

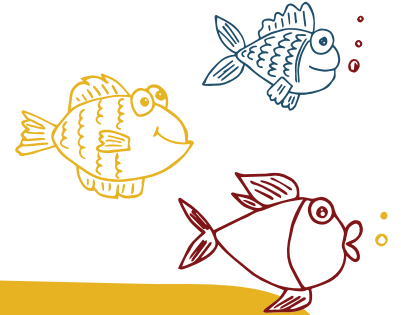


SUMMER 2023: CELEBRATING A YEAR OF SUCCESS

PREPARING STUDENTS FOR  
**LIFE BEYOND THE  
CLASSROOM**

est. 1991

# FOCUS ON PHOENIX



## What's inside



CASINO NIGHT AT A GLANCE



EVENTS: FORMAL AND GRADUATION



SPOTLIGHT ON:  
TPC'S STAFF DISCUSSION SERIES



PLANNED GIVING GRATITUDE!



PARTNERS IN CARING

## A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



We are excited to share with you our summer edition newsletter—Celebrating a Year of Success. During this past school year, our theme was HOPE—Have Only Positive Expectations. Together, TPC instills HOPE every day—to our students, their families and to each other.

We see the potential of every student and educator and have positive expectations that they will continue to learn and reach their highest potential. Hope is an optimistic state of mind, based on an expectation of positive outcomes and is at the core of what we do every day together. Our ability to HOPE provides the power to positively affect our students and their families.

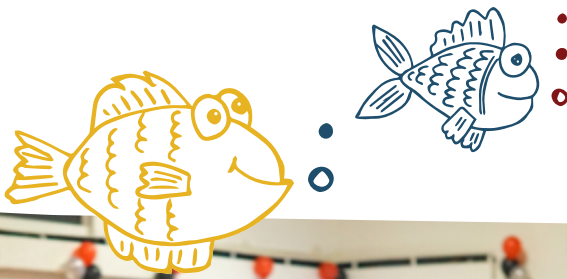
As you read through this newsletter, you will learn how our educational community did just that by hosting TPC's school formal and graduation ceremony, embarking on a culture campaign, as well as realizing our most recent fundraising efforts and accomplishments.

Wishing you a happy and healthy summer! Until next time, take care, be well and stay connected. ♥

With gratitude,  
Julie Mower, M.A.Ed.  
Executive Director



The mission of The Phoenix Center, working in partnership with families and community, is to develop the potential of each student with developmental disabilities and those on the autism spectrum ages five through 21 and to provide customized, unique, and individualized programs aligned with the New Jersey Student Learning Standards. Promoting the development of the whole student, we care for, educate, and empower our students and graduates so that they will develop life-centered skills which will prepare them for life beyond the classroom.



# CASINO Night at a Glance

Over 150 guests attended Casino Night on Friday, April 28th. It was a great night with hors d'oeuvres and cocktails donated by many generous donors. The event included 40+ prizes, plus a silent auction with Taylor Swift and Bruce Springsteen concert tickets, golf foursomes and other awesome items. Funds raised will be earmarked for renovating our teaching kitchen as well as other programmatic enhancements, which are directly tied to our vision of preparing students for life beyond the classroom.

We are so grateful for our many sponsors, including Columbia Bank Foundation as our top supporter.

## CASINO COMMITTEE

Ashley Agresti, Jonathan Andolino, Maryanne DeGroot-Striano, Jeffrey Hecker, Iryna Lomaga Carey, Leon Morton, Natalie Neubauer, Marc Restaino, Kimberly Robinson, Danielle G. Paul, Carolyn Sharaway, Julie Mower, Katie Passarotti, Andrew Schuck, Kim Wynbeek

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

James Ball, Ed.D., BCBA-D; Iryna Lomaga Carey, Esq.; Elizabeth Copti; Maryanne DeGroot-Striano, Esq.; Geraldine A. Gibbia, Ph.D. CCC-SLP, Executive Director Emeritus; Dennis Gibney, CFA; Jeffrey Hecker; Mayra Pastore; Natalie Neubauer, M.S. CCC-SLP; Kim Oakes, M.S., LDT-C; Andy Rovegno; James Russomano; Maria Sedlack; George Spina

“ i LOVE The PHOENIX CENTER. i WOULDN'T WANT TO BE ANYWHERE ELSE! i'm a FATHER OF A FORMER STUDENT...i WOULDN'T BE ANYWHERE WITH MY DAUGHTER WITHOUT THIS SCHOOL. i LOVE THIS PLACE. i LOVE THIS NIGHT. it'S MY FAVORITE NIGHT OF THE YEAR. MY DAUGHTER WILL BE HERE SOON TO SEE EVERYBODY AND THAT WILL BE THE BEST PART OF THE NIGHT.”

