

# WORK READINESS ACADEMY

October 2025 Newsletter

## Message from the Director



Dear Families & Supporters,

As we move into the heart of the fall season, our classrooms and work-based learning sites are buzzing with energy - and learning is truly in full swing. Students have settled into their routines, and it's been inspiring to see their focus, curiosity, and growth as we progress through the first part of the school year.

It was wonderful seeing many of you at our **Back to School Night** events earlier this month. Thank you for your continued partnership and support. If you have not already done so, please make sure to begin the process of applying for DDD services for your child. The first step is securing Medicaid either by applying for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or attaining Medicaid for your child from the state of New Jersey.

### News, Notes & Reminders

- We are pleased to share that we have hired a new Social Worker. **Ms. Alixandra Leitner** will be starting with us the week of November 3rd. Ms. Leitner will be here on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. She will immediately begin meeting with students who have counseling written in to their IEPs and will also be available to provide support to other students as needed.
- Our programs will be closed on Thursday, November 6th and Friday, November 7th for the Annual NJEA Conference.
- WRA Families should be on the lookout for a letter and email from me sometime in the next two weeks inviting you to contact us to schedule a **Transition Planning Meeting**. These meetings will allow your child, our team and your family the chance to collaboratively begin discussing and planning for life beyond our program. This will include a discussion about future employment, post-secondary education (where appropriate), social, recreational and volunteer opportunities, and linkages to important service agencies.
- If you believe your family may qualify for **reduced priced or free school meals**, please make sure to return a reduced priced meals application ASAP. Please contact [dblajsa@ucesc.org](mailto:dblajsa@ucesc.org) if

you have any questions or need a new application.

Thank you for your continued partnership and support.

Please enjoy the rest of this month's newsletter and wishing you and your family a safe and enjoyable Halloween!

**Josh Bornstein, Director**

UCESC Work Readiness Academy

[jbornstein@ucesc.org](mailto:jbornstein@ucesc.org)



## Instructional Insights

### Laying the Foundation for Respect

At the Work Readiness Academy our mission, is to work together to provide opportunities, lessons and activities that will prepare our students to become independent, contributing members of their homes, communities, and future workplaces. This month, as part of our districtwide theme, "Paving Paths, One UCESC Voice at a Time", we focused on "**Laying the Foundation**" for growth by emphasizing **respect** as the cornerstone of personal and professional success. Students worked through a variety of lessons and projects in which they were given opportunities to explore, discover, and apply these concepts to everyday experiences. To truly emphasize and highlight our foundation of respect we also took time to recognize **Anti-Bullying Month** and the **Week of Respect**, where Students participated in meaningful activities that celebrated kindness, inclusion, and teamwork.



We kicked off the week by pledging to stand against bullying and to support one another with empathy. Tuesday's "Teamwork Tuesday" encouraged unity through shared school spirit, while Wednesday's "Highlight Respect" filled our building with bright notes of encouragement and positive chalk messages. Thursday reminded us to "Exercise our right to stand up to bullying," and we closed the week on Friday by "Blueing Up" in solidarity for bullying prevention. Together, these activities helped our students see and connect, that every act of respect toward themselves and

others, builds a stronger community. As we continue paving our collective path forward, we are reminded that

*"Respect is one of the greatest expressions of love."* – Miguel Ángel Ruiz

Rachel Richer, Supervisor of Curriculum and Instruction



**November 6 & 7** - School Closed (NJEA Convention)  
**November 26** - Early Dismissal (1:00pm) - Thanksgiving Break  
**November 27 & 28** - Thanksgiving Break



### Attendance Reporting

In the event that your child will be absent, arriving late, or picked up early, **please send us an email at [AttendanceWRA@ucesc.org](mailto:AttendanceWRA@ucesc.org)**.

You may also call our main number at (908) 633-2704. If it is before 8am, please leave a message.

# Recognizing Achievement: Students of the Month

## Erin & Ariana

This month, we are proud to recognize **Erin and Ariana** as our **Work Readiness Academy Students of the Month!**

**Erin** has consistently demonstrated a *positive attitude, strong leadership, and kindness* toward others, serving as an excellent role model for our new students. She has also excelled during her internship experiences, staying focused, open-minded, and eager to learn new skills while adapting to new schedules and environments.

**Ariana** has impressed our staff and her internship mentors with her *hard work, dedication, and determination*. In her short time at the Work Readiness Academy, she has already shown remarkable independence and self-management skills, earning positive feedback and praise for her professionalism and enthusiasm at both of her internship sites.

We are so proud of Erin and Ariana for representing the spirit of the Work Readiness Academy through their leadership, perseverance, and commitment to growth!



*Erin*

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BE THE  
PERSON  
YOU WANT  
TO WORK  
WITH.

*Ariana*



## Inside the Classroom

Sharlene's Classroom

During the month of October, my class has been preparing for, and participating in our new Work Based Learning Experiences in the community. As part of our preparation, during our Career Readiness classes, students have had a variety of lessons and activities to help practice advocating for themselves. Students have brainstormed what self advocacy is, what it looks like in different settings (home, work, and at our program), and then spent time applying what they have learned during role play scenarios throughout the month.

**Self-advocacy is a life skill that allows us to problem-solve, speak up, and get our needs met.** 🙌🙌🙌

Students have also been working hard this month to learn how to create a business plan, which will guide them in the pricing, advertising, and production of our student run business! These lessons have given students the opportunity to apply new skills to a hands-on authentic experience that they can connect with personally as they watch their business grow throughout the school year!

**Sharlene McQuade**  
**Work Readiness Academy Teacher & WBL Supervising Teacher**



## Project SEARCH Update

The Project SEARCH Class of 2026 interns participated in a National Disability Mentoring Day program that included tours and demonstrations in the following departments:



- Radiology
- Environmental Services
- Clinical Engineering

Additionally, the weather cooperated allowing our students & staff the chance to visit the Overlook Helipad!

The program culminated with a luncheon alongside members of the AHS Corporate Social Responsibility Team.

Our first round of Employment Planning Meetings also took place in October. These meetings bring together the intern and his or her support team, including families, our on-site SEARCH staff, the assigned counselor from DVRS and a representative from DDD. We discuss each intern's progress, including strengths and areas for growth, options for the next internship rotation, and potential ideas for long-term employment placement following the completion of the program.



# Haunted Hallway at WRA!

## 🎃 1st Annual Haunted Hallway & Halloween Carnival 🎃

The students of the **Work Readiness Academy** proudly hosted their **1st Annual Haunted Hallway and Halloween Carnival on October 30th**, creating a fun-filled and spooky sensory experience for our friends at **The Crossroads School**! Visitors were *spooked, entranced, and engaged* as they explored the haunted hallway of the Work Readiness Academy before joining our carnival-style celebration.

At the carnival, guests enjoyed festive games, Halloween-inspired crafts, and plenty of opportunities to make new friends! Every piece of artwork, decoration, and game was designed and created by our students, who also performed during the event, showcasing their incredible **leadership, teamwork, creativity, and communication skills**.

It was truly a day filled with laughter, collaboration, and community spirit. Be sure to check out next month's newsletter for pictures from what WAS an *unforgettable* event!

# Work-Based Learning (WBL): Where Learning Meets the Real World!

*Chelsea at Summit Health Pediatrics in Berkeley Heights*

*Christian at Overlook Medical Rehabilitation Dept. in Union*

*Matt at Barnes and Noble in Union Plaza*

*Steven at Home Power Yoga in Downtown Cranford*

*Anthony at Best Buy in Union Plaza*

*Nick L. at Walgreen's in Cranford*

**"Behind every great school day...is a great bus driver (or several)!"**

One of the most critical and valuable aspects of the Work Readiness Academy is our ability to provide our students with extensive time learning outside the school and in the community. This would not be possible without our amazing team of drivers!

Pictured below from left: Rose Makris, Felder Filias, Donna Kiritcheva, Jermaine Thomas, and Marge Bishop.

Not pictured: Sarah Cooke

**Scarecrow Stroll 2025**

The students and staff at the Work Readiness Academy made their annual pilgrimage to Downtown Cranford to participate in the "Scarecrow Stroll". Local residents, organizations and businesses design fun and spooky scarecrows that are hung up throughout the downtown area.

Once again our students volunteered to create the scarecrow for Sweet 'n Fancy Emporium - one of our wonderful business partners for Work-Based Learning Experiences.

This year's entry: **Captain Crumbcake**



Vote now under "Schools/Organization" at:

[https://downtowncranford.org/scarecrow-stroll-voting/?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTAAYnJpZBExR1VRODJ2d3BxZUhDbHpVRgEeuOzmCRLnrZTFV8t\\_Cm9wNpLjG8myw4lYe30xCfg478mDvvWGTbhQ4YB88Xc\\_aem\\_VzuuNLcEWs5zmGx2pJMuCg](https://downtowncranford.org/scarecrow-stroll-voting/?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTAAYnJpZBExR1VRODJ2d3BxZUhDbHpVRgEeuOzmCRLnrZTFV8t_Cm9wNpLjG8myw4lYe30xCfg478mDvvWGTbhQ4YB88Xc_aem_VzuuNLcEWs5zmGx2pJMuCg)



## Look Who Was Spotted in the Community!

*Former Project SEARCH student, **Jasmine**, currently a Radiology Assistant at Overlook Medical Center*



## Picture of the Month

*Ben's new study buddy - a little more "Statuesque" than others!*



# Community Resources/Events

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## Guardianship Resources

### Guardianship Webinar Replay

The Union County Board of County Commissioners recently invited residents to attend a free virtual Guardianship Webinar, titled: "Navigating Guardianship for Loved Ones with Special Needs: What Families Need to Know".

"This webinar will offer practical resources and professional insight to help residents better understand guardianship and make informed decisions for their loved ones," said Union County Commissioner Chairwoman Lourdes M. Leon. "The Commissioner Board is proud to support programs that connect residents with the knowledge and services they need."

A link to a replay of the webinar is below:

<https://www.facebook.com/share/v/1Dd5UPLEsL/>

At 18 years old all individuals, including those with intellectual and developmental disabilities, reach the legal age of majority. This means that parents can no longer make decisions legally on behalf of their children. See the attached fact sheet from the Arc of New Jersey for more information about Guardianship and various alternative options.



**Updated Guardianship Fact Sheet (3).pdf**

**Download**  
107.0 KB

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## Upcoming Webinar on SSI & Medicaid!



Welcome! You are invited to join a webinar: "An Overview of SSI & Medicaid for Individuals with IDD Transitioning into Adulthood." . After registering, you will receive a confirmation email about joining the webinar.

Director of Healthcare Advocacy Connor Griffin will cover everything you need to know about these two services, taking the anxiety and guesswork out of the process.

