



Westlake December



NEWSLETTER

Message from the Administrators

**“Some say our world is getting too small, I say with kindness there’s room for us all....in our world”-
Muppets: Emmet Otter’s Jug Band Christmas🎄**



This December has been filled with excitement and community spirit at Westlake School! Our WPO kicked off the season with a joyful Family Movie Night featuring the live-action *Grinch*, complete with hot chocolate and holiday treats like candy canes, brownies, and cookies for families and staff to enjoy together.

Students and staff showed their festive cheer during Holiday Spirit Week by wearing colorful socks, cozy pajamas, and their favorite holiday or “ugly” sweaters, and joining in our schoolwide Holiday Sing-Along. Our annual Holiday Sale was a huge success, showcasing beautifully crafted student-made items such as beaded pens, dog biscuits, engraved key rings, scarves, jewelry, bookmarks, greeting cards, and even holiday-themed engraved chocolates. Throughout the month, our school community gave back through a Holiday Food Drive and an all-school Penny War, with classes competing to support the Community Food Bank of NJ—the winning class earning a well-deserved pizza party! Classrooms also participated in a creative Door Decorating Contest, and even good old “Saint Nick” himself, Santa Claus, paid a visit to Westlake School, delivering gifts, good cheer and smiles to every student. To top it off, our Sunshine Café featured

festive student-made treats, including Snowman Sugar Cookies and a refreshing Grinch Smoothie. It has truly been a magical month of learning, giving, and celebrating together at Westlake School!

From our family to yours,
May you have a happy and healthy holiday filled with festivities, family and fun!
Till next Year my friends, Be Good to Yourself and Each Other!
Claudine T., Stacey K., Bobby P.



Westlake Information

Important Dates!

- December 23: (1:00 Early Dismissal); Santa visit
- December 24-January 4: (District Closed) Winter Recess
- January 5: District Open
- January 12: (1:00 Early Dismissal) for Staff Professional Development
- January 16: School Spirit Day
- January 19: (District Closed) Martin Luther King Jr. Day
- January 23: Creature Comforts visits Westlake School



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						
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	31	

November '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						

December '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	31			

January '26						
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	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.

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 and sent via the First Alert system.

February '26						
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

March '26						
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	31				

April '26						
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		

May '26						
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
31						

June '26						
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				

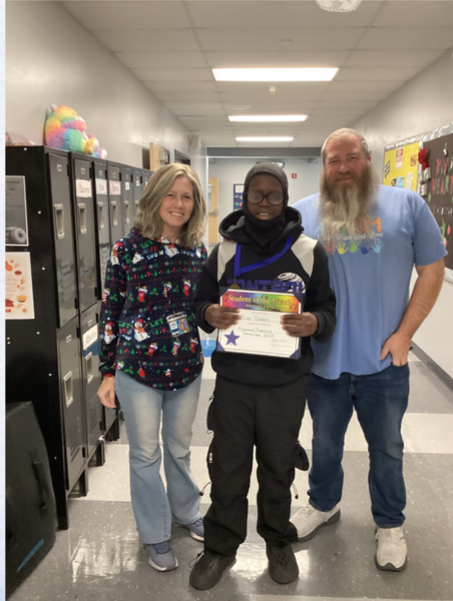


December Spotlight!

Student of the Month!



Student of the Month



Z.S. is being recognized for consistently demonstrating kindness and patience throughout the month. They are a hard-working student who approaches their schoolwork with focus and determination. In addition, they have made a wonderful effort to build positive relationships and make new friends, creating a welcoming and supportive classroom environment.

Principal Award Winner!



Principal's Award



J.K. is our Principal's Award winner! He is being recognized for working so hard over the past month. Through hard work and a positive attitude, he has shown noticeable growth. Their commitment to doing their best is commendable and sets a great example for others!

Staff of the Month!



Staff Member of the Month



T.J. is our Staff of the Month and is being recognized for his kindness and patience in working with the student he supports each day. He consistently creates a fun, engaging environment that helps the student feel comfortable and motivated to learn. His dedication and genuine desire to do what is best for his student truly makes a positive impact.

Sunshine Cafe Employee of the Month!

SUNSHINE CAFE EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH



The Sunshine Cafe would like to announce our December Employee of the Month.... E.K.! We chose him because he comes to school every day ready to work. He is always kind and respectful to everyone around him. He's always working hard and wants to help in any way he can. He's an amazing worker and friend to all!



Sunshine Cafe!



The Sunshine Café was filled with holiday cheer and excitement. The students made adorable snowman sugar cookies decorated with marshmallows, Mini M&Ms, and pretzels. They also created a festive Grinch Refresher featuring a red sugar-rimmed cup and a choice of peppermint or sour apple drink. In between serving customers, the students played Christmas music and enjoyed fun dance parties, spreading joy throughout the café.







Work Based Learning!



Our Work Based Learning students had the opportunity to practice real-world job skills at the Clark Public Library. They assisted with setting up a festive Christmas display and helped clean and organize toys in the children’s section. This experience supported skill development in responsibility, teamwork, and following workplace routines. The students took pride in contributing to a welcoming environment for the community.



December Tips from the Westlake Behavior Team!

Supporting Regulation and Independence During a Busy Season

December often brings unique challenges, changes in routine, special school events, community outings, and sensory overload. For students with autism and multiple disabilities, predictability and clear communication become even more essential. So, what can we do to help?

Prepare for Changes with Predictable Supports

Unexpected schedule shifts can create anxiety. Use:

- Visual schedules
- “Change” icons
- First/Then boards
- Countdown timers
- Talk about upcoming changes
- Watch videos about what event may be coming

Simple previews like, "After dinner with the family, we will have a special activity," help maintain security and reduce refusal behaviors.

Support Communication in All Forms

Many students express overwhelm through behavior. Encourage regulated communication by modeling or prompting:

- AAC messages ("Break, help, finished, wait")
- Gestures
- Coping visuals

Every time a student uses their system instead of escalating, reinforce it:

"Great job telling me you needed space."

Match Support to the Child's Regulation Level

Busy environments (assemblies, holiday crafts, class parties) can increase sensory stress. Offer:

- Sensory breaks
- Movement or quiet corners
- Noise-reduction supports
- Step-by-step modeling for tasks

Adjusting expectations based on regulation preserves dignity and independence.

Maintain Calm, Safe Body Language

When a child becomes dysregulated, fewer words and more gentle presence help:

- Provide proximity (get closer)
- Use clear visuals
- Join them in the first step of the task

Your calm body language and modeling communicates safety more strongly than verbal prompting.

December Independence Challenge

Choose one communication or ADL skill to reinforce daily (e.g., requesting help, using a schedule, folding laundry, or asking for a break). Celebrate every attempt!

With Appreciation,

The Westlake Behavior Department



Mr. Wasserman's Class

I would first like to thank Mr. Abhay, Ms. Jackie, and Ms. Diana for working so hard this year to support the students to help them reach their highest potential.

This month, classroom W83 has been very busy. In addition to continuing to work hard on our core academics, we have also been working diligently on our vocational tasks. We have been making

personalized key chains and one-of-a-kind bookmarks.

- The key chains are leather on a metal ring. The students use a metal stamping kit to engrave a personal message.
- The bookmarks are made from stickers or pressed flowers that are then laminated.

These are for sale all year long and profits will replenish the student funds account.

The students have been engaging in activities and lessons reinforcing our monthly themes of kindness and respect. The students are excited to participate in our holiday-sing-along as well as the holiday sale and then take a well-deserved vacation. We look forward to seeing everyone in the new year.

Mr. Wasserman's class W83



Ms. Claire's Class!

This month, students in W81 have been focusing on the theme of patience and kindness. We have been practicing these values throughout our daily routines, classroom activities, and collaborative projects, learning how kindness can be shown through both words and actions.

In Social Studies, students have been learning about maps and how they help us navigate the world around us. To connect this learning to our monthly theme, the class worked together to create a map of the school that will be displayed for new students, staff, and visitors. This project allowed students to put kindness into action by creating something helpful for others in our school community.

Math lessons have been both hands-on and creative. Students explored patterns by making ABA, ABB, and ABC sequences using fresh fruit skewers, and are exploring geometry through the construction of gingerbread houses. Functional math and financial literacy skills continue to be a major focus through our classroom dog biscuit business. Each week, students bake a new batch, take orders, and fulfill previous orders. We love celebrating our happy canine—and even a few feline—customers on our classroom “Wall of Dogs.”

In preparation for the upcoming holidays, students have also been busy creating beaded pens to sell at our holiday sale, practicing fine motor skills, perseverance, and pride in their work.

As the season approaches, the students and staff of our classroom would like to wish everyone a joyful holiday season filled with warmth, kindness, and cheer.



Occupational Therapy with Ms. Sara!

Happy Holidays from the Occupational Therapy Department!

December has been a busy and festive month, filled with hands-on learning, skill-building, and joyful winter activities. As we wrap up the year, we wanted to share some of the wonderful things our students have been working on.

