

April 2026

EDUCATION NEWS

from the Cedar Grove School District • Cedar Grove, NJ

BOE eyes September 15 vote

Referendum would address infrastructure needs, re-open LRP to solve space crunch

THE Cedar Grove Board of Education has set its sights on a fall referendum to address **critical school infrastructure needs** and a **lack of instructional space**.

The district is awaiting a decision on the amount of state aid it would receive for a component of the plan now under consideration. Once that determination is made, the BOE is expected to act quickly to finalize the proposal. The **targeted referendum date is Tuesday, September 15** – the first state-set election date of the 2026–27 school year.

Funding the work through a referendum allows the district to maximize state aid. Approximately **40% of the total cost** would be paid by the state. If the same work was completed through the annual budget, the district would receive **little to no state aid** – and the work would take many years longer to complete.

Reopening LRP solves space crunch

The cornerstone of the plan is the **reopening of Leonard R. Parks School**, which closed in 1990. Reopening LRP for grades 3–5 would free up instructional space at North End and South End schools, as well as Memorial Middle School. Significant work is required to modernize LRP and replace outdated systems. Major components would be renovated or replaced, including **doors, windows, fire alarm and PA systems, heating and ventilation units, air conditioning, and bathrooms**.

In the 36 years since LRP closed, Cedar Grove has grown considerably. Pompton Avenue has become significantly busier. The possible reopening of LRP raised safety concerns for students crossing the road and the risk of increased traffic, particularly during arrival and dismissal.

A traffic study prepared for the district recommended constructing an access drive to provide an additional entry point to the LRP property. The drive would create a continuous



Space shortage

Spikes on enrollment graphs and class size charts provide information. But perhaps no other visual better shows our elementary space shortage than a look at the libraries of the End schools.

The libraries are now catch-all instructional areas, partitioned off for personalized teaching and services such as speech, language instruction, and gifted and talented programs.

Left, the South End library

loop on the grounds, helping avoid congestion on Pompton Avenue for the entire community, while providing safe student entry and smooth vehicle flow for families and staff.

Probable menu-style vote

While no final decisions have been made, the board is leaning toward a menu-style ballot, which would allow voters greater choice. At this time, two propositions are being considered:

Proposition 1: Safety and Infrastructure (Needs of current schools)

This proposition would address essential building needs at the district's four existing schools. Major improvements include partial roof replacement and restoration at all schools, replacement of HVAC systems at Cedar Grove High School and Memorial Middle School, air conditioners at the End schools, and modernization of aging science labs at the high school.

Proposition 2: Room to Learn (LRP reopening)

This proposition would fund the work needed to reopen LRP for grades 3–5, relieving crowding at North End, South End, and MMS. The cost of the recommended access drive would also be included. (If Proposition 2 is approved,

Proposition 1 must also be approved for this work to be completed.) The target date for reopening LRP is September 2028.

The district has made communication and community involvement important parts of this process. Once financial details are finalized and the plan is complete, a comprehensive communications effort will begin to ensure residents have the information they need to make informed voting decisions.



At North End, classrooms for specials such as art, music, and world language have been converted to general instruction. Teachers in those subjects travel from room to room with carts of materials.



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A healthy hat trick at SE

FORMER New Jersey Devils player Colin White recently visited South End School with the team mascot to teach an important lesson about health and fitness.

The presentation promoted three (a hockey hat trick) key messages: being educated, being healthy, and being active. During the assembly, students learned healthy habits and the importance of physical activity through demonstrations and hands-on participation. The program encouraged students to build healthy routines through exercise, learning, and teamwork.

Students also took part in ball hockey activities, practicing how to handle a stick and score goals. At the conclusion of the assembly, hockey sticks and nets were



The New Jersey Devil and former Devils player Colin White

donated to the school for use during physical education classes.

The visit was part of NJ's Healthy Hat Trick, a program from the Devils and Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield.

Fourth-grade teachers Lauren Reid and Brooke Reynolds coordinated the visit.

