



# SPECIAL SERVICES MONTHLY

908.436.5200



DIVISION OF SPECIAL SERVICES



EPSNJ.ORG

Professional Spotlight

## MEET OUR SPECIAL OLYMPICS COORDINATORS

For over two decades, Elizabeth Public Schools has been a proud participant in Special Olympics New Jersey, fostering an environment where student-athletes with developmental disabilities can thrive. The program, initiated by Wendy Lopez-Silva, Psy.D., began in 2004 with just three students and has flourished into a robust program serving over 40 athletes per season and hundreds of students over the years.

The program provides a vital platform for students to enhance their athleticism, social connections, and team-building skills. Throughout the years, students from across the district, including Schools #21, 22, 28, 29, and several high school academies—Dwyer, Cicarell, Halsey, and Bollwage have competed in bowling and track and field events. The program's success is a testament to the dedicated support of the Superintendent's administration, Special Services administration, school principals, and the selfless Child Study Team members, teachers, and aides who volunteer their time.



*Dr. Dardeir & Dr. Lopez-Silva*

Currently, Wendy Lopez-Silva, Psy.D. and Susane Dardeir, Ed.D. serve as the Local Training Program Coordinators for the Elizabeth Public Schools. As coordinators, they ensure all coaches and volunteers meet the Special Olympics state standards and look for opportunities to foster new ways students with special needs can excel in competitive sports. The goal is to create and sustain a continuum of participation from elementary to high school for our students with developmental disabilities by expanding opportunities to ensure that Special Olympics remains a cornerstone of the Elizabeth community for years to come.

## Featured Community Resource

Your New EPS Website



The newly redesigned Elizabeth Public Schools website offers a clean, user-friendly layout that makes it easier for families to access important district information. Parents of students receiving special education services may find the [Division of Special Services](#) section especially helpful, as it provides an overview of programs, in-class supports, related services, and guidance on the special education process, including referrals, evaluations, and IEP development. The site also includes family resources, key forms, and direct contact information, helping parents stay informed, connected, and actively engaged in their child's educational supports.



## KNOW YOUR IEP

### Annual Goals

The Annual Goals section of an Individualized Education Program (IEP) describes the specific skills and outcomes your child is expected to work toward over the course of the school year, based on their unique strengths and areas of need. These goals are carefully developed by the IEP team to support your child's access to the curriculum and overall growth.

Each annual goal is measurable and clearly defined, meaning it includes:

- What skill or behavior your child is expected to develop
- The conditions under which the skill will be demonstrated
- How success will be measured
- How and when progress will be monitored

Progress toward these goals may be tracked through teacher observations, work samples, classroom data, progress monitoring tools, or assessments, depending on the nature of the goal. This allows the school team to regularly review progress and adjust instruction or supports as needed. Annual goals may address a wide range of areas, including:

- Academic skills (such as reading comprehension, writing, or math problem-solving)
- Communication skills (expressive, receptive, or pragmatic language)
- Social or behavioral skills (self-regulation, peer interaction, attention)
- Functional or life skills (organization, independence, self-advocacy)

For parents, this section is especially important because it outlines what your child is actively working toward. Progress on annual goals is formally reported to families and reviewed at IEP meetings to ensure the program continues to meet your child's needs. Ultimately, annual goals serve as a roadmap for instruction and support, helping ensure that services are purposeful and individualized.

## A MESSAGE FROM YOUR DIRECTOR OF SPECIAL SERVICES

Stakeholders of Students with Special Needs,

As we step into this new year together, I hope you are finding moments of warmth and connection despite the frigid weather. We've reached the halfway point of the school year, and this is a wonderful time to pause, reflect on the challenges we've faced, and celebrate the achievements—big and small—that have brought us to this point.

A new year offers a fresh start. Whether you're reigniting personal goals, making meaningful choices for your family, or simply seeking renewal, this season invites us all to grow and move forward with hope. We remain committed to keeping our community informed and uplifted by sharing all the wonderful things happening across Elizabeth Public Schools. Please continue to visit our website regularly for the latest updates and celebrations of student and staff success.