[us06web.zoom.us](https://us06web.zoom.us)

## DDD Services

### Applying for DDD Services

As soon as your child turns 18, you can begin applying for services via the NJ Division of Developmental Services (DDD). The first step is accessing Medicaid; this can be accomplished by applying for an getting approved for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or applying for NJ Family Care (Medicaid) via the state of New Jersey. Please see the attached resources.



**Family Quick Guide to DDD\_English**

[Download](#)

3.0 MB



**Family Quick Guide to DDD\_Spanish (Espanol)**

[Download](#)

2.1 MB



**Full DDD Application-for-Eligibility-Spanish (Espanol)**

[Download](#)

8.2 MB



**Full DDD Application-for-Eligibility-English**

[Download](#)

3.6 MB



DDD Resource Links

Download

595.6 KB

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## Union County Office for Persons with Disabilities & Special Needs (OPDSN)

The Office for Persons with Disabilities & Special Needs offers a range of social and recreational opportunities to help individuals with disabilities connect with others and engage in meaningful activities.

[Click Here for More Information About Events Sponsored by Union County's OPDSN](#)

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The **#2NDFLOOR app** for NJ youth is here! It only takes a second to get free 24/7 mental health support with one-on-one chat, helpline, community conversations, and more.

**2NDFLOOR** is a confidential and anonymous support network for New Jersey's youth. We are here to help you find solutions to the problems that you face at home, at school or at play.

Get started at [2NDFLOOR.org/download](https://2NDFLOOR.org/download) #mentalhealth #support.

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## Understanding Supported Employment Options Available AFTER Graduation



Supported Employment Fact Sheet Final.pdf

Download

Click the link to download the attachment

641.9 KB



## About the Work Readiness Academy

The Work Readiness Academy serves students ages 18-21 with disabilities and provides a comprehensive employment training experience that incorporates both classroom-based instruction and community-based work-learning experiences. While in the training classroom, students work cooperatively with similar aged peers to learn critical skills related to employment and socialization. Students also work on career exploration and planning, including the development of a person-centered, post-secondary vision and plan with clear goals and action steps. Program staff remain on-site during the internships to provide and fade support and assistance as needed. Students also participate in field trips focused on career discovery, independent living skills, recreation and independent travel training.

For more information or to make a student referral, please email Rachel Richer at [rreicher@ucesc.org](mailto:rreicher@ucesc.org)

Email: [jbornstein@ucesc.org](mailto:jbornstein@ucesc.org)

Website: [https://www.ucesc.org/schools/the\\_work\\_readiness\\_academy](https://www.ucesc.org/schools/the_work_readiness_academy)

Location: [970 Suburban Road, Union, NJ, USA](#)

Phone: [908-633-2704](tel:908-633-2704)



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**WRA Smore**

WRA is using S'more to create beautiful newsletters



## Message from the Administrators

☛“Oh, autumn in New York, It lifts you up when you run down”-Autumn in New York, -Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong☛

While ghouls and goblins and creaks in the night may be at the end of October, the “Power of Respect and Positivity” as well as standing up for what’s right was in full effect during this month focusing on

**Anti-Bullying and respecting oneself and others.**

Classroom lessons addressing what it means to be kind, caring and mindful of others were demonstrated throughout various classes having students earn Acts of Respect and Kindness points/tickets redeemable for preferential activities when engaging in kind words and actions, being a good listener and friend and asking and/or offering help to a friend in need.

Other Social Emotional lessons within the classrooms focused on acceptance of differences, embracing diversity as well as individuality within each other through real world applications such as students identifying characteristics and traits they found endearing within themselves and others such as funny, creative and generous which made them “unique” and celebrated who they are. Other projects such as “I Can Be a Good Friend” engaged students through hands-on activities and role playing through demonstration and discussion of how they can actively be a good friend identifying such actions as sharing, encouraging, including others and cooperating through teamwork.

Celebrations at the end of the month were plentiful and bountiful including staff members sharing their Indian culture through traditional Indian snacks and treats brought in to celebrate Diwali the festival of lights, joy and prosperity and a "Harvest Fest Parade and Dance" with staff and students having the opportunity to dress up in school appropriate costumes or pajamas while celebrating this festive day.

Till next time my "Fiendish Friends", be "Ghoulishly Good" to yourself and each other,  
Westlake Admin Team: Claudine T, Stacey K, Bobby P



**STACEY K.**



**BOBBY P.**



**CLAUDINE T.**

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## Westlake Information

- 
- 11/2: Daylight Savings Time Ends
- 11/4: Election Day
- 11/6-11/7: NJEA Convention (District Closed)
- 11/11 Veteran's Day
- 11/13: Holiday Express visit to Westlake
- 11/14: School Spirit Day
- 11/21: Creature Comforts Pet Therapy visits Westlake
- 11/26: Student Dismissal 1:00
- 11/27: Thanksgiving



Union County Educational Services Commission

**September '25**

Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				

**October '25**

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**November '25**

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30						

**December '25**

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**January '26**

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25	26	27	28	29	30	31

2025-2026



District Calendar

Sep 1	Labor Day
Sep 2 - 4	Staff Development Day
Sep 5	School Opens (Students & Staff)
Sep 23 - 24	Rosh Hashanah
Oct 2	Yom Kippur
Oct 13	Early Dismissal (1pm)/Staff Development
Nov 6 - 7	NJEA Convention
Nov 26	Early Dismissal (1pm)
Nov 27 - 28	Thanksgiving
Dec 23	Early Dismissal (1pm)
Dec 24 - Jan 2	Winter Recess
Jan 12	Early Dismissal (1pm)/Staff Development
Jan 19	Martin Luther King Jr. Day
Feb 16	President's Day
Mar 6	Staff Development Day
Apr 3 - 10	Spring Recess
May 11	Early Dismissal (1pm)/Staff Development
May 25	Memorial Day
Jun 19 - 23	Early Dismissal (1pm)
Jun 23	Last Day of School

Total Days for Students: 180\*\*

Total Days for Staff: 184\*\*

\*\*Three emergency days are built into the calendar.

Should extra days be needed they will be added at the end of the year.

If all emergency days are not used, the days will be reduced at the end of the year.

**February '26**

Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
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22	23	24	25	26	27	28

**March '26**

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22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

**April '26**

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19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30		

**May '26**

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					1	2
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17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						

**June '26**

Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
	1	2	3	4	5	6
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14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				

Emergency Closing Information

- First Day of School - Students
- School Closed - Holiday
- Early Dismissal
- School Closed - Staff Development

In the event of a delayed opening, all UCESC Schools and Programs will be delayed by 90 minutes.

Delayed opening, early dismissal and school closing announcements will be posted online at [www.ucesc.org](http://www.ucesc.org) and sent via the First Alert system.



# September Spotlight!

## Student of the Month!



Our Student of the Month is an J.C. who truly exemplifies respect and kindness every day. He treats his classmates and teachers with care. He's a great friend who helps create a positive, welcoming environment for everyone!

**Principal Award Winner!**



Our Principal's Award Winner this month is L.M. who consistently shows respect toward others. Her positive attitude makes our school a better, more inclusive place for all. We're so proud to recognize her as a role model for respect and integrity!

**Staff of the Month!**



## *Staff Member of the Month*



Our Staff of the Month is our new gym teacher, Ms. Renzo, who has already made an incredible impact in such a short time! Her enthusiasm and energy have brought a fresh spark to the Westlake Gym, making fitness fun and engaging for all students. They consistently go above and beyond to support every learner, encouraging teamwork and confidence!

**Sunshine Cafe Employee of the Month!**

# SUNSHINE CAFE EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH



The Sunshine Cafe Employee of the Month for October is... M.K! We chose him because he always works hard and treats everyone with respect! He is always looking to lend a helping hand, and always goes above and beyond in the cafe. He's an amazing worker!



**Sunshine Cafe!**



This month the Sunshine Cafe worked on fun creative drinks! This month's menu featured a Passion Fruit Refresher and a Spooky Special Oreo chocolate milk. The cafe gives students a chance to practice life skills, teamwork, and customer service while sharing their talents with the school community!

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## Work Based Learning!

The Work-Based Learning Program at Westlake School provides students with valuable hands-on experience in real-world settings. Through partnerships with local organizations such as Walgreens, the Clark Public Library, Complete Care Nursing Home, and Marshall's, students gain meaningful job skills and confidence. These work sites offer opportunities to practice communication, teamwork, and responsibility while exploring different career paths. This program empowers students to build independence and prepare for a life beyond school in a supportive and inclusive environment.

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# Ms. Marshall's Class!

## Westlake Bagels and More – Classroom News

The students of Mrs. Marshall's class, also known as the hardworking employees of Westlake Bagels and More, have been busy preparing a weekly special for staff to enjoy. This year, we're excited to introduce ground beef and rice-and-bean tacos to our menu! At our first attempt, the tacos were a big hit, and we'd like to thank everyone who made a purchase to support our students in their vocational endeavors.

A new and exciting addition to our classroom is the creation of personalized napkins! Our students and staff have been training on the Howard Customization Printing Press and are now ready to produce festive napkins for Thanksgiving and Christmas. In the future, our goal is to make these products available to Westlake parents through a vocational website. This initiative will give our students even more opportunities to practice task-based learning, social communication, money management, and other essential life skills.

Our class has also been busy maintaining and expanding our school garden. This year, our fig tree finally produced figs! Looking ahead, our long-term goal is to expand the garden to include larger flower and herb beds—both for sale to the community and for donation to local nursing homes. Beyond the classroom, students have continued to participate in community-based instruction, including trips to ShopRite, as well as engaging in yoga, karate, bowling, and mini golf. Each experience helps students build independence, communication, and confidence in real-world settings.



# Nurse Veronica!

## Welcome to a New School Year Westlake!

We managed to have a pretty healthy year last year and I know we can do a great job again by doing the following:

- Stay home when not feeling well
- Follow instructions from your doctor to recover smoothly!
- Communicate to the nurse or administration any questions or concerns

- Visit Nurse Veronica when you need to ensure you are ok (She has a diffuser to help you relax if you need a moment too 🧘.)
- Cover your cough with your forearm or tissue to avoid spreading germs
- Wash Your Hands & Sanitize areas around you as needed

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## Ms. Grace's Art Class!

### 🎨 Art Room Update 🎨

October has been a wonderfully creative month in the art room! Our students have been strengthening their fine motor skills through painting, cutting, gluing, and other hands-on art activities. It's been amazing to see their focus, effort, and creativity in each project! Every masterpiece is truly one of a kind!

We've also been celebrating the spirit of the season with colorful projects inspired by Halloween and Diwali. From spooky pumpkins to bright diyas, our young artists have explored different cultures and traditions while expressing their creativity. The art room is glowing with imagination this month!

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## Speech Therapy with Ms. Amanda!

