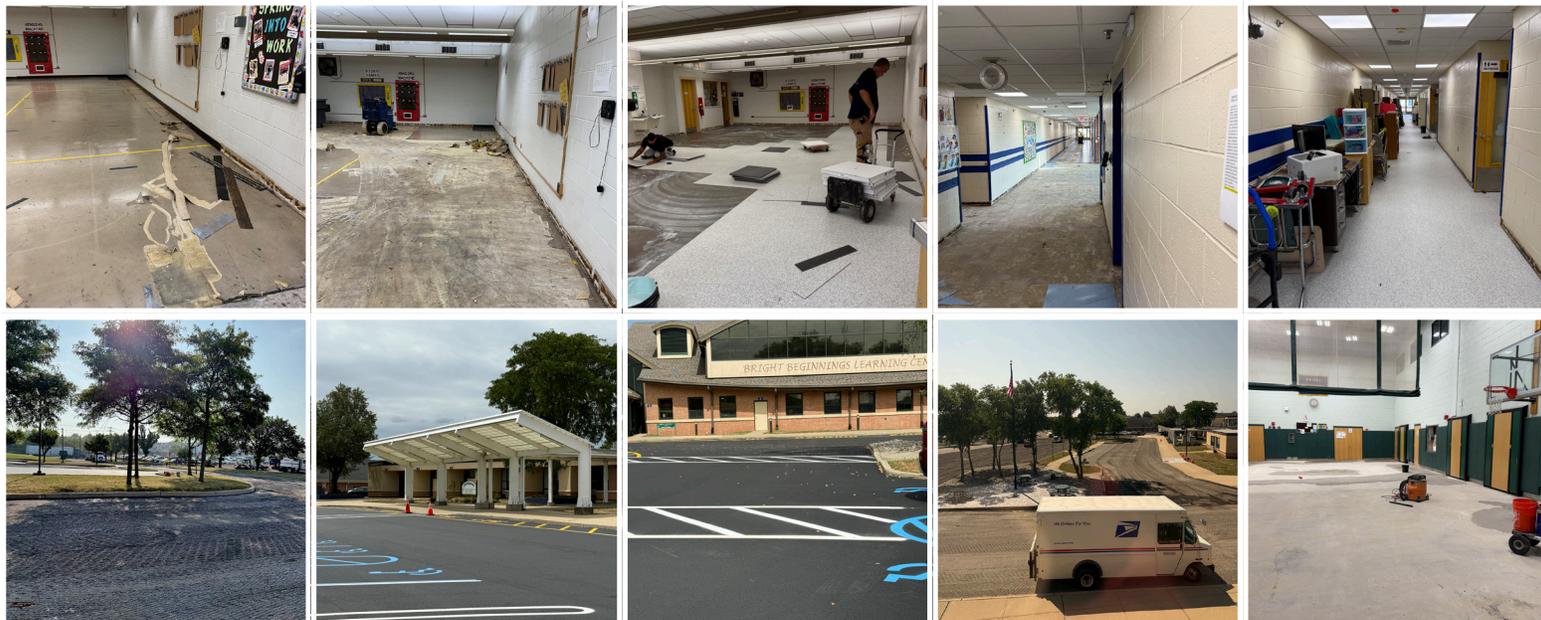
Professional Conference Center



IT Department

WE ARE...
ESCNJ

Renovations Around ESCNJ Campuses



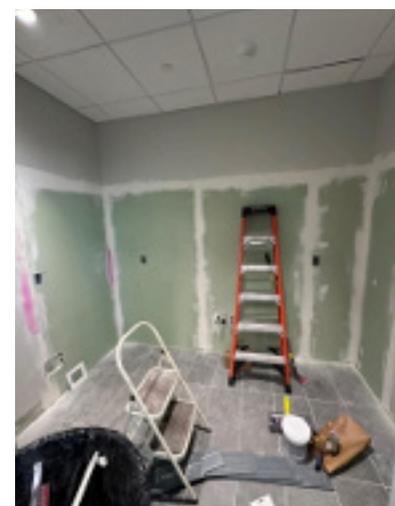
Over the summer, the ESCNJ team spruced up many of the facilities to ensure a safe and supportive environment for our students and staff. Some of the key projects include:

- Repaving of parking lots across several campuses to improve safety and accessibility, with the addition of multiple curb access points for student mobility.
- Renovations to the gymnasium flooring, nursing office, and Occupational/Physical Therapy room at Bright Beginnings Learning Center, providing students with an improved space for physical education, recreation, and OT/PT services.
- Cosmetic and security upgrades to the Piscataway campus fencing, adding color, style, and safety.
- "Phase One" of floor replacement at the Piscataway Regional Day School, as well as furniture replacement in several high-access areas. This will be a multi-year project to bring PRDS facilities up to date.
- Replacement of the roof at the Center for Lifelong Learning and Aquatics Center in Sayreville, ensuring the integrity and longevity of the facility.
- Complete replacement of the duct socks at the Aquatics and Fitness Center in Sayreville, enhancing air quality and comfort for all facility users.
- Updated security systems and security staffing across all ESCNJ campuses to provide the safest learning environment for students and staff.

