education news

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LITTLE FALLS TOWNSHIP PUBLIC SCHOOLS

October 2022

$5.6 million cut from school improvement project

Plan addresses health, security, and instructional space issues; vote set for Dec. 13

RESIDENTS will vote December 13 on a school improvement project $5.6 million less than the one proposed in 2021. A committee of 50 community members and staff members recommended the trimmed down plan after touring all three buildings and considering the educational goals of the district.

Among the highlights:

Abatement and replacement of asbestos floor tiles, and **new floors** district wide

More **instructional space** at School No. 2 for the opportunity to provide state-funded **pre-K** and to alleviate a **space crunch**

A **library** for School No. 2 (the building does not have one)

Better classroom security district wide by replacing old wooden doors with sturdier, intruder resistant doors

More space for music/performing arts

Expansion of the School No. 1 **cafeteria** so students do not have to eat in 20-minute shifts as they currently do

Heating and ventilation improvements

More sports opportunities for middle schoolers by expanding the School No. 1 all-purpose room into a regulation size gymnasium

Several members of the community committee discuss options

"This is a basic plan that addresses health and security concerns, replaces old worn-out building components, and adds instructional space," said Superintendent Tracey Marinelli. "The oldest building, School No. 2, is 100 years old and doesn't have a library. That's a fundamental resource.

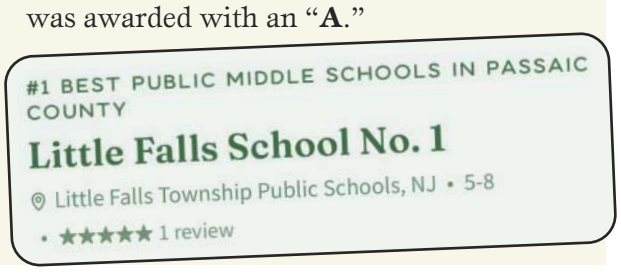
"So many members of our community facilities committee when they toured the buildings were surprised to see that while everything was well maintained, not much had changed since they were students."

If approved, the average home would see an increase of $26 per month. Watch the mail in November for more detailed info.

Best elem school and best middle school in Passaic County again!

School No. 1 was named the top middle school in Passaic County and School No. 3 was named the best elementary school in the county. (School No. 2 is not rated.) The school district earned the high marks from **Niche.com**, a website that compiles data to determine the nation's best places to live, work, and learn.

Overall, the Little Falls School District was awarded with an "**A**."



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Dana Sprague, School No. 1 principal, speaks with student council members Victoria Kiefer, Adam Stuber, Brandon Kribs, and Shea Hill

Rewards program planned

A LONG-ENVISIONED schoolwide program to reward positive conduct, good character, and academic achievement took a major step this fall to becoming reality. The School No. 1 Parent Teacher Association purchased a vending cart that will be used to sell school supplies and Little Falls-branded merchandise using special school currency that will be awarded by staff members.

The program was conceived by Principal Dana Sprague several years ago. "We have such great kids and I think it's important to recognize their random acts of kindness, positive attributes, and successes whenever we can," she said. "We work hard to cultivate admirable character traits such as respect and responsibility, so we should reward students who show them."

The student council is working with Sprague to select the items that will be available in the program. First, though, will be a student design contest to create the school currency.

The council sold Little Falls-emblazoned hoodies and tee-shirts last year for purchase using old-fashioned U.S. currency, providing students with money management and retail skills. Now with the formal sales space, located between the gym and cafeteria, the rewards program is ready to kick into gear. The hope is that the cart will be stocked and the program fully underway this winter.

New recognition program

SCHOOL No. 2 recently began a monthly recognition program for second-graders. The winners will be selected based on commendable character attributes such as kindness and cooperation. Any staff member can nominate a second-grader for consideration.

Second-grader and student of the month Deanna DeCaito holds up her award certificate which was presented by School No. 2 Principal Jill Castaldo

Deanna DeCaito was the September student of the month. She was awarded a certificate and acknowledged during morning announcements. She will also receive a student of the month tee-shirt and be recognized for her accolade at a board of education meeting.

Deanna was nominated by school custodian Rob Scelzo, who also works in the school's aftercare program. In his nomination letter, Scelzo commended Deanna for her "great manners," the way she "assists friends who are struggling," and how she "never lets anyone feel alone" during lunch."

PROFILE

New business admin joins district

Melissa Sanzari-Stevens recently joined the district as its new business administrator.

Sanzari-Stevens brings a breadth of knowledge and experience to her role. She spent 12 years in the classroom as an elementary school teacher, reading specialist, and instructional coach. Most recently, she served as the instruction and data coordinator for the Hackensack Public Schools. Prior to her entry into education, she worked in the financial sector for companies including the prestigious firm, PricewaterhouseCoopers.

"Melissa is top-notch, both friendly and extremely knowledgable," said Tracey Marinelli, superintendent. "She's the perfect addition to our team. She's not only an expert in finance, she brings more than a decade of experience as an educator and administrator."