NE reads for 42K minutes

NORTH End Elementary School students logged more than 42,000 minutes of reading in just two weeks as part of a school-wide read-a-thon fundraiser. The total far exceeded the goal of 20,000 minutes and eclipsed last year's total of 23,000.

Students completed the reading outside of class time. The effort not only encouraged reading for enjoyment but also raised money for the school's Family & School Association, which supports school enrichment activities, assemblies, and service projects.

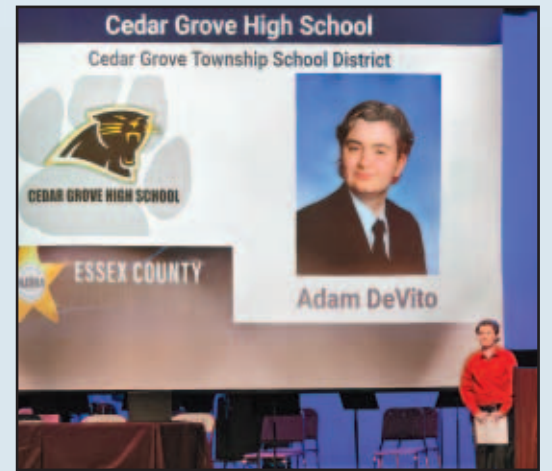
Friendly classroom competition and prize incentives helped boost participation. Classes reaching an 80% participation rate will receive an ice cream party provided by the FSA.



The read-a-thon was held as part of North End's March literacy activities connected to Read Across America. RAA is the nationwide reading celebration sponsored by the National Education Association.

Above, Sara Liberman and second-grader Jana Rajchinoksi celebrate the start of the read-a-thon with a book from the "What Should Danny Do?" series

HONORS & AWARDS



Senior honored with Unsung Hero Award

CEDAR Grove High School senior Adam DeVito has been recognized with an Essex County Unsung Hero Award.

Presented by the Essex County School Boards Association in partnership with the New Jersey School Boards Association, the Unsung Hero Award recognizes high school seniors who quietly make a meaningful difference in their schools and communities.

Adam and the other recipients from across the county were honored in a ceremony at West Essex High School in North Caldwell.



Young chef's recipe wins award

MYA DerSookias, a sixth-grader at Memorial Middle School, was selected as a grand prize winner in Pomptonian Food Service's Healthy School Lunch Challenge.

In honor of National School Breakfast Week, the 7th annual challenge asked students to create a healthy breakfast item that included a whole grain, a lean protein, and a fruit or vegetable. Since Pomptonian is serving local corn and blackberries this spring, the dish also had to incorporate at least one of those ingredients.

Mya's dish: a BBQ chicken burrito.

Robotics team heads to St. Louis

THE Cedar Grove High School robotics team is headed to the 2026 VEX Robotics World Championship in St. Louis later this month. They'll compete against more than 2000 teams from around the world.

The CGHS team earned a shot at the title when one of its three squads partnered with an Ohio team and won a regional competition in Cleveland.

“The students were ecstatic. They worked so hard and so well together. I can’t say enough about their professionalism and teamwork.”
David Coster
Adviser

skills championship at a robotics tournament in Iowa, competing in a field of 152 teams representing 39 U.S. states and 11 countries.

The annual VEX competitions challenge middle and high schools students to design, build, code, and operate robots that can compete in fast-paced, athletic-style tournaments. The objective of this year’s game was to place blocks into four goal areas within a 15-second autonomous period and 1:45 driver-controlled period.

Cedar Grove’s tournament-winning group consists of seniors Vraj Paghdal (lead designer, programmer, and driver), John Mize (lead strategist and team scout) and Daryl Lacuesta (lead pit manager and match loader).

This is only the sixth year of the CGHS team’s existence. Despite its relatively brief history, the team has developed into an elite



John Mize, Vraj Paghdal, and Daryl Lacuesta hold the trophy from the VEX robotics event in Cleveland

program, ranked among the best in New Jersey. The school hosted its second annual robotics competition in January with more than 45 teams competing.

