



Lamberts Mill Academy

FEBRUARY 2026 MONTHLY REPORT



"Enjoy the little things, for one day you may look back and realize they were the big things."

— Robert Brault

Administrators' Message

Dear Parents, Guardians, Case Managers, Directors, and Valued Stakeholders,

As we close the chapter on February, I want to take a moment to reflect on what has been a meaningful and productive month for our school community. February may be the shortest month of the year, and had the most snow this year, but it has certainly been filled with impactful moments, celebrations, and preparation for important milestones ahead.



Before I get into this month at LMA, I just want to remind all parents/guardians LMA and the UCESC will participate in the NJSCI school climate survey this year, for the 3rd year in a row. Please know this data is incredibly meaningful for our school community, allowing us to look authentic data, and better plan and prepare to enhance the student experience: both academically and therapeutically at LMA.

This month, our students and staff proudly celebrated Chinese New Year, taking time to learn about cultural traditions, history, and the significance of the Lunar New Year. These celebrations

continue to enrich our school environment, fostering understanding, respect, and appreciation for the diverse backgrounds that make our community so special.

On February 13th, we hosted our 2nd Annual Valentine's Day Student Dance, and what an incredible event it was! Students enjoyed music, dancing, refreshments, and most importantly, time together in a safe and joyful space. Events like these create lasting memories and strengthen peer connections that extend far beyond the classroom.

We are also excited to announce a new Work-Based Learning (WBL) site opportunity for our Post Graduate students and Seniors. Expanding our community partnerships continues to be a priority, and this new placement will provide valuable hands-on experience, skill development, and increased independence as students prepare for life after graduation. We look forward to sharing more highlights as our students begin this new opportunity and continue building essential career readiness skills.

Academically, February marked the beginning of focused preparation for upcoming state assessments. Our students have been working diligently in preparation for the New Jersey Graduation Proficiency Assessment (NJGPA), and we are laying the groundwork for NJSLA testing later this spring. These assessments are important benchmarks, and we are committed to ensuring that every student feels supported, confident, and prepared. Thank you to our teachers and case managers for the intentional planning and targeted instruction that make this possible. For our Seniors, February serves as a reminder that graduation is just four months away. The countdown is real, and with each passing week, we see growth in maturity, independence, and determination. We are so proud of the progress they have made and are excited to celebrate their accomplishments in the months ahead.

As we reflect on this month, I am reminded of the quote:

"Enjoy the little things, for one day you may look back and realize they were the big things."

— Robert Brault

Whether it was a student mastering a new skill at a WBL site, laughing with friends at the dance, participating in a cultural celebration, or gaining confidence while preparing for assessments, these "little things" truly shape the bigger picture of our students' journeys.

Thank you for your continued partnership, trust, and support. Together, we will make these next four months meaningful, productive, and celebratory for our entire school community—especially for the Class of 2026.

Sincerely,
Reed & John

Monthly Data

1. Enrollment - 47
2. Acceptances - 3
3. New Students - 3
4. Intakes - 4
5. Referrals - 4

6. Disenrollments - 1

2. Fire Drill - 2/2/26

3. Other Drill EM: 2/18/26 Lockdown Drill

Upcoming Events

March 2026 Important Dates

March 2nd: Field Trip: Top Golf

March 2nd-13th: NJSCI Parent Survey

March 6th - No School for Students, PD for Staff

March 13th: Field Trip: Union County Teen Arts Festival

March 16th-20th: NJGPA for 11th grade students

March 25th: Community Meeting



Student of the Month -

Lydia K.

Lydia has started with us at LMA back in September of 2024, and we are all incredibly proud of her progress, and hard work while attending LMA. Making great strides in both academic and therapeutic progress, Lydia had earned the majority of staff votes for Student of the Month. Eager to show off her artistic abilities, and consistently attending school with a positive attitude make her a great addition to the LMA school community!



Staff Spotlight - Ms. Ma



This month, we are thrilled to shine a spotlight on the incredible Ms. Ma! As a dedicated Teacher Assistant, Ms. Ma consistently goes above and beyond, pouring her heart into the success and well-being of our students. Her hard work and unwavering commitment were on full display recently as she single-handedly organized a vibrant and educational Chinese New Year celebration for the school. Ms. Ma brought the holiday to life by teaching students the rich history and traditions of the Lunar New Year, leading hands-on cultural crafts, and teaching the students how to

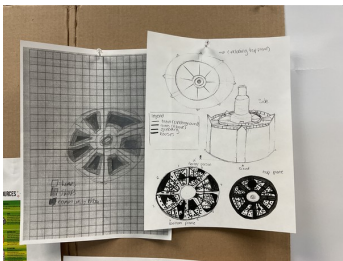
use chopsticks. From the delicious traditional food to the festive atmosphere, her passion for sharing her culture created an unforgettable experience for students and staff alike. We are so lucky to have Ms. Ma's energy, expertise, and kindness on our team!

Chinese New Year Celebration



"I liked the Chinese New Year Celebration because of the music, food, candy, and games. I was able to try new candies and practice using chopsticks to win a prize." - Nathan, 8th Grade

February at The Mill



Working on a Smart Cities Project in Science Class



Preparing Lions Lunch for students who earned all their weekly points



Decorating treats for the Valentine's Day Bake Sale



Making spring rolls for the Chinese New Year Celebration



Learning new cooking skills in Career Explorations



Post Grads made thank you baskets for their WBL sites

Valentine's Day Dance

LMA & Student Council hosted it's 2nd Annual Valentine's Dance on February 13. This event, student driven and advocated for, had all the ingredients to incorporate appropriate social skills, enjoy and dance to student playlists, and genuinely allow all students to feel special. In addition to students dressing up, the Post Graduate program spent time earlier the week making chocolate covered pretzels to sell at the event for a fundraiser. This positive, school community event is just

one example of how all LMA students gain social experiences modeled after traditional school events.



Weekly Trips to the Sunshine Cafe



Creature Comfort Pet Therapy



YESTERcades Field Trip



LMA students recently took a field trip to Yestercades in downtown Westfield, and it turned out to be a morning packed with nostalgia, teamwork, and nonstop fun. After arriving, students split into small groups and explored rows of classic arcade games and a wall of present-day consoles. They challenged each other in favorites like Pokemon, air hockey, DDR and various driving games. Throughout the visit, students rotated between friendly competitions and free play, cheering each other on and celebrating high scores. Teachers even joined in on a few rounds, sparking some lighthearted student-vs-staff rivalries. Beyond the games, the trip gave everyone a chance to unwind, bond outside the classroom, and experience the evolution of video games firsthand.

Classroom Spotlights

Music

Music students started their new unit learning about 20th Century Music. Students hear samples of music throughout the century, and compare it to current music and genres they are familiar with. Using application of knowledge from history, students are able to make connections between social and economic factors that affect music. Additionally, they also focus on how music helps with other medias; such as film, television, radio and written publications.



Social Studies

The Social Studies classroom has been transformed into a gallery of legacy and leadership as students wrap up their Black History Month research projects. To honor the profound impact of Black Americans on our nation's story, each student selected an influential figure to profile—ranging from civil rights icons and scientific pioneers to modern-day trailblazers. After diving deep into the research to uncover the life and accomplishments of their chosen individuals, students created either pennants or flip charts to display around the classroom. The room is now filled with a mix of biographical flip charts and colorful commemorative pennants, each highlighting the lasting contributions of the historical figures.

Work Based Learning

The Post Graduate Program is excited to announce that we have acquired two new work based learning sites!

The first site is located at Cory Matthews 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.



Our second new addition to the work based learning program is located at Barnes and Noble! Some of the responsibilities include, alphabetizing sections by author and title, shelving new books that come in, looking up pricing by ISBN, looking up books at the terminal, and so much more!

Our students are eager to learn the hands-on skills necessary to be successful for post secondary opportunities!

Clinical Corner

The UCESC themes for the month of February are Friendship and Cooperation. Here are 5 ways you can incorporate these themes into your household.

The "Family Mission" Project

The job isn't done until we've **both helped!**

- ✓ Wash the car
- ✓ Build the LEGO set
- ✓ Cook the meal

Use the "I-Statement" Script

✓ I feel [emotion] when [action].
Can we try [solution]?"

Repair, Don't Blame.

Play Cooperative Games

✓ Let's win or lose as a team!

Work Together, Have Fun!

Model "Friendship Maintenance"

✓ Little things keep friendships strong!

"I'm going to check on my friend!"
"Let's bring cookies to the neighbor!"

Collaborative Problem-Solving

✓ "How can we work together to solve this?"

Family vs. Problem

The infographic features five illustrations: a woman and child washing a car, a boy speaking to a girl, three children playing board games, a woman talking on a phone while holding a plate of cookies, and a family of four sitting around a table with a lightbulb idea.

Group Therapy

Students continue to eagerly participate in group therapy and look forward to interacting with their peers during sessions. With this month's theme as cooperation and friendship the students have discussed relationship building, social skills, and boundary setting. With the start of the new marking period, students were assigned to different groups giving them an opportunity to appropriately interact and socialize with new peers.

LMA Behavior Team:

Supporting Emotional Regulation Through Collaboration

February can be an especially challenging time for adolescents and young adults. Motivation may be lower, emotions can feel more intense, and managing stress or expectations may take extra effort. During this time, collaboration between families and school is essential.

At Lamberts Mill Academy, behavior support is not about control or punishment. It is about teaching skills, building trust, and supporting emotional regulation so students can make safe, healthy choices.

What Families Can Do at Home

Small, consistent supports at home can reinforce the work happening at school.

Try these strategies:

- Maintain clear and predictable expectations while allowing flexibility when emotions are high.
- Offer choices and shared decision-making to support autonomy and buy-in.
- Model calm responses during moments of stress or conflict.
- Validate emotions without reinforcing unsafe behavior (e.g., "I hear you're upset, and we still need to keep everyone safe.").
- Check in regularly, even briefly, to strengthen connection and communication.

