



*"January is the time to start something new and better."*

- Unknown

---

## *Administrators' Message*

Good Morning Parents, Guardians, Case Managers and Support Staff,

Welcome to 2026! As we settle into the rhythm of the New Year, January has served as a pivotal time for our school community to reflect, plan, and grow. There is a unique energy that comes with a fresh calendar, a chance to look back at our progress and set a deliberate course for the months ahead. At Lamberts Mill Academy, we have used this month to refocus our intentions, ensuring that every student feels supported as they pursue their individual paths toward success.



Our therapeutic supports and sessions remains the cornerstone of the LMA experience, and this month we saw incredible engagement in our ongoing Pet Therapy program. These sessions continue to provide a vital sense of calm and connection for our students. Parallel to these moments of comfort, our students have been working closely with their clinicians to create long-term goals. By looking beyond the day-to-day and visualizing their future selves, our students are building the self-advocacy skills necessary for lifelong achievement.

On campus, the atmosphere was heightened by the return of our Annual Badminton Tournament. It was a joy to see the gymnasium filled with such school spirit and healthy competition. While the matches were intense, the true victory was seeing the sportsmanship and perseverance on display from every participant. These events remind us of the strength of our LMA community and the importance of physical activity in maintaining a balanced mindset.

In the realm of career preparation, we are thrilled to announce that our Work-Based Learning (WBL) program has resumed with full momentum. We are particularly excited to welcome Barnes & Noble (Clark) as our newest worksite partner. As we add Barnes & Noble, we thank the Cranford Book Store for their support of our Post-Graduate program, as our time with the Cranford Book Store has come to an end. Adding Barnes & Noble provides our students with a fantastic opportunity to develop professional skills in a dynamic retail environment. Expanding our community footprint through WBL ensures that our students are not just learning in the classroom, but are gaining the real-world experience necessary for a smooth transition into the workforce.

Finally, we want to speak directly to the Class of 2026. With January coming to a close, you now have just five months left until graduation. This is a significant milestone, but it is also a time when "senioritis" can start to set in. I urge you not to lose track of your goals. Stay disciplined, stay focused, and remember that the hard work you put in today, is the foundation for your life after LMA.

We believe in you and are here to help you cross that finish line with pride.

Warmly,

Reed & John

---

## *Upcoming Events*

### **February 2026 Important Dates**

February 2nd - Marking Period 3 begins

February 16th - School Closed for Presidents Day

February Field Trips: Yestercades



---

## *Student of the Month - Elena*

We are incredibly proud to announce that Elena, a dedicated and high-achieving senior, has been named our Student of the Month for January. Elena's commitment to excellence is evident in her academic performance, having earned a well-deserved spot on the Honor Roll for the first half of the school year. Beyond the classroom, she is a natural leader who consistently finds ways to brighten our school community. Most recently, she took the initiative to make hand-crafted, custom hot chocolate orders for students and staff during our holiday celebration. With her

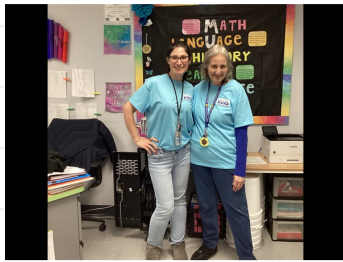
compassionate heart and proven leadership skills, Elena plans to pursue a career as a social worker, a path that perfectly aligns with the empathy and service she displays every day.



---

## *Staff Spotlight - UCESC Spirit Day*

All staff participated in a district wide Spirit Day to show off our new UCESC Tee Shirts!



---

## *January at The Mill*

### *Badminton Tournament*

Students are currently participating in the Badminton Unit, which will continue through the remainder of the month. Badminton remains one of the most popular activities among LMA students, and the unit will culminate in the 9th Annual LMA Badminton Tournament. Last year's tournament was a tremendous success, and we look forward to continuing this exciting tradition.



---

### *Weekly Trips to the Sunshine Cafe*



LMA RBTs, Mr. Murphy and Mr. McParland, working hard to ensure the Behavior Modification Programs runs smoothly.

## *Classroom Spotlights*

### **What I Need (WIN)**

This month in "WIN" (What I Need), students learned about positive and negative consequences to a singular behavior. They completed a "Courageous Heroes" Project where they read quotes about courage and interpreted what they mean in their own lives. They then had to research 3 people who

have been courageous and share their inspirational stories, these people included; Colin Kaepernick, John Scopes, Greta Thunberg, John Lewis, Malala Yousafzai and Laverne Cox. We started watching the movie *The Pursuit of Happyness* and discussed the 4 “Hurdles” (systemic/economic, social interpersonal, logistical, temporal) that the main character had to overcome in his life.



## Mathematics

All math classes are moving along smoothly. The 12th grade Consumer Math class will be embarking on a Budget project. The purpose of the project will be to prepare them to understand the real cost of living. They will choose a job and research its starting salary and create a monthly budget as if they are a 23-year-old.

## Science

In service to one of our Student Growth Objectives, we are facilitating hands-on activities like a Burning Candle Lab - can you predict how long it takes for a 60-gram candle to be completely consumed, that is, be reduced to carbon dioxide and water vapor? We simulated a semi-permeable cell membrane with a baggie filled with starchy water surrounded by an aqueous solution of iodine - what do you think would happen when left overnight? (Hint: Iodine turns blue in the presence of starch)



---

## Clinical Corner

One of January's themes is courage. Courage doesn't mean feeling fearless; it means trying even when something feels hard or uncomfortable. Courage can look small on the outside, but it's powerful on the inside. Here are a few ways we can practice courage every day:

---

## Group Therapy

Students continue to be fully engaged in their group therapy and look forward to participating in daily sessions. With this month's theme as leadership, courage, and unsung heroes the students have focused on learning characteristics and applying similar skills that made heroes such as Martin Luther King Jr. so successful. This allows the students to work on skills such as self awareness, consequential thinking, communication skills, leadership skills, etc. Students and clinicians have worked on building a welcoming and healthy environment during group sessions by facilitating group check-ins, play therapy, etc!

---

## *LMA Behavior Team:*

### *Time Saving Supports for a Strong Start to the New Year*

January often brings a return to routines after a busy and emotionally full holiday season. For families supporting teens and young adults with complex emotional, behavioral, and mental health needs, daily life already requires flexibility, patience, and thoughtful planning. When time and energy feel limited, small, intentional supports can make a meaningful difference.

Below are practical, time-saving strategies designed to support regulation, independence, and healthier daily rhythms, for both caregivers and students.

#### **Use Predictable Routines to Reduce Daily Stress**

Consistent routines help teens know what to expect and reduce power struggles, shutdowns, and emotional overload. Helpful strategies include:

- Visual or written routines for mornings, after-school time, and evenings
- Simple checklists for tasks like getting ready, packing belongings, or winding down
- Keeping the same order and language for routines each day
- First/Then supports to move through challenging or non-preferred tasks

When expectations are clear and predictable, transitions tend to be faster and less emotionally charged.

#### **Prep Once to Ease the Week Ahead**

A small amount of preparation and helping teens to learn to prep can prevent daily stress from piling up:

- Prepare snacks or meals ahead of time when possible
- Choose clothing the night before to reduce morning pressure
- Create a “ready-to-go” bag with items that support focus or regulation (headphones, fidgets, coping tools, visuals)
- Use labeled bins for school items, personal belongings, or therapy materials

Reducing last-minute decisions can help mornings start calmer and with fewer conflicts.

#### **Build Independence to Reduce Repetition and Burnout**

Supporting independence takes patience, but it saves time and emotional energy over the long term:

- Offer limited choices to support decision-making without overwhelm
- Use step-by-step visuals, written prompts, or technology for daily tasks
- Allow extra time for learning new routines so adults don't need to step in
- Acknowledge effort, growth, and attempts, not just completion

Independence supports confidence and reduces the need for repeated adult prompting.

#### **Let Visuals and Technology Do the Reminding**

Visual and digital supports can reduce repeated verbal reminders and tension:

- Timers for transitions, breaks, and task completion
- Visual countdowns for preferred activities
- Shared calendars for appointments, school days, and commitments

- Communication supports for expressing needs, emotions, or requests

Clear communication helps routines move forward with less frustration for everyone.

### **Plan for Emotional Regulation Before It's Needed**

Proactive regulation saves time, energy, and emotional strain:

- Build movement, breaks, or downtime into the daily schedule
- Offer choices during high-stress moments
- Keep expectations realistic, especially after long or demanding days
- Create calming routines before transitions like bedtime or leaving the house

When teens feel more regulated, routines are more efficient, and more successful.

### **January Family Focus: Simplify One Routine**

Choose one routine to simplify this month:

- Morning routine
- After-school or evening time
- Bedtime
- Leaving the house

Add one support, a checklist, timer, visual, or prep step, and notice what feels easier. Small, thoughtful changes often lead to meaningful improvements.

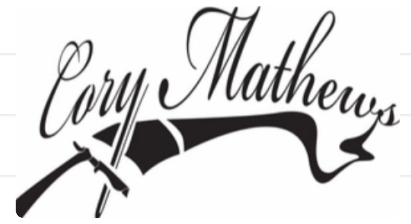
With appreciation,

The Lamberts Mill Academy Behavior Team

---

## *Students Outside the Classroom*

The Post Graduate Program is excited to announce that we have acquired a new Work Based Learning experience at Cory Mathews Salon. Students have the opportunity to learn how a professional salon operates on a daily basis while gaining hands-on experience! Some of the responsibilities include but are not limited to preparing



hot towels, greeting clients, assisting the hair stylists as needed, and maintaining clean work stations. Students will also have the opportunity to work on skills such as communication, teamwork and time management while working within the community setting.

We look forward to a successful work experience while working at the salon!

---

## *Upcoming Community Events*

---

# 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, Maschio's Food Service, and Cory Mathews Salon.
2. Students earning a trip to the Westlake School Cafe

---

## About Us

### **Contact Information:**

Phone: (908)-233-7581

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

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

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

Lamberts Mill Academy is a school within the Union County Educational Services Commission. We are an out of district public school for students with psychiatric disabilities. We continue to partner with RWJ Trinitas Regional Medical Center to provide clinical services for our students. Our school community prides itself on our relationships with all stakeholders: students, staff, parents,

families and community partnerships. Being a public school, we adhere to all NJDOE assessment and curriculum mandates. Our professional learning community strives to increase student achievement and improve classroom instruction to provide students with the most effective educational, social and emotional learning environment possible.



