



# Scotch Plains-Fanwood Public Schools

A Community of Learners Seeking Excellence Together

Nov.  
2024

## A Message From the Superintendent

Dear Scotch Plains–Fanwood  
Community,

As we head into the Thanksgiving break, I want to express my gratitude for you – the students, families, educators, staff, and community members of SPF. The tremendous pride, dedication to high-quality teaching and learning, and special connections that happen here in Scotch Plains–Fanwood Public Schools is because of *you*. From my heart, thank you!

You'll also see in this newsletter that a very special surprise happened at Nettingham this month: fifth-grade teacher Emily Litz was named the recipient of the 2024–25 Milken Educator Award! This prestigious award is often called the "Oscar of Teaching" and recognizes outstanding teaching and innovation across the nation. Congrats and thank you, Emily!

In keeping with the theme of 'thank you', I also want to thank our Board of Education for their extraordinary dedication to our schools. As volunteers, they each have chosen to step up to represent their communities and to make a difference in the lives of our students. We notice and appreciate all that you do!

Enjoy the break!

Sincerely,  
**Dr. Joan Mast**  
*Superintendent of Schools*



## SPF teacher recognized with the "Oscars of Teaching"



Nettingham Middle School teacher Emily Litz attended what she thought was a school assembly about artificial intelligence (AI) in education. Unbeknownst to her (and the rest of the attendees), an important guest would bring a surprising twist.

After Mr. Kevin Dehmer, acting commissioner of the NJ Department of Education (DOE), addressed the school about the potential for AI, he introduced Dr. Jane Foley, senior vice president of the Milken Educator Awards. That's when the big secret was revealed: fifth-grade teacher Mrs. Litz received the 2024-25 Milken Educator Award – the sole recipient in New Jersey and the first winner in Scotch Plains-Fanwood Public Schools history.



Electric cheers erupted from the stands as students chanted for their teacher. Other Nettingham teachers ran to embrace her in a huge group hug.

“When I heard my name, I was shocked and beyond excited. As teachers we don’t think about awards,” said Mrs. Litz. “In my classroom, I tell my students that we will learn to be good humans. I want everyone to feel like they are a part of a family when they come to school.”

Mrs. Litz knew she would be a teacher early in her life. She thanks her third-grade teacher for that inspiration. For many in Mrs. Litz classroom, she will be the teacher that they remember years from now.

The Milken Foundation honors 45 teachers nationwide every year – Dr. Foley likened it to winning an Oscar. Recipients are sought out by the foundation to recognize all they have achieved and to expand winners’

professional leadership.

Mrs. Litz and all other recipients receive a \$25,000 cash prize. In addition, the Milken Family Foundation provides mentorship and networking opportunities.

“We are so immensely proud of Mrs. Litz. She embodies what it means to be a teacher and creates a warm, welcoming environment where her students are free to explore,” said Superintendent Dr. Joan Mast. “We know she will continue to make Scotch Plains–Fanwood Public Schools proud.”

After the ceremony Mrs. Litz reminded her students that it does not take an award to make someone feel appreciated. She encouraged her students to use this as inspiration to thank their teachers for a job well done.

Local news is celebrating Mrs. Litz's win too! Check out the story on [Nj.com](#), [My Central Jersey](#) and [Tap Into](#).



## SPFHS recognized for the 2024 AP School Honor Roll



Scotch Plains–Fanwood High School has been recognized for the 2024



AP School Honor Roll Silver and AP Access Award for developing an AP program that creates a college-going culture and gives students opportunities to earn college credit and to maximize their college outcomes. SPFHS is also honored with the 2024 AP Access Award for ensuring AP coursework is equally available to students no matter their backgrounds.

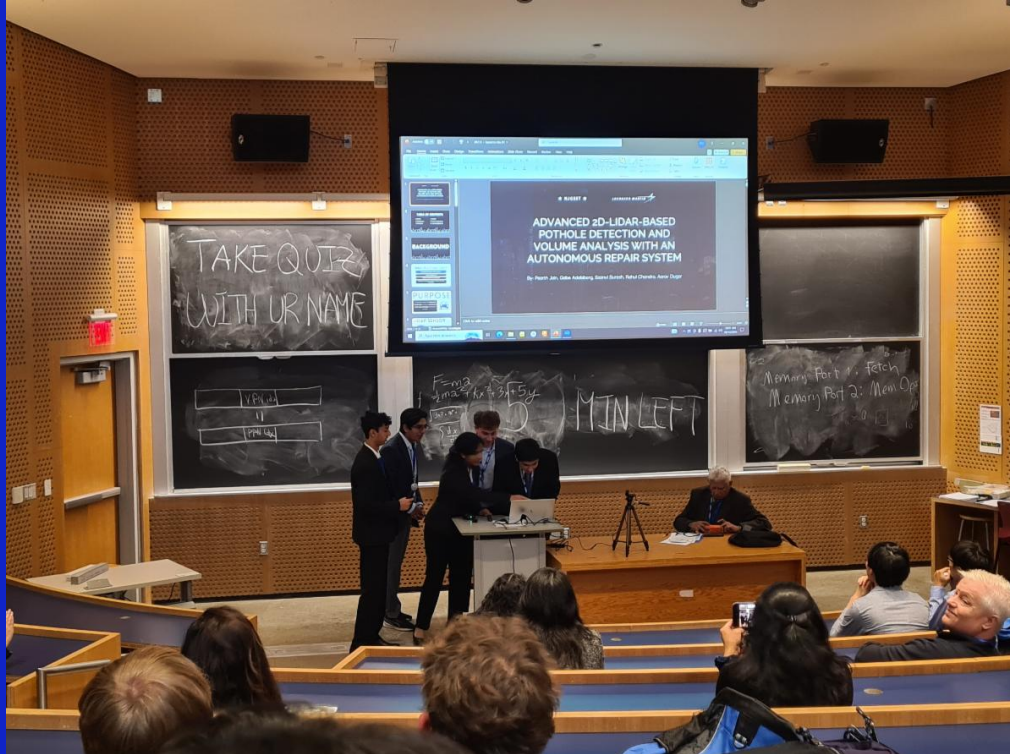
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## SPFHS student publishes article advocating for nuclear power