This month, our students strengthened their fine motor skills through holiday-themed tasks such as cutting, coloring, bead stringing, and using tweezers for small-object activities. These exercises help build hand strength, coordination, and precision—important foundations for writing, self-care skills, and classroom tasks.

We've also incorporated a variety of sensory activities to support regulation, attention, and exploration. From textured art projects to scented playdough and winter-themed sensory bins, students had opportunities to engage their senses in fun and meaningful ways. These experiences help promote body awareness, emotional regulation, and readiness for learning.

One of the highlights of December was practicing multi-step directions while completing simple recipes (Grinch popcorn, gingerbread houses, soap scrub bars to sell at the holiday sale). Cooking activities are a great way to reinforce sequencing, safety awareness, and problem-solving, all while supporting independence in activities of daily living. Students enjoyed measuring, mixing, pouring, and of course tasting their creations!

As we head into the holiday break, we are grateful for the hard work and enthusiasm our students bring to each session. We look forward to more growth, creativity, and fun in the new year. Wishing all of our students and families a warm, safe, and happy holiday season!



Hanukkah Celebrations at Westlake!

Thank you Ms. Aliza, Ms.A, and Mr. Wasserman!

Teachers shared meaningful Hanukkah traditions with both staff and students throughout the school. Ms. Aliza brought in doughnuts for the staff, while Ms. A played the dreidel with L.R. and Mr. T.J. Mr. Wasserman's class created edible dreidels using Hershey Kisses, pretzels, and marshmallows. In addition, all classes completed a lesson on Hanukkah, helping students learn about and appreciate the holiday's traditions.



Westlake Holiday Sing Along!

The Westlake School Holiday Sing-Along was a joyful event that brought students, staff, and families together. Everyone sang holiday favorites such as *Let It Snow*, *Jingle Bells*, and *Dreidel*,

Dreidel, Dreidel, along with Westlake favorites like *Sweet Caroline*. The celebration ended with the beloved Westlake tradition of the *12 Days of Christmas*. It was a fun and meaningful way to bring families together and celebrate the holiday season before winter break.



Wolf Pack Press! 🐾

The Holiday Sale at the Commission was a huge success! We sold a variety of things - From mugs and hats, to custom key chains and bookmarks, chocolates and cards, jewelry, and more.

The students did an excellent job and worked hard!

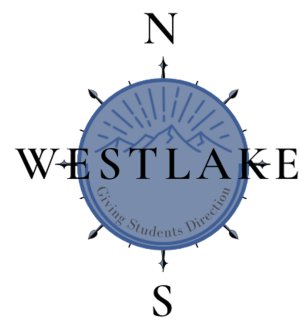
Parent Resources!

Contact Us!

Website: www.ucesc.org/schools/westlake_school

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

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



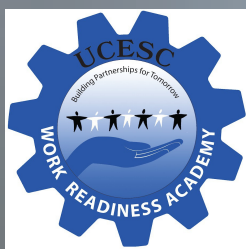
INSTAGRAM!

Visit us!



Robert Peneno

Robert is using Smore to create beautiful newsletters



Work Readiness Academy

December 2025 Monthly Report

Message from the Director



Dear Families & Supporters,

As December arrives and we approach winter break, I want to take a moment to reflect on the first part of our school year and the important learning and skill-building that has taken place across our programs.

The months behind us have been a true foundation-building phase. In classrooms, students have been developing essential skills for employment and applying these skills during their Work-Based Learning experiences in the community. Just as importantly, they have been growing as members of our community:

collaborating with peers, showing responsibility, and developing empathy and respect for one another. This stage of the year is not always about flashy final products; it is about practice, effort, and growth. These early investments in skills and habits of learning prepare students for deeper exploration and confidence in the months ahead. We are proud of the progress our students have made and grateful to our teachers and staff for the care, patience, and dedication they bring to this work every day.

As we head into winter break and the holiday season, I encourage families to take time to rest, reconnect, and celebrate in ways that are meaningful to you. A break from the school routine can be a valuable opportunity for reflection, curiosity, and joy—whether through reading together, having conversations, or simply enjoying time as a family.

There is nothing I enjoy more than running into former students and seeing them thriving at work. On days when I am on-site at Overlook Medical Center, I always try and make time to stop by the salad bar in the cafeteria and place my order with **Cynthia**, a current team member in the Food Services Department at Overlook, and former Project SEARCH intern (Class of 2020).

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.

Thank you for your continued partnership and support. We look forward to welcoming students back in the new year refreshed and ready to build on the strong foundation they have already established.

Wishing you a safe, restful, and joyful winter break.

Warm regards,
Josh Bornstein, Director
UCESC Work Readiness Academy
jbornstein@ucesc.org



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.** You may also call our main number at (908) 633-2704. If it is

before 8am, please leave a message.



Instructional Insights



Managing the Bumps in the Road - Building Skills for Real Life at the Work Readiness Academy

"A smooth sea never made a skilled sailor."
- Franklin D. Roosevelt

In December at the Work Readiness Academy, our students focused on an essential life and workplace skill: *managing the bumps in the road*. Whether at school, in the community, or at their internships, challenges are a natural part of learning and growth. At WRA, we intentionally teach students how to recognize challenges, communicate their needs, and work through problems with confidence and independence.

Across our classrooms, instruction emphasized teamwork, self-advocacy and communication. Students practiced identifying when they needed help, asking clarifying questions, expressing preferences, and using effective language to express their concerns, thoughts, and ideas. Through guided discussions, role-playing, and reflection activities, students learned that speaking up is not only encouraged, but a critical component of success across all settings.

In our skills center, students applied these concepts through hands-on, real-world tasks. Activities were designed to require collaboration and teamwork, encouraging students to share responsibilities, problem-solve together, and support one another when plans didn't go as expected. When materials were missing, steps were unclear, or tasks needed adjustment, students practiced staying flexible, communicating with peers and staff, and finding solutions rather than giving up.

These skills were again put into practice and truly came to life during work-based learning internships, where students are often met with authentic workplace challenges. From navigating schedule changes to adapting to new expectations or asking for clarification from mentors and teaching assistants, students were supported in using problem-solving strategies and self-advocacy skills in real time. Weekly feedback from internship sites helped guide conversations back in the classroom, allowing students to reflect, adjust, and grow from each experience.

Managing the bumps in the road is not only about accepting challenges, but more importantly about having the tools to face them successfully, and move forward with confidence to achieve our goals! Through individually designed instruction, meaningful practice, and real-world experiences, WRA students are developing the communication, collaboration, and problem-solving skills they need to become confident, independent, and contributing members of their homes, communities and future workplaces.

Together, we continue paving paths, one student, one skill, and one challenge at a time.

Rachel Richer, Supervisor of Curriculum and Instruction



December 2025 Data

Enrollment as of December 22, 2025

Actual: 28

Changes: Entered: 0 Exited: 0

Referrals: 4

Intakes Scheduled: 2

Accepted: 2

Drills

12/11/25 - Fire Drill

12/22/25 - EM (Lockdown Drill)





January 5, 2026 - District Re-Opens from Winter Break

Jan 5 - Jan 9, 2026 - 2nd Internship Rotations Begin at Project SEARCH

January 12 - Early Dismissal (1:00pm) - Staff Development

January 19 - No School - Martin Luther King Jr. Day

Leveling Up: Student Achievements

Proud Moments: Showcasing Student Accomplishments

This month, we are thrilled to recognize three WRA students who exemplify what it means to manage challenges with resilience, teamwork, and a positive mindset. Each of these students demonstrates how patience, responsibility, and encouragement help turn obstacles into opportunities for growth.

Matt

Matt brings creativity and enthusiasm into everything he does. When faced with challenges, he approaches them with an open mind and a willingness to try new ideas. Matt is always ready to lend a helping hand to peers, offering support and encouragement when things don't go as planned.

His positive attitude and collaborative spirit make him a valued team member who helps others stay motivated, even during difficult moments.

Kiya

Kiya demonstrates remarkable composure and empathy in all settings. She approaches challenges thoughtfully, remaining open to feedback and willing to share her ideas. Kiya shows compassion for others, offering encouragement and understanding when peers need support. Her calm presence and sense of responsibility help create a respectful, collaborative environment where everyone feels valued and supported.

Sean

Sean’s hard work and dedication shine through each day. He consistently gives his best effort, even when tasks are challenging or require extra patience. Sean’s joyful sense of humor brings positivity to the group and helps ease stressful situations, reminding others that it’s okay to laugh while working through a problem. His perseverance and responsibility show how commitment and a positive outlook can help overcome any bump in the road.

We are so proud of Matt, Kiya, Sean, and all of our hard-working students of the Work Readiness Academy! Keep of the fantastic work everyone!

Matt

.....

Kiya

.....

Sean

.....

Teamwork Makes the Dream Work at WRA!

I'm so excited to share all the incredible things we've been working on in the classroom this month. It's been a period of remarkable growth and hands-on learning, centered around a theme that's essential for success: teamwork.