When Behavior Feels Challenging

Behavior is communication. For students at LMA, challenging behavior may reflect stress, difficulty regulating emotions, or challenges related to recovery. Approaching these moments with curiosity, consistency, and support helps students build the skills they need for long-term success.

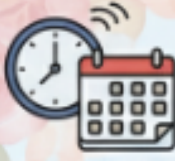
Working Together

Families are a vital part of each student's support system. Your insights help us create plans that are realistic, respectful, and aligned across home and school. Thank you for your continued partnership and commitment to your student's growth. Together, we can support resilience, accountability, and progress, even during the more difficult months of the year.



– The Lamberts Mill Academy Behavior Team

WHAT FAMILIES CAN DO AT HOME



PREDICTABLE & FLEXIBILITY



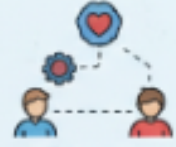
CHOICES & DECISION-MAKING



MODEL CALM RESPONSES

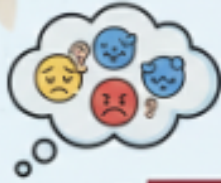


VALIDATE EMOTIONS & SAFETY



REGULAR CHECK-INS

WHEN BEHAVIOR FEELS CHALLENGING



BEHAVIOR IS COMMUNICATION: CURIOSITY & SUPPORT



FAMILIES ARE A VITAL PART:



FAMILIES ARE PART: RESILIENCE & ACCOUNTABILITY

- The Lamberts Mill Academy Behavior Team

Upcoming Community Events



TEEN SPEAK EVERY CONVERSATION MATTERS

This workshop is designed for parents, caregivers, and guardians of Somerset County

ABOUT THIS WORKSHOP

Teen Speak teaches the skills necessary to open the lines of communication between parents/caregivers and their teens focusing on topics such as sex, mental health, and substance use.

Learn how to create a healthy, loving environment that fosters growth to help your teen make safer, more informed decisions as they continue into adulthood.

**PARTICIPANTS WILL RECEIVE
A \$25 GIFT CARD
FOR COMPLETING
BOTH SESSIONS.**



**DATE, TIME, LOCATION
MARCH 3 AND 10, 2026**

**6:00 PM - 8:00 PM
North Branch Reformed Church
203 NJ-28, Bridgewater, NJ 08807**

To register, scan the QR code or go to:

<https://forms.gle/5jkzNTHZ2BK7Hhus6>

The Union County Board of County Commissioners
and New Jersey Ladies Order of Ancient Hibernians
proudly invite you to our 2026

Irish Flag Raising

March 5, 2026 • 4:00 PM
Union County Courthouse
2 Broad Street, Elizabeth



BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE
UNION COUNTY
BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS



NEW JERSEY LAOH



FREE WEBINAR

THURSDAY : 12–
MAR. 26 : 1 PM EDT

Caring for the Caregiver: Self-Care in Grief Support

- **Gina Kornfeind**

Community Outreach & Training Manager,
Good Grief



Family caregivers deserve support too. This session offers practical, culturally responsive tools to understand grief reactions, recognize personal stress, and use simple, restorative strategies that bring emotional balance—without adding to their load.

REGISTER AT:

www.good-grief.org/training



Community Resources



UNION COUNTY MEALS ON WHEELS

HOME-DELIVERED MEALS AVAILABLE NOW!

If you:

- Have difficulty preparing meals due to illness, injury, or a medical condition
- Have trouble shopping or no way to get groceries

Meals on Wheels, Inc. of Union County is accepting applications for Union County residents 60 years or older.

CALL (908) 486-5100

Monday – Friday to see if you're eligible!




BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE

UNION COUNTY
BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Department of Human Services

Division on Aging

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




**CHILDREN'S
SYSTEM OF CARE**

The **Children's System of Care**, a Division of New Jersey's Department of Children and Families, provides timely and individualized support and services to youth with emotional and/or behavioral challenges, substance use disorders, and/or youth with intellectual/developmental disabilities.

Through a single point of entry, New Jersey's eligible youth and families can obtain behavioral health, substance use treatment, and developmental disability services.

For more information on eligibility and to access services, please call CSOC's statewide hotline, 24/7/365, at:

(877) 652-7624 or www.performcarenj.org



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



<https://naminj.org/>



988 SUICIDE & CRISIS
LIFELINE

988 will be available for
call, text, and chat on July 16.

Confidential, free, and available
24/7/365



<https://988lifeline.org/>



NJ4S

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

School in the Community

1. Post Graduate Students working at the Barnes & Noble, Chili's, Maschio's Food Service, and Cory Mathews Salon.
2. Students earning a trip to the Westlake School Cafe
3. Field Trip to Yestercades

About Us

Contact Information:

Phone: (908)-233-7581

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

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

Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/ucesc_lma/?hl=en

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



LMA Smore

LMA is using Smore to create beautiful newsletters



February

Newsletter 25-26



February 2026 Monthly Report Enrollment Data

Enrollment-96 (as of 2/26/26).

New Students-9

Disenrollments-2 (Attendance).

Emergency Drill-2/18/26, Lockdown.

Fire Drill-2/2/26.



A Message From Our Principal: Dr. Balsamello

February 2026 at Hillcrest Academy South Campus (HAS) was filled with many wonderful events that included Black History Month activities infused into lessons, a Valentine's Day dance, as well as our weekly visits to the Westlake Cafe and School Spirit themes. Students and staff are ready to put behind the snowy days of February and make way for warmer spring weather.

Parents and guardians are asked to complete this confidential survey so HAS can better assist serving you and your students. Between 3/2 and 3/16, HAS parents and guardians can [CLICK THIS LINK](#) and enter the following password: **parent**. Your participation will be greatly appreciated! Please contact me with any questions by calling the main office at (908) 654-8558 or email me at jbalsamello@ucesc.org.



Important Dates

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	Groundhog Day				Wear Sports Jersey for Superbowl	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Superbowl	Beginning Math Portfolios			Yearbook Pictures	Black History Month Movie Day Wear Valentine's Colors	Valentines Day
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
	Presidents' Day - No School	Lunar New Year 100th Day of School	Ash Wednesday Ramadhan Begins	Honor Roll Trip	Wear College Gear	
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
	Snow Day	Snow Day	Delayed Opening		Dr B's Birthday	
22	23	24	25	26	27	28

Student of the Month!

Congratulations Mariuxi

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



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Faculty/Staff "Getting to Know You"!

Sra Flores' Favorites:

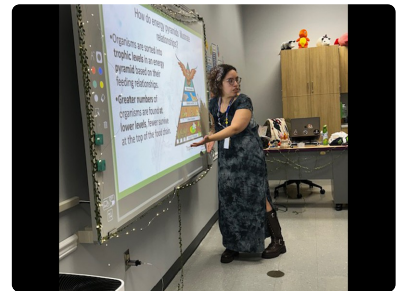
- Favorite movie: Breakfast at Tiffany's
- Favorite food: Baked Salmon with Vegetables
- Favorite color: Lilac & Pink
- Favorite book: Diana
- Favorite travel spot: Lisbon, Portugal
- Favorite Exercise: Body Balance, Kickboxing, Dance



Teacher's Corner: Science

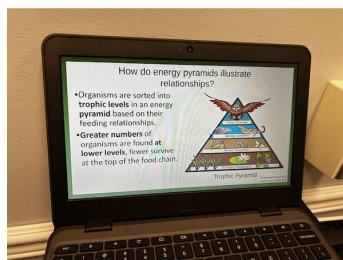
Ms Santiago:

In **Environmental Science**, students studied organism relationships in the biosphere. They investigated how energy transfers from primary producers (plants) all the way up to tertiary consumers (predators like owls and wolves). Students learned how some organisms depend on other organisms for survival, to the benefit or detriment of the other organism, and how if something happens to one organism it can have a ripple effect for the rest of the food chain.



In **Forensics**, students learned how to process a crime scene. From knowing what staff is needed to protect and to process the scene, to knowing which search methods are the most appropriate given the crime scene's size, location, and content within the scene.

In **Computer Science** class, students began exploring the foundational role of algorithms in programming and how they contribute to efficient problem-solving. Students also learned how to use flowcharts as visual tools to represent the logical structure of programs, particularly for modeling decision-making processes such as yes-or-no (binary) choices.



Mrs Arora: Biology/Forensic Science

In **Biology**, students studied the topic of cell division, learned how cells divide, and why this process is important for growth and repair. In the second half of the unit, students focused on cancer. Students learned about the most common types of cancer in males and females, the factors that can cause cancer, ways to prevent it, and why cancer rates are increasing worldwide.

In **Forensic Science**, students discussed fire science. In this unit, they learned about the most common causes of fires and ways to prevent them. Students also studied the different types of fingerprints and important facts about them. They learned how fingerprints can be lifted and how they help solve crimes. As part of a hands-on activity, students collected their own fingerprints and analyzed them as a class. They also compared their findings with U.S. and global population data. Additionally, they explored how fingerprints are used to solve crime scene mysteries.

In the **Credit Retrieval course**, students conducted experiments to test whether the "5-second rule" really works. They dropped food for five seconds and 50 seconds, collected bacteria samples from the food, and grew them on agar plates in an incubator for 24, 48, and 72 hours. They analyzed the results using graphs to conclude. In a second experiment, students collected bacteria samples from different surfaces such as cell phones, laptops, doorknobs, and tabletops to demonstrate that bacteria are present everywhere.



"Paving Paths" Teacher Recognitions

February - Navigating the Terrain Together



Mrs Schulhafer -
Guidance Councilor



Sra Flores - Spanish
Teacher



Mr Duvestil - Custodian

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

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

How can cooperation and friendship help you stay on track as you work toward your goals?