Winter months can sometimes bring a dip in attendance, and we understand how difficult routines can be during colder days. We kindly encourage you to help your child maintain consistent attendance, as each day of learning plays an important role in their educational progress. Every step your child takes in their educational journey strengthens not just their future, but the future of our entire community.

Thank you for your continued partnership and trust. Stay warm, stay encouraged, and know that the renewal of spring is already on its way.



Nancy Morales-Frigoletto  
**Director**

Thelusma Cadet, Scott Cohen, Myraida Conceicao, Cheryl Ferry, Maria Dolores Garcia, Julia Krisanits Lehman, Ali Abdul Malik  
**Supervisors**

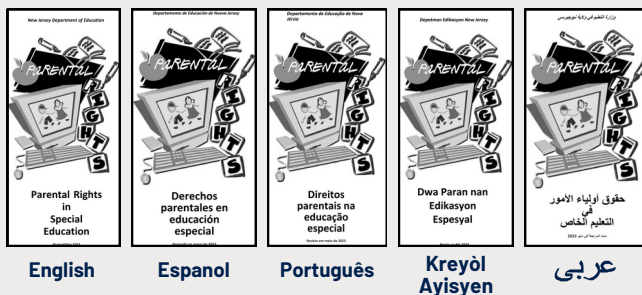


## IEP BUZZ Words: Reevaluation & Eligibility

- A **reevaluation** is a comprehensive review of a student’s eligibility for special education services and occurs at least once every three years, or sooner if requested by a parent or school staff, in accordance with New Jersey Administrative Code (N.J.A.C. 6A:14). The reevaluation process includes a review of multiple sources of information, such as classroom performance, progress monitoring data, teacher observations, parent input, related service reports, and formal assessments when appropriate. This ensures the Child Study Team considers the whole child, including academic, social, emotional, and functional development.

As part of the reevaluation, the team determines whether a student continues to meet **eligibility** criteria under one or more of the 14 NJAC disability categories, which include Autism, Communication Impairment, Specific Learning Disability, Emotional Regulation Impairment, Other Health Impairment, Cognitive Impairment, Multiple Disabilities, and other recognized categories outlined in NJ Code. When a student demonstrates characteristics across multiple areas, the Child Study Team carefully identifies the classification that best represents the student’s primary educational needs and guides appropriate supports and services. We must always consider how do the student’s needs impact access to and progress in the general education curriculum.

### PARENTAL RIGHTS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION



## Featured Community Resource



**INROADS**  
TO  
**OPPORTUNITIES**

Inroads to Opportunities provides services to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities who live in Elizabeth and surrounding Union County communities. Their programs support transition-age students and adults through employment readiness, vocational training, supported employment, and life skills development.

For Elizabeth families, Inroads to Opportunities can be a valuable post-school and adult service resource, offering opportunities that promote independence, community inclusion, and meaningful employment. Programs are designed to support individuals as they build skills for adult life while remaining connected to their local community.

Families interested in learning more about eligibility and available programs can visit [www.inroadsto.org](http://www.inroadsto.org) or contact Inroads directly for information specific to Union County.

# SUPPORT STAFF SPOTLIGHT

## THE WELCOME CENTER GIVING TREE



*Jamil Jackson, Timothy Kirk, Vito Tropeano & Leon Davis*

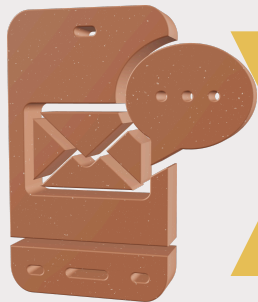
The Welcome Center Giving Tree provided an opportunity for staff to support students and families in need during the holiday season. Participants selected a Giving Tree tag from the Welcome Center, which included a student's age, size, and a suggested gift item. Students' wishes reflected a wide range of interests and needs—ranging from simple comforts like milk and cookies, to new sneakers, and even more personalized items such as a sewing machine or a robot.

