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Great things are happening at New Haven Public Schools

October 1, 2019 through October 10, 2019

We believe that all kids can learn, achieve, and rise to a bright future. Our purpose is to provide an outstanding education that extends beyond graduation and prepares our students to be the next generation of leaders, innovators and problem-solver.

- **Teacher Wins National Honor**
- **Fun at Back to School Night**
- **I Teach, Therefore I Learn!**
- **New Haven Students Celebrate Science at ARTE INC Hispanic Heritage Month Celebration**
- **Hill Central Great News**
- **Parents, He Has Your Number**

Clinton Ave. Teacher Wins National Honor

by Christopher Peak | Oct 1, 2019 2:52 pm



Christopher Peak Photo

Lauren Sepulveda receives a congratulatory hug from her students.

Lauren Sepulveda felt like a “pretty average” high school student with no direction — until a social studies teacher encouraged her to sign up for an Advanced Placement class and compete in National History Day.

Sepulveda, now a social studies teacher herself at Fair Haven’s Clinton Avenue School, found out just how exceptional she is when she was surprised Tuesday with a \$25,000 check for being one of the country’s best teachers.

That check came from the [Milken Family Foundation](#), which honored Sepulveda as one of this year’s top educators during at a morning assembly in her school’s gym.

Since 1987, the Milken Educator Award has recognized promising educators who are still early in their careers.

Jane Foley, the senior vice president of the California-based foundation, said it’s a way of recognizing the stellar educators who don’t get enough credit for “teaching the people who get all the other awards.”

This year, Sepulveda received the very first award on Milken’s national tour that will tap nearly 40 teachers and principals in districts across the country.

Sepulveda spoke on Tuesday of how she has always tried to emulate her role model and high school social studies teacher, Ms. Taylor, in being “relentless about holding high expectations for our students,” like herself, who might not even realize what they’re capable of.

That drive caught the attention of Milken, and it resulted in the surprise recognition.



Sepulveda: See the potential in every child.



Clinton Avenue students celebrate their teachers.

Sepulveda, who teaches history and world cultures to seventh and eighth graders, is the only Connecticut recipient this year and the first New Haven recipient since 2007.

Foley said the foundation picked her because she “brings history to life” and teaches students their “responsibilities as global citizens.”

After graduating from Southern Connecticut State University in 2010, Sepulveda started her teaching career in New Haven.

She’s spent most of the decade at Clinton Avenue School, right by where her parents lived before they headed out to the suburbs. “I can see myself as one of the kids,” she said.

In her classes, Sepulveda often encourages students to take a critical look at what’s being taught and what’s being left out.

For one assignment, she asked students to figure out what was missing from the textbook’s section on the Revolutionary War. They wrote up a new chapter featuring forgotten voices and they sent it to the publisher.

Sepulveda also makes the lessons real. She’s brought in guest speakers, including veterans from World War II and survivors of the Rwandan Genocide. And she’s asked students to draft a bill that the entire class would approve like a legislative body.

Outside class, Sepulveda has organized community service, like hurricane relief fundraising and food drives, and she advises the student council. She has a spot on the school’s culture and climate committee and on the district’s equity and strategic planning committees. She mentors beginning teachers and she helps the state recruit new teachers.



Desi Nesmith, alongside Principal Kristina DeNegre and Superintendent Carol Birks.

“The successes we continue to see in districts around the state are in large part due to the dedication and passion that educators like Lauren Sepulveda bring to the classroom,” Miguel Cardona, the state’s education commissioner, said in a statement.

“As educators, we know that the way to get students engaged is by presenting them with content that helps them apply context and meaning to what they are learning,” he went on. “Lauren’s approach to social studies challenges students to go above and beyond textbook lessons with exciting activities that resonate and enrich their learning experience, leading them to form real-world connections with the subject matter at hand.”

At Tuesday’s ceremony, state officials applauded [Clinton Avenue’s recent turnaround](#). Over the last four years, [with a new principal and a turnaround grant](#), reading proficiency scores have [nearly doubled](#), marking the largest gains of any elementary school in the district.