The Power of Collaboration

This month, our main focus has been diving deep into the concepts of collaboration, contribution, and communication—all vital components of effective teamwork, especially as they relate to the world of work.

Building on the foundation we established earlier in the year with themes of self-advocacy and communication, we've integrated this teamwork theme into nearly every lesson and activity. We've learned that being able to speak up for yourself (self-advocacy) and clearly express your thoughts (communication) are crucial skills, but they truly shine when you put them into practice while working with others.

We are finding that the more practice we get, the easier it is to self-advocate and communicate while working alongside our classmates and colleagues at work.

Putting Skills to the Test

The students have been practicing their teamwork skills in two major environments: our dedicated skills room and, most excitingly, our student-run enterprise, the maker of our delicious Soul Energy Snack Mix and Granola.

In our student run enterprise, things have been changing! We recently assigned leadership roles to different aspects of the operation. This strategy allows a student who is confident and skilled in a particular area to step up, take the lead, and use their strengths. This not only builds their confidence but gives them a real-world opportunity to practice communication, modeling, and teamwork as we produce our goods.

- **Contribution:** Everyone has a valuable part to play, whether it's measuring ingredients, packaging, or managing inventory.
- **Collaboration:** Students must work together to make sure the production process flows smoothly.
- **Reflection:** At the end of our tasks, students take time to reflect not only on their level of **independence** with the work but also on how well they utilized their **teamwork** skills.

Teamwork Matters (Beyond the Classroom)

We've spent time discussing *why* teamwork is such a valuable skill. The students have grasped that teamwork is a benefit to **everyone** involved:

1. **For Team Members:** It allows us to leverage diverse strengths, share the workload, and learn from one another.
2. **For Employers:** A team that communicates well and collaborates effectively is more productive and successful!

It's been wonderful watching the students grow more comfortable and effective in their roles, realizing that **teamwork truly does make the dream work!** I'm incredibly proud of the hard work and cooperation I see every day.

Jodi Klimko, WRA Classroom Teacher/SLE

Tige and Steven cutting ribbon for our Soul Energy Snack Mix and Granola



Anthony and Christian curling ribbon



Nick and Steven putting ribbons on our bags

Kiya and Tige making our granola



Project SEARCH Update

For the 2nd year in a row the Project SEARCH interns participated in a "Introduction to Patient Care Technician Skills Training" session led by representatives from the Atlantic Health PEACE Grant team. The students learned various skills including how to take vital signs!



We are now accepting applications for the Project SEARCH Class of 2026 cohort for the 2026-27 school year! Please click the link below for more information and to access the application!



Project SEARCH Internships for Neurodiverse Young Adults at Atlantic Health

Through Project SEARCH, Atlantic Health System offers year-long internship opportunities at three NJ hospitals for young adults with developmental differences.

atlantichealth.org



Cookies with Kelley

During the month of December, Kelley Schupak, one of UCESC's Board Certified Behavior Analysts launched a new recurring training series for our staff at the Work Readiness Academy.

The "**Cookies with Kelley!**" series brings WRA staff together for quick, practical "bite-sized" behavior chats. During this time, Kelley shares neurodiversity-affirming, evidence-based strategies that support communication, independence, and respectful behavior interventions for young adults preparing for life and work after graduation. This ongoing series helps our team reflect, learn from everyday situations, and continue improving how we support students as they prepare for adulthood.

.....

Kelley Schupak, MA, CCC-SLP, BCBA
Union County Educational Services Commission
kschupak@ucesc.org

.....

From Classroom to Career: Work-Based Learning in Action!

Jonathan at Shoprite in Clark

.....

Larissa at Petco in Clark Commons

.....

Tige at DSW in Union Plaza

.....

Izzy at Sweet & Fancy in Downtown Cranford

.....

Kevin at South Avenue Dental in Downtown Cranford

.....

Giselle at Bovella's in Mountainside

.....

.....

From Hallways to Holiday Sales - Our Students Sleigh the Mall Trip!

WRA Holiday Spirit Found...Mostly in the Jersey Gardens Mall Food Court

Small blurb about the mall trip

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Spreading Holiday Cheer to Local Seniors!

This week in our social skills groups we made holiday cards for elderly residents in our community.

.....

.....

Greetings from Our Holiday Party!

WRA, Project Search and former Students Celebrated the Season Together!

Everyone enjoyed decorating cookies, singing, dancing, playing games and each other's company.

.....

Picture of the Month

Donna and Chelsea are proof that "two hats are better than one"!

Community Resources/Events

As we prepare to turn the calendar to 2026, one of our staff will be contacting you (or may have already contacted you) to determine which services your family may have already applied for and which services you may still need to apply for.

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/1Dd5UPLsL/>

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

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

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**



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 #mentalhealth #support.



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

Email: jbornstein@ucesc.org

Website: https://www.ucesc.org/schools/the_work_readiness_academy

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

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



**Click Here to Follow the
WRA on Instagram!**



WRA Smore

WRA is using S'more to create beautiful newsletters



December



May this month bring comfort, celebration, and beautiful memories to close the year.
Newsletter 25-26

The central graphic is framed by a decorative border of red poinsettias, green holly leaves, and red berries. The word "December" is written in a large, elegant red cursive font. Below it is the Hillcrest Academy South Campus logo, which features a black silhouette of a dove with its wings spread, surrounded by the text "HILLCREST ACADEMY SOUTH CAMPUS" and "We Celebrate HOPE". Below the logo is the tagline "Hillcrest Opens Possibilities for Everyone".

A Message From Our Principal: Dr. Balsamello

Hillcrest Academy South Campus (HAS) was filled with holiday cheer throughout December with School Spirit Themes everyday! We continued to recognize students and staff for their excellent work and contributions to our school community. Please enjoy our newsletter...Merry Christmas, happy holidays, and Happy New!



Important Dates



Student of the Month!

Congratulations Jonathan!

HAS's Student of the Month is an individual who consistently demonstrates a combination of strong character, dedicated effort, great attendance, and a positive impact on our school community. While academic achievement is part of his 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. Jonathan embodies the values of HAS and truly shines as an example for peers. Congratulations Jonathan on a job well done!



Faculty/Staff "Getting to Know You"!

Ms Gilchrist's Favorites:

Favorite movie: The Departed

Favorite food: Steak

Favorite color: Blue

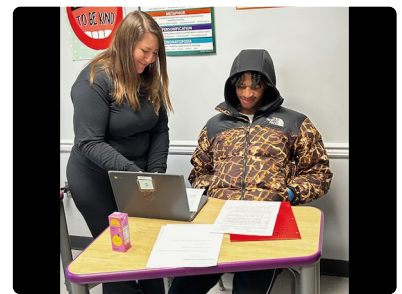
Favorite book: *Gone with the Wind*
Favorite travel spot: Anywhere with a Beach
Favorite pastime: Reading



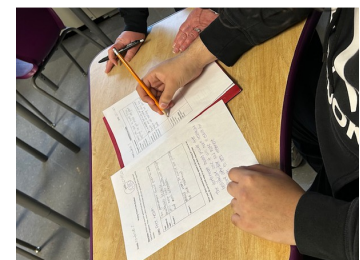
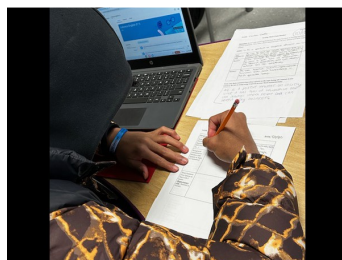
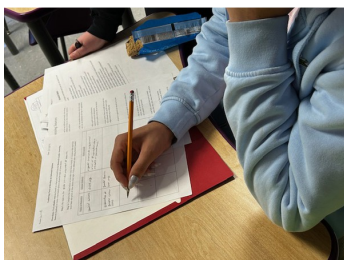
Teacher's Corner: ELA

Mrs Lobosco: English

Ms. Lobosco's English courses completed Unit 1 of the English curriculum. At the beginning of the month, classes reviewed the skills needed to write an Argumentative Research Paper. Students started this by reading a Pro-Con article that discussed whether or not the United States should import goods. Students identified the elements of an argument in each article and then formed their own viewpoint on the issue. Classes then wrote a short argumentative piece where they wrote a claim based on whether the United States should continue to import goods, cited supporting evidence, and wrote a counterclaim and rebuttal for their claim. This helped prepare students for their final writing task for Unit 1.



For the final writing task, students conducted research on a topic of their choice and to form an opinion. They then wrote an argumentative essay based on their thesis statement, researched supporting evidence, and wrote an outline. Once students completed their Argumentative Essay Outline, the teacher provided feedback, and students made appropriate revisions to type out their final essays on Google Classroom.