## LMA Smore

LMA is using Smore to create beautiful newsletters



# WESTLAKE JANUARY NEWSLETTER



## Message from the Administrators

**Staff & Students at Westlake have a dream that every voice will be heard, every mind will be challenged, and every student will be seen for who they truly are.**

Dear Families, Friends and Community partners,

This month, our students have been exploring our new theme:

**Leadership & Courage** and what it means to be an **Unsung Hero**. We learned that leaders don't always wear capes or stand on big stages. Sometimes, leadership looks like helping a friend, trying again after a mistake, speaking up for yourself, or showing kindness when it's hard. These everyday actions make our students true unsung heroes! This year, **Elijah K.** has been chosen to represent UCESC - Westlake school for the Union County Unsung Heroes given by the New Jersey School Boards Association. Elijah will be honored at a ceremony at Rahway High School on March 11, 2026. We are so proud of all that Elijah has accomplished at his time at Westlake and he will be graduating at the end of this school year.

Our lessons also focused on **Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.**, where students learned about fairness, standing up for what is right, and using peaceful words and actions to make the world a better place. Teachers talked about how Dr. King showed courage by believing in himself and in others.

Throughout the month, students practiced:

- Making good choices
- Using kind and respectful words



- Helping others and working as a team
- Being brave when learning something new

We are so proud of the leadership and courage our students show every day—often in quiet and powerful ways! Thank you for supporting our classroom heroes.

From our family to yours,  
**Claudine T., Stacey K., Bobby P.**

## Westlake's Unsung Hero - Elijah K.



---

## Westlake Information

### Important Dates!

- January 23: Creature Comforts Pet Therapy visits Westlake School
- February 13: School Spirit Day - Wear your Westlake T-shirts
- February 13: 1:00 pm - Valentine's Day Dance for students
- February 16: School Closed - Presidents Day
- February 19: 6:30 pm - Westlake Parent Organization Meeting
- February 20: Creature Comforts Pet Therapy 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

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				

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](http://www.ucesc.org) and sent via the First Alert system.



# Westlake PTO!

Join us for a delicious way to give back at our upcoming PTO fundraiser hosted at Panera Bread. By enjoying your favorite soup, salad, or sandwich, you'll be helping us raise vital funds that go directly toward supporting our students' programs and school initiatives.



*We're raising dough!*

## WESTLAKE SCHOOL

**25%**

OF NET SALES  
WILL BE  
DONATED\*

**February 20, 2026  
4:00 pm to 8:00 pm  
1255 Raritan Road, Clark, NJ**

Use code **FUND4U** at [panerabread.com](https://panerabread.com), in the Panera App,  
or at the kiosk in-cafe.

Online orders placed all day at your event cafe will count toward your total sales.

Bring this flyer or show a digital copy to your cashier when ordering at the cafe to ensure your organization gets a portion of the net sales.

**Panera**  
**FUNDRAISING**

\*20% fundraiser: Up to 20% of net sales from your designated and registered fundraising event will be donated to your approved organization. Minimum sales of \$100 on the specified date, time and location required to receive 20% donation. 25% fundraiser: Up to 25% of net sales from your designated and registered fundraising event will be donated to your approved organization. Minimum sales of \$150 on the specified date, time and location required to receive 25% donation. General terms: Details on percentage of net sales to be donated and the minimum sales requirement will be provided during the event registration process. Fundraising events available only at participating US bakery-cafes. Fundraising event details and available dates and times for fundraising events will vary by bakery-cafe. Gift card purchases, catering orders, and orders placed on third party delivery sites are excluded and will not count towards the total net sales from your designated fundraising event. This offer will be void if flyer is distributed in or near the participating bakery-cafe on the night of the event. Fundraising events may be cancelled without notice due to abuse, error, fraud, computer error, electronic or technical malfunctions, or other unforeseen or unintended circumstances. Other restrictions may apply. For more information on how our fundraising events work, please visit: <https://fundraising.panerabread.com/faq>. © 2024 Panera Bread. All Rights Reserved.



*Estamos recaudando dinero*

## WESTLAKE SCHOOL

**25%**

DE VENTAS  
NETAS SERÁ  
DONADO\*

**20 de febrero de 2026  
4:00 pm to 8:00 pm  
1255 Raritan Road, Clark NJ**

Use el código **FUND4U** en [panerabread.com](https://panerabread.com), en la app de  
Panera, o en el quiosco del café.

Los pedidos en línea realizados durante todo el día en su café del evento contarán  
para sus ventas totales.

Traiga este volante o muestre una copia digital a su cajero al hacer su pedido en el café para asegurar que su organización reciba una parte de las ventas netas.

**Panera**  
**FUNDRAISING**

\*20% fundraiser: Up to 20% of net sales from your designated and registered fundraising event will be donated to your approved organization. Minimum sales of \$100 on the specified date, time and location required to receive 20% donation. 25% fundraiser: Up to 25% of net sales from your designated and registered fundraising event will be donated to your approved organization. Minimum sales of \$150 on the specified date, time and location required to receive 25% donation. General terms: Details on percentage of net sales to be donated and the minimum sales requirement will be provided during the event registration process. Fundraising events available only at participating US bakery-cafes. Fundraising event details and available dates and times for fundraising events will vary by bakery-cafe. Gift card purchases, catering orders, and orders placed on third party delivery sites are excluded and will not count towards the total net sales from your designated fundraising event. This offer will be void if flyer is distributed in or near the participating bakery-cafe on the night of the event. Fundraising events may be cancelled without notice due to abuse, error, fraud, computer error, electronic or technical malfunctions, or other unforeseen or unintended circumstances. Other restrictions may apply. For more information on how our fundraising events work, please visit: <https://fundraising.panerabread.com/faq>. © 2024 Panera Bread. All Rights Reserved.

# January Spotlight!

## Student of the Month!



We are thrilled to announce our C.V. as our Student of the Month, who perfectly embodies this month's themes of leadership and courage. This student displays incredible bravery by working hard to accomplish his goals, they show true leadership by always being there to help friends in need, guiding their classmates with kindness and a supportive spirit.

## Principal Award Winner!



## *Principal's Award*



We are incredibly proud to recognize our Principal Award Winner N.K.! She demonstrates quiet leadership by working hard in the classroom every day and being a supportive, kind friend to her peers. Her spirit also comes alive in her art, where she expresses her creativity through truly great drawings that bring joy to our school.

## **Staff of the Month!**



# Staff Member of the Month



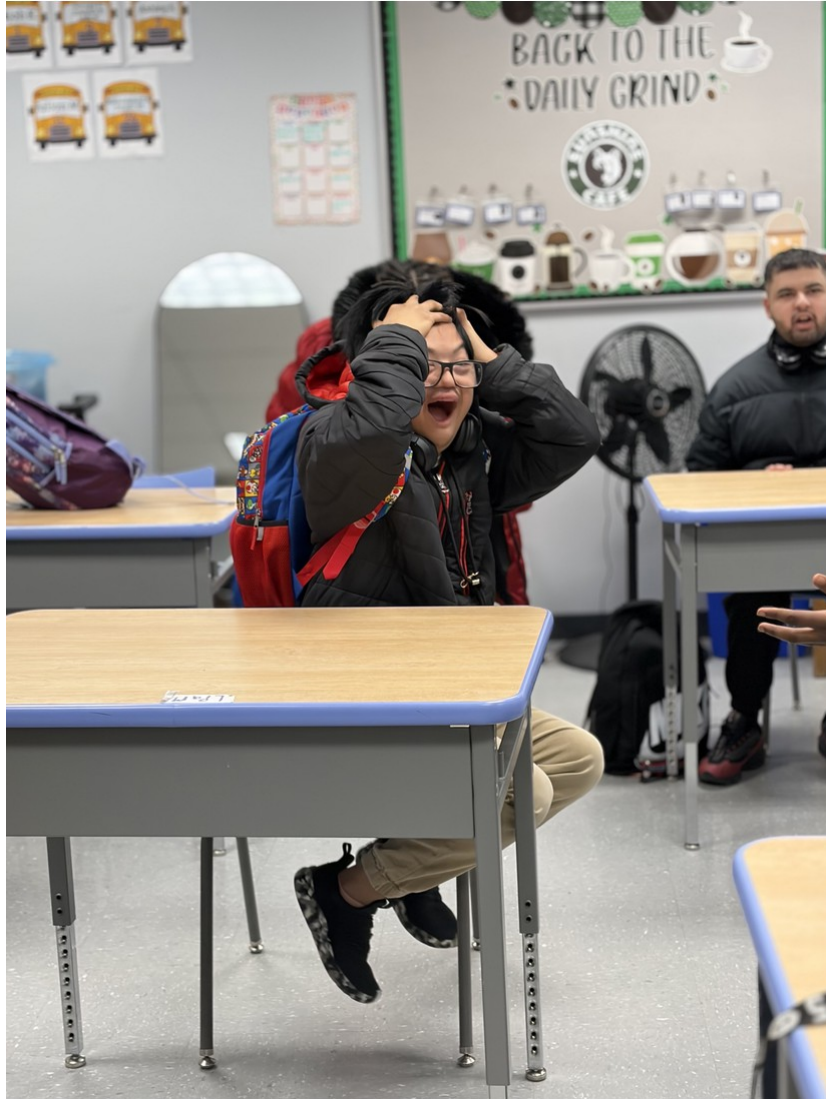
We are honored to celebrate our Staff of the Month, Mr. Julio, who truly embodies the essence of leadership and courage. He models exceptional character by treating his own student and every child in the classroom with unwavering kindness and deep respect.

## Sunshine Cafe Employee of the Month!

# SUNSHINE CAFE EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH



The Sunshine Cafe Employee of the Month for January is... L.W! We chose him because he is a hard worker who is kind to everyone! He is always looking to help others and learn new things. He is an amazing worker and we are very lucky to have him!