-JEFF HECKER, TPC BOARD MEMBER

“ My Family AND i HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN THE SCHOOL FOR OVER 10 YEARS. it'S AN ABSOLUTELY AMAZING PLACE. They REALLY CHANGE FAMILIES' LIVES.”

-JIM RUSSOMANO, TPC BOARD PRESIDENT

# EVENTS

## FORMAL

One of our favorite events of the year is our annual formal. Our students 17 and above dress up and enjoy music, refreshments and dancing. A special shout out to Ashley Agresti for her tireless organizational skills and DJ Tim Hughes, who generously donated his time and expertise which helped make the afternoon so memorable.



## GRADUATION

On June 9th, we were pleased and proud to celebrate TPC's Class of 2023! As a result of the State of New Jersey's Bill S.3434, students with special needs were able to receive an additional year of state-funded education from 2021-2023, so this year's graduating class consisted of a combination of '22 and '23 year graduates.

Our class speaker Ismael R. gave a heartwarming speech about his experience at TPC.

Dr. Gibbia, Co-Founder & Executive Director Emeritus provided our graduates with words of encouragement and wisdom. Our Board President, Jim Russomano, presented diplomas to the graduates. Another highlight of this graduation ceremony was given by our student dance troupe, run by Jena H. and Diana W.!

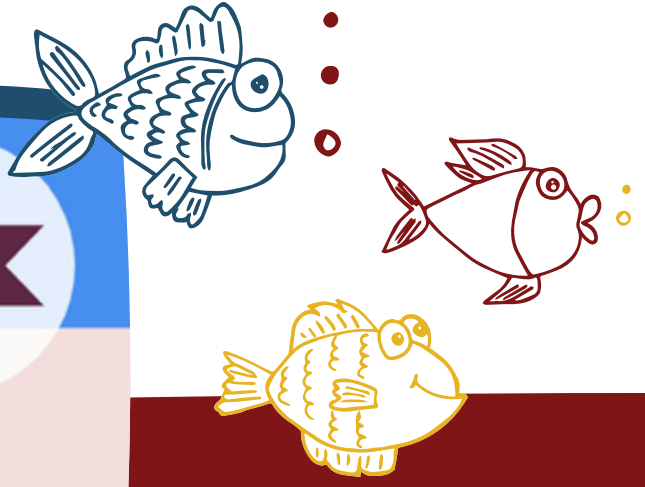
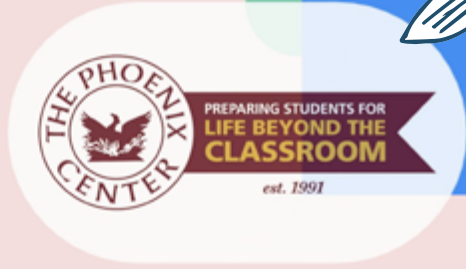
**“**IN 2016, I CAME TO THE PHOENIX CENTER AT AGE 14 LOST AND UNPREPARED ABOUT WHAT TO EXPECT. HOWEVER, I EXPERIENCED THE MOST UNEXPECTED EVENT: I MADE FRIENDS WHO ACTUALLY UNDERSTOOD ME AND HAD SIMILAR INTERESTS AS ME. THIS MADE ME FEEL BETTER ABOUT MYSELF, AND IT ALLOWED ME TO FINALLY HAVE FUN IN SCHOOL.”



## CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR GRADUATES

Adam S., Amani S., Anthony B., Anthony F., Analy P., Ismael R., Jared M., Jaydon P., Kristyna M., Luis G., Zach S.





# TPC'S STAFF DISCUSSION series

## SPOTLIGHT ON: TPC'S STAFF DISCUSSION SERIES

As summer unfolds, we find ourselves reflecting on the incredible journey we've embarked upon with our Staff Discussion Series. This series, comprising four remarkable videos, has been a testament to the unwavering dedication, teamwork, and nurturing culture that define The Phoenix Center. Let's take a moment to recap the powerful and inspiring stories from our team members.

In the first video, titled *"Educators have an innovative way of teaching thanks to The Phoenix Center's Administrative Support,"* we explore the importance of providing support to the educational staff. Christine Hartz, a speech therapist, beautifully articulates the unique support received from the administration, which allows staff to think innovatively while providing exceptional tools and materials that enable our students to flourish.

Continuing our journey, the second video, *"Collaborating for Success: The Teamwork Behind TPC,"* highlights our educational community's ability to collaborate and support each other. Melissa Closterman, a head paraprofessional, emphasizes the significance of uplifting our students during both challenging and victorious moments, showcasing the immense power of encouragement and teamwork in creating a supportive and fulfilling educational experience.

