



Michael LaSusa, Superintendent of Schools
25 Valley Road, Princeton, New Jersey 08540
michaellasusa@princetonk12.org

January 23, 2026

Dear PPS Parent/Caregiver,

Now that we have landed in 2026 and are about to begin the second half of the year, I am writing to provide a brief update on a few items of note in the upcoming months.

Snow and School

It looks like we may have a significant snow storm this weekend. As a reminder, this year's [school calendar](#) marks Friday, February 13, as "Designated Snow Day #1." If we need to close schools for snow prior to then, February 13 will become a day of school with an early dismissal.

Construction Projects

It was almost precisely one year ago that Princeton voters approved an \$89M capital spending proposal. We have made steady progress according to the timelines developed at the time of the proposal, and this is where we are now:

- The construction packages for both Princeton Middle School and Community Park are currently advertised. Over the December break, prospective contractors had an opportunity to tour the schools to review the areas of proposed work. Bids for both projects are due in early February. We anticipate that the Board will approve the successful bids in February or March. Once this occurs, we will be able to develop a more specific timeline and schedule for work. Our anticipation is that contractors will break ground at each school this spring. The most immediate impacts may be related to parking, changes to drop-off and dismissal, and then restrictions in terms of building use and access to certain parts of the buildings this summer. The administrators at both schools will be involved in all meetings regarding construction and will be the ones who relay information to parents about potential impacts. The original timeline for construction completion remains roughly the end of 2028.
- The construction packages for the Littlebrook expansion and the Princeton High School renovation are expected to be advertised in early February, with due dates for bids in mid March. Our anticipation is that we will award the projects by the end of March/early April, with physical construction beginning by the end of the school year/early summer. Again, the administrators at these schools will be participants in the construction meetings and will inform the parent community at their schools about what to expect and what adjustments we might need to make.



Michael LaSusa, Superintendent of Schools
25 Valley Road, Princeton, New Jersey 08540
michaellasusa@princetonk12.org

- Finally, as part of the 2023 referendum, the Board of Education recently awarded the contract for site work and playground renovations at Johnson Park, Littlebrook, and Riverside. This work cannot take place until after the school year ends because it will be disruptive and restrict the use of playgrounds. We are in the process of scheduling meetings regarding this work, and the principals will be involved in these meetings.

The Board of Education reports out on construction progress at each meeting, and I will continue to deliver periodic updates as well. Thank you in advance for your flexibility as we ready for some of the physical disruptions that we know will come.

Technology/Device Use

We have fielded a number of questions and email messages from parents regarding cell phones, screens, and student use of technology in our schools. Governor Murphy and the Legislature recently enacted [a law](#) that restricts the use of cell phones in all schools. While our school district rules at present largely mirror the provisions of the law, the Policy Committee of the Board of Education is reviewing the [updated guidance](#) from the Department of Education in order to adopt and implement a Board-level policy. Beyond just the use of cell phones, the Policy Committee is discussing other aspects of device use. For example, as a district we are gathering data on how much time our students spend on school-issued devices (iPads, Chromebooks, MacBooks) while in school. We are also exploring programs that can provide parents with more information about what sites their children are visiting while using their school-issued devices and how much time they are spending on those sites. Finally, we are evaluating whether the district should implement content monitoring software on district-issued devices so that we are made aware if a student is searching for or writing something that could have to do with violence or self-injury. We will provide updates about all of the above, with the goal of implementing any changes by the start of next school year, and clear communication about said changes prior to implementation.

Standardized Testing

This may seem far off, but our schools are already planning for the administration of state standardized tests this spring. There has been a tradition in Princeton, primarily at the high school level, of some students and parents choosing to “opt out” of state tests. This is understandable, as I believe that over the course of this millennium, beginning with the enactment of No Child Left Behind in 2002, there has been an overemphasis on standardized testing that fails to recognize the full spectrum of a student’s aptitudes, skills, and knowledge. However, there are drawbacks to the tradition of students opting out of tests.