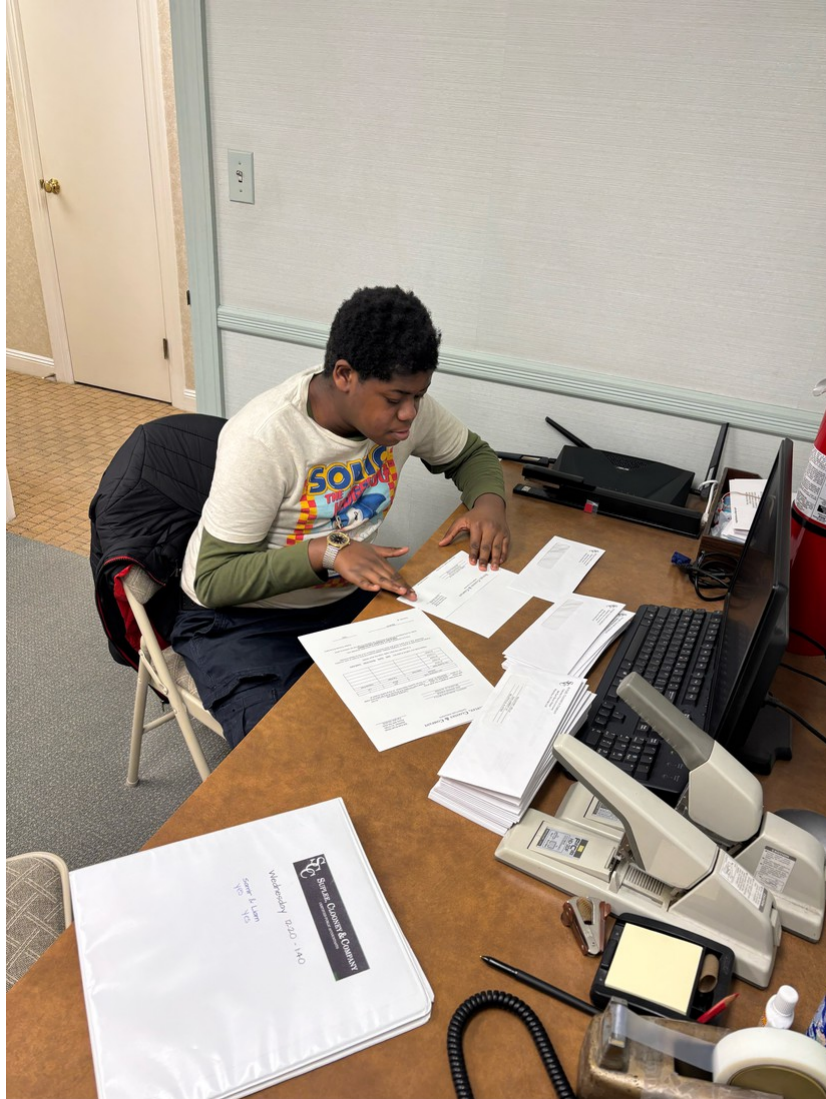
# Sunshine Cafe!



The Sunshine Cafe staff is feeling the love this month with two vibrant specials that are as delicious as they are colorful. You can cool down with our refreshing, bright blue raspberry drink or treat yourself to a decadent red velvet cupcake smothered cream cheese icing. Each cupcake is finished with a sweet Valentine's Day candy, making it a perfectly festive treat prepared with heart by our talented student team. Stop by to grab this "perfect pair" and support the hard work and hospitality of our amazing cafe crew!



## **Work Based Learning!**

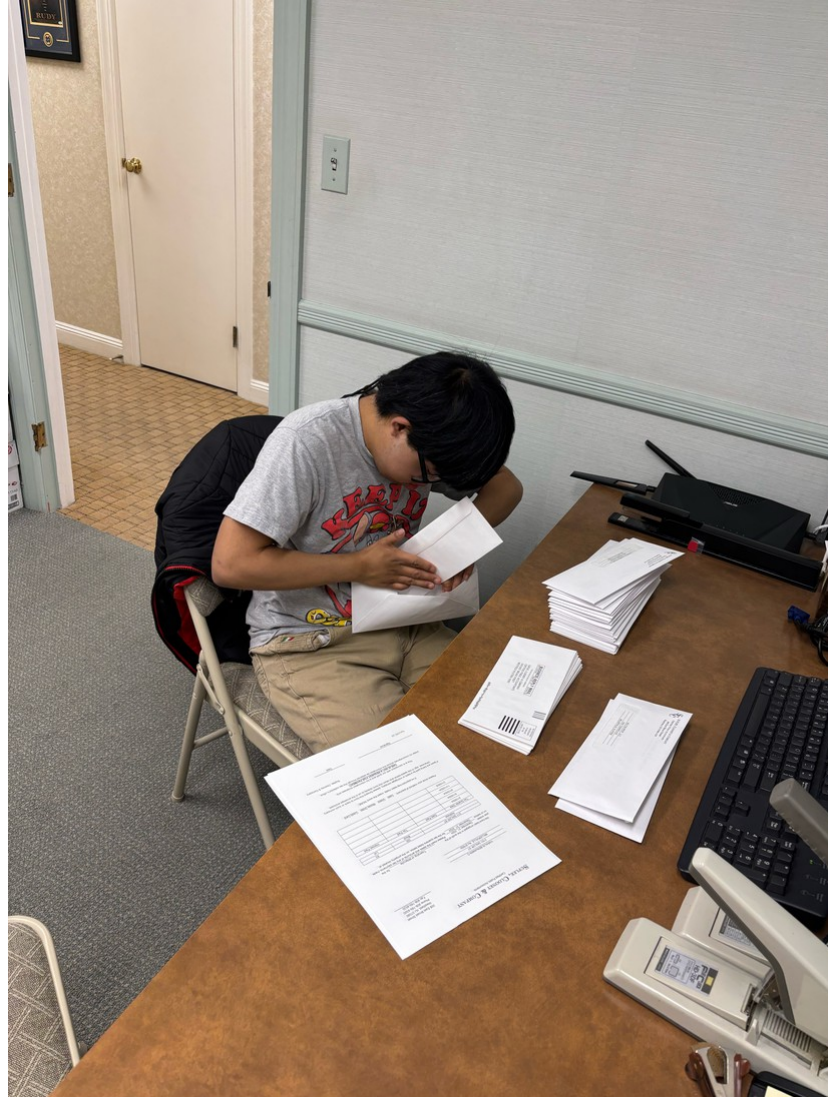


**Work-Based Learning students are excited to return to their job sites after Winter Break, ready to jump back into their routines. They are reconnecting with supervisors and continuing to build valuable job skills and independence!**

**At the Suplee, Clooney & Company, an accounting office, L.W. and S.W. were busy stuffing envelopes and shredding old papers. They were helping to prepare for a busy tax season.**

**At the Clark Library, J.M. assembled small boxes for penguin figurines. This was a multi-step process that entailed, removing the penguin from plastic wrap, putting straw paper in the box, putting the little penguin in the box, and then closing the box. J.M. checked all his work at the end of the process. J.B. worked on cutting sheets with black squares on them. She carefully arranged them in groups so the next part of the project can be completed efficiently.**

**At Walgreens, G.R. and E.K. were tasked with checking in the expiration dates in the snack aisle. They found a lot on the shelves. The Walgreens employee was very happy that this job was completed so carefully!**









## January Tips from the Westlake Behavior Team!

JANUARY 23, 2026

## WESTLAKE SCHOOL – TIPS FROM THE BEHAVIOR TEAM

Time-Saving  
For/Then visuals

### TIME-SAVING SUPPORTS FOR A STRONG START TO THE NEW YEAR

#### PREDICTABLE ROUTINES

- Visual schedules
- Checklists
- Consistent language
- First/Then visuals

#### PREP ONCE, REDUCE STRESS

- Pre-portion snacks/lunches
- Choose clothing
- Movement/sensory breaks
- Create a "go bag"
- Labeled bins

#### SUPPORT INDEPENDENCE

- Pre-portion snacks/lunches
- Choose clothing
- Labeled bins
- Timers
- Shared family calendars
- AAC systems

#### VISUALS & TECHNOLOGY

- Limited choices
- Allow extra time
- Reinforce effort
- Visual countdowns
- Step-a-step visuals

#### PLAN FOR REGULATION

- Offer choices
- Realistic Calm routines

#### JANUARY FAMILY CHALLENGE: SIMPLIFY ONE ROUTINE

- ★ Morning routine
- ★ Add one support (visual, checklist, timer) prep
- ★ Bedtime and notice what feels easier.

With appreciation,  
The Westlake Behavior Team

## Supporting Regulation and Independence During a Busy Season

### Time-Saving Supports for a Strong Start to the New Year

January often means getting back into routines after a busy and sometimes dysregulating holiday season. For families of adolescents and young adults with autism and mental health needs, daily life already requires thoughtful planning, and time can feel especially limited.

The good news: small, intentional supports can save time, reduce stress, and create smoother days for both caregivers and students. Below are practical, realistic strategies that support regulation, independence, and overall family well-being.

### Let Predictable Routines Do the Heavy Lifting

Consistent routines reduce the need for repeated reminders, negotiations, and last-minute stress. Helpful strategies include:

- Visual schedules for morning, after-school, and evening routines (posted or digital)
- Checklists for tasks such as getting ready, packing bags, or bedtime
- Using the same order and consistent language each day
- First/Then visuals to move through non-preferred tasks more efficiently

When expectations are clear and predictable, transitions are quicker and calmer.

### Prep Once, Reduce Stress All Week

A small amount of preparation can save significant time during busy weekdays:

- Pre-portion snacks or lunches ahead of time (if your student brings food)
- Choose clothing the night before or use simple choice boards
- Create a “go bag” with items like headphones, fidgets, visuals, AAC supports, or preferred regulation tools
- Use labeled bins for school materials, therapy items, and daily essentials

Reducing daily decisions helps mornings start on a steadier footing.

### **Support Independence to Cut Down on Repetition**

Building independence takes time up front—but pays off long term:

- Offer limited, meaningful choices to encourage decision-making
- Use step-by-step visuals for daily living and self-care routines
- Allow extra time initially so tasks don't need to be completed by adults
- Reinforce effort and progress, not perfection

Independence builds confidence and reduces the need for constant adult prompting.

### **Use Visuals and Technology as Time-Savers**

Visual supports can often replace repeated verbal reminders:

- Timers for transitions, waiting, or preferred activities
- Visual countdowns to support task completion
- Shared family calendars with pictures or icons
- AAC systems or communication visuals for common requests

Clear, accessible communication reduces frustration and keeps routines moving.

