



Elizabeth Public Schools Press Release

*For further information contact:
Olga Hugelmeyer
908.436.6131*

Newly Elected Members Sworn in at EBOE Reorganization Meeting

Bathelus, Chevres, and Goncalves Pestana begin new terms; Board names Neron President, Carvalho VP

Elizabeth, N.J., January 9, 2025 – The Elizabeth Board of Education held a swearing-in ceremony on Tuesday, January 7 for its three newly elected members at its reorganization meeting at Donald Stewart Early Childhood Center School No. 50.

Charlene Bathelus, Ileana Chevres, and Stephanie Goncalves Pestana each earned three-year terms in the November 2024 election. Bathelus, who has served on the Board since 2013, is entering her fifth term, Goncalves-Pestana, who has served on the Board since 2016, is serving her fourth term, and Chevres, who has served on the Board since 2019, is serving her third term.

Bathelus was sworn in by the Honorable Judge James Wilson, Chevres was sworn in by City of Elizabeth 4th Ward Councilman Carlos Cedeño, and Goncalves Pestana was sworn in by the Honorable Judge Jubilo Afonso.

Bathelus became the first newly elected person of Haitian descent to ever hold public office in the city of Elizabeth, NJ, when she was elected to the Elizabeth Board of Education in November 2013. She has served her community in support of church youth groups, troubled teens, and college students for many years and founded the Charlie Robert Prostate Cancer Foundation in memory of her late father Charles Robert Bathelus to promote awareness about prostate cancer and educate men on the importance of getting prostate exams.

Chevres has served her community in many ways, especially when it comes to children with special needs. Inspired by her son who was diagnosed with autism, she founded the Elizabeth Parent Support Group, a non-profit organization that provides integrated free services every week to children with special needs. The organization has experienced growth thanks in part to collaboration with other local and state organizations.

Goncalves Pestana has served the community as a eucharistic minister at Our Lady of Fatima Church and has been involved with the Portuguese Instructive Social Club for well over a decade, serving on the board of directors and the Elizabeth Portugal Day Committee. She has also served as vice president of the Elizabeth Portuguese Lions, which seeks to strengthen communities by improving health and wellbeing and supporting those in need through various humanitarian services.

In addition to swearing in the new members, while showing solidarity in wearing purple attire, the Board reorganized and unanimously voted Stanley Neron to serve as president and Maria Carvalho as vice president.

Neron, who is serving as president of the Board for a second time, reflected on the incredible opportunity the Board has to shape the future of education in the community while connecting it to the color purple and the many themes it represents.

“I’m thinking about this moment, and I couldn’t help but consider the color purple... a hue that symbolizes so much of what we are striving to achieve,” said Neron. “Purple is a color of royalty, reminding us that the students are the crown jewels of the district. They are our legacy and our greatest investment and the ones who will carry forward everything we build today. Purple also represents creativity and wisdom, two pillars of a thriving school system. It challenges us to think outside the box to innovate and prepare our students not just for the world as it is but for the world as it could be.”

Carvalho also commented on her service as a Board member, thanking her fellow Board members for the trust they have placed in her to once again serve as vice president of the Board of Education.

“We have achieved so much, and I know we will continue to work tirelessly to build upon our success,” said Carvalho. “When I first began this journey in 2015, my commitment was clear; to serve the children, the educators, and the families of this community with dedication and integrity. That commitment remains unwavering. We face new challenges, but our purpose remains the same; to ensure that every child has access to the best quality education possible, to support our educators, and to foster an environment where all of our students can thrive.”

The three sworn-in members each addressed the audience, thanking the community for their support and expressing their commitment to continued service to the Elizabeth community.

“To the families of Elizabeth, thank you for trusting us with your most precious gifts: your children,” said Bathelus. “It is for you that I remain steadfast in advocating for equity, opportunity, and a brighter future for all. Together, we will continue to dream big, push boundaries, and build a legacy of opportunity and excellence for students and families in Elizabeth. Thank you again for allowing me the privilege to walk this path with you, to grow with you, and to serve you. It has been an honor.”

“I’m here to continue working together for the benefit of our children and families and I know that as a team we will accomplish many great things during this year,” said Chevres. “I want to thank the residents of Elizabeth for providing me with this opportunity to serve this great community. I will continue advocating for our students, especially for the ones who need a voice, to provide equal opportunity to all our students and members of our community thank you.”

“I am honored to have this opportunity to serve on the Board once again for another three years,” said Goncalves Pestana. “To the people of Elizabeth, thank you for putting your trust in me to serve and give back to this wonderful community that has given so much to me. We must continue to work together for the betterment of our children and our city. Brighter days are ahead for each and all of us and I thank you for allowing me to once again be a part of the team that will help us get there.”

###

For further information on Elizabeth Public Schools, please visit www.epsnj.org