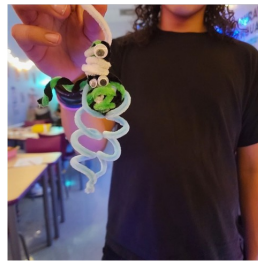
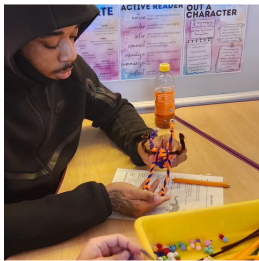


Ms Vlastaras: English/Creative Writing

During the month of December students in Creative Writing continued reading, discussing, and analyzing memoirs in order to explore the essential question of *What makes a story worth telling?* Students read memoirs by Jason Kim, Christian Garland, Sandra Cisneros, and Trevor Noah. After reading each memoir, students reflected on their own life and experiences related to the themes in

their reading. These activities are part of an ongoing unit on memoir writing and students will soon be crafting their own short memoir pieces on aspects of their life which they wish to explore further.

Students in Ms. V's English classes launched into the narrative fiction unit using Frankenstein as the mentor text in order to explore big ethical questions that still feel relevant today. Before opening the novel, students engaged in pre-reading activities that challenged them to respond to hypothetical scenarios about scientific exploration and the limits of human responsibility. They also created their own "monsters" with pipe cleaners and other craft materials, using the creative process to reflect on the obligations a creator has toward what they bring into the world. Along the way, students viewed and discussed clips from various Frankenstein adaptations to compare interpretations of the story's themes and characters. They are now reading Mary Shelley's novel and analyzing its language, characters, and enduring questions about ambition, morality, and humanity.



"Paving Paths" Teacher Recognitions

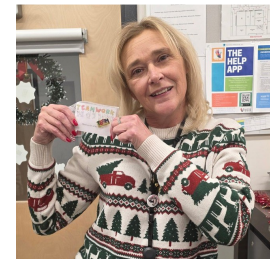
December - Managing Bumps in the Road



Mr Solano - RBT



Ms Picciano - Art Teacher



**Mrs Demillio -
Administrative Assistant**

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.

How can showing kindness and patience help you handle challenges that might slow you down on your journey?

Kindness and Patience help me handle challenges that might slow me down during my journey. Due to the challenges I have faced, I have come forward with learning from them even when it does slow me down. Kindness and patience helps me gain understanding to what others are dealing with. Kindness could be the answer to getting the help we need to achieve stuff to continue our journey. Having patience with everything and taking your time is what matters at most. Always spend your time wisely, even if it takes a lot of time to understand from them, because this gives a sign that you shouldn't give up that easily and learn from the challenges with facing with kindness and patience. - JMO

Showing kindness is a way to show you are a good person in a evil world. You can bring other people's hopes up to help them succeed. It will help you to realize that your kindness does help others. Patience is key to every thing you need to become the person you wanna become in the future. It's all in God's timing. You need patience because if you rush into things, you'll miss the knowledge you could've had to become more. Kindness and patience is the key thing to become your better version of your old self. - EC

Showing kindness and patience could help you handle challenges that might slow you down on your journey. By showing kindness you will receive the same energy back from other people and the same thing with showing patience. Being patient with other people with save you a lot of time and people will be happy with that because you are taking your time with things. At the end of the day being respectful and kind to others will take you far, no one will like you for being rude. - KC

By showing kindness and patience it helps you look back on your choices. When you are to be patient, good things will come to you for waiting. Another thing is maybe if you are patient and kind it brings more positivity. With the more positivity you have more faith and hope, then all of a sudden it will be easier to overcome any challenges you are facing. With all of the positivity and good vibes coming you're journey will speed up way more. - AP

Showing kindness and patience helps you handle challenges that may slow you down on your journey by understanding that not all people are at the same pace. Some people may be a bit slower than you or faster than you at things, that's because not everyone's gears function the same. Kindness helps you handle challenges because by being kind with people can't do, helps give them hope and you confidence. - ER

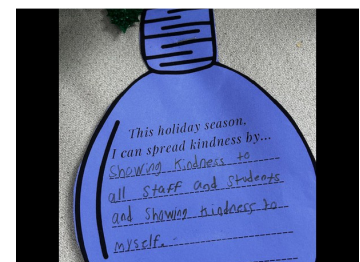
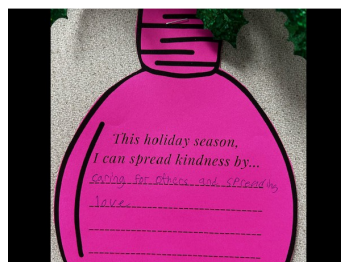
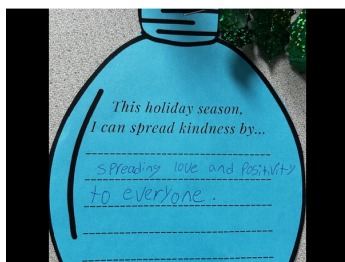
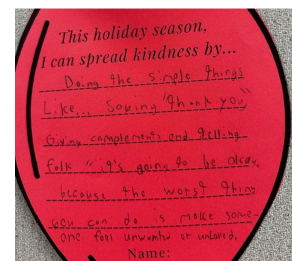
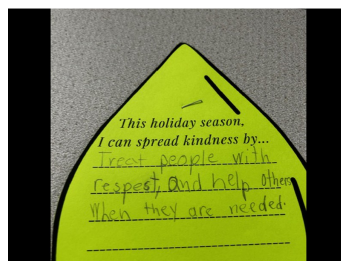
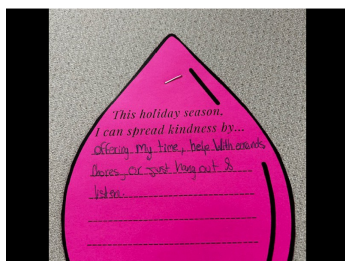
Think about a recent 'bump in the road' you faced – how might patience or kindness (toward yourself or others) have helped?

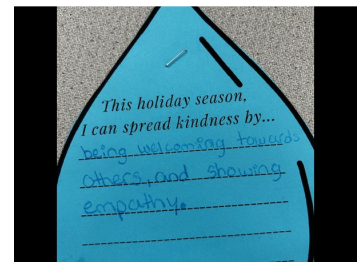
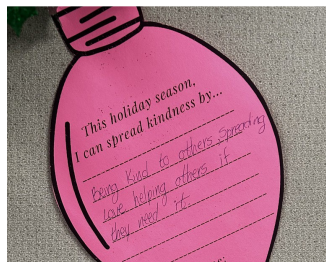
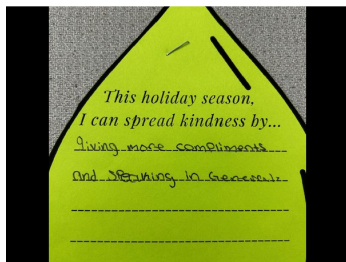
Patience with others taught me to be patient with myself. How in times where I couldn't be kind or patient to people in that moment, they were the ones to lift me up and treat me with the kindness and patience I needed. They understood that in that moment, that person who I was being wasn't really me. It reminds me that in any point in time, someone could be showing people a side that is not kind and that I should be that person to help lift them up in those bumps in the road. - AE

Today on my way to school, I slipped on some hard to see ice over the entrance to a parking lot. A lady from across the street asked if I was okay. I am thinking about it now how you can never take anybody for granted. Imagine if my ankle actually broke and she didn't bother to even turn her head? I'd be stuck there in pain until somebody noticed. Kindness is a great thing and I don't think enough people really appreciate kind people. - CH

'Tis the Season to Spread Kindness

As the festive season arrives, a tangible spirit of goodwill settles in, reminding everyone that this is a truly special time to spread kindness and brighten the lives of others. The students of Hillcrest Academy South embraced this spirit wholeheartedly, dedicating time to reflect on how they could embody this generosity. Each student thoughtfully articulated ways to be extra kind in their daily lives, writing down resolutions that ranged from simple gestures of respect and helpfulness to grander acts of community service. Their collective effort demonstrated a commitment to being a shining light in the world, proving that even the smallest acts of empathy and compassion can create a powerful, positive ripple effect throughout the school and the community.

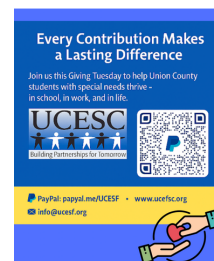
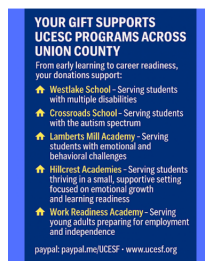
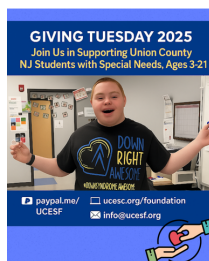




Giving Tuesday

Giving Tuesday is a global generosity movement that takes place annually on the Tuesday after U.S. Thanksgiving, serving as a powerful counterpoint to the consumerism of Black Friday and Cyber Monday. Initiated in 2012, its simple but profound purpose is to encourage people to do good by focusing on charitable giving, volunteering, and acts of kindness after a long weekend of shopping. The movement empowers individuals, non-profits, businesses, and communities to support causes they care about, recognizing that generosity can take many forms—from financial donations and volunteering time to sharing skills and simply helping a neighbor. By inspiring collective action, Giving Tuesday has grown into one of the largest donation days of the year, kicking off the charitable season and demonstrating how every act of kindness, no matter how small, can contribute to significant global change.

