



Superintendent's Report

March 26, 2026

Closter Public Schools is proud to announce that Josephine Hunt, Pre-K teacher at Hillside Elementary School, has been named the 2025–2026 recipient of the prestigious Ringelheim Award by the New Jersey Council for Exceptional Children. This honor is awarded to an educator who embodies the legacy of Dan Ringelheim and his lifelong dedication to advancing education for children with disabilities across the United States. Ms. Hunt was formally recognized with a plaque at the New Jersey Council for Exceptional Children's Annual Spring Convention on Monday, March 16, 2026. On behalf of the Closter Public Schools Board of Education and our entire community, I extend our deepest congratulations to Ms. Hunt. Her compassion and commitment to students and parents are inspiring. I wish her continued success and thank her for her work with students and beyond the classroom. Well done, Ms. Hunt!

On Thursday, March 19, 2026, administrators and Anti-Bullying Specialists participated in the district's annual Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying (HIB) training. The session was led by district counsel Vic LaPira and served as a comprehensive refresher on the New Jersey Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights. Participants also examined recent court decisions involving HIB investigations, ensuring that our staff remains current with evolving legal standards and best practices. Our school district remains committed to maintaining a safe, supportive, and respectful environment for all students.

In an effort to keep faculty and staff informed, Floro Villanueva and I presented information about the proposed 2026-2027 budget to staff at both Hillside and Tenakill schools on March 20 and March 23, 2026, respectively. The presentations highlighted the district's financial outlook for next year and underscored the importance of working together to keep Closter Public Schools on strong financial footing — because, as was noted, it "doesn't happen by accident, and it doesn't stay that way without effort."

The public hearing on the 2026-2027 budget will take place at the Board of Education meeting on April 30, 2026. We invite all community members to attend.

District Goals Update

Goal #1: The Profile of a Learner Rubric committee convened again on Tuesday, March 24, 2026, for a productive collaborative work session focused on three key areas: confirming the accuracy of the draft rubric across grade bands, identifying items in need of revision, and engaging in an in-depth discussion on implementation. The implementation discussion has centered on how best to make the rubric meaningful as a tool for monitoring student growth across the six characteristics of the Profile of a Closter Learner — mindful communicators, critical thinkers, self-directed learners, empowered decision-makers, responsible citizens, and well-balanced individuals — as students progress from PreK through eighth grade. Equally important to the committee is ensuring that implementation remains manageable for teachers.

The committee also explored how to most effectively communicate with families about student progress on the six Profile characteristics. While no final decision has been made, the committee is currently leaning toward a phased-in implementation over a two- to three-year period. The committee will meet again next week and remains on track to complete its work prior to the May 2026 deadline.

Goal #2: Significant progress has been made toward District Goal #2, which calls for 100% of PreK–8 teachers to complete a minimum of five hours of professional development focused on data analysis, and to demonstrate proficient use of data-driven instructional decision-making through monthly data team meetings. At Hillside Elementary School, nine teachers participated in a full-day, six-hour professional development session with literacy consultant Patty McGee through the FOCUS Grant in October 2025, followed by a second full-day session on March 3, 2026. Additional training sessions were held for all teachers on LinkIt! (October 13), DIBELS (October 22), and Big Ideas assessments and data reports (January 19), the latter of which also included a review of AimsWeb, DIBELS, and LinkIt data. Monthly grade-level team meetings have been ongoing since October 2025, with teachers regularly reviewing student performance data and documenting findings in a Needs/Experiences spreadsheet. Teachers have received more than five hours of professional development and have met the goal. At Tenakill Middle School, the work began with a Faculty Exchange "Data Dive" in September 2025, followed by a Data Dive PD session for all TMS staff in October. A second Faculty Exchange, focused on accessing data and formative assessment review, was held in January, and on January 19, 2026, the full staff participated in a comprehensive, 6.25-hour Data-Driven Instruction professional development day. Monthly data team meetings by grade band have been in place since October 2025, and teachers across all departments continue to independently review data, sharing findings at regularly scheduled department meetings throughout the year. Both schools have met the goal! This goal has been met and we continue our work in using student performance data to implement targeted interventions for students.

Goal #3: Interim reports from Ms. Smith and Ms. Cipollini indicate that strong progress is being made toward District Goal #3. Teams at both Hillside Elementary and Tenakill Middle School have been working diligently to complete a comprehensive SWOT analysis of the district's character education and mental wellness programs, ICARE and CharacterStrong, respectively, by the May 2026 deadline. At HES, the ICARE/School Safety team has been meeting regularly since its formation in September 2025. At TMS, administrators, counselors, the SEL Committee, and the PAC Committee have all been engaged in the process. Surveys capturing feedback from parents, students, and staff were administered during the week of February 23, 2026, and PAC meetings in January and February offered further opportunities for community input. The SWOT analysis and action plan are currently in draft form, with final recommendations and resource planning to be completed and presented to the Board by May 2026.

I wish all of our families celebrating Easter and Passover next week a joyful and meaningful holiday season!

Schools will be closed on Friday, April 3, 2026, in observance of Good Friday and for spring recess from Monday, April 13, 2026, through Friday, April 17, 2026.

Vincent Mc Hale