### **Plan for Regulation Before It's Needed**

Preventing dysregulation saves time, energy, and emotional bandwidth:

- Schedule movement or sensory breaks into the day
- Offer choices during high-stress times
- Keep expectations realistic after long school days
- Build calm, predictable routines before transitions

Regulated students move through routines more efficiently—and more comfortably.

### **January Family Challenge: Simplify One Routine**

Choose one routine to focus on this month:

- Morning routine
- After-school or homework time
- Bedtime
- Leaving the house

Add one support (a visual, checklist, timer, or prep step) and notice what feels easier. Small changes can make a meaningful difference.

With appreciation,  
The Westlake Behavior Team



## Ms. Jess' Class

Students in Ms Jess' class are putting their learning into action with engaging hands-on activities leading to lots of confidence. Each student is showing amazing progress through consistent routines and individual support. This month we learned about Dr Martin Luhter King Jr and all took a Promise Peace Pledge.



## Ms. Amodol's Class!

We have been having a great 2026 so far in W65! We kicked off the new year by welcoming 3 new friends to our class. Getting back into the swing of things after winter break always means reviewing all our class expectations and relearning procedures, but this time we were teaching our new friends about them, too! We also talked about New Year's resolutions and goal setting. We discussed our goals for the year ahead and how to set achievable goals for ourselves. We put our SEL themes of the month (leadership & courage) into practice – leading by example to help our new students get acquainted with the classroom. We explored what it means to be a leader and took a pledge to be leaders in our classroom and school community. We discussed what makes someone a good leader and famous people who were strong leaders in their times, especially Martin Luther King, Jr. We learned about MLK's life, his accomplishments, and what he fought for. We talked about what it means to have a dream or a wish and shared our dreams for ourselves, our families, and the world.



# Physical Therapy with Ms. Aliza!

Our PT students are working towards their IEP goals with fun winter themed activities and exercises this month. They enjoyed “building a snowman” with winter themed obstacle courses and having “snow ball fights” while on scooters with peers. Our students in PT groups continue to build lifelong wellness habits by learning how to stretch and complete various strength training exercises independently. They are also working their cardiovascular endurance with treadmill training each week. These skills support ongoing physical health and overall confidence. Our department is looking forward to our upcoming OT/PT winter olympic games!

---

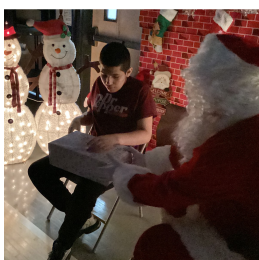
## Speech Therapy with Ms. Sara

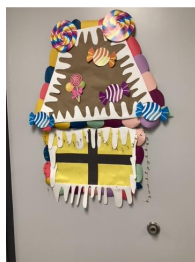
Happy New Year! January has been a fun and busy month in Speech Therapy! Students explored winter-themed activities while building communication and language skills. Through books, games, crafts, play, and functional activities, students worked on a variety of speech and language goals. Students targeted functional communication, vocabulary, following directions, answering questions, articulation, and social interaction. In recognition of Martin Luther King Jr. Day, therapy sessions also highlighted themes of kindness, helping others, and working together, giving students opportunities to practice social language skills like turn-taking, commenting, and sharing ideas. We love seeing our students communicate, connect, and grow!

---

## December Highlights!

Our school transformed into a winter wonderland this December, buzzing with creativity during our door decorating competition and plenty of laughs over the "questionable" fashion choices in our ugly sweater contest. The magic truly came alive when Santa made a special visit to deliver gifts, sparking pure joy and excitement throughout the hallways. We capped off the month by inviting our families to join us for a heartwarming holiday sing-along, proving that the best part of the season is the music and memories we share together. It was a month defined by community and cheer that sent everyone off to break with a smile.



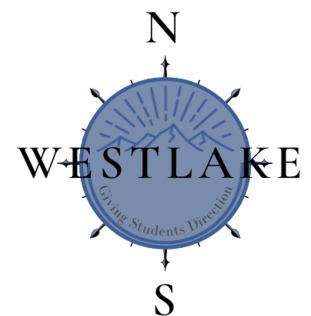




## Parent Resources!

## Contact Us!

**Website:** [www.ucesc.org/schools/westlake\\_school](http://www.ucesc.org/schools/westlake_school)  
**Location:** [1571 Lamberts Mill Rd, Westfield, NJ, USA](http://1571_Lamberts_Mill_Rd,_Westfield,_NJ,_USA)  
**Phone:** [908-232-4181](http://908-232-4181)



### INSTAGRAM!

Visit us!





**Robert Peneno**

Robert is using Smore to create beautiful newsletters



# Work Readiness Academy

January 2026 Monthly Report

## Message from the Director



Dear Families & Supporters,

Well January has certainly kept us on our toes! From the flurry of excitement—and actual flurries—that brought us our recent "snow day" to the unexpected victory of the New England Patriots advancing them to the Super Bowl (can you tell this Director is from Boston?), it's been a month defined by resilience and surprises. While we all enjoyed the brief, snowy respite from the classroom, seeing our students jump back into their routines this week with such energy has been the real highlight of the month.

As we settle back into the rhythm of the school year, we continue to focus on assisting our students in setting meaningful and individualized weekly goals. Much like navigating a sudden snowstorm or a tough playoff season, achieving these milestones requires persistence, a bit of grit, and a clear vision. I am incredibly proud of the focus our students are showing as they continue to **chart new roads** during the coming months. I encourage you to read more below in our **Instructional Insights** update from Supervisor of Instruction, Rachel Richer!

A few other quick notes and updates...

- Earlier this month our staff participated in an half-day of professional learning that focused on two primary learning objectives; **gaining a better understanding of the continued service options available to our students once they exit our program**; and maintaining focus on **best practices for Natural Environment Teaching (NET)**. Read more later on in the newsletter!

- Please be reminded that in the event your child's resident school district is closed due to weather, and the Work Readiness Academy/Project SEARCH is open, **transportation will not be provided by the district.** However, in this situation, you are welcome to drive your child to the program (9:00am) and then pick them up (2:30pm). We just ask that you communicate your plans with us.
- Our Social Worker **Ali Leitner** will be continuing to reach out to each of our families to touch base and provide support with linkage to important post-high school services. If you see an email or get a call from Ali, please be sure to respond! We are here to help.

*\*\*Yes, the picture above was created using Google Gemini (AI).*

Thank you for your continued partnership and support.

Stay warm and safe,

**Josh Bornstein, Director**

UCESC Work Readiness Academy

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

### **Charting New Roads Ahead**

*"Success is the sum of small efforts repeated day in and day out."* – **Robert Collier**

Our instructional focus for January has centered on charting new roads ahead, as teachers and students continue to build skills that support independence, growth, and readiness for life beyond the classroom. Our current instructional unit on productivity has provided meaningful opportunities for students to understand how consistent effort, responsibility, and engagement contribute to success across real-world settings.



Teachers have intentionally utilized our skills center to create authentic learning experiences where students can practice productivity in action. Through hands-on tasks, structured routines, and collaborative activities, students have worked on staying organized, managing time, completing tasks efficiently, and reflecting on their effort and progress. These experiences allow

students to strengthen foundational skills in a supportive environment while preparing them to transfer those skills beyond the classroom.

In addition, teachers have continued to use data and feedback from work-based learning internships to inform instruction and set individualized goals. Observations from internship sites help identify areas of strength and opportunities for growth, ensuring instruction remains responsive and directly connected to students' real-world experiences.

We have also continued to implement more Natural Environment Teaching across all settings to promote independence. Students practiced productivity through authentic workplace routines such as clocking in and out, receiving directions from mentors, navigating missing materials, adjusting to schedule changes, and interacting with coworkers. By embedding instruction into these everyday moments, students are learning to problem-solve, self-monitor, and take ownership of their responsibilities in meaningful ways.

As we continue charting new roads ahead, our focus remains on helping students build the habits, confidence, and independence needed to navigate real-world expectations, skills that will guide and support them in their future endeavors.

**Rachel Richer, Supervisor of Instruction**



**Week of February 2** - Roll out of New WBL Internships Begins  
**Friday, February 13** - WRA Valentine's Day Mocktail Party  
**Monday, February 16** - No School - President's Day  
**Friday, March 6** - No School - Staff Development  
**March 10-12** - Employment Planning Meetings at Project SEARCH

---

## January 2026 Data

### January 2026 Data

#### Enrollment as of January 28, 2026

Actual: 28

Changes: Entered: 0 Exited: 0

Referrals: 5

Intakes Scheduled: 5

Accepted: 3



#### Drills

1/14/26 - EM (Evacuation-Non Fire)

1/23/26 - Fire Drill

---

# Celebrating Our Students' Success

## Growth, Grit, and New Directions

This month, we are proud to recognize **John, Izzy, and Tina** for their hard work, growth, and dedication to charting new roads ahead. Each of these students has shown meaningful progress as they continue building confidence, independence, and readiness for adult life.

### John

John has consistently approached challenges with a positive and open-minded attitude, even when situations have been difficult or unexpected. He has shown resilience by staying engaged, adapting to changes, and pushing forward when tasks felt challenging. John's perseverance and willingness to try, even when things do not go as planned, reflect important skills he will continue to use as he navigates new paths ahead.

### Izzy

Izzy has demonstrated impressive growth by remaining open to new experiences and learning to recognize when she needs support. This month, she has shown strong self-awareness and effective communication skills, clearly expressing her needs and demonstrating genuine understanding across classroom, skills center, and community settings. Izzy's willingness to ask for help and engage thoughtfully in new situations highlights her continued growth and maturity.

### Tina

Tina has grown in her understanding of the value of friendship as she navigates independent adult life. This month, she has recognized how having a trusted friend to lean on or seek support from has helped build her confidence. Tina has worked thoughtfully to "pay it forward," offering encouragement and support to others while continuing to develop her own independence and optimism for the future.

We are incredibly proud of **John, Izzy, and Tina** for the way they continue to grow, reflect, and chart new roads ahead through their daily efforts and commitment to learning.



*Izzy*

---



*Tina*



# Welcome to **Our Classroom**

It's been a busy start to the new year for my class. The students started 2026 by developing post-secondary goals to help guide their next step after exiting our program. The students created Google Slides with this information to present to their classmates, use in their Transition Meetings, and shared with their parents.