Giving Tuesday provides a vital opportunity for the UCESC district to rally its entire community—including current parents, alumni, staff, and local businesses—to address specific educational needs. By creating focused campaigns, the district can leverage the global generosity movement to secure essential funds. Furthermore, it is a powerful day for community building, as it encourages individuals to offer not just money, but also time and skills, thereby fostering a shared sense of pride and investment in the students' success and demonstrating to the broader public the tangible, positive impact of their collective contributions.



Spirit Weeks

Throughout the entire month of December, the school transformed into a festive hub of creativity and cheer as students and staff participated in holiday-themed spirit days. Each morning, the

hallways were flooded with color and excitement, ranging from "Mad about Plaid" days and festive sock showcases to the ever-popular "Ugly Sweater". These daily themes did more than just break the monotony of the academic routine; they fostered a deep sense of school-wide unity and joy. By encouraging everyone to dress up and share in the lighthearted fun, the school created an inclusive environment where students could celebrate the season together, building lasting memories and a vibrant, supportive community spirit before the winter break.



Week 1



Week 2



Week 3

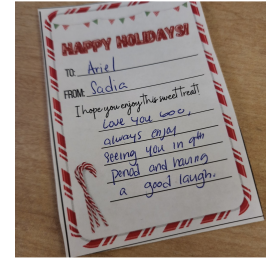
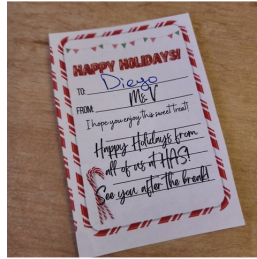
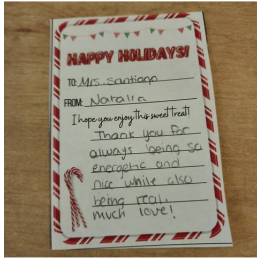
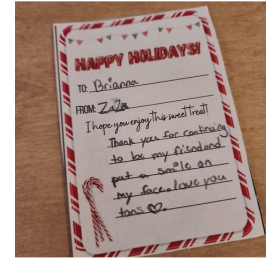
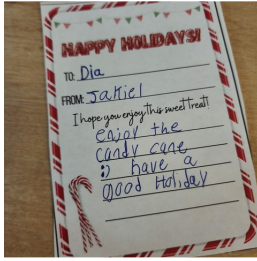


Week 4

Candy Grams

During the holiday season, the tradition of HAS students sending "candy grams" to their friends has become a treasured ritual. Students get to write a message on a small card, which was then attached to a piece of festive candy, like a miniature candy cane. These candy grams were then lovingly sorted by Ms V and delivered by hand to the recipients' homeroom classes on the last day before the winter break. The excitement on delivery day was palpable, as students eagerly checked

their names against the growing piles of colorful, sugar-laden messages, finding small, sweet reminders of the friendships and camaraderie that defined the school community.



Students Outside of School

Za'miyah has been a dedicated drummer for approximately three years. Her journey into drumming began when she wanted to be a part of a band at her home academy and was motivated by the desire to perform in their upcoming rock concert. For Za'miyah, this hobby is far more than just keeping a beat; it serves as a powerful and essential emotional outlet. Since she finds it challenging to articulate her feelings through speech, drumming provides her with a crucial and expressive non-verbal way to process and release her emotions.



Blooper Pic of the Month

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

Instagram: [ucesc_has](#)

Facebook: [Hillcrest Academy South](#)

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

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

[Visit us on Instagram](#)



HAS Smore

HAS is using Smore to create beautiful newsletters



HAN December 2025 Newsletter

December 2025

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



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

As we reflect from the start of the school year to the holiday season, I am incredibly proud of the academic accomplishments of our students. Their hard work, curiosity, and perseverance are clearly evident in the classroom, and it is wonderful to see them growing as confident learners. Their voices are certainly being heard! Our teachers and staff continue to provide meaningful learning experiences that help every student reach their potential, and the results truly show that our students are thriving.

We are also encouraged by the positive trend in student attendance. Being present each day makes a powerful difference, and our families' commitment to regular attendance has strengthened both

learning and engagement. When students show up ready to learn, they build stronger habits, deeper understanding, and lasting connections with their peers and teachers.

Most importantly, our sense of community continues to grow. HAN is a place where students feel safe, supported, and empowered and that spirit is something we cherish deeply. As we head into the holiday season, we wish all HAN families a joyful and restful break. Happy holidays to you and your loved ones—we are truly delighted to be on this journey with you.

Warm Regards,

John Marquet
Principal

Upcoming Dates

December 24 - January 2 - Winter Recess
January 5 - School Reopens
January 5 - Senior Pictures
January 12 - 1 PM Early Dismissal - Staff Development
January 19 - School Closed - Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

Attendance Matters!

Our Attendance Matters! Program continues to create an environment of success and positive culture. Students are still striving to make it to school everyday. Our Monday breakfast is encouraging students to come in everyday, and getting up has become habit. Our "Student of the Month" has done quite the turn around from last year. Ya'Niece has an 87% attendance rate and is an Honor Role student for the first marking period. This is a dramatic change from last year when her attendance rate was below 50%. She has made an effort to be here every day, and it shows in her grades, her attendance, and her attitude at school. "I need to graduate soon, so I decided to change my mindset."



Ya'Niece is one of the 44 students who were in the Green Zone - having an 80% attendance rate and above, who were invited to go on the Attendance Matters! Incentive Trip. These students maintained the 80% since the beginning of school. Students went to Jersey Lanes Bowling in Linden on Friday, December 19th.





Awards



December Awards



November Perfect Attendance

Teacher's Spotlight

“Children are likely to live up to what you believe of them.” – Lady Bird Johnson.

As teachers, we hold one of the most influential roles in society. With our words we have the power to inspire confidence, curiosity, and motivation; or if not careful we can diminish them. Therefore it must be our mission to be intentional with our words, our lessons, and our actions.

Margaret Mead once said that children must be taught how to think, not what to think. It is these words that have guided my planning to ensure that I am presenting lessons and experiences that encourage and model problem-solving, collaboration, emotional awareness, and executive

functioning skills. It is these abilities that students will take with them long after their work in my room is done.

My role as a teacher goes beyond what I academically present. It is about supporting students as they grow into the people they want to become. By seeing the whole student as an individual we can help guide them in the direction of their own version of success. Through exposure to new experiences, perspectives, and opportunities, students may discover new interests or a future they once may not have imagined. It is a privilege to have the opportunity to take this role and be part of the process of learning and growth.



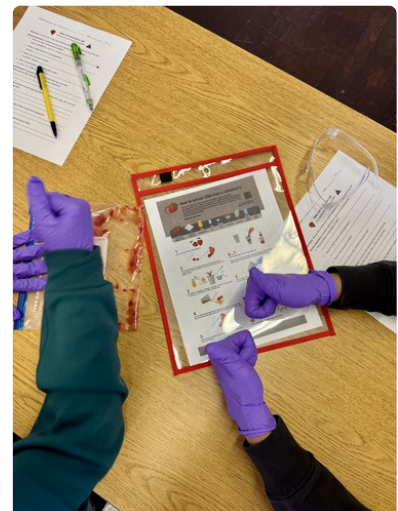
In The Classroom

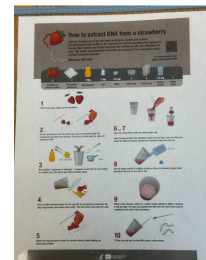
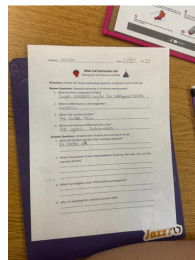
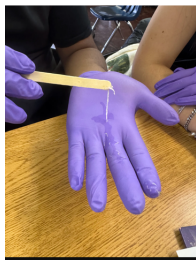
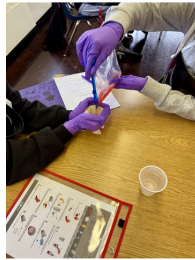
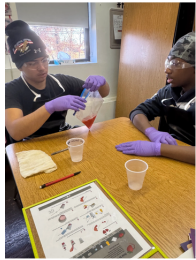
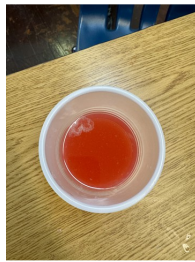
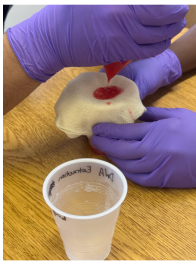
Science Class

Students in Ms. Silva's Science classes recently took part in a hands-on Strawberry DNA Extraction Lab that brought genetics to life. Using everyday materials (such as dish soap, salt, and water), students worked step by step to break down strawberry cells and isolate their DNA. The moment the cloudy, white strands of DNA became visible was especially exciting, giving students a tangible look at the genetic material they usually only see in pictures or textbooks.