- If you have a good group around, you will be able to confront those challenges like there is nothing in front of you. You can't win a war without a good army. You need to be friends with those that could help if you want to become great at something. You could be that good friend to help the one who falls in holes. Friends should help build that life you guys are going for. No one can beat things alone, so to be able to keep getting up, you need a hand to help you. You cannot get out of quicksand without help and not everything is meant to go through alone. That track you wanna go through needs a crew to help move that train to success. - EC
- Cooperation and friendship are key terms in my life. Finding the right company motivates me to be more present and social. If I'm having a bad day, talking to the right people always helps. Also, you never know when you might need a hand with work or something. Cooperating with other people and becoming their friend always comes handy. Even though it is really hard to find people who really want to succeed academically and in thier personal life, this doesn't mean that you don't know how to focus or that you don't have a goal that's worth your 100% attention. - KB
- When you cooperate it makes things go by easier and smoothly. For example, if no one in your group project is cooperating and doing their part, nothing will get done. It is good to cooperate in almost everything since it will make things that are hard seem way easier and you'll get it over with faster. That will help you stay on track and work on your goals. Friendship is a good and bad thing. Too many friends can eventually turn into problems, but that doesn't mean you should not have friends. You should have friends that are willing to be cooperative and want the same success you do. Friendship can help you stay on track and work to your goals by having an extra hand and having another opinion and another brain to help. Friendship is good because you have team work and with teamwork you can accomplish a lot since its two minds work. Cooperating and having a good friendship helps a lot when you need an extra push. - AP

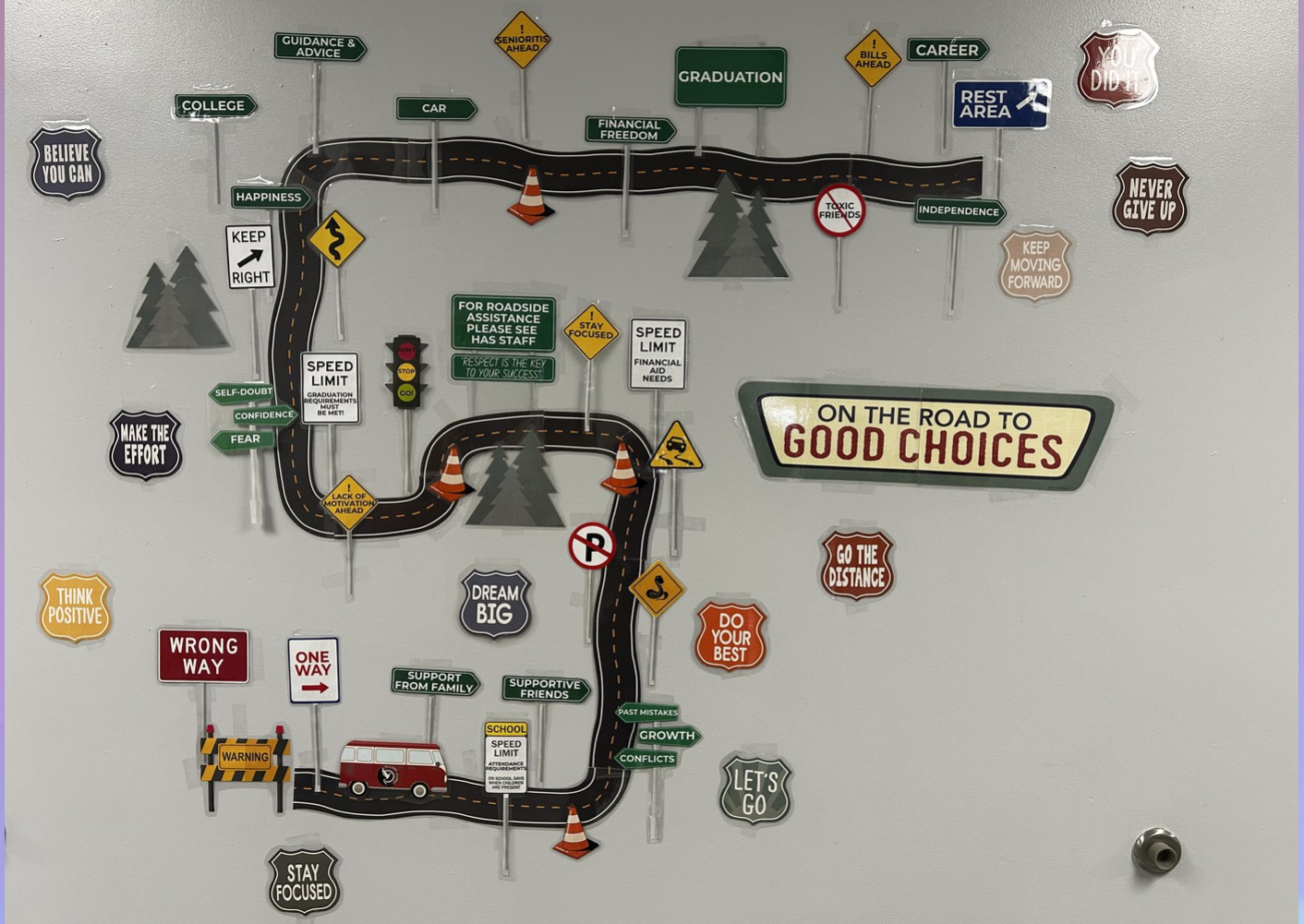
Think of a time when a friend or teammate supported you. How did that make your journey easier?

- A time when a friend/teammate supported me is when my sister traveled far just to be able to see me walk across the stage 8th grade graduation. This made my journey easier because it showed me that I really had somebody there for me to support me during this time. It made me feel comfortable because I could learn things from her. -JP

- During my freshmen year of high school, I didn't think I would fit in due to me being new to the town. My mom and dad supported me, lifted my spirits, and helped me continue on my journey. Because of their guidance I made friends at the school. This support helped me overcome my fear of large groups of people now I have many friends till this day. Many people may have this same fear and may not know how to go about their situation. My advice to them is to believe in yourself and others will believe in you as well. Another time when someone supported me was when I wasn't sure if I could bench 405 during football tryouts. My future teammates supported me on my journey to lift the weight. I didn't believe in myself but they believed in me which helped me and gave me the strength to lift up the weight and bench press it 2x. The support that I have received throughout my life had helped me in many different ways such as making friends, weight lifting, even to overcome my fear of heights. Another time I was supported was when I was unsure if I was smart enough to complete my work and my South teachers supported me and helped me gain the strength and knowledge to complete the work and pass with a 100%. - KA
- A time a friend supported me was when I was absent for a whole week for being sick. She gave me all the assignments I missed for that class. I felt so relieved to not have to worry about getting my grade back up. It made my journey easier because I didn't have to waste time on that one class picking my grade back up. On top of that, I had extra time to finish other class work during that class. - ER

Paving Paths Mural

Each school program was provided with the "road" to use on the mural/bulletin board. We all were encouraged to be creative when putting the mural together! In our mural, we included a goals and words that are meant to guide us on our path for this school year and beyond. Student suggestions include encouraging words in our mural include "believe you can" and "never give up" and some goals were "financial freedom" and "graduation". Overall, our mural is an amazing representation of the trajectory HAS is heading!

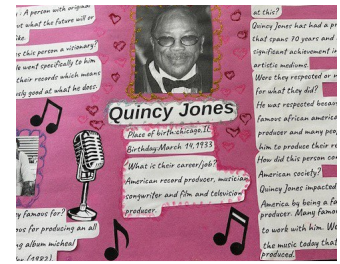
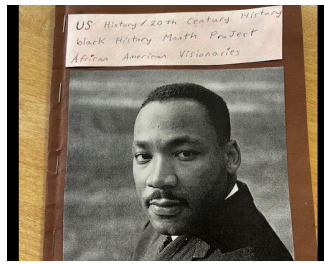


Black History Month

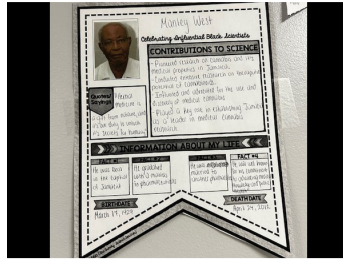
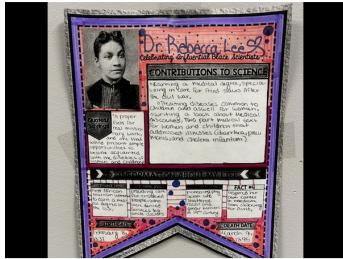
Throughout February, HAS students have been deeply engaged in a multidisciplinary celebration of Black History Month, integrating the achievements and contributions of African Americans into every corner of the curriculum. In English classes students are analyzing the powerful rhetoric of Black/African American poets and lyricists, while Social Studies classrooms are diving into the systemic impact of the Civil Rights Movement through primary source research. The Science classes highlighted trailblazers such as Dr. Charles Drew and Katherine Johnson, exploring how their breakthroughs in medicine and mathematics changed the world. Even in Spanish classes, students are creating vibrant tributes honoring contemporary Afro-Latino creators. This school-wide initiative has transformed the month into a profound learning experience, fostering a campus environment where history is not just remembered, but actively connected to the students' own academic journeys.