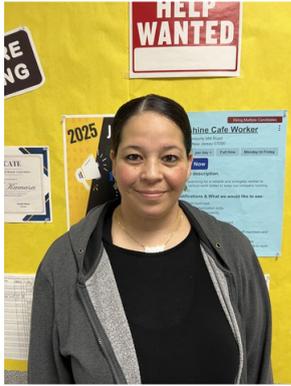
### 🗣️ October in Speech! 🍁

This month in Speech, our students participated in many fun and engaging fall-themed activities that supported their communication goals. We kicked off October with an apple tasting activity. Students sampled different varieties of apples, applesauce, and apple juice. Students described the look, taste, and texture of each item and shared their opinions with peers. They practiced conversational turn-taking, comparing and contrasting, and using descriptive language. We also had fun answering and creating Halloween riddles, which encouraged problem solving and vocabulary development. In addition, we read a variety of fall-themed books and discussed how the weather is changing, what we notice outside, and what activities we enjoy during this season. Sessions were lively and interactive, providing many opportunities for students to work on

answering and asking questions, making predictions, using descriptive words, and engaging in meaningful peer conversations—all while celebrating the fun of fall!



## Wolf Pack Press! 🐺



Ms. Jackie



Ms. Anusha

### Hispanic Heritage Month and Diwali

In honor of Hispanic Heritage Month and Diwali, the Wolf Pack Press interviewed some staff members to learn more about their culture and favorite traditions!

Ms. Jackie

Q: Which ethnic group do you identify with?

A: I am Puerto Rican.

Q: Can you share a favorite tradition from your culture?

A: One of my favorite traditions is when we get to make Pasteles. It's a food that we make mostly during Christmas time as a family.

Q: What is your favorite cultural dish?

A: Our standard dish, Arroz con gandules, and our Pasteles for Christmas.



## Week of Respect!

New Jersey's Week of Respect, established by the [Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act](#), is the first full week in October, which was October 6-10, 2025. It is dedicated to fostering a safe and positive school climate through activities and education about harassment, intimidation, and bullying (HIB)

prevention, character education, and social-emotional learning. Schools across the state participate with themed events and initiatives to promote respect, kindness, and safety. To highlight the importance of character education and promote a culture of respect, safety, and kindness in schools.

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## Sunshine Club Celebrations!

Staff at Westlake came together to celebrate both Hispanic Heritage Month and Diwali by preparing and sharing traditional dishes from each culture. These lunches filled our staff room with delicious aromas, vibrant colors, and joyful conversations. It was a wonderful opportunity for everyone to learn about each other's traditions while enjoying homemade food. The celebration highlighted the school's spirit of unity, diversity, and appreciation for cultural heritage.

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## Parent Resources!

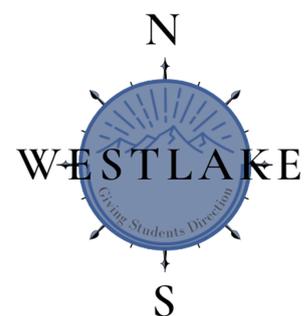
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## Contact Us!

**Website:** [www.ucesc.org/schools/westlake\\_school](http://www.ucesc.org/schools/westlake_school)

**Location:** [1571 Lamberts Mill Rd, Westfield, NJ, USA](#)

**Phone:** [908-232-4181](tel:908-232-4181)



### INSTAGRAM!

Visit us!





**Robert Peneno**

Robert is using Smore to create beautiful newsletters





# LAMBERTS MILL ACADEMY

October 2025 Newsletter



*"Life starts all over again when it gets crisp in the fall."*

- F. Scott Fitzgerald

## **Administrators' Message**

*As the autumn leaves reached their peak color, October at Lamberts Mill Academy was a vibrant month filled with significant achievements, engaging activities, and deep learning!*

### **🎃 Seasonal Fun and School Events**

Our annual Halloween Party was a fantastic success, offering students a chance to show off their creative costumes and enjoy some festive fun with their peers and staff. It was a wonderful way to celebrate the season and build community spirit!



### **🛡️ Safety and Respect in Focus**

Student well-being and a positive school environment remain our top priorities. This month, we completed comprehensive training for all staff on Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying (HIB)

policies and procedures, along with determining the differences between conflict and HIB.

Additionally, our school actively participated in the annual Week of Respect. Students engaged in a variety of meaningful activities within their academic classes and therapeutic groups, promoting kindness, empathy, and mutual respect throughout the building. We are so proud of our students for actively participating and embracing these social lessons.

### Learning Beyond the Classroom

October provided some excellent opportunities for our students to learn experientially:

- **Field Trips:** Students took a memorable trip to the Battleship attraction, where they learned about history and engineering firsthand.
- **Work-Based Learning (WBL):** We officially kicked off our WBL program! We are thrilled to see our students gain invaluable work experience out in the community at our new partner locations: Chili's Restaurant, Cranford Book Store, and Walgreens. We also launched an exciting in-house experience working with Maschio's food services, giving students hands-on skills right here at Lamberts Mill. This is a critical step in preparing our students for future success!

### Academic Achievements

Finally, we want to acknowledge the hard work and focus of our students in the classroom. We are incredibly proud of all the students who successfully completed the NJ DOE Field Tests for the NJSLA and the NJGPA. Your effort and diligence in completing these assessments are commendable and show your dedication to your education.

Thank you to all the staff, students, and families for a productive and memorable October. We look forward to another month of learning and growth in November!

Reed Leibfried, Principal

John Lopreiato, Supervisor of Instruction

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## **Upcoming Events**

### **November 2025 Important Dates**

November 6th & 7th - School Closed

November 26th - Early Dismissal

November 27th & 28th - School Closed for Thanksgiving Break

November Field Trips - Splatter Craze and Lucky Strike Bowling Alley



# Columbia Bank Foundation Grant



We are thrilled to share our appreciation and gratitude to the Columbia Bank Foundation for their \$2,500 donation to our school! This generous contribution is a direct investment into the heart of Lamberts Mill Academy, our students. The funds will be used to enhance our Behavior Modification Program which will foster a more respectful, focused, and supportive school environment for all of our students.



## Columbia Foundation

The Columbia Bank Foundation is committed to serving the needs of its local communities. [Learn more.](#)

[columbiabankonline.com](https://columbiabankonline.com)



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## Staff Spotlight - Student Assistance Counselor - Dr. Lockett



### Getting to know the new UCESC SAC

**What's your favorite part about working with high school students?**

*This is a very transformative stage of life for students, and I genuinely love helping them realize their strength and resilience, especially when they overcome personal and academic challenges that will positively impact them for a lifetime.*

**If you weren't an educator (or working in a school), what career path do you think you would have chosen and why?**

*It would consist of providing housing services for families, embarking upon entrepreneurship as it relates to real estate and ensuring affordable purchasing and rental opportunities.*

**What is one thing about your job that people might not realize?**

*It is meaningful, and my care and concern for my students and their families does not stop because I have gone home for the day.*

**What is one piece of advice you would give to a new student or to a parent of a student starting at our high school?**

*This is not the time to let go of your student's hand, this is the time to hold it even tighter.*

**When you're not at school, what do you enjoy doing in your free time?**

*I enjoy various means of relaxing which usually involves reading and watching movies. However, I can never read a book straight through, so I read while watching tv and often while looking at an Architectural Design magazine. It seems none of the three hold my attention long.*

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## Student of the Month - Na'Kier

This month, we're proud to recognize Na'Kier for his perseverance, positive attitude, and commitment to his academics. He consistently shows motivation towards his academic and career goals. Na'Kier sets a great example for peers as he works towards graduation. Congratulations, Na'kier!



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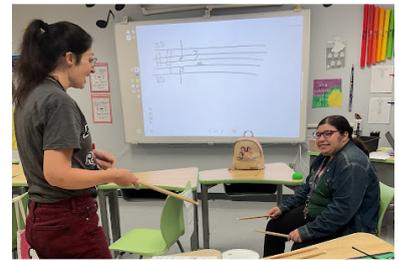
## October at The Mill



**Students interviewed the staff for WIN Class**



**Colorful Science Experiments**



**Rocking out in Music Class**



**Working hard on an independent art project**



**Enjoying a treat at the Weslake Cafe**



**Learning to use microscopes in Biology**

## **Week of Respect**

Students used sidewalk chalk to write positive messages on the walkway around The Mill for everyone to enjoy.



## **Spirit Week**

Students and Staff participated in a Week of Respect Spirit Week to raise awareness against bullying. Spirit Days included Wear Blue Day, Cultural Appreciation Day, and Hat Day.



## **Annual Student vs Staff Volleyball Game**

Students and staff participated in the second annual volleyball game to celebrate a successful Week of Respect!



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Students and staff were excited to celebrate Halloween with an afternoon party! There was a costume contest, snacks, music and tons of fun! Check our Instagram and November Newsletter for pictures from our Halloween Celebration!

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## **Outside The Mill**

### **Hiking through the Watchung Reservation**

Earlier in the month, students explored the outdoors on a nature hike through the scenic Watchung Reservation. The 2-mile hike around Lake Surprise provided a beautiful setting for students to learn about local history, appreciate nature, and experience the mental and physical benefits of outdoor exercise. The day was capped off with a relaxing lunch in a pavilion surrounded by fresh air and the peaceful sights and sounds of nature.



### **Visiting The Battleship New Jersey Museum & Memorial**

A field trip to the USS New Jersey, a retired battleship now turned floating museum, offers an immersive, educational experience aboard America's most decorated battleship. Docked on the

Delaware River, the ship served in major conflicts from World War II through the Persian Gulf War, earning 19 battle and campaign stars. Students explored the ship's massive guns, navigated the tight passageways, and got a firsthand look at life in the US Navy during World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. Highlights included visiting the bridge, learning about naval engineering, and hearing amazing stories about the ship's long history. This immersive trip brought history to life and gave our students a powerful appreciation for military service and maritime heritage.



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## Classroom Spotlights



### What I Need

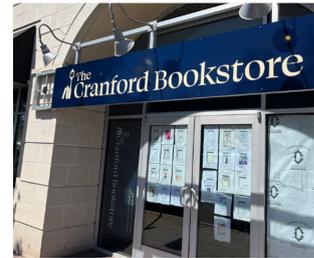
In "WIN" we continued reading *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* and focused on "keeping the end in mind". The students learned how their decisions now can impact them in the future. Similar to baking or construction, you are more likely to have a favorable outcome when you follow a path to get a final product.

Every student at LMA interviewed a staff member about the decisions that they made in their teen years and how that impacted their trajectory in life.