The Professional Conference Center (PCC), located on the Piscataway campus, has undergone some enhancements this past year. There is a new office built for the coordinator, and a newly-designed kitchenette. This work is part of the overall effort to increase the efficiency and enhance the capability of the center for all events.

ESCNJ has hired interns who will support the overall event planning and support the PCC coordinator with the day-to-day operations and event logistics.

The event space serves as an attractive, yet affordable, option for local and national businesses, chambers of commerce, local government, trade associations, exhibitions, and higher education institutions. As usage increases, revenue from the PCC will be used to support dynamic learning programs in ESCNJ classrooms.



For more information, visit www.escnjevsnj.com.

Turning Point Academy: Facility Enhancements and Continued Commitment

Turning Point Academy, located within the Middlesex County Juvenile Detention Center in North Brunswick, continues to serve as a place of learning, structure, and hope for justice-involved youth. The program, operated by ESCNJ since 2017, provides daily instruction for approximately 30 to 50 students – offering educational stability and personal growth opportunities during a critical period in their lives.

This summer, the facility underwent a \$120,000 renovation project focused on improving both the learning environment and staff workspaces. The upgrades reflect a shared commitment between ESCNJ and the Middlesex County Juvenile Detention Center to treat all students with dignity and care while supporting their rehabilitation through education.



Highlights of the Improvements:

- **Modernized Classrooms and Teacher Spaces:** Classrooms now feature new furniture and updated finishes—creating cleaner, brighter, and more engaging learning environments. Teacher workspaces were also redesigned to better support instruction and individualized student attention.
- **Comfort and Engagement Areas:** Library nooks and bean bag seating were added to provide comfortable areas for reading, reflection, and counseling. These spaces also serve as calm zones for de-escalation and one-on-one support.
- **Interactive Common Area Additions:** The shared lounge now includes new furnishings and tabletop game boards for chess and checkers, promoting social interaction, critical thinking, and recreation in a structured setting.

Next Steps and Future Phases:

ESCNJ and the leadership at the Juvenile Detention Center are already assessing additional facility needs as part of a multi-phase improvement plan. Priorities under review include:

- Replacing worn padding along the interior gymnasium walls.
- Upgrading gym equipment and teacher desks.
- Expanding the library to include a legal resource section, literature, and enhanced educational materials.

These investments reflect ESCNJ's broader mission – to create safe, supportive, and inspiring environments where every student, regardless of circumstance, is given the opportunity to learn, grow, and prepare for a better future.

PAL Program Continues its Partnerships with New Jersey Colleges

On May 30, the Pathways to Adult Living program proudly participated in the "Dare to Dream" Student Leadership Conference held at Brookdale Community College in Lincroft.

The conference, an initiative by the New Jersey Department of Education, empowers middle and high school students with disabilities by fostering self-advocacy skills and preparing them for college and careers.

This event offers a positive, supportive environment where students can share personal stories, learn from their peers and successful young adults, and receive essential information about their rights and responsibilities.

This year's event included emphasis on self-advocacy, peer-led workshops and inspiring keynote presentations and college/career readiness.



Enhancing Student Transportation Services

The ESCNJ Transportation Services Department is excited to announce the upcoming implementation of a new, full-featured transportation management system through Transfinder.

ESCNJ coordinates transportation for special education, public, non-public, and vocational-technical programs, operating more than 1,200 routes and serving approximately 10,800 students each day. This advanced system will enhance efficiency, streamline route planning, and further strengthen our commitment to safe and reliable student transportation.

For more information, contact the transportation department at transportation@escnj.us.



The Professional Conference Center Hosts a Leadership Development Conference

The PCC hosted this year's NJALAS (New Jersey Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents) leadership development conference, featuring Franklin Covey Associates and the Four Pillars of Leadership.



ESCNJ Teacher Grant Funding is Underway

ESCNJ's partnership with member school districts to provide \$4 million in teacher grants for dual certification began on July 1, 2025, and will conclude on June 30, 2027.

The partnership helps fund current teachers in obtaining additional certifications that will benefit students with diverse needs. Teachers must be enrolled

in an accredited program that aligns with state and school district requirements.

The grant will reimburse the district for tuition costs and out-of-pocket tuition expenses. Here are some of the colleges/universities that offer teacher training programs: Caldwell University, Felician University, Georgian Court, NJCTL, Rutgers University and TCNJ.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS:



Thanksgiving November 27 & 28, 2025
(All schools and programs closed)

Winter Recess December 24, 2025 to January 2, 2026
(All schools and programs closed)

Schools Open January 5, 2026

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day January 19, 2026
(All schools and programs closed)

Presidents' Day February 16, 2026
(All schools and programs closed)

EID-AL-FITR March 20, 2026
(All schools closed)

Spring Recess March 30 to April 6, 2026
(All schools closed)

Schools Open April 7, 2026

Visit www.ESCNJ.us for more information



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Dr. David Roman, *President*

Dr. Richard Labbe, *Vice President*

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