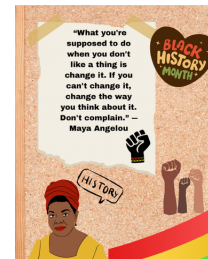
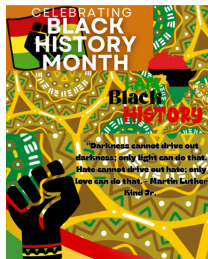
Social Studies - projects focusing on Black/African Americans who helped change history



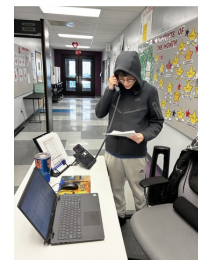
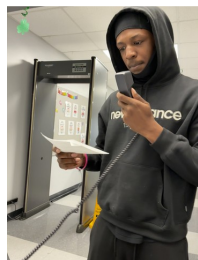
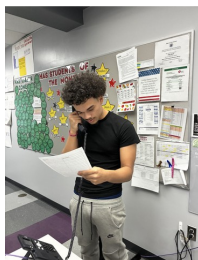
Science - Scientific strides would not have been made without prominent Black/African American scientists



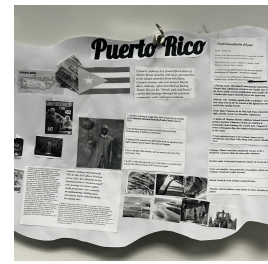
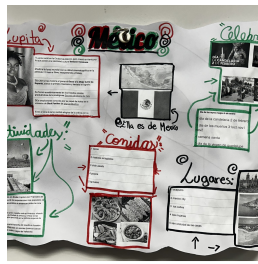
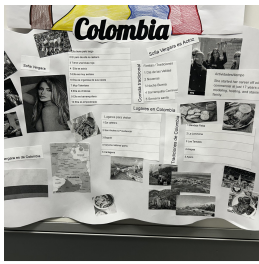
Computer Science - Students created vibrant tributes to affluent Black/African Americans



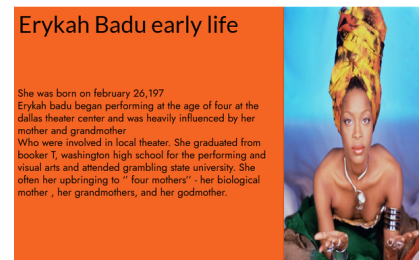
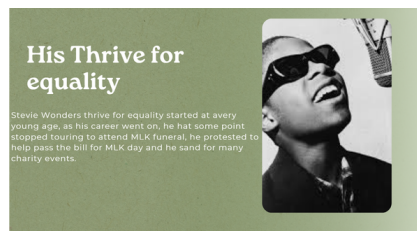
Reading Quotes for HAS - Quotes were read throughout the Month of February



Spanish - tributes to Afro-Latinos that paved the way in Latin America



English - PowerPoint presentations on Black/African American poets and lyricists



Welcome Back Mrs Flores!

The second half of the academic year at HAS has been brightened by the warm welcome of Mrs. Flores, who has officially returned to lead the Spanish department. Her arrival brings a renewed sense of energy to the world language classrooms, as students transition into her immersive and culturally rich curriculum. Known for her ability to make the complexities of Spanish grammar and conversation accessible, Mrs. Flores has hit the ground running, picking up as if she wasn't gone for a whole year. Whether she is leading a spirited debate in Spanish or guiding students through the nuances of Hispanic traditions, her presence ensures that the remainder of the year will be filled with both linguistic growth and a deeper appreciation for global cultures.



Westlake Valentines Dance

The spirit of inclusion and friendship took center stage at Westlake's special Valentine's Day Dance, where select high school students from HAS joined the festivities as "buddies" for the afternoon. This meaningful collaboration allowed the HAS students to provide support and companionship, ensuring every Westlake student felt celebrated and empowered on the dance floor. From sharing a slow dance to cheering each other on during upbeat hits, the buddies focused on creating a supportive environment where



social barriers vanished. The event was more than just a holiday party; it was a powerful display of empathy and community, leaving both the guests and the student volunteers with a deep sense of connection and a memory of a truly "heart-filled" Valentine's Day.



100th Day of School

The halls of HAS were filled with a mix of youthful energy and comedic aging on February 17th as the community gathered to celebrate the milestone of the 100th day of school. To mark the occasion, several faculty members fully embraced the spirit of the day by dressing as centenarians, complete with gray wigs, spectacles, and vintage attire that drew plenty of laughs from the student body. The centennial festivities were made even sweeter with a school-wide treat of rich hot chocolate, providing a cozy break for students as they reflected on how much they have grown since the first day of the year. It was a lighthearted day of celebration that successfully combined a sense of achievement with a healthy dose of school spirit.



Fire Safety Assembly

Mrs. Arora's Forensic science students recently traded their lab goggles for a front-row seat at a specialized fire safety assembly led by Captain Karl of the Westfield Fire Department. Captain Karl captivated the students with a professional demonstration of modern fire suppression equipment, emphasizing the critical "Golden Hour" of response and the specific physics behind fire containment in residential structures. The session went beyond basic drills, challenging the students to think like first responders by identifying potential hazards and understanding the thermal dynamics of a spreading flame. By the end of the presentation, the class gained a profound respect for the Westfield Fire Department's expertise and a practical understanding of how to stay safe in an emergency.



Marking Period 2 Honor Roll Trip

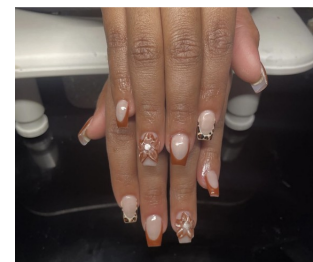
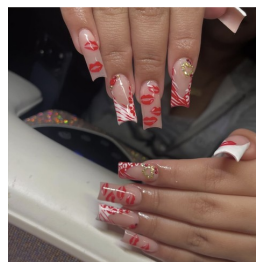
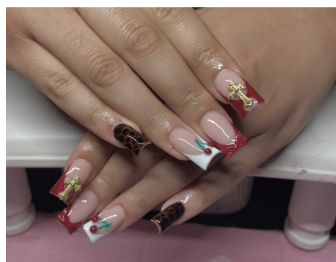
The lobby of the Cranford movie theater buzzed with a specific kind of kinetic energy as the second marking period honor roll students traded their pens and pencils for popcorn buckets. It was a well-earned victory lap especially after weeks of projects and assignments, the reward was a private screening of the blockbuster *GOAT*. There was a palpable sense of relief in the air as friends huddled together, debating theories about the film's plot while the buttery scent of the concession stand filled the air. As they filed into the darkened theater, the usual academic pressures faded into the background, replaced by the collective excitement of a group who had navigated the semester's hurdles and finally earned the right to just sit back, relax, and lose themselves in the magic of the big screen.



Students Outside of School

Get Your Nails Did!

Chrisauri is a dedicated nail technician who has been honing her craft since the 2020. Her journey began when her mother gifted her a small starter kit, encouraging her to explore a skill that could serve her well in the future. After gaining experience by practicing on her sister, Chrisauri transitioned into her current role where she enjoys the independence of being her own boss. She finds deep fulfillment in her work, noting that the best part of the job is the ability to brighten someone's day and make them feel happy and beautiful through her artistry.



Blooper Pic of the Month



About Us

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

Website: www.ucesc.org

Instagram: [ucesc_has](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



Hillcrest North February 2026 MR

February 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:

As we close the first month of the new semester at Hillcrest Academy North, I am filled with pride in the strong start our students and staff have made. A large percentage of our students have demonstrated outstanding commitment to their learning by maintaining excellent attendance, setting a positive tone for the months ahead. We are especially proud to celebrate the many students who earned honor roll recognition for MP2. Their dedication, perseverance, and focus reflect the high expectations we continue to uphold as a school community.

We are also thrilled to welcome Art back into the building! The return of our art program has brought a renewed sense of creativity and excitement to our school. Students have enthusiastically embraced opportunities to express themselves, explore new techniques, and showcase their talents. It has been wonderful to see their joy and engagement as they dive into hands-on artistic experiences that enrich their overall education.

Finally, I would like to commend our incredible teachers for their hard work and dedication. They have done an exceptional job keeping lessons engaging, meaningful, and aligned to our academic goals. Their commitment to creating dynamic classroom environments ensures that students remain motivated and supported. Thank you to our staff, students, and families for making the first month of this semester such a success.

Warm Regards,

John Marquet
Principal

Monthly Data

Enrolled - 82

Accepted - 11

Disenrollment - 3

Drills: Lockdown, Fire Drill

Upcoming Dates

March 3 - Ms. Silva's "Read Across America" Trip to Crossroads School

March 6 - School Closed for Students - Staff Development Day

March 16 - 20 - Spirit Week

Student Awards



Monthly Awards



Attendance Awards



Honor Roll

In The Classroom

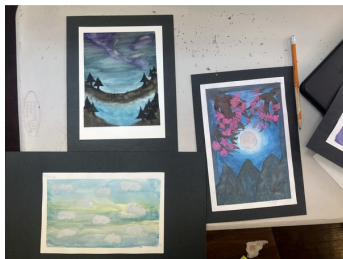
Art Class

Art has returned to HAN for the spring semester. Students were very eager to get started and dove right into using watercolors and gouaches. The first week as we got settled, the classes explored

the different behaviors of the paints in very experimental and sensory-driven procedures. It was nice to see how eager students were to start painting and how much they enjoyed watching it react under different conditions. Many variants can affect the final outcome of the paint so it's imperative to experiment first to learn how to control it. The classes were led through a series of different exercises in order to see different results. They practiced using wet and drier paints and papers, creating layers, keeping areas separate, adding white to make clouds, playing with texture through stippling and dry brush, etc. While using paint, students were also getting used to the art room and learning classroom procedures.



The next step was to do something with all the experimental swatches the students made. Many were abstract or had the look of land and sky. These offered *mood* but lacked narrative. To develop their backgrounds into something other than a traditional landscape, students were asked to choose images that “spoke to them” from a collection of random pictures and magazines. The goal was to create a little art work with narrative but no initial plan. Some students created silhouettes on top of their backgrounds based on a picture, others constructed a narrative influenced by a cut-out they glued down and some became abstract designs. Designing without a plan results in each piece being completely unique.

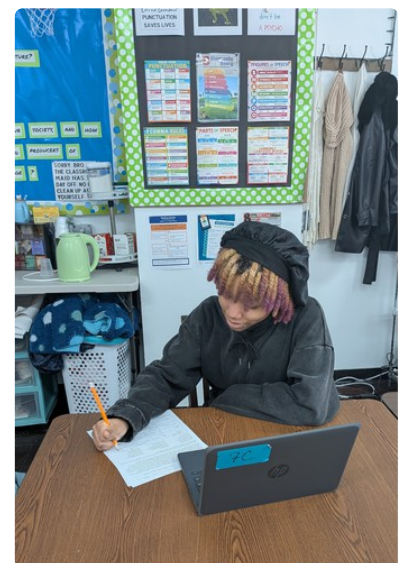


Media Literacy

Students in Media Literacy have been learning about the difference between fact and opinion, and why being able to distinguish between them is important. We also discussed why it is important to hear different and varied opinions.