### English Language Arts & Literacy

Students have been developing their argumentative essays on self-driven topics creating grand discussions. We have explored various skills and strategies for an argument to be successful. Students have been completing their IXL diagnostic, which reveals their individual literacy skills and recommendations for areas of improvement. We have our annual Scary Story writing contest underway with various spooky and creative submissions. In recognition of week of respect, we watched short clips with adolescents promoting and defining respect



### Work Based Learning

This month, we started our Work Based Learning experiences at Chili's, Cranford Bookstore, Walgreen's, and Maschio's. By engaging with local businesses, organizations, and professionals, students gain practical skills, develop a stronger work ethic, and build meaningful connections that can guide their future careers. The students and staff are looking forward to a successful year of work based learning opportunities!

in schools and life. Students then colored a respect mandala to create a classroom display enhancing the learning environment to remind us as the year progresses.

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## ***Student Council***

### **A Message from the LMA Student Council President:**

Dear UCESC family,

As president of Lambert's Mill Academy, I ensure that the student council is continually working to improve the school. We are now working on a presentation to the principal and vice principal explaining why we believe prom would benefit Lambert's Mill juniors and seniors. We are also aiming to improve and make our point system more adaptable for both students and teachers. I've also been working on creating a weekly art elective for all students who want to participate. Our student council has been very engaged and hard at work to improve Lambert's Mill Academy!

Sincerely the President of Lambert's Mill Academy, Emma S.

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## ***Clinical Corner***

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### ***Group Therapy***

During the month of October, we focused on respect, bullying, and building healthy friendships. Students are beginning to build rapport with each other in their groups and are demonstrating respectful and supportive behaviors toward their peers. Our Group Room has been a huge success and appears to be a safe and comfortable space for the students where they welcome joining their daily group. During the Week of Respect, each group designed canvas boards identifying positive therapeutic topics, where they had the opportunity to highlight their individual talents, while working together as a group. Upon completion these canvas boards will be hung as a collage in our group room to enhance their space.



## 🎃 **October Behavior Tips from the LMA Behavior Team** 🎃

As teens grow, emotions and behavior can feel more intense, especially for those with emotional regulation disorders or behavior challenges. From a behavior analytic lens, we know that all behavior has a function, and understanding that function is the first step toward supporting positive change.



### Identify the “Why” Behind the Behavior

Behavior happens for a reason: to get something, avoid something, or meet a sensory need. Before reacting, pause and consider: What’s my teen trying to communicate or achieve?

### Use Proactive Strategies, Not Just Reactive Ones

Don’t wait for a meltdown to address regulation. Build in regular “check-ins,” breaks, and predictable routines. Consistency helps reduce uncertainty, a common trigger for emotional outbursts.

### Teach Coping & Replacement Skills

It’s not enough to say “calm down.” Model and practice strategies like deep breathing, grounding techniques, journaling, or asking for a break. Reinforce these skills when your teen uses them, even if only for a short moment.

### Catch Them Being Good

Reinforcement is more powerful than punishment. Notice and praise even small steps toward regulation: “I saw you took a breath before answering me, that’s great self-control.”

### Plan for Triggers

Work together to identify patterns. If you know certain classes, social situations, or transitions are challenging, prepare in advance with supports in place, like role-playing responses or setting up a discreet “signal” to ask for help.

### Stay Calm and Model Regulation

Teens are expert emotion detectives. Your calm tone, steady breathing, and composed body language send a strong message about how to handle stress.

With Appreciation,

**The Lamberts Mill Academy Behavior Team**

## **October Challenge:**

Choose one replacement skill to focus on this month and reinforce it every time your teen uses it. Consistency builds habits!

Remember, regulation is a learned skill, and like any skill, it takes time, patience, and practice. Small, steady improvements now lead to long-term success!

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# Upcoming Community Events

Click on the flyers below for links to fun events happening in our community.

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<https://www.rwjbh.org/events/event/?event=48398>

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## HealthHike: A "Walk and Talk" on Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction

Join an RWJUH Somerset health care professional for a discussion on mindfulness-based stress reduction (MSBR). HealthHike walkers will take a walk around the mall as a group, log their miles, and receive stress balls. Jean Trujillo, MSE, ACC, NBC-HWC, AFC candidate, Qualified Level One MBSR instructor Behavioral Health Services

🔗 [rwjbh.org](https://www.rwjbh.org)



## Young Teens Group (Ages 14-16)

Young Teens Group (Ages 14-16) Date: Every Tuesday | 3:45 pm – 5:00 pm

🔗 [rwjbh.org](https://www.rwjbh.org)



## Happi.Hearts Sensory Experience

Happi.Heart is a vibrant, fun-filled space designed to provide a safe and stimulating environment for kids to explore, and play!

🔗 [eventbrite.com](https://www.eventbrite.com)

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# Community Resources

<https://www.nj.gov/dcf/about/divisions/dcsc/CSOC.brochure.pdf>

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<https://naminj.org/>

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<https://988lifeline.org/>

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<https://nj4s.nj.gov/s/>

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## School in the Community

1. Post Graduate Students working at the Cranford Bookstore
  2. Students earning a trip the Westlake School Cafe
  3. Field Trips to the Watchung Reservation and Battleship New Jersey Museum and Memorial
- 

## About Us

### **Contact Information:**

*Phone:* (908)-233-7581

*Address:* 1571 Lamberts Mill Road, Westfield, NJ, 07090

*Website:* [https://ucesc.org/schools/lamberts\\_mill\\_academy](https://ucesc.org/schools/lamberts_mill_academy)

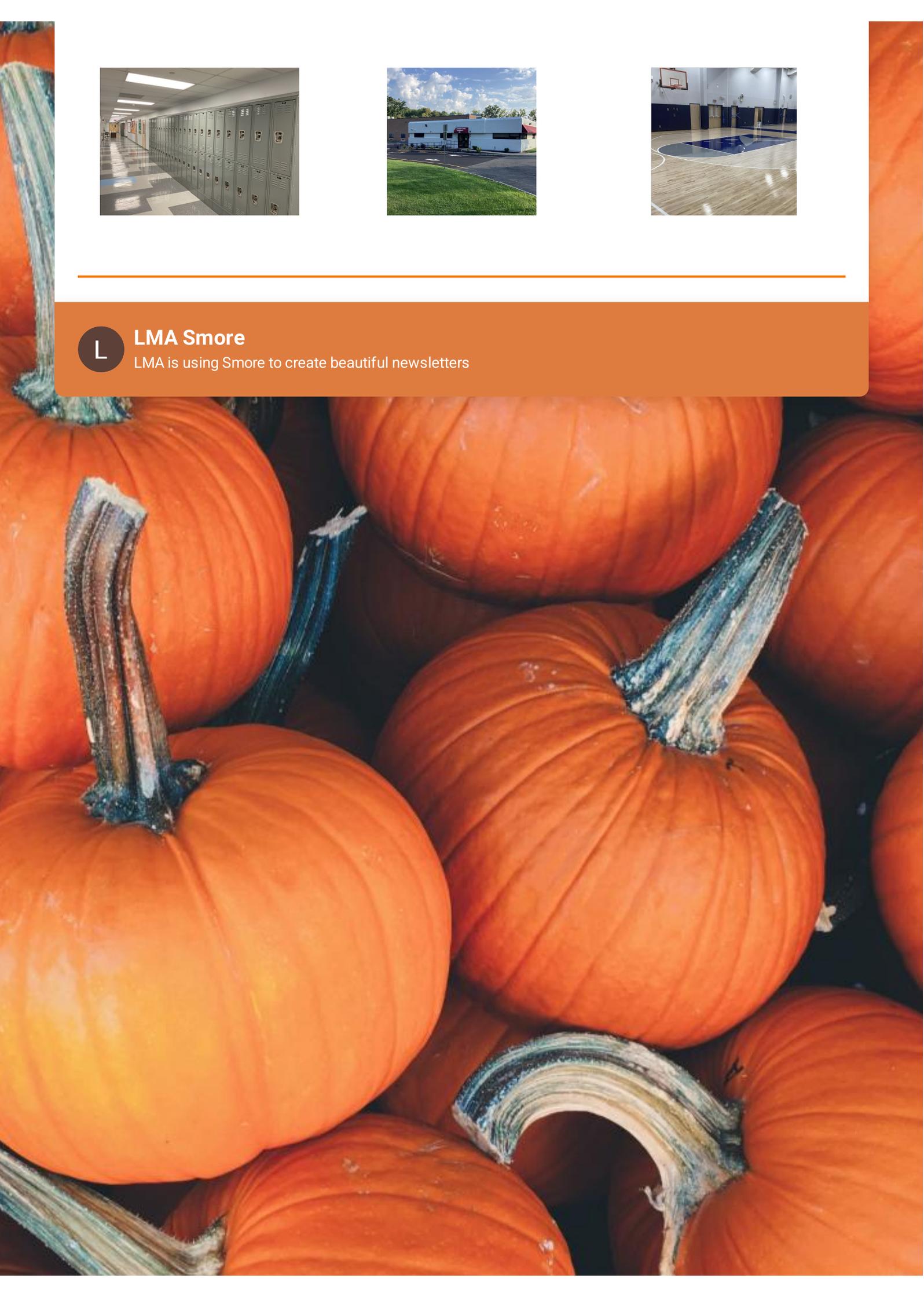
*Instagram:* [https://www.instagram.com/ucesc\\_lma/?hl=en](https://www.instagram.com/ucesc_lma/?hl=en)

Lamberts Mill Academy is a school within the Union County Educational Services Commission. We are an out of district public school for students with psychiatric disabilities. We continue to partner with RWJ Trinitas Regional Medical Center to provide clinical services for our students. Our school community prides itself on our relationships with all stakeholders: students, staff, parents, families and community partnerships. Being a public school, we adhere to all NJDOE assessment and curriculum mandates. Our professional learning community strives to increase student achievement and improve classroom instruction to provide students with the most effective educational, social and emotional learning environment possible.



## LMA Smore

LMA is using Smore to create beautiful newsletters





# NAN NEWSLETTER OCTOBER 2025

October 2025

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Si usted desea leer “The Newsletter” en otra lengua que no sea inglés, hay un botón para traducir la página en la parte superior de la computadora (Translate). Le llevará a la siguiente página para que presione (Translated) y escoja la lengua en que usted desea leer.

## *Principal's Message*

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Dear Hillcrest Academy North Campus (HAN) Students and Families:

At HAN, academic excellence remains at the heart of everything we do. Our classrooms are vibrant spaces where curiosity drives learning and students are challenged to think critically, explore deeply, and grow beyond what they once thought possible.

Teachers are dedicated to creating rigorous and engaging lessons that stretch students’ minds, ensuring that every learner has the tools and support needed to succeed in an ever-changing world.

We take immense pride in seeing our students rise to meet these challenges with determination and enthusiasm. Each day, they demonstrate what it means to work to their fullest potential—whether through tackling complex math problems, crafting thoughtful essays, or engaging in spirited classroom discussions. Their commitment to personal growth and

academic integrity reflects the shared belief that learning is not just about achieving grades, but about striving for excellence in every endeavor.