A Park Ridge resident, Sanzari-Stevens holds a bachelor's degree in accounting, a master's in teaching, and a master's in educational leadership.

Juliette Orzel and Malak Mustafa work with School No. 1's new versatile printer

New printer brings new opportunities

If the posters and signage for School No. 1 activities, programs, and classroom projects look sleeker and more artistic, you're not seeing things. The Little Falls Education Foundation purchased an eColor+ printer for the school. The high-tech device can output full-color posters up to 36" wide on paper, canvas, and vinyl.

With a built-in library of templates and educational graphics, as well as a scanning station, the printer and accompanying resources give students the opportunity to produce professional quality work.

Experienced educator takes the helm as School No. 3 principal

A veteran educator has taken the reins at School No. 3 and also serves as district curriculum coordinator.

Elba Castrovinci officially joined Little Falls on September 1; however, she was on the go from the moment she learned of her selection to replace the departing principal and curriculum coordinator. In early August on the night of her appointment by the board of education, she held a popsicle meet and greet for parents and students. A visit to a township movie night and a guest gig as a reader at the public library followed – all before her official Little Falls start date.

> ***Making connections and involving others as much as you can are keystones to student success.“***
>
> **Elba Castrovinci**
> *Principal & district curriculum coordinator*

The activities exemplify what has become a hallmark of Castrovinci's leadership style: fostering positive school climate and a spirit of collaboration.

“Everything that we do should be done in partnership,” Castrovinci said. “This is a human business, and forging real connections and engendering mutual respect, care, and collaboration are so important. We're all in this together. I really saw the importance early on.

“I am still connected with colleagues in my previous districts. And I still have former students and their parents from my first couple classes [as an elementary teacher] who reach out to me for my birthday or during the holidays, or to ask advice. Making connections and involving others as much as you can are keystones to student success.”

That philosophy was cemented even more when Castrovinci became a parent herself. (She has three children, ages 9, 6, and 2.) She understands first-hand the hopes and concerns of being a parent – a lens through which sees all educator-parent interaction.

Castrovinci brings to Little Falls nearly two decades of experience which includes time as both as an elementary principal and a district-level administrator. She began her career in Fair Lawn as a third grade teacher before becoming a middle school literary specialist.

“I knew I wanted to be a teacher from when I was in elementary school,” she said. “I really believe that a good education opens doors. That's something my father would always tell me when I was young.”

When she made the tough decision to leave the classroom and become an administrator, Castrovinci moved on to the Lyndhurst School District (which her own children now attend). In Lyndhurst, she served as an elementary school principal and elementary supervisor of English language arts and social studies. Most recently, she served as Woodland Park School District's director of early childhood education.

Castrovinci holds a bachelor's degree in education and a master's in educational leadership from Montclair State University, and a master's in reading from Fairleigh Dickinson University.

During back-to-school night in September, Castrovinci asked parents and staff members to write onto a bulletin board messages of hope and encouragement. In the main hallway, the board serves as an ever-present reminder of what we all should take to heart: to stay focused and work hard, to aspire to grow into the best you can be, to build meaningful friendships, and to remember to stay positive.

The creation of the board was an important activity with a clear goal, Castrovinci explains. “It's tough being a kid sometimes. Staying optimistic, and knowing your teachers and parents believe in you and are here to support you are poignant messages. The board is a wellspring of inspiration and a list of what's truly important in life. For a student who is struggling, it's a reminder that every day won't be perfect, that's why we have tomorrows.”

A parent writes a message to students – just one of the community-building activities organized by Principal Elba Castrovinci

Music teacher Owen Davitt jams on the sax

Instrumental inspiration

The music from the Harry Potter movie franchise and the hit film, “Frozen,” recently filled the all-purpose room at School No. 3. Played on clarinet, saxophone, and flute, the familiar tunes served as an introduction to the instruments – and possibly an inspiration to students considering joining the school band or enrolling in a music course.

Music teacher Owen Davitt and Lauren Sleath, a representative from the rental house National Educational Music Company, played the brass and woodwinds, showing off their skills to the delight of the students.

Nearly 50% of the school's fourth-graders participate in band.

Thanks to members of the Community Facilities Committee

for their work on behalf of our students

Janine Barone
Lauren Belasco
Thomas Breitwieser
Shpresa Bruncaj
Dr. Rachel Capizzi
Jill Castaldo
Elba Castrovinci
Christina Caswell
Dorothy Cataldo
Casey Cordes-Fronzuto
Alex Daste-McGinn
Dawn Daura
Fred DeMarco
Nieves DePaz Nunez
Marylou Diamond
Desiree DiBuono
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Amanda Garcia
Gennaro Gencarelli
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Sandra Petracca
Christina Puri
Michael Russo
Cynthia Saenz
Melissa Sanzari-Stevens
Renea Shapiro
Charlie Smith
Dana Sprague
Jimmy Stolz
Kelly Torres
Debbie Trapanese
Meaghan Tullo
Lauren Verdi
John Veteri
Stephanie Wheat
Shannon Zurbruegg

thank you

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moving FORWARD
Little Falls School Improvement Project

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