Next students have been learning about bias in themselves, society, and the media. We discussed the different forms bias takes, how it can be both helpful and harmful, and how it is used in the media. Media bias has been around since the founding of our country. Information travels through many filters before it becomes our perception. Understanding biases helps us to understand these filters. Students have been looking at articles from news

organizations to figure out the important news of the day. Then they have been drawing conclusions based on these articles. They then picked one article to determine the bias of the article. They had to determine the following about the article: who created it? how did it make you feel? fact or opinion? was there bias by labeling (word choice)? were there logical fallacies? whose



voice is heard? was there anything said about the other side? is there visual bias? are other news organizations reporting the same information? do the facts check out? who benefits? and what was your emotional reaction to the article? All of these questions help to determine the bias of the article.

Students discussed how we use words that show how we feel about something unconsciously, and that's how we can recognize bias. Students are going to be taking the Bias Implicit Association Test to see their personal biases and then reflect on them.

Honor Roll Movie

Students who received Honor Roll and High Honor Roll spent a Friday afternoon watching "Happy Gilmore" and snacking on popcorn and lots of other treats. Congrats to all students who made the list!



Spirit Week & Valentine's Day



STOPit Solutions

Students and staff were introduced to STOPit Solutions, a program that allows students and staff to report any concerns about unsafe, harmful, or inappropriate behavior to the HAN Safety Team. Students and parents/guardians are encouraged to download the STOPit App onto their phones.



About HAN



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

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

Mr. John Marquet, Principal

Mr. Thomas Van Cleef, Supervisor of Instruction

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

Phone Number: (908) 233-9366

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

[Visit Us On Instagram](#)



Mission Statement

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

ucesc.org



John Marquet



Crossroads Monthly Report

February 2026

Message from the Administration

Dear Crossroads Community,

As we wrap up the shortest month of the calendar, it is clear that the weeks were anything but short of activities. Throughout February, our school leaned into the district-wide theme of Paving Paths: One UCESC Voice at a Time by focusing our energy on navigating the terrain together. In the spirit of our monthly social-emotional learning themes, our students spent their days exploring the meaning of cooperation and friendship. Whether working through a classroom project or supporting a friend, our students are discovering that the paths we pave are much smoother when we walk them hand-in-hand.



The halls have been buzzing with a vibrant energy this month. In honor of Black History Month, our art teacher, Ms. Grace, created a stunning gallery walk that transformed our space into an immersive educational experience. Her work highlighted the incredible contributions and legacies of prominent Black Americans, sparking important conversations throughout the building. We also took time to celebrate the joy of friendship during our Valentine's Day dance and ice cream social. We owe special; thanks to Ms. Elaine, who spent the day tirelessly scooping treats and ensuring every student felt celebrated.

Midway through the month, we reached the milestone of our 100th day of school. It was great to see the building filled with centenarians as students and staff dressed up to mark how far we have come since September. Beyond the festivities, we also prioritized student wellness during National Children's Dental Health Month. We were fortunate to welcome back Dr. Beck, who gave a presentation on dental hygiene, and we were equally thrilled to have Dr. Giacona from the Rutgers School of Dental Medicine share her expertise during our parent education meeting.

As we transition into March, there is much to look forward to as we continue our journey. We will kick off the month with Read Across America week, a time dedicated to the joy of storytelling and literacy. During that same week, we will be reaching out to our families to participate in the NJ School Climate Improvement survey. This anonymous NJSCI survey is a vital tool that helps us better understand the experiences of our students and families. Your participation is essential, as your feedback directly helps us identify our strengths and shapes the future improvements we make as a school community. Thank you for your continued partnership and for adding your unique voice to the Crossroads community.

Warm Regards,

Matt, Danielle, and Stacey





General Information

Enrollment as of February 26, 2026

Actual: 61

Changes: Entered: 1 Exited: 0

Referrals: 6

Intakes Scheduled: 2

Accepted: 1

February Drill Schedule

Fire Drills: 2/5/26

Emergency Drills 2/18/26 (Lockdown)

Upcoming Dates

March 2 -6, 2026 - NJ School Climate Improvement Survey administration window

March 2 -6, 2026 - Read Across America Week

March 6, 2026 - School Closed for Students (Staff Development Day)

March 10, 2026 - 10 AM - Westlake Info Session/Tour for Middle School Families (@ Westlake)

March 19, 2026 - 1:00 PM - Parent Education/Support Meeting (OT Presentation)

March 20, 2026 - Pinewood Derby



Crossroads Student Spotlight

Student of the Month - Ahmed

Ahmed joined Mrs. Anna's classroom in September and has been doing a wonderful job adjusting to our routines. He especially enjoys playing with superheroes, after unpacking each morning, Ahmed eagerly enters the classroom and selects his superhero for the day. Ahmed is making great progress using his AAC device to communicate his wants and needs, including requesting to watch *Harry the Bunny* and asking for his favorite snack, Goldfish. He also enjoys taking walking laps around the school as part of his day. We are so happy to have Ahmed in our class this year.



Classroom Spotlights



Ms. Hannah's Classroom

Happy February from 104!

This month we have been showing love to our friends and family, celebrating the 100th day of school, and learning about Black History Month. For Valentine's Day, we had an ice cream party and made valentine's for each other. We dressed up like we were 100 years old for the 10th day of school. And all month long we have been celebrating different inventors, artists, and heroes from black history. And we even got to go back to Lifestown-a mini town setup where we can practice buying things, using the crosswalk, and riding a bike.

We especially enjoyed our annual Pizza Making Day! Students were able to follow step-by-step instructions to make their own pizzas. It was so much fun. And in between all the fun we worked on social skills, following sequences, waiting and taking turns. Putting all our learning and classroom skill-building to good use.



Ms. Jennifer's Classroom

February has been a fun and busy month for 110!! We have enjoyed all the lessons, crafts and activities celebrating Groundhog's Day, Valentine's Day, President's Day, Black History Month and the 100th day of school. Valentine's Day was especially fun with making cards for our classmates, exchanging valentines and enjoying the ice cream social and dance party. We also enjoyed going to the movies with our friends from room 111 to watch Monter's Inc.

Our students have also been working hard on their academic and functional skills. Everyone has been making progress in their individual and group goals! We recently started going to the ADL room where we work on our individual daily living goals as well as learn how to set the table, make the bed, and sort different types of foods. We are looking to see what the upcoming months will bring!





Specials Spotlight

Mr. Rich - Physical Education/Health

This month in physical education, students have continued participating in various activities that improve cardiovascular fitness, hand-eye coordination, balance and strength. We have tried to incorporate some topics/lessons that are done in the classroom and included a fitness component to them. Since the weather has warmed up a little over the past 10 days or so, we have extended our outdoor walking during the beginning of each class. We have increased the amount of laps and the pace at which we complete them. We have a handful of few new students that started recently and they are adjusting well and are making new friends.

In health class we are learning about community helpers and their roles, uniforms they wear, tools they use, vehicles they drive and where you might see them. Students have continued to work in a group setting and practice following directions and turn taking while playing various games as well as answering questions on large flash cards, ipads and a touch screen monitor.



Fitness groups/individual sessions are going well and are giving students a chance to participate in certain activities that they might not necessarily get to in a typical physical education setting.

Students have been engaged and are enjoying the extra time in the gym. They have also had the chance to be more independent and are practicing making choices on what activities they participate in. This has helped to keep them on task and take more of an interest in the activities they do.

February Tips from the Behavior Team

Crossroads School Tips from the Behavior Team

Supporting Behavior Through Collaboration at Home

February can be a tough month for many students and families. Routines feel harder, energy is lower, and big feelings may show up more often. During this time, small, consistent supports at home can make a big difference. At Crossroads School, we believe behavior support works best when families and school work together.

What Families Can Do at Home

You don't need to do anything perfectly, consistency and connection matter most!

Try these simple strategies:

- **Keep routines predictable** when possible (morning, after school, bedtime).
- **Offer choices** to support independence (e.g., "Do you want to do homework before or after a break?").
- **Name and validate feelings** ("I see you're frustrated. I'm here to help.").
- **Reinforce effort**, not just outcomes ("You tried and that was hard.").
- **Communicate with your child's team** about what you're noticing at home.

When Behavior Feels Challenging

Behavior is a form of communication. When a child is struggling, it may mean they are overwhelmed, tired, or having difficulty expressing a need. Taking a pause and focusing on support, rather than punishment, helps build long-term skills.

Working Together

Families are an essential part of every behavior plan. Your observations help us create supports that are realistic, respectful, and effective across settings. Thank you for partnering with us and for all you do each day to support your child. Even small steps, repeated over time, make a meaningful impact.



– The Crossroads School Behavior Team

February Behavior Team Tip
Supporting Behavior Through Collaboration at Home

What Families Can Do at Home

- Keep routines predictable
- Offer choices
 - Name and validate feelings
- Reinforce effort
- Communicate with your child's team

Behavior is Communication

When a child is struggling, it may mean they are overwhelmed, tired, or having difficulty expressing need. Taking a pause and focusing on support, rather than punishment, helps build learning skills.

Working Together

- ✓ Realistic
- ✓ Respectful
- ✓ Effective

– The Crossroads School Behavior Team
Thank you for partnering with us and for all you do each day to support your child. Even small steps, repeated over time, make a meaningful impact.