Beyond academics, our school community is what truly makes our environment special. The sense of belonging, collaboration, and shared purpose connects students, teachers, and families in meaningful ways. Together, we celebrate each success, support one another through challenges, and foster a culture of respect and inclusion. Being part of the HAN community means more than just attending a school—it means being part of a family dedicated to learning, growth, and the pursuit of a brighter future.

Warm Regards,

John Marquet  
Principal

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## ***Upcoming Dates***

November 4th - Election Day - School OPEN  
November 6th & 7th - School Closed - NJEA Convention  
November 26th - Early Dismissal at 1PM  
November 27th & 28th - School Closed - Thanksgiving

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## ***Attendance Matters!***

Our Attendance Matters! Program continues to gain momentum. Students are working hard to be at school every day and their effort and growth is showing in their classes. Teachers are seeing a dramatic change in their classes since students are here consistently. Students are also seeing a change, not just in their grades, but in how they understand what is going on in their classes. They are no longer playing "catch up" from when they are absent. See below to see some student stories on how the Attendance Matters! Program has been affecting them. Students whose September attendance was above 80% were rewarded with an incentive trip to Yestercade in Westfield. A trip is being planned for students who meet the criteria in October. The October attendance rate so far is 81%.





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## ***Student Stories on Attendance Matters!***

"One main thing that motivates me is the fact I'm supposed to be a junior and I have no credits and how horrible I did in Halsey. I feel great getting awarded for my attendance because I'm coming to school not expecting much and then I come and get awarded just for coming so honestly it's great. I've changed my attitude by being respectful with students and teachers and doing all my work the day it's due. My attendance helps my grades and my understanding because if I miss a day or two I could miss out on the lesson and that gets me off track and I'm trying to stay on track for the rest of the years I'm in this school."

- JJ



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"What has motivated me to be here everyday is the fact that this school is relaxing and calming. I feel better about the way they reward us for the things we do. My attitude has changed a lot since I changed schools. My attendance helped my grades a lot and the understanding of my classes since i got here so i know this school is better for me and other kids."

- Isayah



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Conversation between students (Edited for clarity)

Kyrah - "Last year was hard for me because I was going through some things."

Irina - "I had stuff going on too, last year. So, I was still absent a lot, but nothing compared to how I used to be."

Kyrah - "I didn't make school a priority, and then when I did, I used to want to come to class, but I missed so many days. I'm like, what am I doing? The whole catching up work -having other students help me or just acting like I knew what I'm doing; it was annoying. I knew that I could just sit there and do it. I knew I could do the work. I know I'm capable of doing the work."

Irina - "Yeah, and school is easier when you're not lost."

Kyrah - "And the incentives, it helps motivate you more because you can expect good out of it. It lets me know that, 'Okay, you're doing good. If you stay in the green - you're on the trip.' Oh, we get



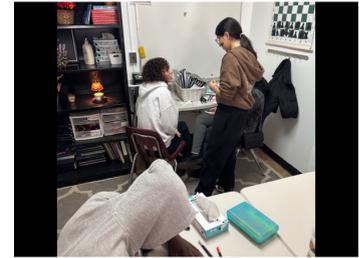
breakfast on Monday. This is like a win-win. You get recognized."

Irina - "Now I'm doing good, and it feels good. I feel powerful."

## Hispanic Heritage Month Day

This month we celebrated Hispanic Heritage Month with a celebration to rival other years. As always, the student-driven event was an enrichment of Latin culture, a fun-filled celebration, and an abundance of food. Students played games, created fans and other art projects, created music with different types of instruments and tried foods from multiple cultures.





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## ***In The Classroom***

### **HAN Student Music and World Language Program Grant**

Thanks to the Union County Educational Services Foundation Educational Enrichment Grant, HAN students started the Music and World Languages program.

Merging World Language with music provides an amazing opportunity to show students that music is fun and can positively impact school performance by enhancing focus, reducing stress, and improving cognitive skills.

HAN students are actively working on World Language Standards to use language to investigate, explain, and reflect on the relationship between the practices and perspectives of the cultures studied and their own music. Mr. Cerria, who is currently a musical consultant for the UCESC, is providing HAN students with his knowledge in music.

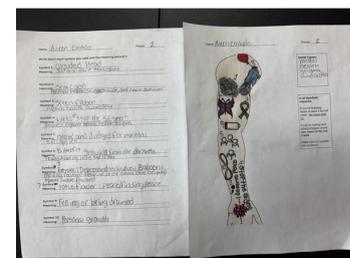
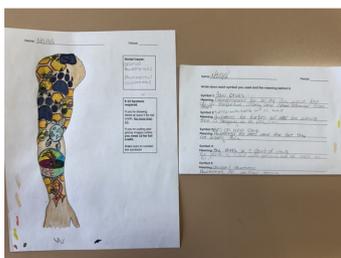
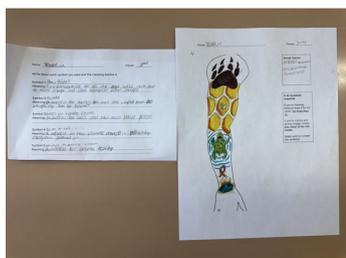
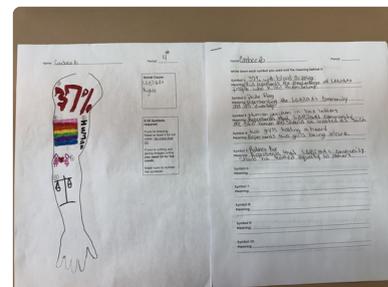
Music and entertainment can assist students channel their passion into a future doing what they love. This program equips students with the skills they need to operate highly interactive shows. For example, they were able to use these skills like running sound and playing live music during our successful The Hispanic Heritage Month event, which was celebrated on Thursday, October 16th, 2025. This celebration helped to develop a culture for learning by communicating a passion of the

students to work together in different ways. They created research projects in each of the Spanish classes to share with their peers and staff. I want to define the importance of the culmination project while incorporating the Social Emotional Learning theme of Respect, Responsibility/Self-Care. The celebration included the entire HAN school and the students created 8 different stations where the students were rotating for 20 minutes in each station.



## English Class

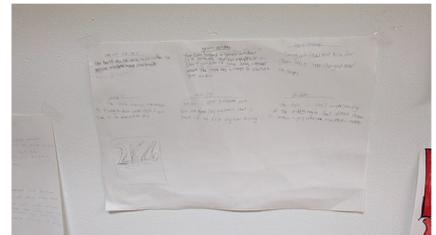
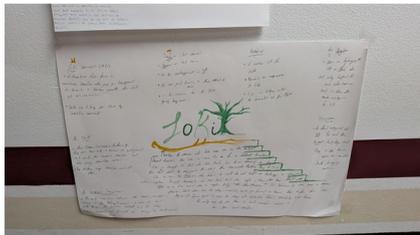
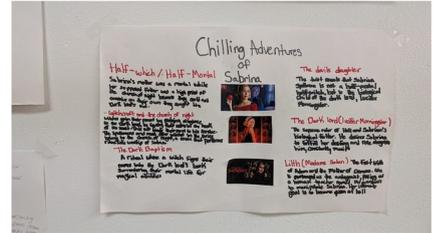
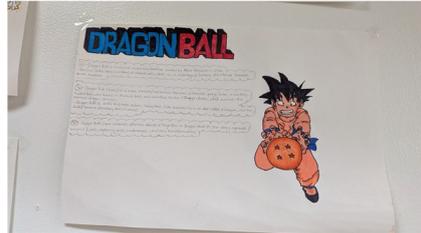
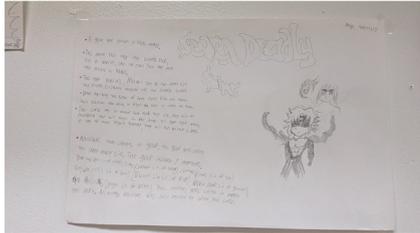
Throughout the first marking period, Ms. Killeen's English classes used song lyrics to strengthen the skill of identifying the main idea in passages. The classes also looked at songs across generations to practice comparing and contrasting. Over the last two weeks, Ms. Killeen introduced the unit of "Music and Art as a Form of Protest." Students learned about protest songs from the last 250 years and how many big movements in our country were driven by protest songs and arts. Students then researched a social cause that they're interested in. After conducting research, students designed their own tattoo sleeves! The "tattoos" or symbols had to be related to the cause they chose. To justify their tattoo designs, students wrote one sentence explanations. Students expressed how excited they were while designing tattoos and how much enjoyed this assignment!





## English Class

In order to get ready for a major project involving zombies, students in Ms. Lederman's class learned about Lore and how it provides traditional knowledge, beliefs, and stories about a particular subject, group, or place, often passed down by word of mouth. Students researched the lore of their favorite TV shows, movies, video games, or holidays and created posters that showcased the lore.



## STOPit Solutions

Students and staff were introduced to STOPit Solutions, a program that allows students and staff to report any concerns about unsafe, harmful, or inappropriate behavior to the HAN Safety Team.

Students and parents/guardians are encouraged to download the STOPit App onto their phones.



## About HAN

Hillcrest Academy North assists students from the Elizabeth Public School District in reaching their full potential by providing an alternative to the traditional high school setting. We offer smaller class sizes with a rigorous and challenging high school curriculum that is aligned to the New Jersey Student Learning Standards and prepares students for college and career. Our goal is to provide a safe, supportive, and empowering school environment that fosters lifelong learning,



mutual respect, creativity, and the joy of learning, with an effective, caring, innovative staff, in partnership with home and the community.