We also focused this month on learning about pace and productivity at work. Through the use of discussions and timed hands-on activities (both in the classroom and life skills room), the students practiced a variety of strategies to help increase these employability skills,



In Financial Literacy Class, the students have been learning about credit scores and credit cards. Gaining an understanding of what a credit score is and how to keep it in good standing. Additionally, there was a focus on how credit works, and how minimum payments and interest rates can lead to debt if not paid back in a timely manner.

Our student-run enterprise, *"Furlicious Treats... They Are Pawsitively Delicious!"* is also up and running! Students collaborate in the making of the peanut butter bones (from scratch) in two different sizes (large and small). The students pre-measure ingredients, make the dough from scratch, press out the bones, and bake them. The bones are then bagged and made ready for sale. "Furlicious Treats" partners with The Cake Artist and Vinny's Pizza and Pasta in Cranford to sell our product. You can find them displayed in a large dog bowl at each business. They are also sold to members of the Work Readiness Academy staff and students' families.

**Sharlene McQuade, WRA Classroom Teacher/SLE**

*Jonathan's Post Secondary Goal Presentation*

---

*Gisselle's Post Secondary Goal Presentation*

---



*Delivering "Furlicious Treats" to Cake Artist Cafe*



*Matt created a new "Furlicious Treats" poster*



*Delivering "Furlicious Treats" to Vinny's Pizza*

---

*Kevin, Nick and Sean collaborate to create large dog bones*

---

*Larissa cutting out small dog bones*

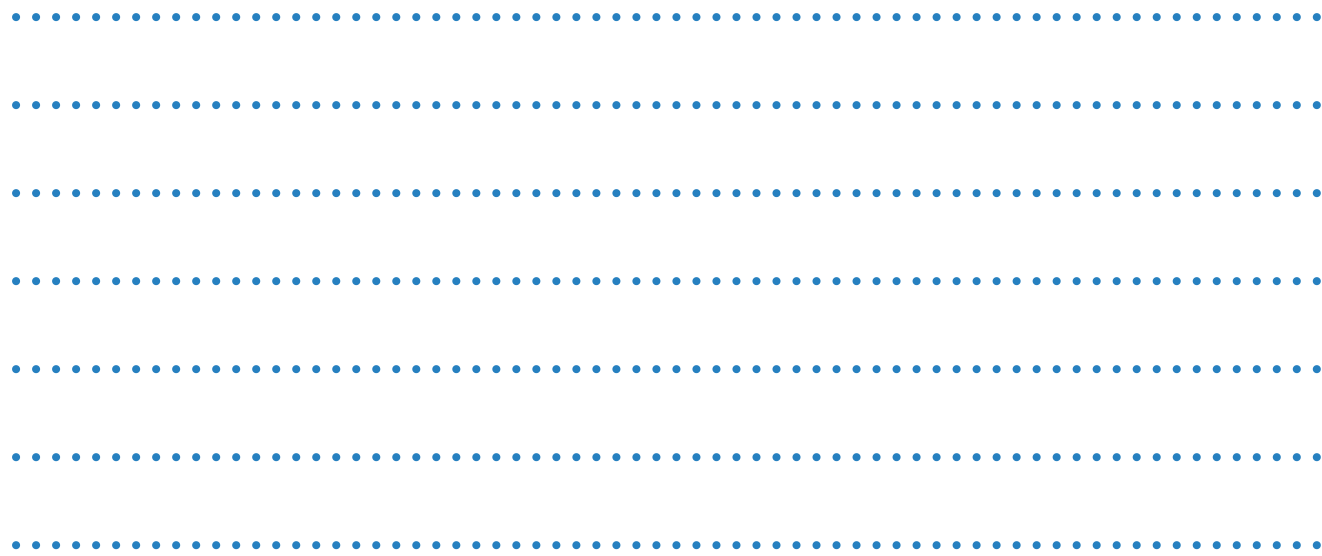
---

January marked the start of the **2nd internship rotation** for the Project SEARCH interns at Overlook Medical Center. Pictured below are **Alfi (Infusion Center), Simon (Endoscopy), Charlie (Central Sterile), and Roman (Materials Management)**.

The SEARCH crew also enjoyed a surprise visit from **Saad Ehtisham, the new President and CEO of Atlantic Health System**.

Also this month, our interns and staff were proud to volunteer at **Overlook's MLK Day Meal Packing event**. This experience provided extreme pride as we were able to give back by helping to provide healthy meals to the local communities served by the event.

Finally, we also held our **second round of Employment Planning Meetings (EPMs)** this month. EPMS occur four times per year and serve as checkpoints for the student's "support team" to touch base, discuss progress including areas of strength & needed growth, and brainstorm ideas for the next internship rotation and eventual possible gainful employment.



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](http://atlantichealth.org)



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

*Steven in Food and Beverage at Hilton Garden Inn, Route 22, Springfield*

---

*Chelsea at DSW in Union Plaza*

---

*Anthony at Bovella's in Mountainside*

---

*Nicky in Food & Beverage at Hilton Newark Airport*

---

*Christian at Shoprite in Clark*

---

*Erin at Cake Artist Cafe in Downtown Cranford*

---

## Professional Learning for Staff

The Work Readiness Academy staff participated in an afternoon of Professional Learning on Monday, January 12th. The session was split into two parts. During the first session staff gained a better understanding of the **continued service options available to our students via the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Division of Developmental Disabilities once they exit our program**. Select staff members, who had visited several adult programs in Union County, presented short recap summaries to their colleagues.

Part two was co-facilitated by Supervisor of Instruction, Rachel Richer, and BCBA Kelly Schupa, and focused on **better understanding Natural Environment Teaching and intentional prompt fading** to support student independence across classroom, skills center, and work-based learning settings. Staff learned:

Independence is the goal- not task completion with support  
Skills must transfer beyond staff presence  
Learning is most powerful when it happens in real environments  
Employers are partners in this process

As a culminating activity, staff collaborated to develop a site-specific Internship Partnership Guide to support consistent communication and shared expectations with employer partners.

---

## Staff Spotlight: WRA Team Spirit

At the Work Readiness Academy, our strength comes from the people who work together every day to support our students. Whether proudly wearing our new district shirts or gathering to celebrate together during our holiday staff event, these moments reflect the strong sense of **teamwork, community, and mutual support** that defines our program. Our staff consistently uplift one another, collaborate across roles, and model the positive, inclusive culture we strive to create for our students.

---

## Look Who Was Spotted in the Community!

*Former WRA students, **Nick and Joe**, were spotted by **Rose** in Downtown Westfield!*

---

## Picture of the Month

*Project Search student, **Caroline**, using the stationary bike to blend her smoothie!*

---

## 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.

---

# Transition Resources for Families from the Arc of New Jersey!

The Division of Developmental Disabilities' Office of Transition to Adult Life and Employment has a variety of resources available to schools and other community organizations, and for students who will be exiting school and turning 21 and their families.

- Visit the [Transition from School to Adult Life](#) page
- Review/share DDD [Graduates Timeline](#) ([Graduates Timeline-Spanish](#))
- [Join the Transition to Adult Life Listserv](#)
- Visit the [Transition to Adult Life Webinars and Events](#) page for a list of upcoming events, including the following:
  - Thursday, February 12, 6 – 7 pm: [Transition to Adult Services and the DDD Intake Process](#)

## Guardianship Resources

### Guardianship Webinar Replay

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

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

A link to a replay of the webinar is below:

<https://www.facebook.com/share/v/1Dd5UPLesL/>

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

---

Are you considering tackling Guardianship on your own (Pro Se)? See the video link below from SCARC Guardianship Services, Inc.'s Meet Us in the Middle webinar!

pro se guardianship video



## Guardianship Options

Presented by:

Judy McDonough, NCS - CEO

Jennifer Case, NCS - Director of Probate Services

Teresa Amadori - Probate Coordinator



**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](https://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](mailto:rreicher@ucesc.org)

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

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

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

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



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



**WRA Smore**

WRA is using S'more to create beautiful newsletters



# JANUARY NEWSLETTER 2026



Happy New Year! We hope this year brings you peace, love, and happiness.

---

## HAS's January 2026 Monthly Report Enrollment Data

---

Enrollment-89 (as of 1/28/26).

New Students-4.

Disenrollments-0.

Emergency Drill-Evacuation Non-fire Level I, 1/14/26.

Fire Drill-1/7/26.

---

## A Message From Our Principal: Dr. Balsamello

---

January 2026 had its share of obstacles from a snow storm, frigid weather, and illnesses, however Hillcrest Academy South Campus (HAS) thrived! Student clubs continued to run smoothly as well as teachers and students completed the second marking period/ semester one. Students and staff are looking forward to the beginning of the third marking period/ semester two that begins in February. We hope you enjoy all the fantastic events occurring at HAS!



## Important Dates

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
				1 HAPPY NEW YEAR!	2	3
4	5 SCHOOL REOPENS SENIOR PICTURES	6	7	8 FINANCE GUEST SPEAKER	9 TWIN DAY UCESC SPIRIT DAY	10
11	12 1 PM DISMISSAL FOR STAFF PD	13	14	15 RWJ DANGERS OF VAPING ASSEMBLY	16 MISMATCHED CLOTHES DAY	17
18	19 REV DR MARTIN LUTHER KING JR DAY	20	21	22	23 SUPERHERO DAY	24
25	26 SNOW DAY	27 DELAYED OPENING	28	29	30 NATIONAL HOT CHOCOLATE DAY	31

## Student of the Month!

### Congratulations Jaiden!

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 their 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. Jaiden embodies the values of HAS and truly shines as an example for peers. Congratulations Jaiden on a job well done!