Michael LaSusa, Superintendent of Schools
25 Valley Road, Princeton, New Jersey 08540
michaellasusa@princetonk12.org

First, the New Jersey Department of Education does not recognize an “Opt Out.” The NJDOE enables schools to code students who do not participate in testing as “Test Refusal.” While the state is required to administer standardized tests as a condition of federal funding, school districts are required to administer standardized tests or may face penalties for not doing so. These penalties may take the form of an action plan during the state’s triennial audit of districts (known as QSAC) or in other ways. I am long in the tooth and can remember the rollout of PARCC and the backlash that accompanied it—state officials at the time informed districts that they could lose state funding for facilitating or promoting test refusal.

Second, when large numbers of students come to school on a testing day and then refuse to test, there is a double burden on our school staff. On the one hand, they must try to maintain a quiet and orderly environment for the students who are testing. On the other hand, they must find spaces to hold and supervise students who refuse to test. All of this may stress our resources and degrade the testing environment.

Finally, an indirect outcome of a high percentage of opt outs may also be in the way a school district is portrayed or “ranked” in publications. The NJDOE publishes data regarding standardized testing and other factors as part of its [ESSA Accountability Notices](#) or other performance reports. Some publications, in turn, take this data and feed it into their formulas for developing school rankings. While not all publications focus on participation rates on standardized tests, those participation rates can affect overall performance. For example, if a large swath of students refuses to participate in testing, and the majority of those students would have scored as proficient on the assessment, then the overall proficiency rate may decline. Back in the summer, a couple of parents mentioned to me that Princeton High School had declined in the *U.S. News and World Reports* annual ranking of high schools. There may be a couple of reasons for this, but one might be the low participation rate of PHS students on state standardized tests versus those of other schools. Below is a comparison of PHS’s participation rate on mathematics standardized tests (NJSLA) during the 2024/2025 school year versus the rates of the top ten-ranked comprehensive public high schools in New Jersey in the *U.S. News* publication. For context, I also included a column alongside the NJSLA participation rate to show the percentage of 11th and 12th graders in each school enrolled in at least one AP class for the 2023/2024 school year (according to the NJDOE [School Performance Reports](#)). This is just a snapshot to show how PHS compares favorably to other schools with respect to AP participation, but is an outlier when it comes to state standardized test participation.



Michael LaSusa, Superintendent of Schools
25 Valley Road, Princeton, New Jersey 08540
michaellasusa@princetonk12.org

High School	NJSLA Participation Rate: Mathematics	AP Enrollment
Millburn	99.7%	67.3%
Glen Ridge	99.2%	79.5%
West Windsor-Plainsboro--North	98.7%	70.5%
North Valley--Demarest	98.9%	77.6%
Livingston	99.6%	75.7%
West Windsor-Plainsboro--South	99.2%	84.2%
J.P. Stevens	99.6%	60.3%
Tenafly	99.3%	66.9%
Montgomery	98.3%	69.1%
Summit	98.9%	62.2%
Princeton	75.0%	77.4%

I generally abhor school rankings for some of the same reasons I have reservations about standardized tests. And I understand that some students and parents may have legitimate reasons for not wanting to sit and take a test with seemingly little value to them. If you feel strongly that your child should not take a standardized test, please keep them home during the morning of testing to lessen the logistical burden at school. If you do not feel strongly about that, I ask that you please consider delivering the message to your child that, even though the tests are not something to worship or stress over, it is appropriate to come to school and put their best foot forward. It will be painless!

I appreciate you taking the time to read this message and for all of the support you show our schools. Like any dutiful superintendent, I am still holding out hope that the impending storm will miraculously swing southward and you will not hear from me for a while. If that is not the case, I hope you have a warm and peaceful long weekend, and I will update you on the status of school by Sunday evening.

Sincerely,
Mike LaSusa