

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 26, 2026. One teacher from each school was selected from nominations collected from students, parents and staff.

New Providence High School recognized Daniel Barletta, who was introduced by New Providence High School Principal, Brian Henry: "In the classroom, Mr. Barletta inspires students through his teaching of Tech and Construction, Advanced Tech and Construction, and Tech and Design Process. He is deeply involved in student life, serving as advisor to multiple clubs that provide meaningful opportunities for engagement and growth for our students."

"He guides students in designing and building a trebuchet for the Annual Pumpkin Sling at Picatinny Arsenal, and supports students' participation in the UCNJ Bridge Building Competition, where they design and construct model bridges. Mr. Barletta assists students in preparing and submitting work for Youth Art Month displays in local New Providence businesses, contributes to the Annual Arts Festival, and helps produce work for the Board of Education recognition displays in our art galleries and exhibits. Additionally, he supports student participation in NJTSA competition events, STEM League competitions and TEAMS, continually encouraging students to challenge themselves and excel."

"His dedication to students is also evident on the athletic field. As a coach for Football, Winter Track and Field, Spring Track and Field, and previously assisting with Basketball, he instills teamwork, discipline, and perseverance in our student-athletes."

Brian Cooper was recognized by New Providence Middle School. Mr. Cooper has been a dedicated member of the middle school faculty since 2013. New Providence Middle School Principal, Michael Criscitello, recognized Mr. Cooper's contributions: "Over the past 13 years, he has become one of our most experienced teachers and a steady, positive presence in our building. In his seventh-grade science classroom, students know what to expect: they will be supported, they will be challenged, and they will be part of a classroom where they feel comfortable being themselves."

"Mr. Cooper connects his lessons to real-world examples and designs activities

that keep students engaged. He finds ways to make the content accessible and meaningful. Students are not just sitting and listening; they are discussing, collaborating, and thinking.”

“Colleagues consistently describe Mr. Cooper as someone who is digital, collaborative, and generous with his time. One colleague shared that when they first arrived, Mr. Cooper immediately offered lesson plans, resources, and support, without being asked. Others noted his willingness to co-teach, share ideas, and help problem-solve for students with a wide range of needs. He is someone people turn to, and someone always willing to step in.”

“Mr. Cooper also contributes to the school community as Head Coach of the boys’ swim team and assistant track and field coach, where he brings the same consistency, encouragement, and focus on growth that his students experience each day in his classroom.”

Allen W. Roberts Elementary School honored Michele Picarelli, who has been a devoted teacher at AWR since 2002. During her time at AWR, Mrs. Picarelli has taught first grade, second grade, third grade, and STEM club. For many years, she worked in the first-grade co-teaching room along with colleague Mrs. Cortese.

AWR Principal, Jay Richter, stated “Mrs. Picarelli is an expert teacher and has tremendous knowledge of the developmental needs of students, especially those in the first grade. She understands the curriculum, district instructional programs, and effective teaching methodology. She has become adept with the iReady and Sonday programs, but it is her relationships with her students and the classroom environment that make her so effective and loved by so many. Parents and colleagues share that her classroom is one where every student feels seen, valued, and capable. She is very encouraging, extremely patient, and runs a classroom that is full of kindness and respect.”

“Mrs. Picarelli is well-known throughout the current and past AWR school community. Given her years of experience, she has strong relationships with many parents and former students. Students that she had five, ten, fifteen years ago still come by for visits! Her students are like her own family - they’re truly in her heart and soul.”

Jennifer Minich, who has been teaching in New Providence School District for 35 years, was honored by Salt Brook Elementary School. Salt Brook Principal Natasha Allen added “Ms. Minich has dedicated herself to this district for 35 years, shaping the lives of countless students and leaving a lasting impact on our school community. Her commitment to teaching extends far beyond delivering lessons...she creates a classroom environment where students feel supported, valued, and inspired to learn every day.”

“Ms. Minich has been an integral part of that [first grade] team for many years, and she exemplifies everything that makes that group so exceptional. What truly sets Ms.

Minich apart is her willingness to step in and lend a hand whenever it's needed. No matter the situation, she is someone you can count on, whether it's supporting a colleague, mentoring others, or doing whatever it takes to ensure students are successful."

"Her impact reaches far beyond her own classroom. Ms. Minich is a role model, a collaborator, and a steady, positive presence in our school. She leads not only through her words, but through her actions, demonstrating every day what it means to be a dedicated educator."

Mrs. Minich's current first grade students also attended the Board of Education meeting, where they were very excited to perform an original poem to honor their teacher.

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.](#)