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

### Mrs Demilio's Favorites:

Favorite movie: Polar Express

Favorite food: Mexican

Favorite color: Black

Favorite book: Twilight

Favorite travel spot: Cabo

Favorite people: Husband (married 26 years), two daughters, pup Luna



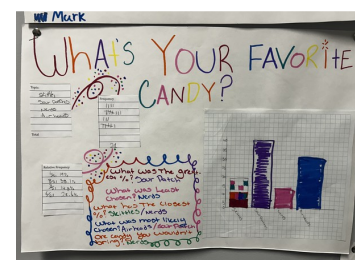
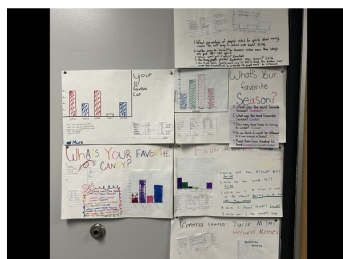
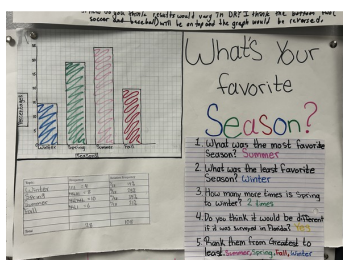
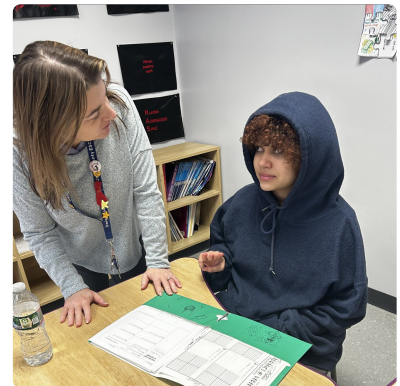
## Teacher's Corner: Math

### Mrs Ferrari: Algebra 1, Geometry, Probability & Statistics

**Algebra I** students began each class with a real-life application of linear equations to reinforce the concepts from the previous unit. The skills the Algebra I students worked on were solving inequalities using addition, subtraction, multiplication and division.

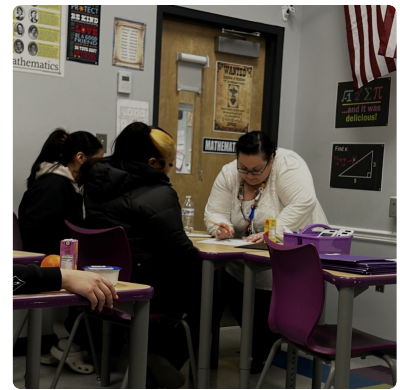
The skills the **Geometry** students worked on included triangles and angles, using angle measure of triangles, congruence and triangles, proving triangles congruence by SSS, SAS, ASA, and AAS, as well as solving isosceles, equilateral, and right triangles.

**Probability and Statistics** began the month by completing their experimental probability projects on surveying students and staff on different interests (candy, fast food, etc.). Other works include theoretical probability, independent vs. dependent probability, factorials, permutations and combinations.



## Mrs Fern: Algebra 2, Computer Science

**Algebra 2** began the month in review of the Product Rule and the Power Rule for exponents as the students learned them before break. From there students learned about the properties of the next rules like the Quotient Rule, Zero Rule, Negative Rule, and lastly what to do if there are Fractional exponents. They were then able to apply these rules to scientific notation, to which the month ended on dividing and using the quotient rule.

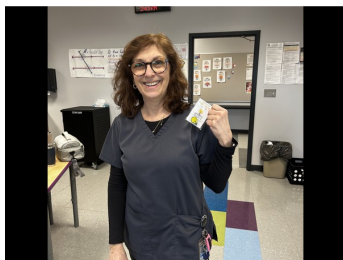


For **Computer Science**, students worked on the lessons of code.org dealing with looping. Monday through Wednesday students learned the different steps of computer programming with fun themes and moving little characters to perform tasks. This month, the looping lessons provide the students with a way to repeat commands with as little prompts as possible. On Thursdays, the students answered writing prompts based on the UCESC theme of "Paving Paths" with each month having its own sub-theme. These answers are then reviewed and select ones get posted in the monthly newsletter. Lastly, on Fridays, students work on assignments based in Canva. Students created "Instagram posts" that were used on the school Instagram, created posts on spirit days, and created vision boards on what they would like to accomplish during 2026.

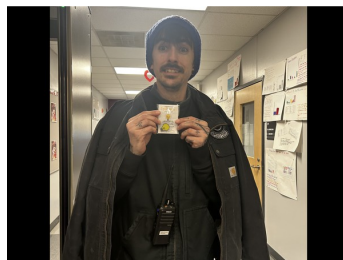


## "Paving Paths" Teacher Recognitions

January - Charting New Roads Ahead



Mrs Rubin - School Nurse



Mr Whitehead - Building Custodian



Mr Shandroff - Teacher

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

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

## **What does leadership or courage look like for you as you take the next steps on your path?**

- Courage is what you need to have if you wanna take the first step in your journey. It is fear that stops you from being the new person you trying to create. Having courage is the main source to become who you wanna be and leave that old you in the past. That feeling that you know you're gonna be scared but you do it anyways, no one will ever have it if they are too scared of what's gonna be on the other side of that road of freedom. The meaning of being a leader is to help those who wanna have that feeling of winning. By helping them and giving them the guide they need, to show them the vision they wanna see, and make sure they don't step on those cracks will give them the courage to move on and not get set back and be there eyes for that road. A leader helps their soldiers into battle and give them courage to win. Be that leader to give other courage to become those who want to win in their own war! - EC
- Leadership looks like someone who is courageous, someone who is bold, someone who is willing to take those first steps during a scary situation. Having leadership or being a leader can impact your life and others for the better, more leaders can help those who need someone to follow off until they can become a leader of their own some day. Having courage can help you get through rough paths on your journey to success. standing up for others, doing something others are scared to, taking a risk is all signs of courage that on has in themselves. - KA

## **Can you think of a moment when you showed courage or took the lead? How did it help you move forward?**

- I show courage when I talk to people about my faith and being more open with it publicly. It has helped me move forward because I stopped caring about what people thought of me and focused on my relationship with God. It helped me be less anxious and not take what people say to heart since no one is perfect, as much as they try to be. It helped just make my life better and know that everybody has a purpose already planned out for them. He showed me that I wasn't alone. - DA
- One moment where I showed courage and took the lead was when me and my mom were moving. I was scared to move to a new state and I mustered up all my courage to collect myself. Once I did a lot of self thinking I said lets go and accomplished moving and getting settled. It helped me move forward by not being scared of new opportunities and new comings. - AP

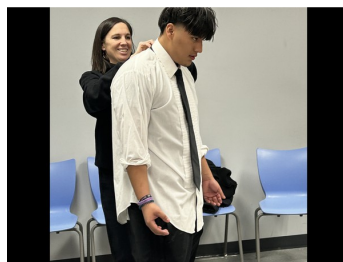
## **Who in your life, or who that you know of, has shown both courage and leadership? In what way have they shown the courage and leadership that you see in them?**

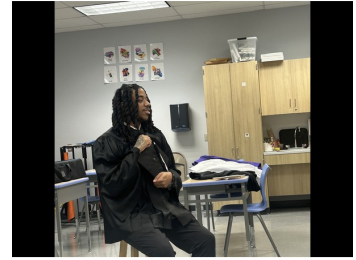
- I can say in my life, my father has shown both courage and leadership. I've seen him do everything he could to make sure me and my siblings could live the life he wanted when he was young. That takes courage to do because not everyone's father is able to be there in the way they want too. He works hard everyday for his family and himself and he doesn't care what anyone has to say. One thing I never understood until I got older was that he liked when people doubted him because it gave him fuel and real ambition. When he did what people said he couldn't, it was the best feeling he could ever seek. I think these reasons are why I deeply believe how he shows courage and leadership. - CT
- In my opinion, someone in my life that has shown both courage and leadership is my mother. My mother has shown courage by raising my sister and I while being a single mother in college. She has shown leadership when she stepped up even when my grandma offered to raise us as her sisters. My mom is truly awesome sauce and I'm very proud of her! She continues to show us what leadership is and to be a good example everyday from the smallest of actions; from waking up and making her bed, to cleaning up, to the harder decisions like working two jobs when she didn't have anyone to back her up. She showed leadership and taught us to be courageous just like her. - CR

---

## Graduation Pics

For a high school senior, donning the cap and gown for graduation pictures is far more than a simple photo opportunity. Rather it is a profound rite of passage that transforms a student into a high school graduate with a single click of the shutter. There is a distinct, heavy symbolism in the stiff polyester fabric and the tassel dangling over one eye, marking the definitive end of a thirteen-year journey. For the faculty and staff of Hillcrest Academy South Campus (HAS), watching these young adults get ready for the next phase of their lives is a quintessential bitter-sweet moment. It's a visual realization that the students who came to HAS are now standing on the precipice of independence. While there is immense pride in seeing them get ready to take on the world, there is an underlying ache in knowing that the familiar rhythm of their presence is about to change. Those portraits capture a fleeting bridge between the safety of being an HAS student and the vast unknown of the future, freezing a second of pure, burgeoning potential before they finally move on.

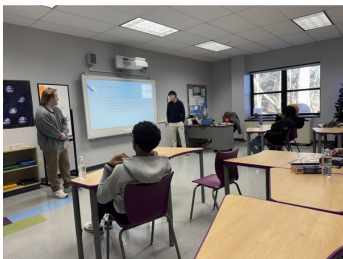




---

## Financial Guest Speaker

With a growing interest in stocks and finance among the students of HAS, Math teacher Mrs Ferrari, brought in guest speakers. They were her son and his friend who are currently college juniors pursuing a degree in finance. The classroom buzzed with professional energy as Sean Ferrari and Anthony Cardozo opened the session with an engaging introduction, bridging the gap between academic theory and real-world application. They began by sharing their own formative journeys, reflecting on how early involvement in campus clubs and specialized internships provided the essential scaffolding for their professional identities. The presentation then transitioned into the mechanics of wealth-building, demystifying the world of investing by breaking down the differences between individual stocks, the security of bonds, and the diversified power of index funds. The dialogue shifted from market theory to personal empowerment as the presenters detailed the strategic advantages of Roth IRAs and brokerage accounts, emphasizing the compounding benefits of starting a financial journey early. Beyond personal finance, they pulled back the curtain on diverse careers in finance, offering a roadmap for students to navigate the industry. To wrap up, the speakers provided a tactical toolkit for the modern job market, stressing that landing a role is often a combination of practicing technical skills, optimizing a LinkedIn profile for visibility, and the relentless pursuit of authentic networking.