Is 2,500 enough?

Then Foley said that she had a surprise for one educator in the gym.

She called up six students who, like on a daytime game show, held up green squares with digits that represented the cash prize. They started out at \$250, then multiplied it exponentially by adding additional zeros.

When Desi Nesmith, the state’s chief turnaround officer, brought out the last square, for a total of \$25,000, students screamed and stomped their feet against the hardwood basketball court in a drumroll of excitement.



Jane Foley: The award goes to...



...Lauren Sepulveda.

Foley pulled out an envelope and read out Sepulveda's gold-embossed name.

For a moment, she stood in the bleachers in shock. Her class cheered her on, as she hugged other teachers. The television cameras all trained on her. She thanked everyone in the school and the city. She said it all felt "unbelievable" and "unreal."

Sepulveda said she plans to use the money to continue her education at Quinnipiac University. She's obtaining a master's in educational leadership, a six-year degree, that will allow her to become certified for a principal position.

In an email, Taylor, her former social-studies teacher, said she knew Sepulveda would pass on the inspiration to the next generation of students, who'd been just like her.

"The most rewarding experience for any teacher is to know that they have had a role in inspiring their students to find their passion and become successful," she wrote. "This is why we teach, and knowing how hard Lauren works, I know that she is passing that passion down to her students and making a difference in their lives."

In a speech during the convocation ceremony last school year, after she was named the district's [Teacher of the Year](#), Sepulveda reminded teachers how their work — that often means ending the day with "our heart on the classroom floor" — can have an effect that lasts a lifetime, just like she said Taylor had done for her.

"Being an educator is such a powerful profession, but we must wield our powers delicately," Sepulveda said. "Even having one teacher who doesn't make the vital and necessary relationships can turn a student off from learning all together. However, we also have the ability to take a child, who may arrive to us unsure of their talents and skeptical of school, and turn them into passionate learners for the rest of their lives.

"We can no longer hold the dated 'it was good enough for me' philosophy. This means shifting the mindset from what our students cannot do, the limits they face and what may seem out-of-reach to them, to instead focus on what our students are capable of, how we can support their talents and what opportunities we as educators can create," she went on.

"Remember we have one of the most important jobs there is," she concluded, "and I believe in my heart that no one knows how to do it better than us."

Food Truck Fun At Back To School Night

by MALLORIE MADDEN | Oct 7, 2019 7:40 am

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Posted to: [Citizen Contributions](#), [Schools](#), [Westville](#)

The following was contributed by King Robinson Inter-district Magnet School kindergarten teacher Mallorie Madden.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

The staff at King/Robinson Inter-district Magnet: An IB STEM School added a twist to their back to school night this year.

The new Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS) committee, headed by third grade teacher Rachel Battino, organized food trucks to come out to the school for the night.

The goal was to increase parent engagement and attendance at Back to School Night and the team knew that food trucks would be very popular.

The food trucks donated a portion of their earnings for the night as a fundraiser for the PBIS committee.



In addition to the typical classroom visits and food trucks the staff offered different educational stations for families to visit and pick up free resources.

Parents and students were able to visit the literacy station, where students were given free books to take home.

The Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) station offered a STEM challenge for families to work together to complete.

The math station had flash cards for students to take home.

Families also had the opportunity to enter into a raffle to win a school supply cake.

The staff was excited to offer the families a complete well-rounded overview of their child's education.

Tags: [King Robinson School](#)



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Thank You for ALL That You Do!

Ms. Matei (HS Science)
Tolland Science Camp

Ms. Zenait (HS Arabic)
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Mr. Romanelli (HS Math)
Google Classroom Training

Mr. Aranci (HS Science)
AP Biology

Mr. Sonleiter (HS Social Studies)
PPT Training; ESL Training;
RULER Training

Mr. Bourhrous (HS Engineering)
PLTW Computer Science Training

Ms. Hutter (School Resource)
"Keys 2 Success"; "Happiness Class" @Yale

Ms. Toothaker (MS Science)
STEM Teaching Tools UnConference
(Equity in Science Education)