Sponsors for the championship include Google, Missouri University of Science & Tech, NASA, U.S. Navy, U.S. Air Force Special Warfare, and U.S. Army JROTC.

Broadway comes to Cedar Grove

TWO Broadway shows came to Cedar Grove – a musical that became a movie and a movie that became a musical. Students at Memorial Middle School performed “Grease” and Cedar Grove High School presented “School of Rock.”

“Grease” featured Bobby DiMattia, Sara Forte, Sofia Maffetone, Scarlett Chapman, Frankie Rego, Mia Barraco, Vivien Rasmussen, Miles Andriola, and Vincenzo LoProto.

Nearly 200 students took part in the productions across the two schools.



Top and top right, “School of Rock” rocks; bottom row, time-tripping back to the 50s with “Grease.” (“Grease” photos courtesy of Kristin Roussel/Flash Photography NJ)





Top of The Class of 2026

Introducing valedictorian Krish Patel and salutatorian Sophia Bobrowsky

They followed different paths to the top of Cedar Grove High School's Class of 2026, but valedictorian Krish Patel and salutatorian Sophia Bobrowsky share striking similarities.

Beyond their academic excellence, both are varsity athletes, accomplished leaders, active in their communities, and known for their empathy and strong family influences.

Krish has his sights set on becoming a doctor – an ambition inspired by his mother, a cardiovascular technician. He is certified in CPR, is training to become an EMT, volunteers at Chilton Medical Center, and has served on the Cedar Grove Ambulance and Rescue Squad for the past two years.

Though he has not yet committed to a college, Krish plans to study cell biology or neuroscience, with a minor in finance – an interest influenced by his father, a business owner.

“Krish is a force unto himself,” said science teacher Gioia Degenaaars. “He’s a rare pearl in the oyster of kids, embodying academic determination, leadership, service, humor, and kindness. Krish will be a force in college and life because he simply doesn’t know anything other than finding the finish line with a



smile.”

Krish’s leadership extends across numerous school organizations. He serves as president of the multicultural club, math club, National Science Honor Society, Red Cross club, and Helping Hands of India, and is co-president of the Asian club and HOSA – Future Health Professionals. In addition to captaining the varsity tennis team, he is also a member of the math, business, and history national honor societies.

Sophia is looking to a future in sports or entertainment marketing. In the fall, she will attend Boston University to study business administration with a concentration in marketing. She credits her business interests to her older sister, who works at JPMorgan Chase, and her appreciation for the arts to her father, an actor.

“Sophia has an impressive base of knowledge that stems from her genuine curiosity,” said English teacher Stacy Kay. “In conversations, she pulls together information from diverse sources – the arts, literature, television, and her own experiences – and makes insightful connections. She’s engaging and genuinely a lovely, caring person.”

A standout leader and athlete, Sophia



captained three varsity teams (soccer, basketball, and track) and holds two CGHS track records. She serves as president of the student council, National Business Honor Society, and history club, and is a member of the math, Spanish, business, and science national honor societies. In addition, she serves as the CGHS student representative to the board of education.

Like Krish, Sophia has shown a strong commitment to helping others. She volunteers with the College Women’s Club of Montclair, a nonprofit dedicated to promoting education and empowering women, as well as Toni’s Soup Kitchen in Montclair. She also organized a Halloween card drive for Cooperman Barnabas Medical Center in Livingston to spread good cheer, collecting more than 500 cards.

In addition, Sophia volunteered with Mind4Youth, an international nonprofit focused on raising awareness about teen mental health. She created social media content to support outreach efforts.

“It has been a privilege to watch both of these outstanding students grow into the leaders they are today,” said Steve Goodman, business teacher. “Krish consistently demonstrates not only academic excellence but also humility and character. Sophia matches that excellence with determination and a quiet confidence. Their friendship exemplifies what it means to lead and collaborate with purpose, and bring out the best in one another.”

Though their next steps will take them in different directions, Krish and Sophia leave CGHS with meaningful contributions behind them and bright futures ahead.

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