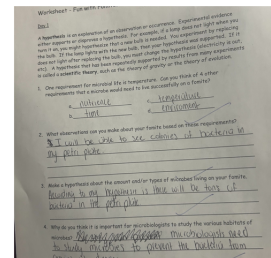
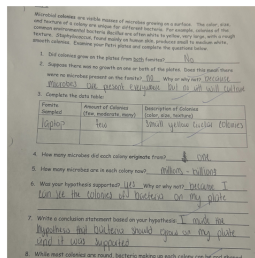
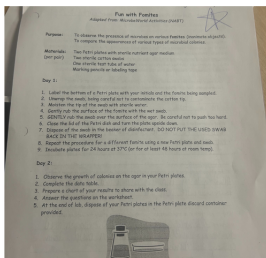
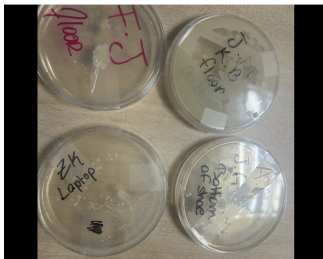






In Mrs. Arora's science class, the HAS side of the 1571 building transformed into a living laboratory as students scoured the school to collect bacterial cultures from everyday surfaces like dusty floors, communal desks, and high-traffic doorknobs. Over a period of three days, the students watched with a mix of fascination and "gross-out" excitement as their petri dishes evolved. The 24-hour mark showed only faint, translucent specks, but by 48 hours, distinct colonies of fuzzy molds and glistening bacteria began to bloom. By the 72-hour milestone, the plates were teeming with diverse biological growth, providing a vivid visual map of the school's invisible ecosystem.

The climax of the experiment involved a rigorous test of the infamous "five-second rule." By dropping food onto both a meticulously sanitized desk and an unsanitized surface, students discovered that bacteria began their transit almost instantaneously. The results were undeniable: the food from the unsanitized desk showed significant microbial transfer regardless of the time spent touching the surface. This hands-on investigation effectively debunked the myth, teaching the class that timing is irrelevant when it comes to microscopic hitchhikers and that a clean environment is the only true safeguard against germs.



# Final BakeOff!

The atmosphere in the art room was bittersweet as the students gathered around the ovens for their final baking session of the school year, marking a poignant end to a new classroom tradition. This culinary celebration served as a farewell tribute to their art teacher, who is set to depart at the conclusion of the first semester to join the faculty at HAN. Between the measuring of flour and the decorating of cookies, there was a palpable sense of gratitude for the creativity she fostered, as the kitchen became a canvas for one last collaborative masterpiece. While the observation of fresh cookies and cakes filled the air, the occasion was underscored by the reality that the second semester would look quite different without her guidance. This final "artistic" feast allowed the students to process the transition together, turning a simple baking lesson into a meaningful send-off for a mentor who left a lasting impression on their palettes and their portfolios alike. Thank you Mrs Picciano for all that you have done this school year!



## Students Outside of School

### Superbowl Meets World Cup!

With both football and futbol (soccer) having big events coming up in the next few months, students who play on both sports are excited to share their passion!

**Football:** For Zyaire, football is more than just a game; it is a lifelong pursuit that began in early childhood, sparked by his father who played the sport and a family tradition shared with his siblings. Beyond the family legacy, the gridiron serves as a vital sanctuary, providing a structured environment that keeps Zyaire focused and out of trouble. On the field, he embraces a versatile role that demands excellence on both sides of the ball: as an offensive threat, he is responsible for running or catching the ball to drive toward the end zone, while on defense, he focuses on jarring the ball loose for fumbles or leaping for interceptions. He understands that the path to a college offer or a career in the NFL requires absolute dedication, 100% effort, and a "show-out" mentality because a scout could be watching at any moment. Ultimately, being part of the team fuels a deep sense of purpose, as Zyaire views his hard work and sportsmanship as the key to a future where he can provide a beautiful home and financial security for his family.



**Soccer:** Jennifer's journey on the soccer pitch began in the eighth grade, driven by a desire to turn years of private practice into a competitive reality. With the dedicated mentorship of her brother, who pushed her to sharpen her skills, and the guidance of a supportive coach, she transformed her passion into a three-year commitment to the sport. As an attacker and striker, she plays a pivotal role on the field, where her focus is on precision, speed, and finding the back of the net to lead her team to victory. For Jennifer, soccer has been a powerful catalyst for personal growth; once someone who preferred to stay in her own space, she now feels more outstanding and confident because of the social and physical demands of the game. Being part of a team filled with like-

minded friends who share her dreams has allowed her to open up and find a sense of belonging among the people she values most.

---

## 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](http://www.ucesc.org)

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

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

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

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

[Visit us on Instagram](#)



**HAS Smore**

HAS is using Smore to create beautiful newsletters



# HAN NEWSLETTER JANUARY 2026

January 2026

---

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:

Throughout the month of January, Hillcrest Academy North focused on the theme of Leadership and Courage, and it has been inspiring to see these qualities demonstrated across our community of students. Leadership is not only about taking charge, but also about making thoughtful choices, supporting others, and doing what is right even when it is difficult. Our students and staff embraced this message and brought it to life in meaningful ways.

We have witnessed students showing courage by trying new challenges, standing up for their peers, and persevering through difficult moments. Staff members modeled leadership through collaboration, innovation in the classroom, and a continued commitment to creating a safe and supportive learning environment. These everyday actions, both big and small, remind us that leadership and courage are traits we all can practice.

As we move forward into the coming months, I encourage our students to continue leading with integrity and courage, and our families to celebrate these efforts at home. Thank you for your ongoing partnership and support. Together, we are building a school community rooted in respect, resilience, and confidence.

Warm Regards,

John Marquet  
Principal

---

## UPCOMING DATES

February 6 - Straight A Movie Day  
February 9-13 - Spirit Week  
February 13 - Bake Sale  
February 13 - Candy Grams  
February 16 - School Closed - Presidents' Day  
February 20 - Attendance Matters! Incentive Trip

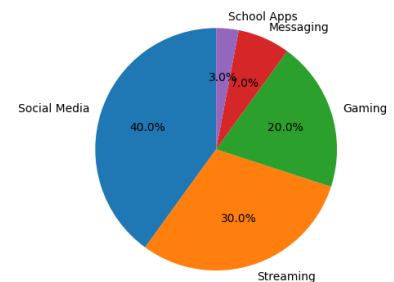
---

## IN THE CLASSROOM

### Statistics Class

Students in the statistics class at Hillcrest Academy North recently completed a final project that turned everyday screen time into meaningful data analysis under the guidance of Mrs. Gomes. Instead of working with abstract numbers, students collected quantitative data from their own daily cell phone usage of the first week of January, including total screen time and their top five most-used apps. They analyzed differences in phone use on school days versus non-school days, calculated measures of central tendency, and compared their results to national averages. Using relative frequency tables, histograms, and pie charts, students transformed personal habits into clear visual representations that demonstrated real-world applications of statistical concepts learned throughout the course.

Top 5 App Usage Distribution (Student Example)

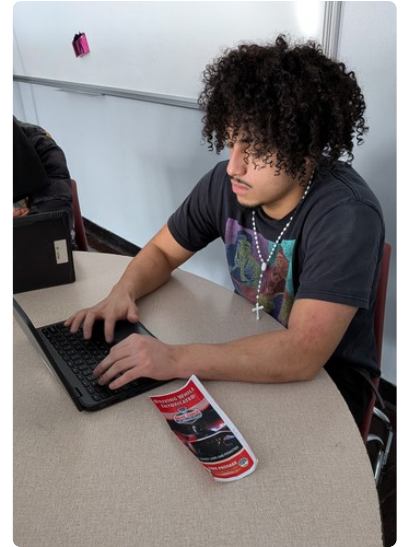


Beyond calculations and graphs, the project encouraged students to reflect thoughtfully on their findings. Each presentation required students to interpret their data with honesty and self-awareness, asking the question, "Am I on my phone too much?" Many students were surprised by patterns they had not noticed before, particularly the increase in usage on non-school days or the dominance of certain apps. By combining math, technology, and personal reflection, the project showed how statistics can be a powerful tool for understanding everyday choices and habits, making the final project both engaging and relevant for students at Hillcrest Academy North.

---

## Physical Education & Health

In Health class, the content covers drugs and medicine. We have briefly started talking about understanding medicine and its use, along with the differences between OTC (over the counter) drugs/medicine and prescription drugs/medicine. The importance of reading a drug label has been expanded to where students had to dissect three different OTC labels and translate it to someone as if they did not know how to read a label. Students also recently completed an opioid research project: a five-paragraph essay and a google slide presentation.



Students have also just started talking about alcohol and the prevalence of alcohol in our society. In continuation to our alcohol topic, we learned about BAC levels and the effects it has on the individual along with the short & long term effects. As a final sum up of our alcohol topic, students are working on a Drunk Driving Mini Project. Students are required to create a Google Slide Presentation which must include the consequences of drunk driving in NJ, two real life drunk driving stories, as well as three specific suggestions that they would recommend to avoid drunk driving.

---

```
var counter;
counter = 1;
for (var count5 = 0; count5 < 3; count5++) {
  for (var count = 0; count < counter; count++) {
    moveForward();
  }
  for (var count2 = 0; count2 < counter; count2++) {
    getNectar();
  }
  turnRight();
  for (var count3 = 0; count3 < counter; count3++) {
    moveForward();
  }
  for (var count4 = 0; count4 < counter; count4++) {
    makeHoney();
  }
  turnLeft();
  counter = (typeof counter === 'number' ? counter : 0) + 1;
}
```

## Computer Science Class

Students in Computer Science have been programming using a language called Blockly on the [Code.org](https://code.org) website. Blockly teaches computer science basics by using drag-and-drop visual blocks, allowing the students to focus on logic and sequencing without getting stuck on syntax rules. We have learned core concepts including algorithms, loops, conditional statements, functions and variables. Students write programs to solve puzzle-based games, write digital music or create interactive experiences.

The photo below shows the type of engaging puzzle the students solve using the block-based language. This program was part of a lesson where students were learning about variables and being able to change the value of the variable while the program was running.

[Code.org](https://code.org) claims that even top universities teach block-based coding. Students are always able to see the actual code that their programs are using. The blocks can be shown in JavaScript, the world's most widely used coding language. The photo above shows the JavaScript represented by the blocks in the first photo.



Instructions Feedback For Teachers Only

Do you recognize this "staircase" pattern from other lessons? Give this puzzle a try!