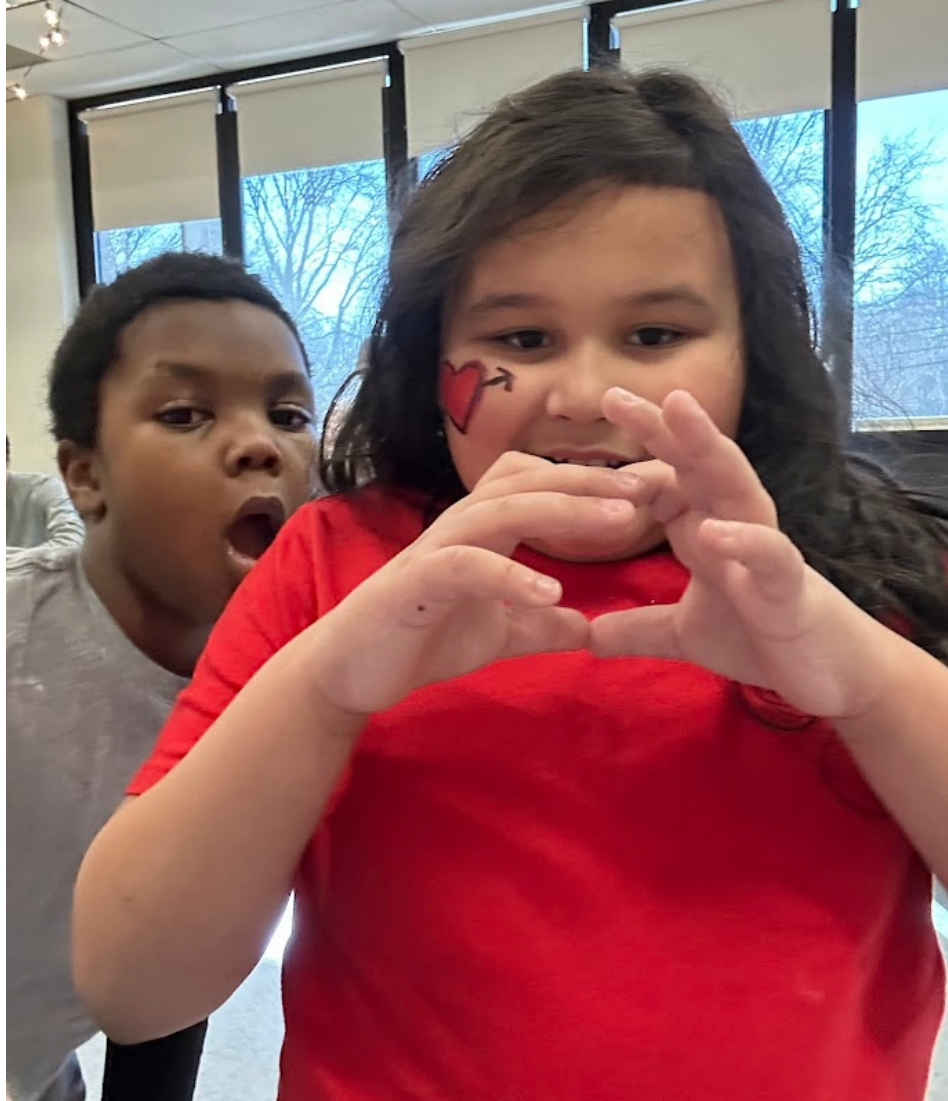
February at Crossroads



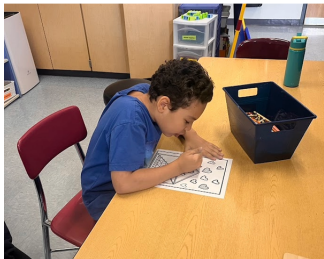


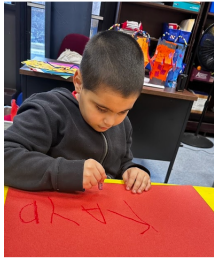


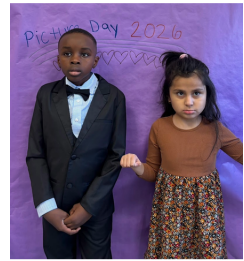




















Crossroads In the Community





Parent Resources

Attention Middle School Families

For our Middle School families specifically, we invite you to an information session regarding Westlake School on March 10, 2026, at 10:00 AM. This session offers a valuable opportunity to receive information on the Westlake program, meet their administrative team, and tour the school as you begin planning for your child's post-8th grade education. We would love to see you there in person, but for those who cannot make it to the building, a virtual option will be available

Location: 1571 Lamberts Mill Road, Westfield NJ 07090

Virtual Option: <https://meet.google.com/yxv-ecib-mme>

ATTENTION! CROSSROADS PARENTS

WESTLAKE SCHOOL

INFO SESSION/TOUR

FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

Date: March 10, 2026
Time: 10:00 AM
Location: Westlake School - 1571 Lamberts Mills Road, Westfield, NJ 07090

Families of Crossroads Middle School students are invited to an informative session and guided tour of Westlake School. This event provides parents with an opportunity to explore our specialized programs, curriculum, and student support services.

What to Expect:

- Overview of Westlake School
- Tour of our classrooms and facilities
- Meet the administration
- Q&A session to address your questions and concerns

Virtual Option Available: <https://meet.google.com/yxv-ecib-mme>

¡ATENCIÓN PADRES DE CROSSROADS!

WESTLAKE SCHOOL

*SESIÓN INFORMATIVA / RECORRIDO PARA ESTUDIANTES DE ESCUELA INTERMEDIA

Fecha: March 10, 2026
Hora: 10:00 AM
Lugar: Westlake School - 1571 Lamberts Mills Road, Westfield, NJ 07090

Las familias de los estudiantes de la Escuela Intermedia Crossroads están invitadas a una sesión informativa y recorrido guiado por la Escuela Westlake. Este evento brinda a los padres la oportunidad de conocer nuestros programas especializados, el plan de estudios y los servicios de apoyo estudiantil.

Qué esperar:

- Descripción general de la Escuela Westlake
- Recorrido por nuestras aulas e instalaciones
- Conocer a la administración
- Sesión de preguntas y respuestas para atender sus dudas e inquietudes

Opción virtual disponible: <https://meet.google.com/yxv-ecib-mme>

Picture Day Retakes

Reflections Studio will be doing Picture day retakes in their studio.

If your child was absent, please contact the studio directly to make an appt. and take pictures on makeup day.

Please use the link below to schedule an appt.

<https://www.reflectionsstudio.com/products/school-make-up-signup>

<https://www.reflectionsstudio.com/pages/contact-us>



**The Union County
Board of County Commissioners
invites you to
Recreational Programs for
Persons with Disabilities & Special Needs
March 2026**

Art for All Abilities 5:30pm - 7:00pm (All ages) 

Elizabeth Peterstown Comm. Center <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wednesday, March 4th	Westfield Community Room <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Friday, March 13th
Rahway Recreation Center <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wednesday, March 18th	Warinanco Sport Center in Roselle <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wednesday, March 25th

Zumba (Ages 12 & up)
March 5th from 6:00pm - 6:45pm
Cranford Community Center 

Karate (Ages 5 - 12) 7:00pm - 7:45pm
March 23rd and 30th
Cranford Community Center 

Karate (Ages 13 & up) 8:00pm - 8:45pm
March 23rd and 30th
Cranford Community Center 

For more information about programs and events hosted by the Office for Persons with Disabilities and Special Needs, please call at 908-527-4781 or visit www.ucnj.org/dhs/opdsn/ or scan the QR Code 





About Us

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

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

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

Visit us on Instagram



CR Smore

CR is using Smore to create beautiful newsletters



Work Readiness Academy

February 2026 - Monthly Report

Message from the Director



Dear Families & Supporters,

As I compose this welcome message for our February Newsletter, I am looking at towering castles of snow standing on all corners of the parking lot here at the Work Readiness Academy. And yet, less than 36 hours after the Blizzard of '26, all of our school buses and other school vehicles have been cleaned off and are ready to be deployed - and all of our walkways and sidewalks are clear and safe. This has been quite the winter season and so, this is the perfect time to extend a heartfelt thank you to our building and grounds Supervisor, Miques Valle, and his team, along with Abe Foumissil, our top-notch head bus driver and his crew. Thank you for all you do to help reopen our school programs when the rest of us are bundled up staying warm at home!

February is the shortest (and often the coldest) month of the year, but we still managed to pack in a significant amount of programming and learning. In this month's newsletter you will read about lessons our students received related to making a great "first impression" and differentiating between criticism and feedback, our Valentine's Day Mocktail Party, an important upcoming Webinar we are hosting about Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and much more!

That brings me to a very important initiative kicking off this month: **the NJ School Climate Survey**. A school is more than just a building or a curriculum; it is a community. To ensure the Work Readiness Academy remains a safe, supportive, and empowering environment, we will again be administering the NJ School Climate Survey.

Why is this so important?

We aren't just looking for data points; we are looking for your perspective. We are inviting feedback from all our stakeholders:

Students: To tell us how they feel supported and challenged.

Families: To share how well we are partnering with you in your student's journey.

Staff: To help us refine our professional environment and instructional impact.

This feedback is the primary tool we use to identify our strengths and, more importantly, address the gaps. When everyone participates, we get a complete picture of our "climate," allowing us to make informed decisions that benefit every learner in our care. Please keep an eye on your inbox for specific links and instructions on how to participate coming the first week in March! Thank you in advance for taking a few minutes to complete the survey and for being such an integral part of this community.

PS: It was great to run into WRA student **Christian** in Linden this month while he was having lunch with his dad (pictured).

Stay warm and safe,

Josh Bornstein, Director

UCESC Work Readiness Academy

jbornstein@ucesc.org



Attendance Reporting

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

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

Instructional Insights

Navigating the Terrain Together

This month at the Work Readiness Academy, our students have been *navigating the terrain together* - learning that growth, independence, and success are rarely achieved alone. Whether in the classroom, in our skills center, or at internship sites throughout the community, students have been strengthening the power of **cooperation, friendship, and problem solving.**



Transition into adulthood requires more than technical skills. It requires collaboration. It requires resilience. And most importantly, it requires the ability to work alongside others while advocating for yourself. Throughout February, our instructional focus has centered on helping students develop the problem-solving strategies necessary to manage workplace challenges, navigate social dynamics, and respond thoughtfully to unexpected situations.

In our classrooms, our teachers are designing authentic lessons that ask students to think critically, communicate clearly, and reflect on multiple perspectives. In the skills center, students are working in teams to complete shared tasks, practicing flexibility and accountability. At internship sites, students are applying real-time problem-solving skills, from managing schedule changes to accepting feedback, with increasing and improving independence and confidence.