The lab helped reinforce key concepts such as cell structure, enzymes, and the role of DNA in all living organisms. By physically extracting DNA, students were able to better understand how scientists study genetic material and why strawberries are often used for this type of experiment. Strawberries are ideal because they are octoploid, meaning each cell has eight copies of its genome. This helps to provide a large, easily visible quantity of DNA. Some students also had the opportunity to take a small sample of the extracted strawberry DNA and observe it under the microscope using different objective lenses. This allowed them to see how the appearance of the DNA changes with magnification and to practice proper microscope techniques.

Overall, the Strawberry DNA Extraction Lab was an engaging and memorable learning experience for everyone. Activities like this allow students to connect classroom lessons to real-world science, making science both accessible and fun. Ms. Silva's classes continue to explore science through interactive labs that spark interest and deepen understanding of the natural world.





Spanish Class

This month students are working on the unit “*La Familia y las Tradiciones*” in Spanish class. Students distinguished the similarities and differences between the patterns of celebrations of the target culture related to activities, holidays, and celebrations of the local culture in different Spanish countries. This unit fits precisely in the social studies component of high school standards, where students are exposed to different experiences, traditions, and lifestyles of other people around the world with “*Las Posadas, La Navidad*”. Students are able to demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between practices of the culture studied. For instance, students have

multiple opportunities to compare and contrast “*La Posadas*”, which is one of the oldest traditions celebrated in Spain and Mexico, dating back since the rule of the Aztec Empire and “*Navidad (Christmas)*”. Students discuss “*Posadas*” and learn about it since it addresses multiculturalism, which helps students develop a sense of diversity and respect for other cultures. Then, as an assessment students will write and illustrate their own version of the “*Posadas and Navidad*”. Students will be required to write and create a presentation or poster, provide input and feedback, ask questions, and contribute to class presentations and discussions.



Welcoming Committee

The Welcome Committee is dedicated to fostering a positive, inclusive school environment where every student feels seen, supported, and valued. Through weekly meetings, student leaders collaborate to organize and implement school wide activities that encourage socialization, promote healthy peer relationships, and strengthen our sense of community. Members of the Welcome Committee serve as role models by demonstrating leadership, respect, and through active participation in school, demonstrating strong attendance and a commitment to academic success. By empowering students to take an active role in building a positive school climate, the Welcome Committee helps ensure our school is a welcoming place where all students can thrive and feel connected.



This week the Welcoming Committee created Candy Cane Grams for students, staff, and teachers to send to other students, staff, and teachers. There were over 200 Candy Cane Grams sent to others.



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

[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



John Marquet

John is using Smore to create beautiful newsletters



Lamberts Mill Academy

December 2025 | Monthly Report

HAPPY HOLIDAYS

*"December is the time for remembering the past and reaching towards the future."
- Ralph Waldo Emerson*

Administrators' Message

Good Morning all,

We hope this newsletter finds you well!
As we close out December, it is a privilege to celebrate the growth and meaningful experiences shared by our students and staff at Lamberts Mill Academy. This month marked an exciting milestone with the launch of our Westlake mentorship program, where students are already building the professional skills and confidence needed to envision their lives beyond the classroom, working hands on with the Westlake school community.



Our commitment to real-world readiness continues through our Work-Based Learning program. We are incredibly proud of our seniors and post-graduates currently in the field, and we look forward to expanding our reach in January 2026 with new placements at Chili's, Walgreens, Cranford Book Store, and Corey Matthews Barbershop. These community partnerships are vital, allowing our students to turn their personal interests into real world experiences with the support of our staff.

Beyond academics and vocational training, December was a month of deep internal growth. Through group therapy, community assemblies, and purposeful field trips, our students practiced the self-regulation and social-emotional skills that are the cornerstone of the LMA experience. As we look toward 2026, we remain dedicated to evolving our programs and strengthening our partnership with you to ensure every student finds their path to success.

The LMA school community would like to thank our students, families, staff, and partners for their continued support and wishes everyone a safe and happy holiday season, and a wonderful New Year in 2026.

Sincerely,

Reed & John

Monthly Data

1. Enrollment - 45
 2. Acceptances - 0
 3. New Students - 1
 4. Intakes - 2
 5. Referrals - 5
 6. Disenrollments - 3
 7. Fire Drill - 12/1/2025
 8. Other Drill EM: Lockdown 12/16/2025
-

Upcoming Events

January 2026 Important Dates

January 5th - School Resumes

January 12th - Early Dismissal for Students, Professional Development for Staff

January 19th - School Closed for Martin Luther King Jr. Day

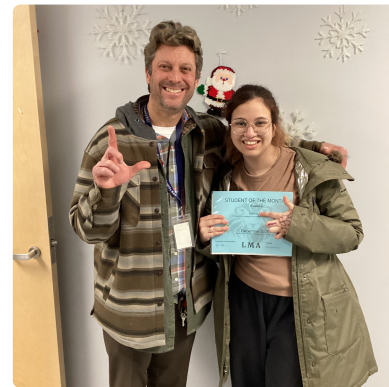
January Field Trip - Yestercades



Student of the Month - Sienna

Sienna started at The Mill in September and has been a shining star ever since. She works hard in class, participating in discussions and offering to help her classmates when needed. Sienna earned straight As for her first marking period grades and is constantly working to achieve her goals. After she graduates from high school, Sienna is interested in becoming a Social Worker

because she wants to help people who may need it. We are very proud of Sienna and cannot wait to watch her continue her successes at The Mill!



Staff Spotlight - Ms. DeVoe



We are happy to have to have former Social Work Intern, Ms. DeVoe, back at The Mill as a full time member of the Clinical Team. We spoke with Ms. DeVoe to get to know her better and welcome her back!

What drew you to social work?

Social work felt like the right fit for me because it allows me to help others in a meaningful way while advocating for those who need extra support. I wanted a career that was fulfilling and made a real difference.

What was it like interning at LMA then coming back to work here full time?

Interning at LMA was a very formative experience. It gave me the opportunity to get hands-on learning, showed me that I love working with teens, and build meaningful relationships. Coming back full time has felt familiar and exciting. It feels like I never left. Stepping into the role with more responsibility has been great.

What is your favorite part of your job?

My favorite part of the job is building relationships with students and watching them grow. Being someone they trust and knowing I can be a steady support in challenging moments is very rewarding.

If you could give one piece of advice to your high school self, what would it be?

I would tell myself to trust the process and not feel pressure to have everything figured out. I worked in advertising for 10 years before moving on to social work and made me realize that it is ok to take your time.

What are three things outside of work that currently bring you joy?

Spending time with my family, getting outside for walks and having small moments of quiet time.

December at The Mill



WBL at Chili's



Post Grad Program making cookies



Building in Science Class



Celebrating the Holiday Season



Volunteering at the Food Pantry

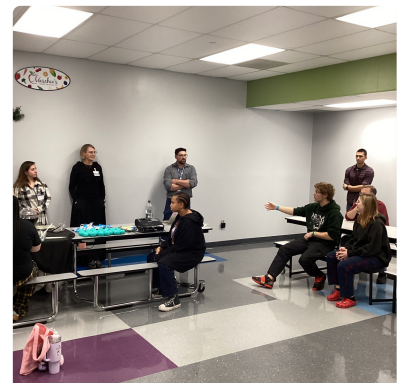
Holiday Sale

LMA Student Council partnered with Westlake School, a UCESC school on our campus, to sale gifting items at their Holiday Craft Sale. Students made ornaments, signs, and picture frames and priced all items to raise money for future Student Council events!



Vaping Awareness Assembly

LMA hosted a Vaping Awareness Assembly presented by staff from RWJBarnadas. Students learned about the risks and dangers of using vapes and e-cigarettes and discussed how those risks can impact their health. Students then conducted an experiment on what the chemicals in vapes can do to a person's lungs by adding dyed water to a jar to visualize what happens when the chemicals mix together inside the body.





DVRS Guest Speaker



DVRS, or the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, came to visit LMA on December 9th and presented about all of the services & opportunities they offer for students with disabilities (including IEP's and 504 plans), based on their strengths & abilities. Some interesting facts LMA students learned about DVRS are:

- The minimum age for Pre-ETS services to begin is 14 years old and a student could continue to have these services until 21 years old. VR (vocational rehabilitation) services are available until the student reaches their desired vocational goals.
- DVRS can potentially financially assist a student with their goals after high school, such as college tuition or trade school fees. If a student qualifies, DVRS can provide up to \$6,000 toward trade school costs. For college-bound students who are eligible, DVRS may also offer financial assistance comparable to the cost of attending Rutgers. DVRS will also assist the student with any equipment needed for employment, such as uniforms, to reach their desired goals.
- One of the services DVRS assists with is supportive employment where a job coach can assist students with the interview (sometimes accompanying them to it), as well as help on the job site.