Ms. Ferrandiz (HS Math)
Taft Institute; AP Calculus AB

Mr. Carrasco (HS Science)
AP Chemistry

Mr. Alexis (HS French)
AP French

Ms. Levesque (HS Social Studies)
AP Psychology; AP US History

Ms. Streets (MS ELA)
Yale Teacher's Inst. Fellow; Lincoln Center Education
Summer Forum; Dalio Fellow; CT Writing Project
Fellow; Fund for Teachers Fellow(Japan)

Mr. Meyer (HS ELA)
Yale Fellowship

Mr. Pinsker (MS Engineering)
UCONN Engineering Fellowship

Mr. Petrescu (MS Engineering)
Yale Fellowship; SCSU "Materials &
Manufacturing Summer Teachers Inst.

Engineering & Science University Magnet School

**ESUMS Educators-- DEDICATED, Life-Long, Teacher-Learners
Engaging in MEANINGFUL and EFFECTIVE
Professional Development All Year Long**

New Haven Students Celebrate Science at ARTE INC Hispanic Heritage Month Arts and Science Workshops







Hill Central Great News

Hill Central School celebrated Hispanic Heritage Month with keynote speaker, Caprice Taylor Mendez, MEd; *Strategic Program Manager for The Community Foundation for Greater New Haven*. She shared career goals, Latino culture, and food. Students enjoyed a culture lunch with Ms. Mendez, and Mr. Ramos continuing their Hispanic Heritage conversation.





After Surgeries, Cross Student Found A Calling

by Staff | Oct 11, 2019 12:53 pm



Sophie Edelstein’s hip and leg surgeries got her interested in biomedical research — and set her on a path.

Edelstein is one six high school students nationwide who shared \$120,000 in college scholarship money for coming up with “distinctive solutions to problems faced their schools, communities, families and the world.”

The annual competition is for the *Milton Fisher Scholarship for Innovation and Creativity*, run by the Community Foundation for Greater New Haven. Edelstein took on a challenge posed by the fact that “the human airway or trachea can be damaged by infection, cancer, excessive intubation of trauma - but no effective replacement exists for this crucial connective tissue,” according to a press release from the foundation.

She was recognized for biomedical research that “*led her to make important strides towards developing a more functional tracheal replacement graft.*” She plans to study biomedical

engineering at Yale, where she has now enrolled since applying for the scholarship and graduating from Cross.

The following comes from the release from the Foundation about the scholarships:

Milton Fisher Fund Awards \$120,000 in Scholarships Six Students Awarded for Creativity and Innovation; Honorable Mention to Five

The Community Foundation for Greater New Haven, the region's largest grantmaker and charitable endowment, announces the winners of the 2019 Milton Fisher Scholarship for Innovation and Creativity. A total of \$120,000 in college scholarships (payable over four years of college) was awarded this year to six high school students who came up with distinctive solutions to problems faced by their schools, communities, families and the world. In addition, a total of \$2,500 in scholarships was awarded to five high school students receiving honorable mentions.

While each application submitted for consideration highlighted a creative project, scholarships were awarded to the candidates who demonstrated the greatest innovation and whose projects have the most potential impact. The winners were recognized for projects involving the arts, science, technology and social action.

The Milton Fisher Scholarship for Innovation and Creativity was established in 2003 at The Community Foundation for Greater New Haven by the René B. Fisher Foundation. This scholarship is not a traditional scholarship focused on rewarding academic achievement and addressing financial need. Its specific goal is to reward and encourage innovative and creative problem-solving. High school juniors and seniors and college freshmen from Connecticut and the New York metropolitan area are eligible to apply. The application deadline for 2020 is May 1; a complete set of guidelines and a link to the online application can be found at <http://www.rbffoundation.org> and www.cfgnh.org/scholarships. For more information, please email mfscholarship@gmail.com or contact Denise Canning at The Community Foundation for Greater New Haven at [203-777-7076](tel:203-777-7076).