As we honor **Black History Month**, we have also explored powerful examples of perseverance, leadership, and collective action. Students have examined how individuals and communities throughout history navigated significant obstacles by working together, advocating for justice, and creating change. These lessons reinforce an important connection: cooperation and problem solving are not just workplace skills, they are civic and life skills that shape our communities.

As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. reminds us,
"If I cannot do great things, I can do small things in a great way."

Problem solving often begins with small actions, asking for help, offering support to a peer, adjusting to feedback, or trying again after a setback. When students commit to doing these "small things" with effort and integrity, they build the confidence and competence needed for long-term independence.

Friendship has also been a meaningful part of our conversations this month. We have emphasized that strong relationships are built on mutual respect, shared responsibility, and the ability to communicate openly when challenges arise. Learning to collaborate, to compromise, and to support one another strengthens both our workplace readiness and our personal growth.

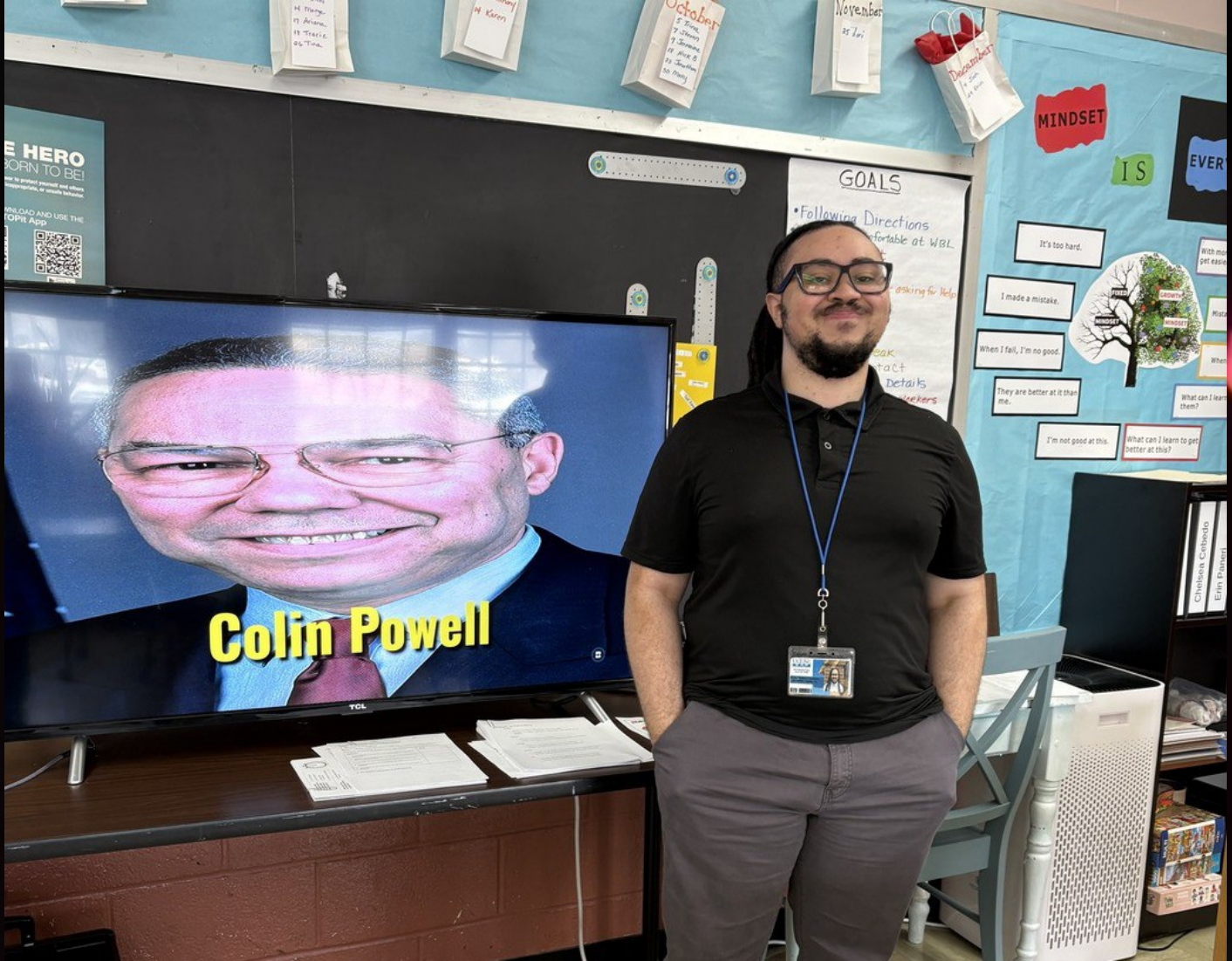
At WRA, we believe that independence does not mean doing everything alone. It means knowing when to lead, when to listen, and when to seek support. As we continue ***navigating the terrain together***, our students are building the skills necessary to problem solve with confidence, cooperate with purpose, and contribute meaningfully to their workplaces and communities.

We are proud of the growth we are seeing every day, one conversation, one collaboration, and one solution at a time.

Rachel Richer, Supervisor of Instruction

UCESC Work Readiness Academy

rricher@ucesc.org



Whitney Houston



I'll always love you(live) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mK4hwaZRU0k>

Interesting facts:
Dionne and Dee dee Warwick are cousins of her.
She linked to Eddie Murphy

Prince




Jonathan Dias



Prince - Somebody's Somebody (Official Video) - YouTube

Alicia Keys



Gisselle

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x593t_Mwz8A

February 2026 Data
Enrollment as of February 25, 2026

Actual: 28
 Changes: Entered: 0 Exited: 0
 Referrals: 6
 Intakes Scheduled: 6
 Accepted: 3

Drills

2/19/26 - EM (Lockdown)
 2/26/26 - Fire Drill



Upcoming SSI Webinar

Please join us in welcoming Connor Griffin, Director of the Healthcare Advocacy Program at the Arc of New Jersey, for a webinar presentation on **Thursday March 19th at 7pm**. This session will help guide families in navigating the application process for SSI and Medicaid for their children with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities, or other significant disabilities. Time will be spent discussing how to apply for SSI/Medicaid when an individual with IDD or a similar diagnosis, is approaching and/or transitioning into adulthood. See below for more information including the link to register. We hope you will join us!



Celebrating Our Students' Success

Growth, Grit, and New Directions

This month, we are proud to recognize **Jonathan, Larissa, and Kevin** who exemplify what it means to navigate the terrain together through cooperation, friendship, and strong problem-solving skills.



Jonathan

Jonathan continues to demonstrate what it means to be both positive and hard working in every setting. He approaches challenges with determination and a growth mindset, understanding that success comes from effort and persistence. What stands out most is Jonathan's ability to self-advocate. Whether clarifying expectations at his internship or asking for support when needed, he takes ownership of his growth. His willingness to communicate and problem solve independently reflects true readiness for adulthood. Jonathan reminds us that independence begins with confidence and the courage to speak up.

Larissa

Larissa embodies perseverance, kindness, and compassion. She approaches obstacles with patience and resilience, never allowing temporary setbacks to define her progress. Beyond her personal growth, Larissa consistently supports her peers, offering encouragement and understanding. Her cooperative spirit strengthens our classroom and internship environments. Larissa demonstrates that friendship and compassion are powerful tools for navigating challenges, and that problem solving often begins with empathy.

Kevin

Kevin has shown tremendous growth in communication and resilience this month. When faced with obstacles, he does not back down. Instead, he works through challenges thoughtfully, demonstrating flexibility and determination. Kevin's ability to express his thoughts clearly and work collaboratively with others has strengthened both his workplace performance and peer relationships. His resilience reminds us that navigating new terrain requires courage, adaptability, and the willingness to keep moving forward.

Each of these students reflects our belief that independence is built through cooperation, resilience, and purposeful problem solving. We are incredibly proud of the leadership, friendship, and perseverance they demonstrate every day at WRA.



Jonathan



Larissa



Kevin

.....



Welcome to **Our Classroom**

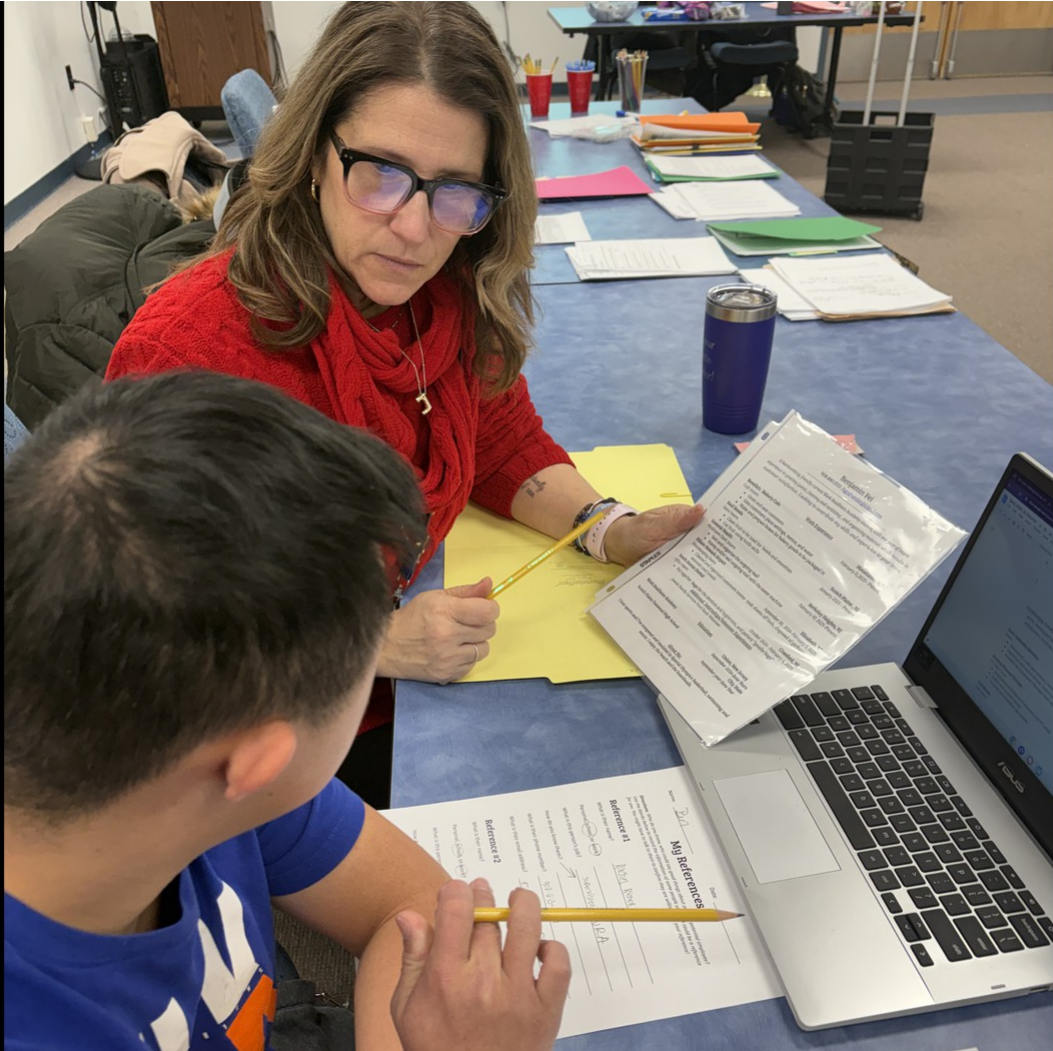
Leveling Up: The WRA's Professional Polish