SPFHS junior and Oppenheimer Project intern Spencer Martin is making headlines with his article [“Reflecting on the Uplifting Humanity Nuclear Energy Symposium: Insights from September 25, 2024”](#) on the Oppenheimer Project website. His article discusses how he attended the Nuclear Symposium at the Cornell Tech Campus on Roosevelt Island in NYC. Nuclear New York hosted the symposium, bringing together leaders from different areas of experience in nuclear energy. Spencer is encouraging his generation to learn about nuclear energy and is advocating for nuclear power as a solution to climate sustainability and clean energy production.

[Read more in this TAPinto article.](#)

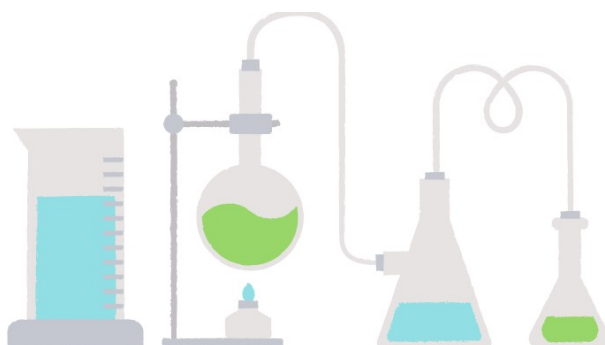




## The Lab Room

Spencer Martin is also leading a new "Shark Tank-style" science competition called "The Lab Room" for SPF students in grades 6 – 12. Participants will create their own science research experiment to be judged in front of a panel of scientists in a Shark-Tank-style format! The Lab Room empowers students to explore the wonders of science, realize their potential, and contribute meaningfully to society's scientific advancement through friendly and fun competition and collaboration!

Learn more at [www.thelabroom.org](http://www.thelabroom.org)



## SPFHS student's research featured at MIT Conference

SPFHS senior Saanvi Suresh recently presented research at

the MIT Undergraduate Research Technology Conference on a pothole detection and autonomous repair system. In addition, a [research paper](#) she contributed to was published by The Governor's School of Engineering & Technology at Rutgers University.

"Saanvi is already contributing to the fields she is interested in and thinking of unique ways to solve problems," said SPFHS Principal Dr. Warren Hynes. "We are incredibly proud of her for doing such meaningful work for the greater good."

Saanvi, who is also captain of the Raiders Robotics team, was selected to attend the Governor's School last summer as part of the state's program to support high-achieving high school students who are interested in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) subjects. As part of the four-week program, she and a team of other high school students from around the state researched ways to locate and fill potholes, created a small-scale prototype of the concept, and presented their findings. The group designed a system to be installed on a city street sweeper – with the front end detecting the potholes and the back end filling the potholes.

"The idea was that in cities of the future, a city sweeper could go over the pothole and detect and fill it using instant asphalt that hardens as more and more vehicles drive over it," Saanvi explained.

In August, she and the team submitted their research and were accepted under the Humanity track to [present](#) at the MIT Undergraduate Research Technology Conference, held in October in Boston. The experience was one that Saanvi said she'll never forget.

Saanvi is interested in majoring in computer engineering in college. She said the research opened her eyes to the possibilities for the future and allowed her to explore the real-world applications of the field.

"I want to be able to invent something and create something that helps a lot of people," she said. "Something like this pothole repair technology can help so many people, especially as they're commuting to and from work."