Milton Fisher was born and educated in New York City and was a Connecticut resident from 1960 until his death in 2001. He was an attorney and an investment banker who also taught a unique course for adults called "*Applied Creativity*" for over 25 years. His deep interest in the roots of creativity, and the many exercises he developed to help people become more innovative and creative in their lives, also led him to write the book "*Intuition: How to Use it in Your Life*," which has been translated into several languages. Fisher also served on the boards of several public companies and wrote two books about Wall Street.

2019 Winners

Leon Aharonian (Bronx High School of Science, Bronx, N.Y.) Back pain caused by bad posture can be alleviated only by changing one's habits—a difficult process that requires advanced biofeedback. Recognizing the limitations of existing devices, Leon designed a distinctive Posture Monitoring Shirt that uses artificial intelligence algorithms to provide reliable biofeedback on

posture in real time that could benefit individuals, therapists and researchers dealing with the challenge of back pain. He will attend Columbia University.

Jody Bell (Greenwich High School, Greenwich, Conn.) Appreciating the confusion and sense of helplessness felt by many American-born children of undocumented immigrants, Jody created an accessible and easy-to-use website to provide answers and help. “In Case of Deportation” ICODhelp.org helps children prepare for the possibility that family members may be deported and directs them to local sources of legal and other assistance. She will attend the College of Charleston.

Sophie Edelstein (Wilbur Cross High School, New Haven, Conn.) Sophie knew that the human airway or trachea can be damaged by infection, cancer, excessive intubation or trauma—but no effective replacement exists for this crucial connective tissue. Sophie’s personal experiences with multiple surgeries for hip and leg problems sparked her passionate interest in biomedical research and led her to make important strides towards developing a more functional tracheal replacement graft. She will be studying biomedical engineering at Yale.

Zhiyuan Li (Freedom High School, Chantilly, Va.) Zhiyuan worried about the fact that existing treatments of chronic wounds and ulcers in an increasingly diabetic and aging population around the globe led to an over-use of antibiotics; but she also knew that the expense of medical-grade honeys that were alternatives to antibiotics disadvantaged low-income communities. She developed a honey from blueberries that had strong anti-microbial power, and patented a low-cost method that can be used to make any honey medical-grade—a new and effective treatment for wounds and inflammation. She plans to study Applied Mathematics at Columbia.

Samuel Loseff (School Without Walls High School, Washington D.C.) Samuel brought us one step closer to transmitting clean, renewable space-based solar power to earth by using 3D printing to fabricate a microwave antenna that he designed and coated with silver epoxy. He will study materials science and engineering at Columbia.

Sophia Wang (Amity Regional High School, Woodbridge, Conn.) By combining approaches from multiple fields—civil engineering, computer science, artificial intelligence, applied technology, chemistry and mathematics—Sophia developed a novel system of underground sensors for detecting sinkholes prior to collapse. The low-cost, accurate, user-friendly detecting device could help stem the threat that sinkholes pose to both public health and property. Sophia is a junior in high school.

2019 Honorable Mentions

Madeline Bale (Clayton High School, St. Louis, Mo.) created, directed, filmed and edited a prize-winning documentary entitled “Menstruation Discrimination,” which has been shown nationwide on CSPAN, to explain why the discriminatory “tampon sales tax” must be abolished nationwide. As a result of the impact of her film, she is now working with Missouri politicians to abolish this tax in her state, which especially affects poor women, while men’s products like Viagra, Rogaine and shaving cream are not taxed. She plans to major in Economics and Women’s Gender and Sexuality Studies at Yale.

Joseph Benedetti (Amity Regional High School, Woodbridge, Conn.) researched how the amount of DNA affects a plant's traits. His research has implications for which species of plants may become most endangered by climate change. Joseph plans to study Civil Engineering at UC-Berkeley.

Gavin A. Krois (Jonathan Law High School, Milford, Conn.) developed a new design for a vertical axis wind turbine that would allow it to operate without causing the fatigue and stress on the system that leads to frequent breakage in current designs. His design could promote the greater use of an important form of sustainable energy. Gavin will attend Stony Brook University.