Gifts were purchased and wrapped by EPS team members from a variety of locations, demonstrating generosity across the district. The students supported through this initiative receive home instruction for a variety of reasons, and to ensure privacy and care, the district's Legal Department safely delivered all gifts directly to students' homes. Teachers shared their gratitude and excitement on behalf of their students, noting the meaningful impact this gesture had during the holiday season. This collective effort not only spread joy, but also reinforced our community's strong commitment to supporting students and families beyond the classroom.



# ESEPAC

ESEPAC Executive Officers  
President: Emily Gonzalez  
Vice President: Gilda Rodriguez  
Secretary: Denise Olivera



Contact Information:  
[ESEPAC@epsnj.org](mailto:ESEPAC@epsnj.org)

**SAVE THE DATE**

The Elizabeth Public Schools Division of Special Services invites parents and caregivers to attend the Special Education Community Resource Fair on **Saturday, March 14, 2026**, from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at Juan Pablo Duarte–José Julián Martí School No. 28, located at 25 First Street, Elizabeth, NJ, in the school gymnasium. This event is designed to connect families with local community agencies and organizations that provide valuable supports and services. Parents will have the opportunity to meet providers, ask questions, and learn about resources available to support their child and family. We encourage all families to join us for this informative and supportive event.

**IN CASE YOU MISSED IT**

If you were unable to attend the last ESEPAC meeting, *IEP navigation*, the recording is available here:

[Zoom Recording](#)

  
**WE WANT YOUR FEEDBACK**

Special Needs Resource Fair Parent Input Survey



# FAMILY CONNECTIONS

## SKATING WITH SANTA



The Union County Board of Commissioners, Department of Human Services, and the Office for Persons with Disabilities and Special Needs partnered to host a festive Skating with Santa event for Elizabeth Public Schools families of children with special needs at the Warinanco Sports Center. Families enjoyed an inclusive afternoon on the ice, seasonal refreshments, and a special visit from Santa Claus, creating a joyful and welcoming experience for all who attended. We sincerely thank the families, students, and community partners who joined us and helped make this celebration of inclusion and holiday spirit so memorable.



# FAMILY TIPS

## TIPS FOR FAMILIES: SKILL GENERALIZATION

The **Needs** section of your child's IEP identifies the skills your child is working to develop through instruction and related services. Families play an important role in helping these skills **generalize**, meaning your child can use the same skills across different settings, with different people, and during everyday activities—not just during school or therapy sessions.

Generalization helps children apply what they learn in meaningful ways. When skills are practiced at home as well as at school, students are more likely to retain skills, use them independently, and apply them in real-life situations.

When reviewing the Needs section of the IEP, look for skills related to organization, attention, self-regulation, motor skills, independence, or daily routines. Below are examples of how families can support generalization at home:

- If the IEP identifies a need for organization or task completion:
  - Use a simple checklist for routines such as getting dressed, packing a backpack, or completing chores. Encourage your child to follow the steps in order and check off each task.
- If attention or focus is listed as a need:
  - Break tasks into smaller steps, give one direction at a time, and build in short breaks to help your child stay engaged.
- If self-regulation or behavioral skills are identified:
  - Practice the same calming strategies your child uses at school, such as deep breathing, counting, or using a quiet space when feeling overwhelmed.
- If fine or gross motor skills are noted:
  - Provide opportunities for hands-on practice through activities like drawing, cutting, building, cooking, carrying items, or playing outside.
- If independence or daily living skills are included:
  - Encourage your child to attempt tasks independently before offering help, supporting problem-solving and confidence.

Using consistent strategies at home and school helps your child understand when and how to use these skills, making learning more meaningful and effective. If you are unsure which strategies to focus on, your child's IEP goals and progress reports can help guide you.





# UPCOMING EVENTS

**DOING OUR PART with**

## Adult Protective Services

**NJ Division of Aging Services**

**WHAT IS Adult Protective Services (APS)?**  
 APS is a social services program focused on helping elderly adults and adults with disabilities live with dignity and respect by investigating allegations of abuse, neglect, self-neglect and exploitation.