Mr. John Marquet, Principal

Mr. Thomas Van Cleef, Supervisor of Instruction

Location: [2630 Plainfield Ave, Scotch Plains, NJ 07076](https://www.google.com/maps/place/2630+Plainfield+Ave,+Scotch+Plains,+NJ+07076)

Phone Number: (908) 233-9366

Website: [https://ucesc.org/schools/hillcrest\\_academy\\_north](https://ucesc.org/schools/hillcrest_academy_north)

## Visit Us On Instagram



### Mission Statement

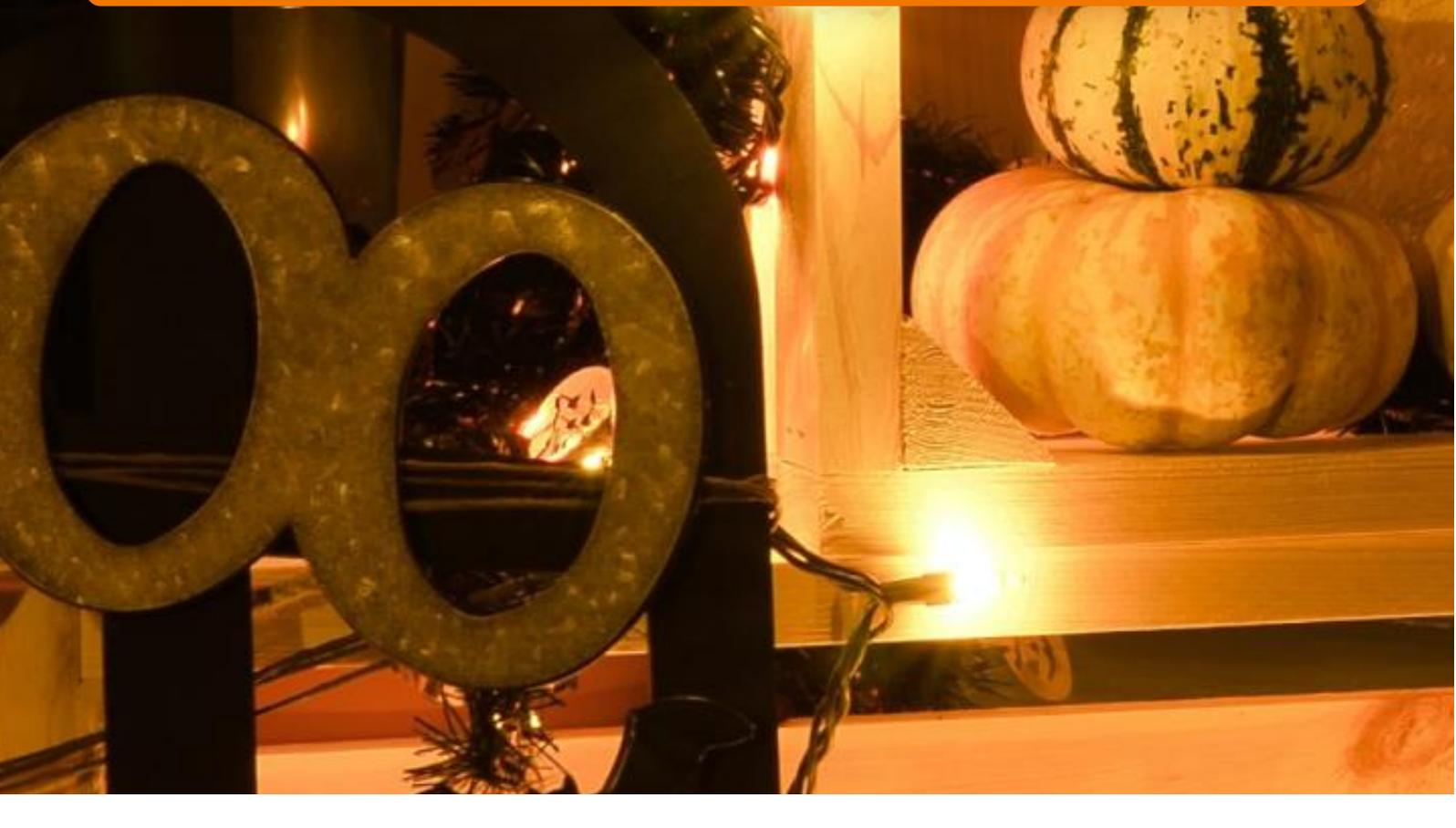
It is the mission of Hillcrest Academy North that all graduates have demonstrated the following attributes: Responsibility and accountability for themselves by routinely producing quality work through high academic standards now and in the future A sense of pride in who they are and what they can contribute as a

[ucesc.org](https://ucesc.org)



**John Marquet**

John is using Smore to create beautiful newsletters





## A Message From Our Principal: Dr. Balsamello

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October 2025 was filled with numerous activities. Through our district theme 'Paving Paths: One UCESC Voice At A Time' we focused on 'laying a positive foundation' whether that be in our class or social interactions. Our Social-Emotional theme was 'Respect' and the topics we reviewed were Anti-Bullying and the Week of Respect. Other activities included Breast Cancer Awareness week, School Violence Awareness Week, Red Ribbon Week as well as our regular School Spirit events, and surprise Attendance Matters Program incentives. Please enjoy our newsletter, be well!



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## October Important Dates

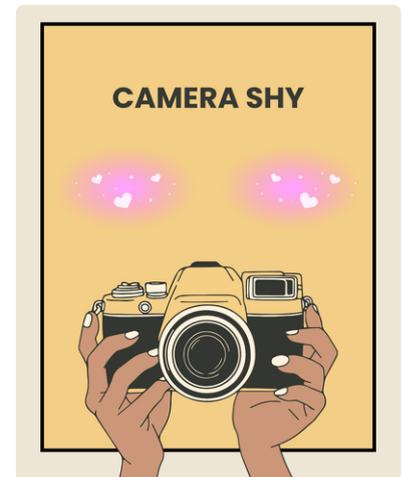
# October 2025

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1	2 no school - Yom Kippur	3 first pj day!	4
5 week of Respect	6 blue ribbon distribution	7 respect quotes read	8 Students sign HIB oath	9 Students write short reflections back to school night	10 wear HAS colors	11
12 Breast Cancer awareness week	13 Be a superhero of hope - wear superhero outfit	14 Peace out to breast cancer - wear tie dye	15 pajamas for a cause	16 team up against breast cancer - wear sports jerseys	17 wear pink	18
19 School Violence awareness week	20 Early dismissal - staff PD	21 hats for peace	22 handprint pledge - HAS peace wall	23 peace quotes read	24 wear white for peace	25
26 Red Ribbon week against drugs	27 Shade out drugs - wear shades & HAS colors	28 stay focused - wear college gear	29 wear red for a drug free school	30 Self care - pajama day	31 HALLOWEEN!	

## Student of the Month!

### Congratulations Fasiya!

HAS's Student of the Month is an individual who consistently demonstrates a combination of strong character, dedicated effort, and a positive impact on our school community. While academic achievement is part of her repertoire, this recognition goes beyond just getting good grades. It honors students who show remarkable perseverance, approaching challenges with a resilient attitude, and a commitment to learning. They are known for their kindness and respect, treating peers and staff with empathy and understanding, and often serve as a helpful friend or mentor to others. This student is a quiet leader and a role model whose positive attitude and integrity make the classrooms and HAS a better and more inclusive place for everyone. Fasiya embodies the values of HAS and truly shines as an example for peers. Congratulations Fasiya on a job well done!



## Faculty/Staff "Getting to Know You!"

### Ms Pradel's Favorites:

Favorite movie: The Blind Side

Favorite food: Haitian Food: Rice and Peas with fried pork

Favorite color: Pink

Favorite book: The Hunger Games by Suzanne Collins  
Favorite travel spot: Haiti  
Favorite activities: Cruises. I have been on 6 cruises in the past 3 years.



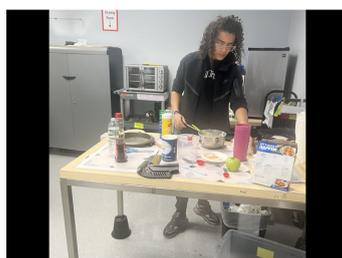
## Teacher's Corner: General Arts

### Mrs Picciano' Art Class

The art department successfully launched its new baking program at Hillcrest Academy South Campus this month. This was possible through a Union County Educational Services Foundation grant that Ms. Picciano received last school year. This began with foundational skills, covering supplies, accurate measuring, and the execution of a simple red velvet cake recipe, with each student producing an individual serving. As the unit progressed, students began to experiment by incorporating additions like cookies and chocolate. The second session included a comparative study of texture and flavor between store-bought and homemade buttercream.



The program then introduced basic breakfast preparations using batter mix to make waffles and pancakes. Students also practiced essential techniques such as cracking eggs separately, mixing ingredients, and mastering the proper cooking temperature and timing. Additional lessons covered simple recipes for roasted breakfast potatoes, brownies, and blondies from scratch. Currently, the program focuses on developing skills in preparing fillings and toppings, such as handmade whipped cream and apple compote, by utilizing pre-made mixes for the baked goods themselves.





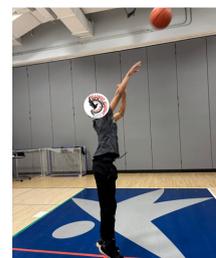
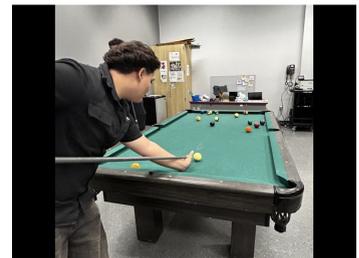
## Mr Barone's PhysEd and Health Classes

This month in **Physical Education**, students actively participated in a variety of activities focused on basketball skills and overall fitness. They practiced fundamental basketball techniques such as dribbling, passing, shooting, and teamwork through drills and modified games. In addition to basketball, students worked on improving their cardiovascular endurance, strength, and flexibility through fitness circuits and personal goal-setting exercises.



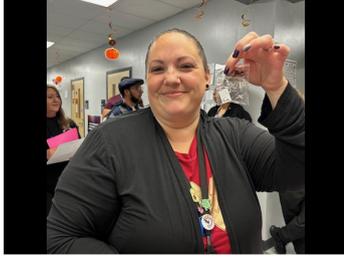
In **Health** class, students explored the topic "What Is Health?". Classes learned about the different dimensions of wellness such as physical, mental, emotional, and social health. They discussed how daily choices, relationships, and habits that all contribute to one's overall well-being. Students reflected on their own lifestyles and identified small steps they can take to live a healthier, more balanced life.

**Overall, students demonstrated strong participation, teamwork, and a growing understanding of how health and fitness connect both in and out of the classroom.**



# "Paving Paths" Teacher Recognitions

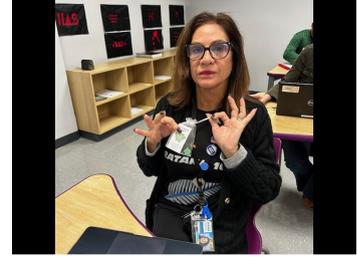
October - Laying the Foundation for Success



**Mrs W**



**Ms V**



**Ms Gilchrist**



**Mrs Fern**



**Mr Van Cleef**

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## HAS Students' Voices on Paving Paths: One UCESC Voice At A Time

Students writing about "Paving Paths: One UCESC Voice At A Time" can be a powerful exercise, allowing them to explore themes of individuality, collective action, and social change. As a result, students in Mrs Fern's classes are voicing their thoughts each month on our district theme.