View only: 21 / 29 blocks

```

when run
  set counter to 1
  repeat 3 times
    do
      repeat counter times
        do move forward
      repeat counter times
        do get nectar
      turn right 90
      repeat counter times
        do move forward
      repeat counter times
        do make honey
      turn left 90
      change counter by 1
  
```

Run Step

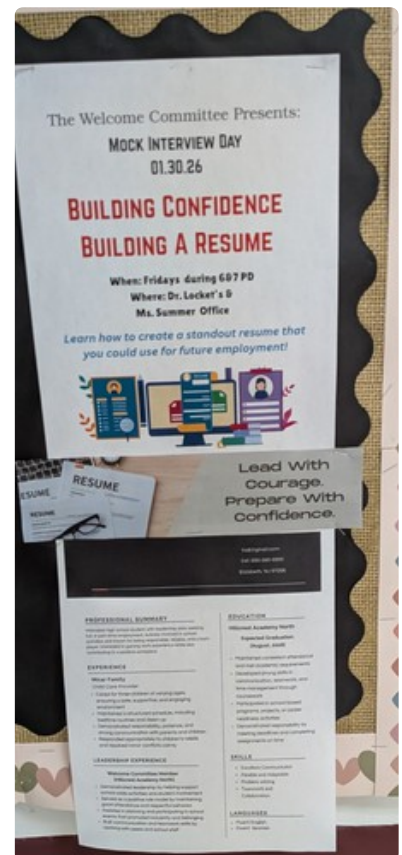
See a solution

English Version: 2025

## WELCOMING COMMITTEE

This month, the Welcoming Committee has been working with students to build their resumes and prepare for mock interviews taking place in February. These activities are designed to support college and career readiness. In alignment with this month's theme of leadership and courage, students are gaining hands-on experience with resume building and interview skills.

Through this month's activities, students are excited and eager to be practicing professional communication, learning how to highlight their strengths, and building confidence for future interviews and applications. These opportunities are empowering students to take pride in their skills and approach future opportunities with confidence.



# 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.ucesc.org/schools/hillcrest_academy_north)

Phone Number: (908) 233-9366

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

[Visit Us On Instagram](#)



### Mission Statement

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

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



**John Marquet**

John is using Smore to create beautiful newsletters





# Crossroads Monthly Newsletter

January 2026

## Message from the Administration

Dear Crossroads Community,

We hope that everyone had a wonderful and restorative holiday season, and that you have been managing well despite the recent cold snaps and snow. As we settle into the rhythm of the new year, we are reminded of our yearly theme of Paving Paths, specifically focusing right now on the concept of Charting New Roads Ahead. This time of year offers a perfect opportunity to reset, look forward, and identify the new milestones we hope to achieve together as a community.



This month, we have also focused on our January Social-Emotional Learning theme of Leadership and Courage, with a special spotlight on Unsung Heroes. While our incredible teaching staff works tirelessly every day for the benefit of our students, we know that there are so many individuals working behind the scenes who make a massive difference in our daily lives. We want to highlight our custodians, Fernando and Maria, who do so much more than keep our building clean. They have been instrumental this winter, in snow shoveling to ensure our walkways are safe, while also stepping up daily to assist with school lunch distribution. We are also incredibly grateful for our wonderful transportation department, headed by Ms. Alyssa and Mr. Abe. These two, along with the rest of the transportation staff, are always amazing when it comes to the complex logistics of scheduling and facilitating the trips that support our students in their learning.

Since transitioning into the new year, Crossroads School has been busy. We are proud to see students continuing to grow in their programs as we work on generalizing skills through community-based instruction. We were very excited to add the Cranford Movie Theater back into our repertoire after they had an unexpected shutdown last spring, providing a familiar and welcoming environment for our students to practice their skills. As we look ahead to February,

there are many things to be excited about, including Picture Day and our upcoming Valentine's Day Ice Cream Social. Please check the schedule below for details, as we would love it if you joined us.

Warm Regards,

Matt, Danielle, and Stacey

---

### Upcoming Dates

**February 9, 2026** - Crossroads Picture Day

**February 12, 2026** - Parent Ed/Support Meeting - 1:00 - (Dental Health)

**February 13, 2026** - Valentine's Day Ice Cream Social

**February 16, 2026** - School Closed - Presidents Day

---

## Honors and Accolades

Please click on the link below to read the interview with Alayna Quattrocchi, Crossroads SLP, regarding the Crossroads partnership with Rutgers School of Dental Medicine



### **New Partnership Serves Kids with Special Healthcare Needs**

Connect with classmates and get involved. Share memories or become a part of today's RSDM.

[sdm.rutgers.edu](https://sdm.rutgers.edu)

---



Congratulations to Andrew Weiler on passing his examine to become a Board Certified Behavior Analyst



## Crossroads Student Spotlight

### Student of the Month - Jay'Haden

Now presenting our sweet Student of the Month, Jay'Haden! Jay-Haden can usually be found with a big, infectious smile across his face throughout the school day. He loves learning new things each day, but his favorite thing to learn about is letters! Jay'Haden has become so independent, you may see him walking to and from class and unpacking his bookbag all by himself. He loves socializing with others on the playground and in the motor room and is our highest trampoline jumper. Jay'Haden lights up our days and is sure to brighten yours too if you come say hello!

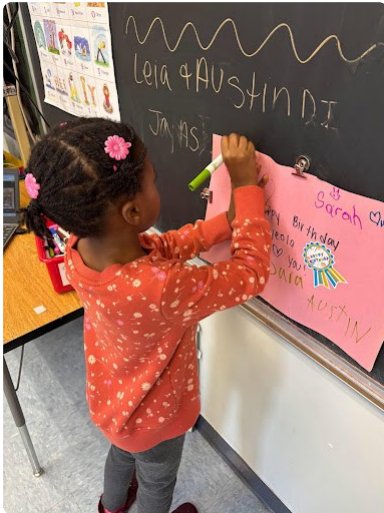




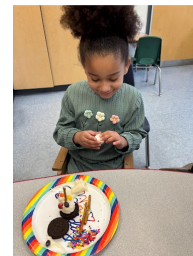
---

## Classroom Spotlights

### Ms. Alison's Classroom



Hello Families and Friends we are here to share a classroom spotlight on room 111! Here in room 111, we enjoy exploring using our senses, celebrating birthdays, and having dance parties! January is a fun month because there are three birthdays. In room 111, we like to celebrate birthdays by making a giant birthday card, creating a mini birthday cake, and singing "Happy Birthday". We use our finger painting skills to fill in the huge birthday card. We use Oreos, Skittles, Sprinkles, Frosting, and Pretzels to make our personal-sized birthday cake. We enjoy highlighting each member of the classroom on their birthday; it is so fun!



---

## Ms. Daria's Classroom

Welcome back from break! Room 220A has been busy with Community-based Instruction trips. We have been going to places such as Clark Commons, one of our other schools (Westlake), Shoprite, and Costco. We also got to go back to LifeTown, where they have a mini town set up where we can practice buying things, using the crosswalk, and riding a bike, all in the safety of the facility. We were able to go back to the Cranford Movie Theatre for the first time since last year. We are bearing with the winter weather, getting outside every chance we get.



Since we are getting back from our Winter Break, we are continuing to get back on schedule with our academics, our prevocational activities, and the school store. We

are enjoying some new tasks received through a grant, including sorting, assembly, and packaging. We are looking forward to the rest of the year and what is in store for us!



---

## January Tips from the Behavior Team

### Crossroads School Tips from the Behavior Team

#### Time-Saving Supports for a Strong Start to the New Year

January often brings a return to routines after a busy holiday season. For families of students with autism and other disabilities, daily life already requires thoughtful planning, and time can feel especially limited. Small, intentional supports can save time, reduce stress, and create smoother days for both caregivers and children. Here are practical, time-saving strategies to support regulation, independence, and family well-being.

#### **Build Predictable Routines That Do the Work for You**

Consistent routines reduce the need for repeated prompting and negotiation. Try:

- **Visual morning and evening routines** (posted or on a device)
- **Checklists** for getting dressed, packing bags, or bedtime
- **Same order, same language** each day for routines
- **First/Then visuals** to move through non-preferred tasks efficiently

When expectations are clear, transitions happen faster, and with less stress.

#### **Prep Once, Use All Week**

A little preparation can save significant time during busy weekdays:

- **Pre-portion snacks and lunches** for the week if you send in
- **Lay out clothing** the night before (or create clothing choice boards)
- **Create a “go bag”** with headphones, fidgets, visuals, AAC supports, and favored items
- **Use bins or labels** for school items, therapies, and activities

Reducing daily decisions helps everyone start the day more smoothly.

#### **Support Independence to Reduce Repetition**

Teaching and reinforcing independence can save time long-term:

- Encourage choice-making with limited options
- Use step-by-step visuals for daily living skills
- Allow extra time early on so tasks don't require adult completion
- Reinforce effort, not perfection

Independence builds confidence, and reduces the need for constant adult support.

### **Use Visuals and Technology as Time-Savers**

Visual supports can replace repeated verbal reminders:

- Timers for transitions and waiting
- Visual countdowns for preferred activities
- Shared family calendars with icons or pictures
- AAC or communication visuals for common requests

Clear communication reduces frustration and keeps routines moving.

### **Plan for Regulation Before It's Needed**

Preventing dysregulation saves time and emotional energy:

- Schedule movement or sensory breaks into the day
- Offer choices during high-stress times
- Keep expectations realistic after long school days
- Build in calm routines before transitions

Regulated children move through routines more efficiently, and happily.

### **January Family Challenge: Simplify One Routine**

Choose one daily routine to simplify this month:

- Morning routine
- Homework or after-school time
- Bedtime

- Leaving the house

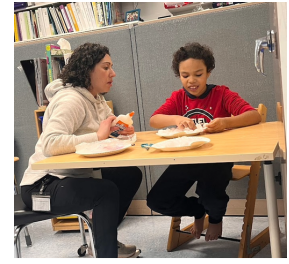
Add one support (visual, checklist, timer, or prep step) and notice what feels easier. Small changes can make a big difference.

With Appreciation,  
**The Crossroads Behavior Team**

---

## January at Crossroads





---

## Crossroads In the Community



# Parent Resources

---

## About Us

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

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

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

Visit us on Instagram



**CR Smore**

CR is using Smore to create beautiful newsletters