**WHO CAN RECEIVE APS services?**  
 In New Jersey, individuals who may be eligible for services must meet **all** of the following criteria:  
 ✓ 18 years of age or older  
 ✓ Lacks sufficient understanding or capacity to make, communicate, or carry out decisions concerning oneself due to physical or mental illness, disability or deficiency  
 ✓ Lives in a community setting (a private residence or non-institutional setting)  
 ✓ Currently the subject of maltreatment

**WHO CANNOT RECEIVE APS services?**  
 Individuals who may **not** be eligible for services include:  
 ✗ Individuals in licensed facilities including hospitals, nursing homes, residential health care facilities, group homes and nursing homes

**HOW DO YOU DEFINE Abuse, Neglect, Self-Neglect, and Exploitation?**  
 Below are some common definitions. Please check [aps.nj.gov](#) for information specific to your local area.

<b>Abuse</b> Abuse comes in physical, mental, or sexual forms and can have physical or emotional signs.	<b>Neglect</b> Neglect is when a primary caregiver fails to provide adequate assistance that the individual depends on—such as food, clothing, shelter, or necessary medical care.	<b>Self-Neglect</b> Self-Neglect is a non-purposeful act where an individual fails to meet their own essential physical, psychological or social needs, which threatens the individual's health, safety, and well-being.	<b>Exploitation</b> Exploitation is when someone takes advantage of the individual for personal benefit in either financial or legal means.
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**HOW DO YOU Make a report?**  
 1. Contact APS using the information below.  
 2. Make sure to provide the following information, but please note that you can make this report anonymously if you so choose:  
 ✓ The individual's name, address, age/DOB, or other identifying info.  
 ✓ The nature and extent of the suspected abuse, neglect, self-neglect or exploitation.  
 ✓ Description of the situation, any important identifiers of the alleged abuser, or other dangers in their home environment.

**EST. 1918 HOPE HARBOR CARE**

# BINGO NIGHT

## COMMUNITY CONNECTION

Join us for a **FUN & INCLUSIVE Bingo Night** for:  
 • Students transitioning out of high school this year  
 • Adults 21+ interested in DOD transition support programs

*This is a relaxed, social evening focused on community inclusion, connection, and fun.*

**LOCATION:** Elizabeth, NJ (Union County)  
 (Exact address will be shared after registration is completed and confirmed)

**DATE:** January 22  
**TIME:** 7:00 PM – 8:00 PM  
**(LIMITED SEATING – spots fill up fast!)**

**WHAT TO EXPECT:**  
 • Bingo games with great prizes  
 • Free snacks & live admission  
 • A welcoming, respectful environment  
 • Social time at your own comfort level

**WHO SHOULD ATTEND:**  
 • Young adults transitioning out of high school this year  
 • Adults 21+ interested in DOD transition support programs  
 • Adults already approved for DOD services  
 • Individuals seeking inclusive, community-based social activities

**HOW TO REGISTER:**  
**Text BINGO to 856-320-8976**  
 A registration link will be sent by text. Registration is confirmed only after this link is completed and a confirmation message is sent.  
 Last day to register: 1/19

**Stay Connected:**  
 Information about other monthly community inclusion activities will be available for anyone interested.

**PHOTO NOTICE:**  
 Photos and/or videos may be taken during the event and may be used for promotional purposes.

THE UNION COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS PRESENTS

# FEBRUARY FESTIVITIES

Saturday, February 14, 2026

**Great Backyard Bird Count**  
 Participate in the Annual Great Backyard Bird Count and help scientists track bird populations in real time. Visit Trakula's bird feeding stations and learn to identify some common birds. Look for birds in their natural habitats and report your sightings online.  
 10:00 AM

**Winter Landscapes with Artist Dario Scholis**  
 Using the winter woods as the subject, let your creativity flow with acrylic paints. Mr. Scholis will guide you to produce a one-of-a-kind masterpiece to take home.  
 For adults ages 18 and older.  
 10:00 AM

**The Journey Of Sap to Syrup**  
 Learn what is needed to collect sap from a sugar maple tree. Take part in a taste test to see if you can identify the real thing. Dress for the weather.  
 11:30 AM or 1:30 PM