### What does it mean to "Lay the Foundation for Success"?

To me it means to plan ahead or to make a blueprint so you would know how to exactly go on about things that lead you to success. It can even be your mindset. You need to have a strong mindset throughout your life so you can keep being successful. Something that reminds you of what needs to be done because it keeps you on track. A strong foundation starts in your head if you're not at your best you wont get the best results. - CT

To "lay foundation for success" means how to plan an idea of success whether it is having success in your classes or even in your future. I would want to focus more and be more energetic, pushing away all my failure problems and stuff that I did in the past. I also want to focus more on myself, my future, and my family. Getting good grades and understanding what I am learning is a plan that I can use for when I get a job. When laying out your plans and making good decisions for your future, it is always good to have God to guide you towards your paths who will always help your way to the right answer. - JMO

## How does practicing respect in school and in life strengthen the foundation for reaching your goals?

Practicing respect in school and in life can strengthen the foundation for reaching my goals by giving me more confidence to take on the day; to take on any obstacles I may face with a head held high and smile on my face. Respect can get you farther as well, possibly opening new opportunities and doors to better places because of the kindness and respect you have. People look for that and being respectful is being mindful, respecting people and their thoughts, and interest will reward you for being empathetic for others. - AE

Being respectful helps you stop thinking about negative things in life. It helps you reach your goals by being confident and not overthinking. Negative things would be hateful speeches, judging, etc, those things can be stuck in your head, and will get you nowhere. It's better to practice respect in school, since school is where you use your brain a lot, while growing up. That is how respect will help you reach your goals and be successful. - CC

## Think about a time when someone respected you (or maybe disrespected you) how did it help you feel more confident (or less confident) in your own path? How did you respond?

Once, someone had disrespected me by calling me out of my name. It had made me less confident in myself. I looked down upon myself. I thought that was who I was or what I was meant to be. I had thought that if you give respect you would get it back to same. That was my mistake; it's not always guaranteed that you will get the same in return, but it's about what you do as a person. That was a sign for me to continue to be respectful and to not stop me from my path of respectfulness and success. - KA

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## Back to School Night

Back-to-School Night was an evening event held earlier this month to introduce parents/ guardians to the HAS atmosphere. The evening was structured so that parents follow an abbreviated version of their student's daily class schedule, moving from one classroom to the next. The central goal was for parents to meet each of their student's teachers, hear a brief overview of the course curriculum, and learn about the classroom expectations regarding grading and conduct. The night began with an address from the HAS principal, Dr Balsamello, to cover school-wide policies and logistics. The overall objective was to establish a collaborative partnership between home and school for the student's to be successful throughout the year.

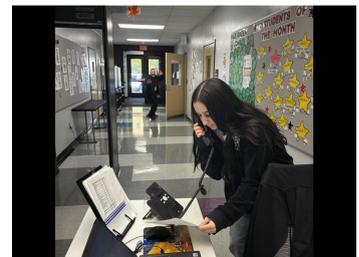
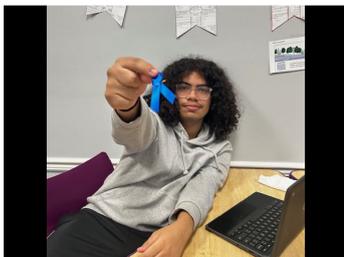




# Spirit Weeks

## Week of Respect

The Week of Respect is an annual observance held during the first week of October. It is designed to promote a positive and supportive school climate by focusing on social and emotional learning (SEL) and the active prevention of harassment, intimidation, and bullying (HIB). This week HAS provided age-appropriate instruction and activities that reinforce the core values of kindness, empathy, inclusion, and mutual respect among students, staff, and the community. The goal is to build character, encourage students to be a positive "upstanders," and to ensure every learning environment is safe and welcoming for all. This year, HAS students wore a blue ribbon in solidarity with respect and students created quotes on respect by affluent people from the past and present. As a sign of good faith and in honor of this week of respect, everyone at HAS signed the HIB Oath!



## Breast Cancer Awareness Week

Breast Cancer Awareness week at HAS was a filled with activities in solidarity with the international campaign dedicated to educating the public about the second most common cancer among women. HAS staff and students held special school spirit days. One was Dress as a Superhero which meant to encourage, recognize, and celebrate the courage and strength of those battling breast cancer and the researchers/medical professionals who work tirelessly for a cure. Wearing Tie-Dye Day promoted the theme of coming together in unity and peace for a common cause, celebrating diversity, and the collective effort to beat the disease. Another event was to wear pajamas that symbolized the importance of comfort, rest, and support for patients undergoing treatment, recognizing that recovery often requires taking care of oneself. The wearing of sports gear, reinforced the idea of teamwork and fighting hard against the disease, encouraging everyone to "team up" and play a part in raising awareness and supporting research. Finally, wearing Pink Day is the most traditional day, symbolizing the international fight against breast cancer and visually uniting the community in support of survivors and patients.

### Breast Cancer Awareness Month

**Spirit Week**  
**October 13-17**

**Monday: 10/13** "Be a Superhero of Hope"  
 Wear your superhero outfit!

**Tuesday: 10/14** "Say 'Peace out' to cancer"  
 Wear tie dye!

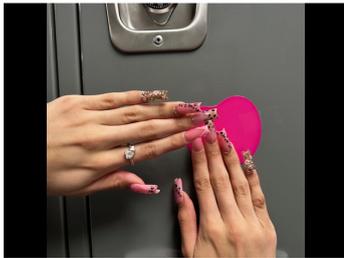
**Wednesday: 10/15** "Pajamas for a Cause"  
 Wear your comfy fits!

**Thursday: 10/16** "Team up against Breast Cancer"  
 Wear your favorite sports team shirt/colors!

**Friday: 10/17** **HAS Pink Day! Wear PINK!**

**Homeroom Competition Details:**  
 Dressing up each day gives your homeroom participation credit!  
 The homeroom with the highest average of participation at the end of the week wins a special treat for breakfast on 10/20!

**DRESS UP & HELP YOUR HOMEROOM WIN!**



### School Violence Awareness Week

School Violence Awareness Week is meant to focus on the critical issues of violence prevention, school safety, and creating a supportive learning environments. During this week, HAS had organized activities for students, and staff aimed at raising awareness about the root causes of violence, like bullying and conflict. One key component of this week is the expansion of our Peace wall. Created a few years ago by Ms Vlastaras, students who are new to the school or those who came later on in the previous year, add their legacy to the wall by putting their hand print on it with paint. This is meant to symbolize their commitment to "keeping the peace" at HAS. Other activities this week included the "hats off to peace" as well as our reading of inspirational quotes on peace by those who have pioneered the way before us. The ultimate goal

**OCTOBER 20-24**  
**School Violence Awareness Week**

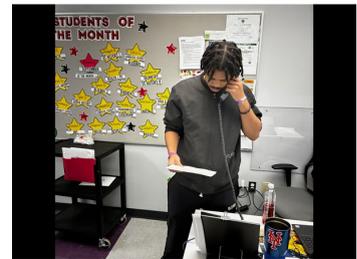
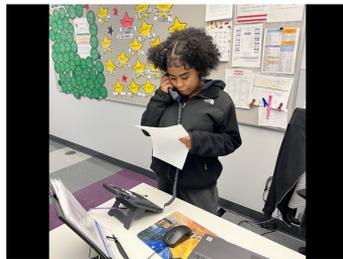
**Tuesday 10/21** - Hats off to peace!  
 Wear your favorite hat!

**Friday 10/24** - School Spirit  
 Wear white, a shirt with a positive message, or your HAS shirt!

**BE KIND** **YOU ARE STRONG** **YOU MATTER**

**WEAR YOUR WHITE PIN EVERY DAY!**

of this awareness week is to proactively build a safe, respectful, and resilient school community by equipping all with the knowledge and tools necessary to prevent violence and seek help when needed.



## Red Ribbon Week

Red Ribbon Week is the nation's oldest and largest drug prevention awareness campaign, observed annually in the United States from October 23rd to 31st to highlight the importance of living a healthy and drug-free life. The campaign began in 1985 in honor of DEA Special Agent Enrique "Kiki" Camarena, who was tragically murdered by drug traffickers while an investigating. During this week, students and staff were encouraged to wear red ribbons as a symbol of their commitment to prevent alcohol, tobacco, and other drug misuse. Students that wear the ribbon every day in the week will receive a special treat from the Westlake Sunshine Cafe. HAS also hosted a themed dress-up days such as "Stay Focused in Education - Wear College Gear", "Unite Against Drug Use - Wear Red", and "Take Care of Yourself - Pajama Day". All of these activities are to reinforce drug-free messaging, empower youth with refusal skills, and encourage the commitment to live a positive life and to make healthy choices.

**Red Ribbon Week**  
*Spirit Week*  
**October 27-30**

**Monday:** Make Healthy, Positive Choices! Lets Shave Out Drugs! Wear HAS colors & shades!  
*10/27*

**Tuesday:** Stay Focussed on Your Education! Wear college or career outfits!  
*10/28*

**Wednesday:** Unite for Safe & Drug Free schools! Wear something red!  
*10/29*

**Thursday:** Take care of yourself! Use positive self-talk and wear your comfy fits/pajamas!  
*10/30*

**Red Ribbon Week**  
 Wear your red ribbon each day in order to show your support of drug free schools!



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# GOOOOOOOOOAAAAAAAAL!!

HAS soccer fans are able to view various matches as an incentive through our Attendance Matters Program. Whether they are from the UEFA Champions League, Union of European Football Associations, or the Serie A Italian premier league, students and staff can enjoy top notch excitement. Watching these soccer matches is one of the many school incentives to reward and motivate students who achieve good academic standing and maintain strong attendance. This arrangement treats access to live or broadcast soccer matches as a privilege earned through demonstrated responsibility and hard work in the classroom. The underlying goal is to create a positive association, encouraging students to view academic success and consistent attendance not as simple requirements, but as a direct pathway to an enjoyable environment, shared social activities, and school spirit. By tying a highly desirable extracurricular event to concrete metrics like grades and attendance records, HAS effectively uses the excitement of sport to reinforce the value of discipline and engagement in our students' educational lives.



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## Diwali

Ms Arora shared with HAS her holiday of Diwali. Diwali, or Deepavali, is the Hindu festival of lights celebrated annually in autumn, also holding religious significance for Jains and Sikhs. Globally it symbolizes the spiritual victory of light over darkness, good over evil, and knowledge over ignorance. Lasting five days, the central celebration involves people thoroughly cleaning and decorating their homes with rows of small clay oil lamps called diyas, candles, and vibrant floor patterns known as rangoli to welcome the goddess of prosperity, Lakshmi. The festivities are marked by family gatherings, elaborate feasting, wearing new clothes, exchanging gifts and sweets, and setting off fireworks, all contributing to an atmosphere of joy, renewal, and hope for a prosperous year ahead. This year, Ms Arora decorated her classroom, shared videos of the different aspects of the holiday, and had students draw henna as a part of this celebration.