Annika Morgan (Joel Barlow High School, Redding, Conn.) replaced hydrogen atoms in Ebola vaccines with deuterium, a non-radioactive, naturally-occurring isotope, resulting in an increase in the vaccine's thermostability and shelf life, and making it easier to transport it in hot climates. Annika will study biomedical engineering at Dartmouth.

Cook Shaw (Brooklyn Technical High School, Brooklyn, N.Y.) drew inspiration from videos on modular architecture to design and construct an ingenious modular backpack with removable inserts that could be reconfigured at will, solving the problem of organizing and accessing what he needed as he shuttled between school and the homes of his mom and dad. Cook will study architecture at Cornell.

The Milton Fisher Scholarship is administered by The Community Foundation for Greater New Haven in partnership with the Arts Council of Greater New Haven.

Parents, He Has Your Number

by JILL RYAN | Oct 11, 2019 1:15 pm

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JILL RYAN PHOTO

If you have kids in a New Haven Public School, you probably get a lot of phone calls from Daniel Diaz.

The kids, at least, are often happy when he calls.

Diaz's is the voice that lets families know about snow days and other school cancellations, along with other breaking public education news.

"Good Evening New Haven Public School parents," Diaz said into the phone one recent weekday, from his office on Meadow Street. He was voicing a message about a workshop that was canceled because of an upcoming holiday.

Diaz came to New Haven from Puerto Rico with his parents when he was 13. With degrees in economics and marketing, he initially worked for utility companies but always wanted to work for the school district. When he turned 40, he made the move, and he is now the [district's liaison to parents](#). (He also co-founded the community organization ARTE INC., for which [he received an award last month from Junta for Progressive Action](#).)

Diaz has been sending out the school system’s recorded messages for 14 years. He records them with little fanfare at a land line phone at his desk, in a shared open room with his co-workers.

There’s no fancy equipment or sound proofing. He doesn’t practice or think much about his delivery, and he hasn’t had voice training.

But when you listen to the messages, he commands your attention. He has a deep voice, with a Puerto Rican accent. He speaks slowly and deliberately, with dramatic pauses.

“This is just coming out of the heart,” he said.

“Sometimes [people] say ‘Oh we make so much fun of your accent,’” he said. “I’m like, it’s OK.

If the kids are laughing, we got the job done.”

His distinct voice also gets him recognized outside of work.

“I cannot commit a crime and talk because everybody recognizes my voice,” he said.

“I’ve been in places, like in Stop and Shop, and the minute I speak, people will go, “You’re the message guy!””



After Diaz records the call, the audio is uploaded to his computer where he can send it to a database of tens of thousands of parents. His records show that a recent call reached 89 percent of them.

“Any marketer would be like ‘Oh my God!’ Because most marketers are hoping for 10 percent. We have a captive audience of 89 percent. You cannot go wrong,” he said.

But reaching 89 percent doesn’t mean everyone is listening to the automated messages. Many are delivered right at 6 p.m., when parents may be putting dinner on the table.

“I know some parents sometimes get upset because they get a lot of calls all the time,” he said. “I always tell parents, ‘If you don’t like it just don’t listen to it, because the next [call] might be the one that is really the one that you need.’”

The calls that parents would not want to miss pertain to emergencies, including school lockdowns.

“The hardest call to make is when you have a lockdown because of police activity in the area,” he said. “Because you put yourself in the parents’ shoes. So now they’re receiving a call, but there’s nothing the parents can do... you’re only hearing and trusting my voice that [the children] are OK.”

He hasn’t had to report a situation where there was an emergency and kids were not OK, he said. “Thank God, knock on wood.”

Diaz’ calls are also crucial when there’s a snow day, of course.

“When there is going to be snow the next day, I start getting calls from kids that I know: ‘Are we going to have school tomorrow?’”

He doesn’t tell them.

“Even though I might know, I’m not going to tell them. They gotta wait for my message.”

And those waiting for the snow day and other messages from Daniel Diaz this year will not include any kids of his own. Diaz said he and his spouse decided not to have biological children. He already has enough kids. “I have 22,000 kids,” he said “And I love them all.”

Tags: [Danny Diaz](#), [New Haven Public Schools](#)