"I thought the presentation was informative. I also felt as if it gave us a new opportunity for our future goals, such as college & employment. Especially as someone with a learning disability, I feel grateful knowing about these helpful services since I had always doubted myself & my future. It's good to know that there are services like this available." - Ana SG

"The presentation was pretty good and taught me what to do in the future. It also taught me about people I can trust to help with getting a job, even with a disability". - Jasson H



Art Club

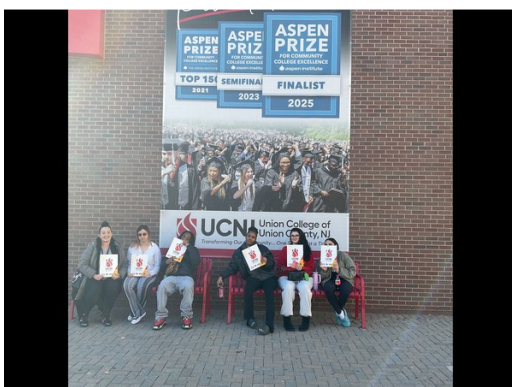
Art Club is a new program that started this school year at The Mill. Students are able to express their artistic abilities and creativity with weekly projects. The completed artwork is hung up on the Art Wall for all to see and enjoy.

Union County College Tour

LMA students had the opportunity to visit Union College for a campus tour and informational session. During the visit, students met with Mr. Alvelaez, Admissions Counselor, who provided an overview of the college and discussed various aspects of student life at Union College. Ms. Cimorelli, Director of Universal Accessibility Services, also presented and shared valuable information about the supports and services available to students with IEPs and those who may need additional assistance at the college level. The visit concluded with a guided campus tour, allowing students to explore the grounds and gain a visual understanding of the college environment.



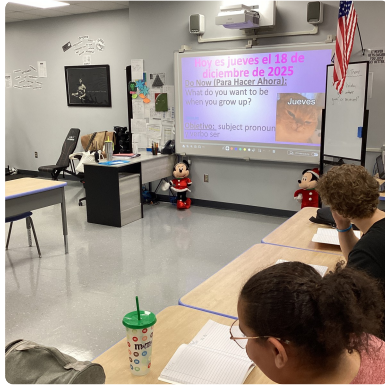
"I learned that Union College was an affordable option for me to go to school. I liked that it was a smaller environment" -Sienna P



Classroom Spotlights

English Language Arts & Literacy

Students have begun exploring the various skills to develop narrative writing as we begin our second Unit of the year. We played a story around the classroom activity and rolled story cubes to get our stories started. Students decorated the building in holiday spirit with new tablecloths, holiday decorations throughout the building and a Christmas tree in our cafeteria. In celebration of December's Monthly Theme , Holidays Around the World, students created Cookie pamphlets with a history of their cookie, the recipe for their cookie and then their own personal creativity. We collaborated with our Post Grad program , who made homemade chocolate chip cookies and distributed our pamphlets with the cookies inside a snowflake bag as students left for the break.



Spanish

This month in Spanish students have been focusing on themes of identity. We began by learning adjectives to describe ourselves and others, then created slideshows to depict each word and presented to the class. Each student then created a 'self portrait' with a detailed description of themselves using the words we learned. Our next topic was 'subject pronouns' which we will use together with the verb 'ser' as well as the adjectives we learned to speak about ourselves and others in complete sentences.

Music

Music students have been completing their new Winter Playlists to enrich their daily SEL/Music appreciation activities. Focusing on lyrics and tone of music, students have been developing a better understanding of expression and how the music, not just the lyrics, help express emotions. Additionally, students have started their melodic unit. Students have the opportunity to perform on either keyboard or the recorder, some even learning festive holiday songs!



Clinical Corner

The monthly themes at LMA are Kindness and Patience. Here are five tips for you to practice and strengthen these skills:

Group Therapy

Students continue to be fully engaged in their group therapy and look forward to participating everyday. In addition to developing appropriate social skills, group therapy also gives students an avenue to safely share with other peers without fear of judgment while allowing them to gain perspective from peers that are often not in their daily cohort. With this month's theme as kindness

and patience, the students have used group time to practice self awareness and explore ideas how to give back to their communities. As the holidays approach, students watched a video that depicted holidays across the world and then reflected on their own customs/traditions.



LMA Behavior Team:

Supporting Emotional Regulation During a High-Demand Season

December brings added social events, schedule changes, academic pressure, and emotional intensity, especially for teens who struggle with emotional regulation. So, what can we do to help?

Normalize Stress and Name Emotions

Teens and young adults benefit when the adults around them calmly label what they're noticing:

- "It looks like this situation is stressing you."
- "You seem overwhelmed, want to take a break first?"

Naming emotions models emotional literacy and reduces shame.

Strengthen Coping and Self-Advocacy Skills

Instead of "calm down," offer concrete strategies:

- Ask for a break
- Use grounding tools
- Breathing routines
- Movement or sensory breaks
- A script or visual calm-down card

Reinforce the skill every time they use it, even briefly.

Plan Ahead for Tough Moments

Assemblies, family gatherings, schedule changes, and holidays can be activating. Work together to:

- Preview changes
- Identify triggers
- Create quick "regulation plans" teens and young adults can use anywhere

This shifts support from reactive to proactive.

Model the Regulation You Want to See

Teens and young adults read adult tone, posture, and energy instantly.

Your calm presence and modeling coping strategies teaches more than any words.

December Reflection Challenge

Pick one coping strategy to practice daily with your teen or young adult for the month of December. Celebrate every use of it!

With Appreciation,

The LMA Behavior Team

Students Outside the Classroom

Nathan volunteering at the Turtleback Zoo

"I tabled the food donation event at the Turtleback Zoo, we collected over 200 cans of food! Although it was cold, I liked it. It was fun helping people!" - Nate



Upcoming Community Events



Events - The Arc of Union County

events events join us and make a difference Coming Next Year! Coming Next Year! Thursday, January 8, 2026 Thursday, January 8, 2026 get in touch with the arc of union county How Can We Help You? Instagram This field is for validation purposes and should be left unchanged. Name(Required) First Last Email(Required) Comments Please let us know what's [...]

arcunion.org



Mental Health 101

Mental Health 101: Kick off 2026 with renewed commitment to your well-being. Supportive introduction to Mental Health and Resiliency!

eventbrite.com



NAMI Middlesex Connection Recovery Support Group - NAMI New Jersey

NAMI Connection Recovery Support Group is a free, peer-led support group for any adult who has experienced symptoms of a mental health condition. You will

naminj.org



MLK Day Poster-Making Workshop + Food Drive - Arts Council of Princeton

Join us as we celebrate the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr with a free Poster-Making Workshop, free and open to all.

artscouncilofprinceton.org



Downtown Newark for the Holidays & Newark Winter Village - NJ Family

Newark Winter Village returns to Mulberry Commons Park as part of Downtown Newark for the Holidays—a citywide celebration filled with music, markets, and merry moments for all ages.

📄 njfamily.com



Edison

New Jersey Convention & Exposition Center 97 Sunfield Ave. Edison, NJ 08837

📄 superpetexpo.com

Community Resources

<https://ucnj.org/press-releases/public-info/2025/09/08/union-county-expands-access-to-home-delivered-meals-through-meals-on-wheels/>

.....

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

.....

<https://naminj.org/>

.....

<https://988lifeline.org/>

.....

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

School in the Community

1. Post Graduate Students working at the Cranford Bookstore, Chili's, and Maschio's Food Service.
 2. Students earning a trip the Westlake School Cafe
 3. Art Club
 4. College Campus Tours at Union County College
-

About Us

Contact Information:

Phone: (908)-233-7581

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

Website: https://ucesc.org/schools/lamberts_mill_academy

Instagram: 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



Crossroads Monthly Report

December 2025

Message from the Administration

Dear Crossroads Community,

As the calendar turns and we prepare for the winter break, we find ourselves reflecting on the incredible energy that has filled our hallways throughout December. This month, Crossroads School has been a wonderful place of celebration, discovery, and community, serving as a reminder of the strength within our school family.



This year, our school-wide theme, "Paving Paths: One UCESC Voice at a Time," has guided our journey. In December, we focused specifically on the skill of Managing Bumps in the Road through our Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) themes of kindness and patience. The holiday season, while filled with joy, can often be a busy and overstimulating time. By practicing patience with one another and leading with kindness, our students are learning that they have the tools to navigate any "bumps" that come their way. Watching our our school support each other during new routines and share in the excitement of the season has been a true testament to the strong paths we are paving together.

December has served as a month-long celebration of diversity and tradition as we explored holidays around the world. We traveled from the snowy tracks of the North Pole to the glowing lights of Hanukkah, creating lasting memories at every stop. The magic began as our wonderful Speech Department treated the students to a Polar Express Activity. Students had the opportunity to "punch their tickets" to board the express, where they settled in to watch the movie while enjoying popcorn and hot chocolate. To celebrate Hanukkah, the festivities continued as a special

holiday cart made its way through the building, treating students to traditional jelly donuts and chocolate coins.

