

JP Kids
Special Section

Ellis Early Learning celebrates first anniversary in JP

STORY & PHOTOS BY MARIANNE SALZA

Ellis Early Learning celebrated its first anniversary of providing a nurturing early education environment for children in its newly-expanded Jamaica Plain location at 555 Amory Street in September. Based in the South End, Ellis is an inclusive, diverse

organization with a multitude of languages spoken and religions practiced. Ellis provides individualized care for each child and their families.

“We strive to be an environment where everyone feels welcome and comfortable. Our model can only thrive in neighborhoods that have a broad spectrum of incomes and identities,”

said Chief Executive Officer Lauren Cook. “We knew JP would be a neighborhood that would embrace what we have to offer. It is a progressive community committed to social justice and educational and racial equity. That’s what Ellis stands for.”

The Jamaica Plain center offers more infant and toddler classrooms than preschool because data revealed that there was a particular need for those facilities in the area. Accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children,



Friends of the Maple Universal Classroom in the play yard.

Ellis provides structured classrooms with stations dedicated to certain tiers of learning, such as literacy, art, science, and dramatic play.

“Everything in early education is about social/emotional development,” explained Cook, who is a Jamaica Plain resident and mother of two. “They learn to identify their emotions, communicate, and share.”

The Jamaica Plain facility serves 58 children, ages four weeks to five years, in six classrooms that are named after trees.

A therapy room provides a space for de-escalation, early intervention, and learning social skills in small groups.

“It’s important in Boston to have a space for kids to release and develop their gross motor skills at all times of the year,” noted Cook about the indoor motor room, where little ones can jump off of padded walls. “This is also where the music class can happen when the weather gets bad.”

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Ellis Early Learning Director Yaskara Cruz, and CEO Lauren Cook.

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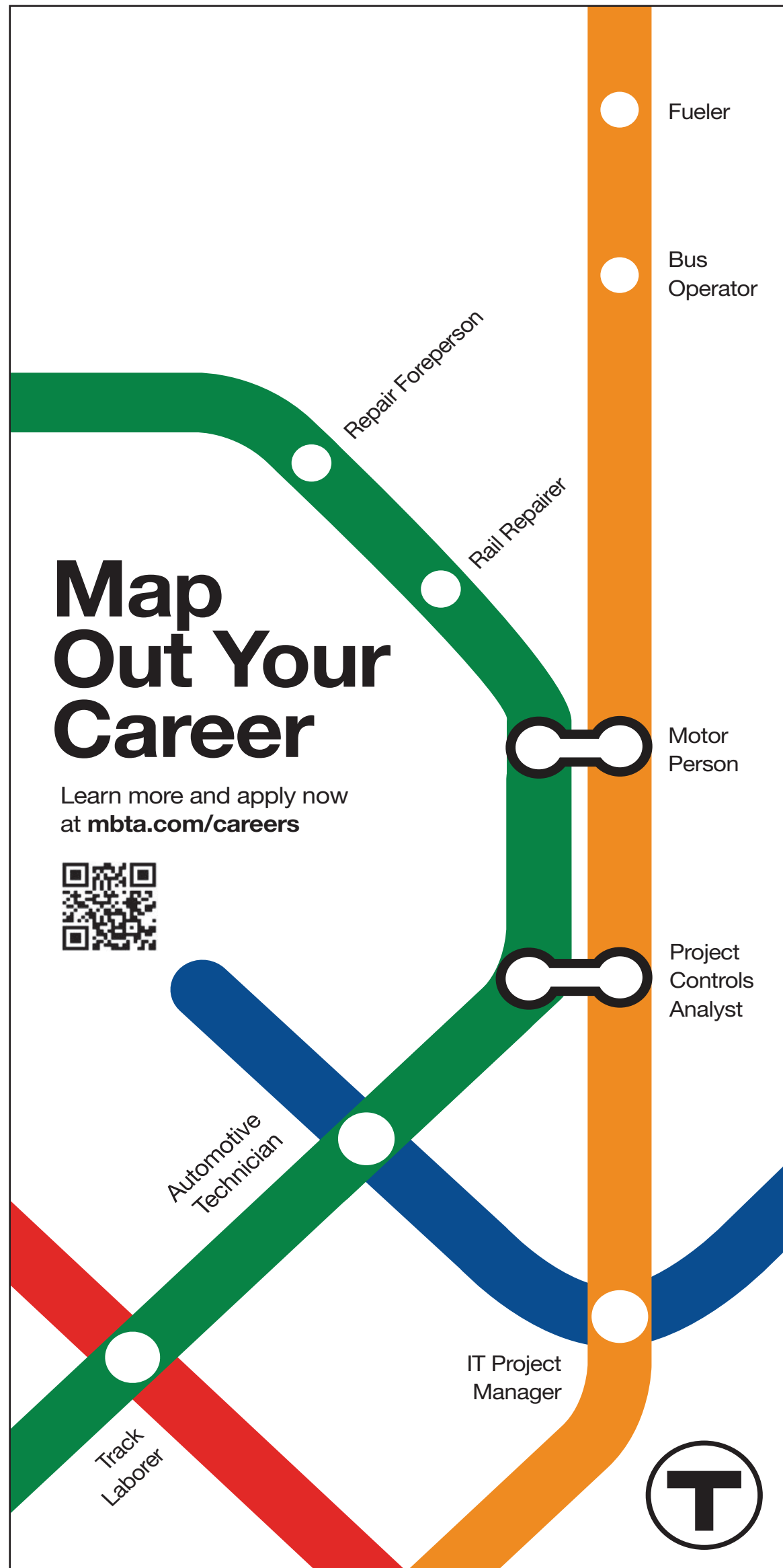
CONGRATS, JP YOUTH SOCCER DYNAMO



