



## Highland Park school chief Scott Taylor named Middlesex County Superintendent of the Year

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(Photo: ~Courtesy of Highland Park School District)

MIDDLESEX COUNTY – Highland Park Superintendent Dr. Scott Taylor has been named the Middlesex County Superintendent of the Year by the New Jersey Association for School Administrators (NJASA).

In each county, a committee of three superintendents chooses a colleague who has been a superintendent for at least five years, has a record of service with the NJASA and who has a distinguished record as an educator.

"I am honored to have been recognized as the 2018 Middlesex County Superintendent of the Year. This honor is more about Highland Park than about any one person," Taylor said. "I am only as successful as are the students, parents, staff, fellow leaders and board of education of our beautiful community."

"Dr. Taylor faced a daunting task when he agreed to become superintendent in Highland Park almost three years ago," said Darcie Cimarusti, Highland Park Board of Education president. "The district was just beginning to heal after a tumultuous chapter in its history — a chapter that was filled with discord and uncertainty. Dr. Taylor immediately brought community stakeholders together to create a strategic plan, and charted a course for rebuilding the district."

**READ:** [Highland Park adopts immigrant inclusivity policy \(/story/news/local/how-we-live/at-risk/2017/06/15/highland-park-adopts-immigrant-inclusivity-policy/399932001/\)](#)

**READ:** [Florida school shooting: Central Jersey focuses on safety \(/story/news/local/2018/02/15/florida-school-shooting-central-jersey-focuses-safety/341465002/\)](#)

**READ:** [Watch: Central Jersey students participate in National School Walkout \(/story/news/education/in-our-schools/2018/03/14/school-walkouts-central-jersey/420065002/\)](#)

Central to that work was healing fractured relationships throughout the district in order to move forward collaboratively.

"The tenor has really changed here in Highland Park, and it is nice to be working collaboratively with both our superintendent and the Board of Education," said Highland Park Education Association President Keith Presty, who spoke on behalf of HPEA. "I look forward to continuing this great partnership."

Taylor is now in the running to be one of three regional superintendents of the year and, if selected, state superintendent of the year.

According to the Highland Park Board of education, Taylor's work in the district continues a long-standing tradition of academic excellence while maintaining a laser focus on equity for the district's diverse student body.

Most recently, after the Florida school shooting in February, Taylor posted a letter to families on the district's website the next day.

"Every school shooting confirms my conviction that our kids are growing up in an extremely difficult time and need social, emotional, and psychological support as much as anything else if they are going to grow up to be mentally healthy and happy adults," Taylor said in the letter.

Taylor said his letter was not just to address how the district is addressing the Florida shooting but to reassure the community that your schools "get it." He detailed two personal wellness initiatives aimed at giving students the behavioral and mental health support they need to make better decisions and helping kids feel confident about themselves by strengthening their interpersonal skills and encouraging strong and healthy relationships with their peers so they all feel they belong to the school community.

On the day of the first National School Walkout on March 14, Taylor supported his student body and became emotional watching the teenagers take charge of an issue important to them. Close to the entire student bodies at the high school and middle school headed to the football field to honor the victims of school shootings and speak their mind.

Before the planned action, Taylor expressed support of the students right to voice their opinion and protest. Staying a good distance from the students and recognizing this was a student-led event, Taylor and Highland Park Mayor Gayle Brill Mittler said they were impacted deeply by their words and action.

"I was emotional, partly because of what I heard, but also because I was so proud of our students," Taylor said.

According to Taylor, the students expressed their desire to organize and take part in the demonstration of solidarity and need for change immediately after it was announced as a national walkout. The students spoke about the need for change in gun laws but also for the need to change mental health policy and practice.

Taylor came to Highland Park in 2015 after serving as Superintendent at Kenilworth Public Schools. He served as an assistant principal, principal, curriculum supervisor and assistant superintendent at various districts in the state. As high school principal, Taylor led the Academy of Allied Health and Science, which was recognized as one of the first National Service Learning Leader Schools.

Taylor received his doctorate from Columbia University, New York and B.A. and Ed.M. from Rutgers University, New Brunswick. He is an adjunct faculty member at the Graduate School of Education at Rutgers University and at Montclair State University's College of Education and Human Services.

Further, Taylor has co-developed and implemented social-emotional learning programs in each of the districts he led and worked with Dr. Maurice Elias of Highland Park to create the Academy for Social-Emotional Learning in Schools. He serves on the Board of Directors for the New Jersey School Development Council and the New Jersey Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, and as a member of the George Street Playhouse Education Advisory Board.

Taylor is married to Caren, a special educator, and is the father of two daughters — both students at Highland Park High School — two dogs and two cats. In his spare time, he competes in Ironman and triathlon races. He and his wife have lived in Highland Park for 23 years.

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