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## Students Outside of School

### He Shoots, He Scores!

Jaiden has dedicated nearly his entire life to basketball, a sport that he naturally adopted because it was simply "always around him." On the court, his defined role is that of a shooter, focusing on that specialized skill set. Being involved in this hobby and part of a team dynamic makes him feel great primarily because it successfully fulfills his need for physical activity and keeps him engaged.



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## Blooper Pic of the Month

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### About Us

Hillcrest Academy South Campus is an alternative high school for students from the Elizabeth Public School District. Students are referred to HAS by their Elizabeth Academy guidance counselor and administration for an interview at HAS. We provide a small educational learning setting with opportunities to make up courses through our Credit Retrieval Program in a caring environment in order to meet Elizabeth's graduation requirements.

Website: [www.ucesc.org](http://www.ucesc.org)

Instagram: [ucesc\\_has](https://www.instagram.com/ucesc_has)

Facebook: [Hillcrest Academy South](https://www.facebook.com/HillcrestAcademySouth)

Location: [1571 Lamberts Mill Road, Westfield, NJ, USA-Door 3B](#)

Phone: [908-233-9317](tel:908-233-9317)

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**HAS Smore**

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# CROSSROADS MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

October 2025

## Message from the Administration

Dear Crossroads Community,

What a whirlwind! It seems as though October flew by, but when we look back, it's no wonder—it truly felt like we had something exciting to do every day at Crossroads School! This month's focus on Laying the Foundation for our year-long theme of Paving Paths has been perfectly reflected in our busy calendar. We've been building strong community ties, establishing positive behaviors, and creating unforgettable memories.



We kicked off the month with the Week of Respect, a time dedicated to promoting civil and supportive conduct among students, staff, and the community. This focus perfectly aligned with our monthly Social Emotional Learning (SEL) theme of Respect! We had fantastic participation in spirit activities, such as HERO Day (Helping Everyone Respect Others) and wearing Pink for Love and cancer awareness. Later in the month, we observed School Violence Awareness Week, a dedicated time to focus on deterring violence in schools and promoting school safety. Our students teamed up against violence by wearing sports gear and symbolically putting violence to bed with a pajama day. October is also Fire Prevention Month, and the students absolutely loved getting a visit from the Westfield Fire Department!

Beyond safety awareness, we ventured out to some amazing locations. Crossroads School was able to take a trip to the farm to pick pumpkins, take a wagon ride, and eat apple cider and donuts (yum!). We also took our monthly visit to Lifetown and resumed our valuable visits to Rutgers

Dental School for dental cleanings and screenings. Students were also treated to a day of mini golf and pizza donated by Connor's Crew. Such a wonderful day for our students.

We were thrilled to be Paving Paths by partnering with other schools in our district this month. The Work Readiness Academy invited some of our Crossroads students to their Haunted House, where they were able to walk through their spooky hallway and play carnival games. This was an excellent opportunity for our students to interact and build connections! Speaking of partnering, on Halloween, we were delighted to have a few students from Lamberts Mill Academy volunteer to help with our event activities. It was so exciting to see everyone in costume, and it was a wonderful day!

As busy as October has been, we have so much to look forward to in November. The holiday season officially kicks off on November 13th with our highly anticipated Holiday Express Party!

We hope you enjoy the start of this next exciting month as we continue to Pave Paths together!

Warm Regards,

Matt, Danielle, and Stacey

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### Upcoming Dates

**November 6, 2025** - School Closed - Teachers Convention

**November 7, 2025** - School Closed - Teachers Convention

**November 13, 2025** - Crossroads Field Trip to Westlake (Holiday Express)

**November 19, 2025** - Parent Teacher Conferences (AM Session 9:00-11:30)

**November 20, 2025** - Parent Teacher Conferences (Afternoon Session 12:30 - 2:00)

**November 20, 2025** - Parent Teacher Conferences (Evening Session 6:00 - 8:00)

**November 20, 2025** - Parent Education/Support Meeting (1:00)

**November 26, 2025** - Early Dismissal for Students - 1:00 - Thanksgiving

**November 27, 2025** - School Closed - Thanksgiving

**November 28, 2025** - School Closed - Thanksgiving

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### Crossroads Student Spotlight

#### Student of the Month - Sarah

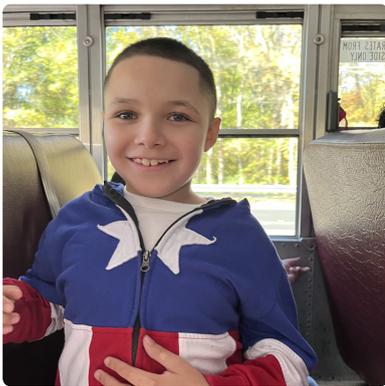
The student of the month is Sarah! Sarah has been attending Crossroads for the past three years and is currently in the first grade. She is a hard-working girl who loves to explore different sensory items. In our class, Sarah enjoys playing with cereal, sand, and cause-and-effect toys. Often, you can find Sarah on the swings, smiling and giggling away. Sarah is fabulous at choosing different videos for her and her classmates to watch during Morning Meeting. Sarah is adored by her fellow peers, therapists, and staff. She is a light in the classroom, and we love working together.



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## Classroom Spotlight

### Ms. Gaby's Classroom



Hello from 105!

It's hard to believe we're already well into fall! October has been full of learning, creativity, and fun. Our focus this month is on the letters A through C, strengthening our independence skills during our morning routine, and preparing for Halloween! During alphabet centers, we went on scavenger hunts looking for all things starting with A-C and created apple, banana, and Cookie Monster crafts.

Our morning routine is the most important part of the day, as it sets us all up for a successful day. We have been incorporating a lot of visuals and checklists for everyone to become more independent as they walk in every day.

Halloween is approaching, and we have been prepping a lot of Halloween activities and talking about our costumes. The most amazing part of October was the FOUR field trips we got to go on. From our first LifeTown trip of the year, mini golfing, Wightman Farms, and the WRA Haunted House, we are super tired, but so thankful for the experiences. We are looking forward to everything coming our way!

With lots of love!



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## Ms. Bridget's Classroom

The fall season is in full swing in Room 220B, and our middle school students have been busy learning and growing both inside and outside of the classroom!

This month, our focus has been on developing real-world functional skills through our Community-Based Instruction (CBI) trips. So far, we've visited Costco, ShopRite, and LifeTown, where students practiced reading shopping lists, locating and identifying ingredients, counting money, and following directions in a community setting.



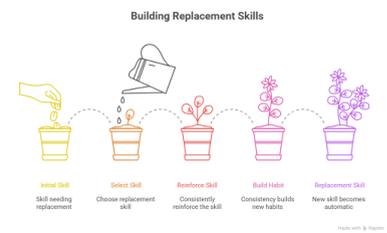
In the classroom, students have also been practicing these same skills through role-play activities, money-counting games, and community-safety lessons, preparing them for success when they go out on future trips.

In addition to money and shopping skills, students are also strengthening their ability to recognize and read community and road signs, promoting safety and independence when out in the community. We've been so proud of the progress our class has made during these outings- everyone is working hard, showing responsibility, and demonstrating great teamwork!

We look forward to continuing our CBI adventures and building even more independence as we move into the next month.



For our younger learners, emotions and behavior can sometimes feel “big” and hard to manage. Every behavior is a way of communicating a need—whether that’s wanting something, avoiding something, or seeking comfort or sensory input. By supporting children with structure, teaching new skills, and reinforcing their efforts, we can help them grow their regulation skills over time.



## Understand the “Why” Behind Behavior

When a child yells, cries, runs away, or grabs for something, they are communicating. Ask yourself: What are they trying to tell me? Are they hungry, tired, overwhelmed, or asking for attention? Looking for the “why” helps us respond with support instead of frustration.

## Build Predictable Routines

Children thrive on structure. Predictable routines (morning greetings, transition songs, clear schedules with visuals) help reduce anxiety and prevent challenging behavior before it starts.

## Teach and Practice Simple Coping Skills

Even very young or non-vocal children can learn coping skills. Practice and model simple tools such as:

- Taking a deep breath with visuals or bubbles 🌬️
- Using a fidget toy or sensory item 🌀
- Asking for a break with a picture card, gesture, or words 🗣️
- Moving to a calm space when overwhelmed 🏠

## Reinforce the Positive

Celebrate the small wins! If a child raises their hand instead of calling out, uses a picture to ask for help, or even takes a breath before crying, notice it right away:

- “I love how you asked for help with your picture card.”
- “Great job taking a break when you felt upset.”

Reinforcement builds skills faster than correction.

## Prepare for Triggers

Some situations can be especially tough for kids—like leaving the playground, going to the store, getting ready for bed, or moving from one activity to another. Planning ahead helps your child feel more comfortable and reduces stress for everyone.

- Practice with visuals or role-play: Show pictures of the steps for bedtime or act out what will happen before a grocery trip.

- Use timers or transition warnings: A simple “5 more minutes, then we clean up” with a timer or song gives your child time to prepare.
- Offer choices when possible: Choices like “Do you want to brush teeth or put on pajamas first?” give your child a sense of control and independence.

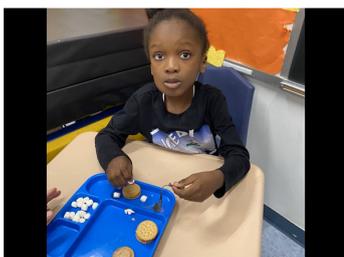
### Model Calm Behavior

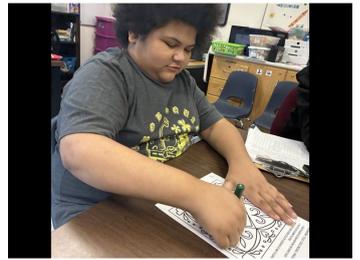
Children look to adults to know how to act. Using a calm voice, steady breathing, and patient body language teaches them how to stay regulated.

### 🎃 October Challenge 🎃

Choose *one* coping or communication skill to focus on this month (like asking for a break or using a calm corner). Reinforce it every time your child uses it, even in small steps. Practice makes progress!

## October at Crossroads







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## Crossroads In the Community





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## Halloween Activities



**Staff Halloween Fun!**

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## **Parent Resources**

The County of Union is advising residents of impacts to those who receive SNAP Benefits due to the Federal Government Shutdown

Visit <https://ucnj.org/dhs/snap-update/>

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### **About Us**

**Website:** [https://www.ucesc.org/schools/crossroads\\_school](https://www.ucesc.org/schools/crossroads_school)

**Location:** [45 Cardinal Drive, Westfield, NJ, USA](#)

**Phone:** [908-233-9317](tel:908-233-9317)

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