Our spirit was on full display during a week-long celebration that brought out the best in everyone. We spent time baking cookies, wearing our favorite holiday hats, and decorating classroom doors. The spirit week rounded out with an array of "ugly" holiday sweaters and ended with a much deserved day of relaxing in pajamas. The hands-on joy continued throughout the month as students completed holiday-themed activities, including cookie decorating, Hanukkah coloring pages, and the crafting of beautiful ornaments.

The highlight of the month arrived when Santa Claus paid a visit to Crossroads, carrying a sack full of gifts for every student. This magical day was made possible by the extraordinary generosity of our community partners. We wish to extend our deepest gratitude to the Wardlaw Hartridge School and Cranford Family Care for their kindness. Their support truly makes this day special and ensures that our students feel the warmth of the community surrounding them.

As we head into the winter break, we wish every family a season filled with the same patience and kindness we have witnessed in our classrooms. We hope you have a wonderful, restful break, and we look forward to seeing everyone again in 2026!

Warm Regards,

Matt, Danielle, and Stacey

General Information

Enrollment as of December 23, 2025

Actual: 57

Changes: Entered: 0 Exited: 0

Referrals: 8

Intakes Scheduled: 3

Accepted: 2

December Drill Schedule

Fire Drills: 12/11/25

Emergency Drills 12/17/25 (Active Shooter)

Upcoming Dates

December 23, 2025 - Early Dismissal for Students - 1:00 - Winter Recess

December 24, 2025 - January 4, 2026 - School Closed - Winter Recess

January 5, 2026 - School Reopens for Students

January 12, 2026 - Early Dismissal for Students - 1:00 - Staff PD

January 15, 2026 - Parent Ed/Support Meeting - 1:00 - (Speech Presentation)

January 19, 2026 - School Closed - Martin Luther King Jr. Day

February 9, 2026 - Crossroads Picture Day

Crossroads Student Spotlight

Student of the Month -Melina

December's student of the month is Melina! Melina a Crossroads 1st grader and the princess of 104. She comes off the bus full of smiles and giggles ready to start the day. Melina does really well following class routines and loves a good sensory experience. Melina gets better and better everyday at communicating what she wants. She works very hard to break down barriers and learn new skills. We love having Melina as part of our class family and watching her change and grow all the time.

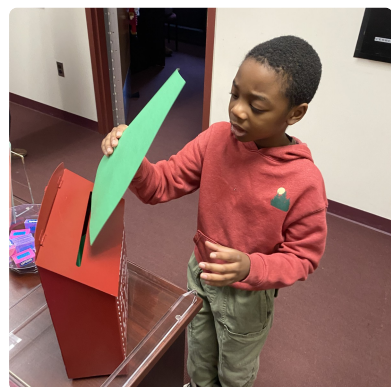


Classroom Spotlight

Ms. Allison's Classroom

December in Room 103

December was so busy for such a short month of school! We made sure to have as much fun as possible to end the year right! We went on 2 field trips, celebrated 3 staff birthdays, had a movie day with our friends in 104 and 111, and received some great gifts from Santa!!



This month we did some community-based learning on field trips to LifeTown, the Dollar General and McDonalds. We practiced appropriate safety behavior in the community, and functional life skills like waiting in line, paying for items, and ordering from a digital menu. Everyone loved being able to pick something out and buy it at the cash register.

While we were at school we worked on following visual directions with crafts for a few different holidays: Hanukkah necklaces, Kwanza banners, and Christmas decorations. Miss Stephine taught us to make snowflakes out of marshmallows and pretzel sticks. We also teamed up with Hannah's class in Room 104 to complete cooking lessons that were a huge hit: Santas and Grinches made out of fruit. The staff and students in 103 had such a great December and can't wait to see what 2025 brings!!



Ms. Gaby's Classroom

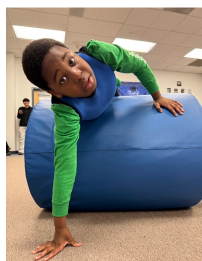
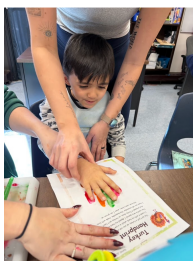
We are getting very excited as the holiday season approaches! December is a wonderful time for learning, celebration, and creativity in our classroom and schoolwide. Throughout the month, students will be learning about the different holidays celebrated during this special time at the end of the year.

Our class is also looking forward to helping decorate our classroom door for the school's door decorating contest. The students are thrilled to contribute their ideas and artwork, and it's been a fun way to encourage teamwork!



Academically, we will continue our alphabet centers, focusing on the letters D, E, and F. Through hands-on activities, games, and crafts, students will practice letter recognition, sounds, and beginning letter skills. Our crafts included ducks, elephants, and flower boxes.

We are so excited to have Santa come to Crossroads and hope we get to see some snow fall one last time before break!



Therapy Spotlight - Speech Therapy

Ms. Alayna, Ms. Jillian, Ms. Tara and Mr. Damon

It is the most wonderful time of the year! December is filled with holiday cheer, sweet treats, and fun with friends! During speech and language therapy sessions our students have been working hard on improving their functional communication skills, building their vocabularies and enhancing

Hot Chocolate

1) Do you want hot chocolate?



2) Choose your toppings



their knowledge of holidays and traditions. They learned about reindeer, especially Rudolph, played adaptive dreidel with gelt, sorted winter clothing, enjoyed hot chocolate and laughed along as the old lady swallowed holiday items! Festive music always brings a smile to everyone's faces.

Each December, the speech department hosts a holiday movie day complete with a hot chocolate cart and popcorn. Each class receives order forms to bring up during their scheduled time. The students practice making choices and answering yes/no and wh- questions. They also work on ordering their hot chocolate, as well as asking for more snacks during the movie. It is a great way to practice our functional communication skills with some holiday magic.

Specials Report: ART

Ms. Grace

December was a busy and joyful month in the art room! Students began Art Jobs, where they practiced responsibility and independence by applying for classroom roles like janitor, delivery person, and dishwasher. After completing an application, students proudly held their job for the month before "retiring," building confidence and real-world skills along the way.



Students also explored winter themes and holidays from around the world while strengthening fine motor skills through cutting, ripping, painting, and coloring. They created Christmas trees and ornaments to hang on our school tree, as well as Hanukkah dreidels and Kwanzaa coloring pages, filling the art room with creativity, learning, and holiday cheer.



December Tips from the Behavior Team

Crossroads School Tips from the Behavior Team

Supporting Regulation and Independence During a Busy Season

December brings excitement, and for students at Crossroads School, it can also bring unique challenges. Changes in routine, special school events, community outings, and sensory-rich experiences can feel overwhelming. For our students, predictability and clear communication are essential. Here's how we can help them stay regulated and independent during this busy season.

Prepare for Changes with Predictable Supports

Unexpected schedule shifts can create stress. Try these strategies:

- **Visual schedules:** Post daily routines in the classroom or on a personal schedule.
- **"Change" icons:** Highlight schedule changes ahead of time.
- **First/Then boards:** Clarify the sequence of activities.
- **Countdown timers:** Help students anticipate transitions.
- **Preview events:** Short explanations or videos like, "After lunch, we'll have our holiday craft activity."

Small, consistent previews help students feel secure and reduce refusal or avoidance behaviors.

Support Communication in All Forms

When students feel overwhelmed, behaviors often communicate what words cannot. Encourage regulated communication by modeling or prompting:

- **AAC messages** ("Break," "Help," "Finished," "Wait")
- **Gestures**
- **Coping visuals**

Reinforce every attempt at communication:

"Great job telling me you needed space!"

Match Support to the Child's Regulation Level

Busy environments such as assemblies, holiday crafts, and class parties can be overwhelming. Offer supports based on the student's current regulation:

- **Sensory breaks**
- **Movement or quiet corners**
- **Noise-reduction supports** (headphones, soft music)
- **Step-by-step modeling** for tasks

- **Adjusted expectations** to maintain dignity and independence

Maintain Calm, Safe Body Language

During moments of dysregulation, fewer words and gentle presence are often more effective than verbal prompting:

- **Provide proximity:** Move closer to offer support
- **Use clear visuals** to guide next steps
- **Join in the first step** of the activity
Calm body language communicates safety and helps students regulate more quickly.

December Independence Challenge

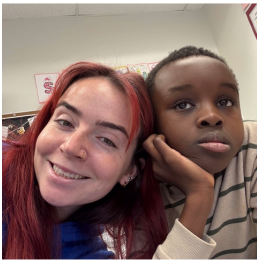
Pick **one communication or daily living skill** to reinforce each day. Examples include:

- Requesting help
- Using a schedule
- Folding laundry
- Asking for a break

Celebrate **every attempt** to encourage growth, confidence, and independence.

December at Crossroads





Crossroads In the Community





Santa Visits Crossroads



Parent Resources

About Us

Website: https://www.ucesc.org/schools/crossroads_school

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

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

[Visit us on Instagram](#)



CR Smore

CR is using Smore to create beautiful newsletters