**Winter Walk Scavenger Hunt**  
 Take a nature walk in search of winter signs. Can you find a track rut, popcorn berries, an animal apartment house and other subtle signs of winter? Warm up by a campfire with hot cocoa.  
 2:45 PM

**Free Children's Crafts, Prize Wheel and Give-Aways**  
**Register at [ucnj.org/trailside](http://ucnj.org/trailside)**  
 Recommended for families with children ages 4 and older.  
 Trailside Nature & Science Center \* 452 New Providence Road \* Mountainside \* 908-789-3470

**REGISTER TO WIN THE UNION COUNTY**

**NJTSS Family Workshop Series**

## NJTSS-ER Family Workshop Series: Understanding Universal Screening & NJTSS-ER Supports

**Description**  
 This three-session virtual workshop series is designed to help families understand how universal screening within a New Jersey's Tiered System of Supports for Early Reading (NJTSS-ER) identifies student literacy needs and provides effective, research-based reading instruction and intervention.

**Session 1: Thursday, January 8th at 6-7 pm ET**  
 Universal Screening - This session introduces families to how schools use universal screening—brief assessments given to all students—to identify early reading needs. Parents and caregivers will learn what tools are used, how screenings are administered, what the results mean, and how schools use this data to guide instructional decisions and supports.

**Session 2: Thursday, January 15th at 6-7 pm ET**  
 Tier 1 Instruction - The session explains how foundational skills are taught, how teachers use assessment information to plan instruction and small-group differentiation, and how families can understand their child's progress toward grade-level expectations. Parents and caregivers will explore what effective, research-based Tier 1 reading instruction looks like for all students.

**Session 3: Thursday, January 22nd at 6-7 pm ET**  
 This session focuses on how schools support students who need additional or intensive help. Parents and caregivers will learn what evidence-based Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions involve, how progress monitoring is used to track growth, and how data informs decisions about their child's intervention and ongoing support.

**Click, Clack, Moo**

Date and Time  
 Jan 24, 2026 - Sat, 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM (EST)

[Add to My Calendar](#)

Address  
**Wilkins Theatre**  
 1000 Morris Ave, Union, NJ 07083, USA

Arts & Culture Music & Concerts

**Teen Take Home Crafts**

**AGES 13-19**

Grab a take home craft at one of our branches! New crafts every month! While supplies last.

Elmora: 740 W. Grand St. | E-Port: 102-110 Third St. | LaCorte: 434 Palmer St.

Elizabeth Public Library Teen Dept. | [EPLTEENSDEPT@GMAIL.COM](mailto:EPLTEENSDEPT@GMAIL.COM) | @EPLNJ




*Qualified, Competent Translators*

Our schools provide language assistance to limited-English proficient families effectively with appropriate, competent staff-or appropriate and competent outside resources.

*Important Document Notice*

If a situation arises when the district or schools are unable to translate a document immediately, please note that translation is available upon request.

- Elizabeth Public Schools offers translation accessibility of district communication and materials. For further assistance, please contact 908-436-5200.
- Las Escuelas Públicas de Elizabeth ofrecen accesibilidad de traducción de comunicación y materiales del distrito. Para obtener más ayuda, comuníquese con 908-436-5200.
- As Escolas Públicas de Elizabeth oferecem acessibilidade à tradução de materiais e comunicação do distrito. Para obter mais assistência, entre em contato com 908-436-5200.
- Lekòl Piblik Elizabeth yo ofri tradiksyon aksè nan kominikasyon distri a ak materyèl yo. Pou plis asistans tanpri kontakte 908-436-5200.
- المدارس بمنطقة اليزابيث التعليميه تقدم خدمه الترجمة لجميع اللغات في حاله الحاجه لهذه الخدمة المقدمة اتصل برقم 908-436-5200



**We value the thoughts of our community members.**

**Have a great idea for an upcoming issue or information that you think would be beneficial to others in our community?**

**Send to: [dssnewsletter@epsnj.org](mailto:dssnewsletter@epsnj.org)**