In the third video, *"From Paraprofessional to Teacher: Caitlin's Alternate Route to Success,"* we are inspired by the remarkable journey of Caitlin Malone, who started as a paraprofessional and embraced the opportunity to pursue teaching through the Alternate Route program. Caitlin's dedication, passion, and willingness to grow exemplify the personal and professional development opportunities available at The Phoenix Center.

Finally, our fourth video, *"Thriving Together: The Vital Role of Culture in TPC's Success,"* delves into the essential role of culture in our school's success. Jena Hinz, a speech therapist, highlighted the importance of a shared common

goal, constant collaboration, and a positive work environment that fuels TPC's commitment to the students' well-being. Her words resonate deeply as they emphasize the significant impact of TPC's culture on our collective mission.

These videos showcase the heart and soul of The Phoenix Center. Through them, we witness the dedication, compassion, and unwavering commitment of our staff members to create an inclusive and empowering educational environment. If you haven't had a chance to watch the Staff Discussion Series videos, we invite



you to visit our **YouTube channel** and experience the powerful stories and inspiring messages from our dedicated staff.

As we celebrate 30+ years of excellence and commitment to our students' lives beyond the classroom, we extend our heartfelt appreciation to our incredible team and the entire Phoenix Center community. Together, we are transforming lives, shaping futures, and building a brighter tomorrow.



# DONATIONS & FUNDRAISING

Much of our fundraising efforts this school year have been focused on raising the capital needed to update our twenty-year-old teaching kitchen. Thanks to our amazing sponsors, especially Columbia Bank and DeMattheis Real Estate, this project has been fully funded!

Our Consumer Family Life Skills (CFL) program utilizes our teaching kitchen and provides an opportunity for students to work on the skills necessary in the areas of cooking and kitchen organization. We are so excited for this new enhancement to our program, as it will benefit the entire school community. Construction is expected to begin this summer.

In addition, grants and gifts from generous donors funded the following programs and activities this school year:

- Therapeutic Horseback Riding
- Yoga
- Tumbling/Gymnastics
- Increased access to STEAM focused online learning tools
- Replacement of nearly 30 Chromebooks
- IXL & Unique Learning: online educational subscription tools
- Point-of-sale system for our CFL program that will enhance our restaurant program and enable students to take orders, enter them into a system which can then be fulfilled—just like in a real restaurant setting.



## PLANNED GIVING GRATITUDE!

TPC has a Planned Giving program that enables parents and families to include us in their estate planning that costs nothing to set up and will make a huge impact on the lives of our students.

**“ I have always been so impressed with the amount of services that the Phoenix Center provides and the environment the school fosters. I've enjoyed watching my granddaughter, Ava, grow and develop to her potential through the many years she has attended. I couldn't think of a more worthwhile place to donate to. I would love to watch other children and young adults flourish with our enhancements.”**

**-GRANDPARENTS OF AVA, JOE AND ARIENE VERNE**



## REMINDER: TPC IS STILL HIRING

Are you passionate about making a difference in the lives of students with special needs? Do you want to be part of a supportive and innovative educational community? Look no further than The Phoenix Center!

As we continue our mission of providing exceptional education and support to our students, we are excited to announce that we are expanding our team. We are currently seeking dedicated professionals who are committed to empowering students with special needs and helping them thrive.

Join our remarkable team of educators, therapists, paraprofessionals, and support staff who are committed to creating a positive and transformative educational experience for our students. Together, we can make a real difference in their lives and inspire them to reach their full potential.



To learn more about the current career opportunities at The Phoenix Center, please visit our careers page by using the QR code or at [thephoenixcenter.nj.org/contact/career-opportunities](http://thephoenixcenter.nj.org/contact/career-opportunities). We encourage you to share this opportunity with anyone you know who might be interested in joining our exceptional team.



## PARTNERS IN CARING

Denise Marcotulio, TPC's Partners in Caring (PIC) President for the past six years, is handing over the reins as her daughter, Kristyna graduates in the class of 2023. Kim Robinson—with the assistance of Jocelyn Gottlieb—will be overseeing PIC, TPC's home-school association.

As current parents, they, along with officers Loida Hernandez and Mayra Pastore will be facilitating various fundraising efforts to provide school assemblies, the holiday boutique, staff appreciation luncheon and support for various school activities. Thank you, Denise, for your many years of service as PIC President and welcome, Kim!

## GO PAPERLESS!

Please send your email address to [CSharaway@thephoenixcenternj.org](mailto:CSharaway@thephoenixcenternj.org). Save money, save trees!



PREPARING STUDENTS FOR  
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