Saanvi said that the teachers and staff at SPFHS have been supportive of her goals. Raiders Robotic Coach Matthew Ducker Duffy, Biology Teacher Lauren DeNicola, and Supervisor of Science, Engineering, and



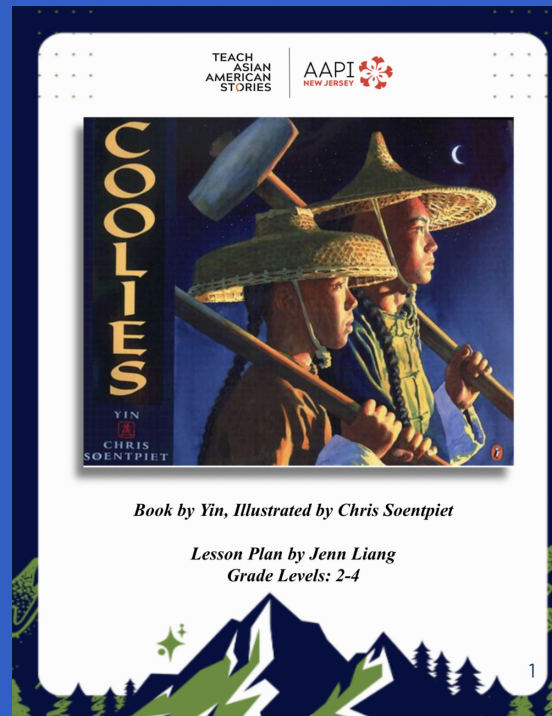


Gifted & Talented Guida Faria have all helped her explore the field of engineering and computer science. Faria nominated her for the Governor's School and was instrumental in the process. While at SPFHS, Saanvi has also taken part in computer programming courses and AP Computer Science classes offered by SPFHS.

## Coles Teacher's lesson plan on Asian American and Pacific Islander history featured

Coles Elementary School teacher Jennifer Liang participated in a workshop last summer with Teach Asian American Stories and AAPI New Jersey where she helped to develop a culturally responsive lesson plan on Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) history. The lesson plan was recently published on the Teach Asian American Stories website for use by other educators. It was also featured at the AAPI NJ Exhibit at the Teacher's Convention.

The lesson plan focuses on *Coolies* by Yin, which tells the story of two brothers who migrate from China to California to work on the Transcontinental Railroad. The lesson plan includes historical context, reading guide, a main activity and optional extension activities.



## Referendum News

### Vote Update: January 28, 2025

Mark your calendar! The Board of Education has finalized plans to hold another community vote on **January 28, 2025**. The revised plan reduced the price and would capture \$11.4 million in state aid. Here's what's on the ballot:

#### Question 1 – Acquire La Grande and meet current district needs

- Free up nine classrooms across the elementary schools and ease space constraints with the purchase of La Grande School and relocation of all pre-kindergarten classes to this building. The cost of minor renovations would be funded by the district's Capital

Reserve, which is an account earmarked for capital improvements that do not fit within the regular operating budget.

- Add air conditioning to all spaces that don't currently have air conditioning district-wide and provide other critical upgrades to HVAC, electrical, and fire alarm systems.

#### **Question 2 – Funding La Grande into the Future**

- Permanently fund the operating costs of La Grande, including supplies, utilities, and salaries and benefits to hire a new administrator, nurse, secretaries, custodial staff, security officer, and building and grounds personnel.

## Featured Events

**Dec. 4, 6:30 – 8 p.m.** –SPFHS World Language Honor Societies Induction Ceremony in HS Auditorium

**Dec. 6** – McGinn Day of Code

**Dec. 6, 3 – 4:30 p.m.** –Nettingham Grade 8 vs. Staff Basketball Game

**Dec. 6, 6 – 7:30 p.m.** –School One PTA Grown Up and Me Dance

**Dec. 10, 7 – 8:30 p.m.** –Nettingham Winter Grades 7 & 8 Band & Chorus Concert at Nettingham Auditorium

**Dec. 13, 3:30 – 5:30 p.m.** -Evergreen Holiday Craft Fair

**Dec. 17, 7 – 8:30 p.m.** -Nettingham Winter Grades 5 & 6 Band & Chorus Concert at Nettingham Auditorium

**Dec. 17, 7 – 8:30 p.m.** -Terrill Grades 7 & 8 Concert in Terrill Auditorium

**Dec. 18, 7 – 8:30 p.m.** -SPFHS Winter Choir Concert in HS Auditorium

**Dec. 19, 1:15 – 2 p.m.** -Evergreen Holiday Sing Along

**Dec. 19, 8 – 9:30 p.m.** -SPFBOE Regular Public Board Meeting in SPFHS Media Center

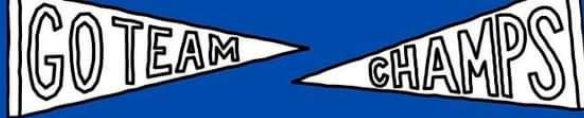
**Dec. 20** –Single Session for All Schools (Check the calendar for Sing-A-Long and other Spirit Days at the elementary schools)

**Dec. 23 – Jan. 1** –Schools Closed for Winter Break

**[View the full calendar for December.](#)**

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**SAVE THE DATE**

**SPF PTA**



**#1**

**SUPER  
SPORTS  
SATURDAY**



**January 11th, 2025  
SPF High School**

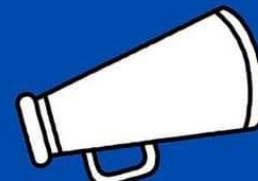


**#1**

**ALL PROCEEDS BENEFIT  
SPF SCHOLARSHIP  
FOUNDATION**



**#1**



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