Congratulations to the Spring 2022 Grade 4 Boys Dynamo, coached by Josh Raisler Cohn, Roman Dvoskin, and Nick Menzies, for being named an honorable mention for the BAYS League Spring 2022 Sportsmanship award. The Dynamo were one of only 5 teams out of over 1300 teams last season that were recognized. The Dynamo truly embody the JPYS philosophy of providing a positive environment in which to develop skilled and passionate soccer players. Great job, Dynamo!

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Toddlers at play in the Oak Classroom.

Ellis

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Ellis is equipped with a kitchen, and partners with the Pine Street Inn to provide daily breakfast, lunch, and snacks. There is also a laundry room to wash bibs and clothes when little accidents occur.

The non-profit organization is concerned with all aspects of family life and even provides a nook for parents to attend virtual meetings or nurse infants. There is an on-staff social worker and family navigator to help families in need of supplies and food.

“What sets the Ellis apart in the early childhood sector is a unique operating model,” explained Cook. “We’re economically integrated. Two-thirds of our families face financial hardship, and they receive subsidies to afford childcare. Research shows that children from lower income households who attend high-quality, integrated, early education programs, like the Ellis, tend to have higher achievement gains.”

Ellis has been serving children in Boston since 1885, and partners with the Department of Children and Families (DCF). A quarter of students have open cases with the DCF and are in state custody, or live with foster or adopted families.

According to Cook, research shows that children who attend racially diverse schools like the Ellis develop empathy and are less prejudice.

“The philosophy and principle goal Ellis has is to support families. It’s not only childcare

services,” emphasized Director Yaskara Cruz, a bilingual, Guatemalan immigrant. “It’s concerned about any need families have – housing and jobs. We are there for them. It creates a positive impact in Jamaica Plain.”

Cruz has three years of experience working in early childcare education. The mother and grandmother is excited to be celebrating her first year as a member of the Ellis team.

“This organization cares for us. We aren’t only employees – we are family,” Cruz declared. “We have connections with all of the administration. They have interest in our lives and care about the needs of our families.”

A teacher respite and resource room grants staff a quiet place to plan curriculum, unwind, and eat lunch. Ellis also offers teachers and their families support, such as monthly professional development courses.

“It’s a meaningful, rewarding career, but our teachers work incredibly hard; and unfortunately, due to systemic problems, they don’t earn what they should,” Cook admitted. “It’s a reflection of there literally not being enough money with such tight margins. It’s really important for us to have a nice space for them.”

Cook believes that it is vital for neighborhoods to close the access gap in childcare.

“The reason why there is not more childcare is it costs too much to provide it. Parents cannot afford to pay more,” Cook stated. “The government needs to invest in early childcare education so our teachers can make livable wages. Only then will we be able to attract and retain enough talent to survive.”