Success is where preparation meets opportunity, and our Work Readiness Academy students are currently in high-intensity prep mode! This month, the focus shifted to a review of the subtle art of the first impression. Beyond just "looking the part," students explored how professional hygiene and a polished presentation build their internal confidence. During this time, we also discussed dental hygiene and tried out some single use toothbrushes perfect for on the go at work. They aren't just sharpening their look; they're sharpening their stories. Between lessons and discussions on grooming and professional etiquette, students have been head-down in resume building.



February also brought about a new rotation of work sites. These photos capture a group that is no longer just "practicing" for the future—they are actively stepping into it.

Jodi Klimko, WRA Classroom/SLE Teacher



Jodi giving Ben pointers on his resume



Christian demonstrating proper brushing technique



Nick demonstrating proper flossing technique

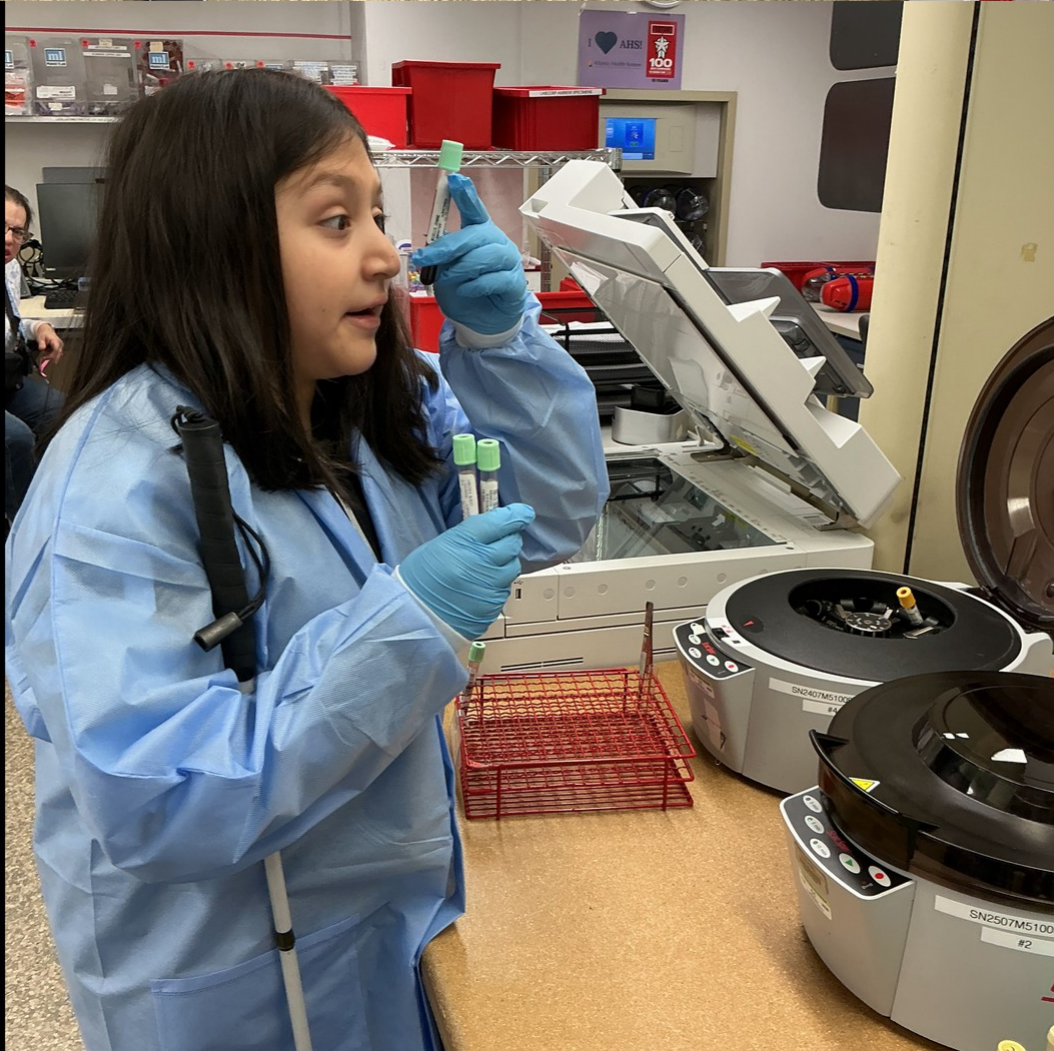
Project SEARCH Update

As we close the book on February, the Project SEARCH interns are more than halfway through their **2nd internship rotations** at Overlook Medical Center. We were thrilled to launch a new internship experience with the Overlook Pathology Lab this rotation! See pictures below of both **Caroline** and **Noah** participating with our newest host department.

Classroom instruction this month included a week-long unit on effectively accepting praise, criticism and feedback - and most importantly, differentiating between criticism and feedback.

The SEARCH crew also enjoyed a surprise visit from the Soothing Paws pet therapy dogs!

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.





You've done a much better job being kind and respectful to others this week.

PRAISE

CRITICISM

FEEDBACK





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.

atlanticealth.org



Real Work. Real Skills. Real Success!



Sean in the produce department at ShopRite in Clark



Tina at Hilton Garden Inn in Springfield



***Matt** at Moving Forward in Mountainside*



Nick at Terrace Plant Shop in Downtown Westfield



Ben at Shoprite in Clark



Ariana at Summit Health Classic Cafe in Berkeley Heights

Behind Our Success are Some Great Staff Members!



Mary Ann Bonczek

Current position at UCESC?

Teaching Assistant

How long have you worked for the Commission?

I have been with the Commission for three weeks!

What do you love best about your job?

I love being a mentor for young adults as they prepare for their future. We learn from each other as they go to their internships. It's a real pleasure to work in such a positive environment. The support given to students is wonderful and the faculty is greatly

supportive of each other.

What do you like to do in your free time?

In my free time, I perform in dance and theater. Currently in rehearsal for the musical 9 to 5.

What is one thing that people would be surprised to learn about you?

People are surprised that I am a 30+ year student of Martial Arts and am currently an assistant instructor for the Knee Hi Ninja program, teaching ages 3 to 7.

A Perfect Strike for School Spirit

Lots of gutter balls, spares, strikes and mostly fun was had by all during our Bowling Trip to Linden Lanes at the beginning of the month...







Shaking Up Success: A Toast to Teamwork and Social Confidence



Mocktail Party: Navigating Social Success Together

This month, our students had the opportunity to put their social and problem-solving skills into action during our 2nd annual WRA Mocktail Party... an event designed to promote cooperation, communication, and real-world social readiness!

From the planning stages to the final toast, students worked together to organize the event, select mocktail recipes, assign roles, prepare materials, and create a welcoming environment.

Through this process, they practiced teamwork, flexibility, and shared responsibility, learning that successful events, like successful workplaces, require collaboration and thoughtful planning.

The social aspects of the mocktail party were equally meaningful. Students practiced greeting peers, engaging in conversation, taking turns speaking, playing bingo, taking pictures together, offering compliments, and demonstrating respectful listening. These are essential life skills that support independence not only in social settings but also in interviews, workplace gatherings, and community events.

Keeping our “Dress for Success” ideas in mind, students also explored the importance of professional presentation. We discussed how clothing choices, posture, body language, and overall appearance communicate confidence and readiness. Students embraced the opportunity to dress festively and stylish, recognizing that how we present ourselves can influence first impressions and open doors to opportunity.

The mocktail party was more than a celebration, it was a hands-on lesson in navigating social terrain together. By combining cooperation, friendship, problem solving, and self-presentation, our students strengthened the interpersonal skills that will support them far beyond WRA.

We are proud of the maturity, effort, and enthusiasm our students demonstrated throughout this wonderful experience!









Look Who Was Spotted in the Community!



*Rose spotted former WRA and Project Search student, **Alberto**, working as a patient transporter at Overlook Medical Center in Summit.*

Picture of the Month

*"The Very Hungry Caterpillar" popped out and surprised **Nick and Matt!***

ORYTIME

ing Readers

Storytime Collections

Col...ties



Favorite Characters



Community Resources/Events



JOIN THE CELEBRATION!

UCESC IS INVITED TO MARCH AT THE UNION COUNTY ST PATRICK'S DAY PARADE

**MARCH 14, 2026 @
1:00PM, UNION, NJ**

This year's parade is dedicated to People with Disabilities!. Let's come together to celebrate inclusion and showcase the spirit of UCESC! Help us shine a light on our students, families, and staff as we proudly march in the parade.

More details for parade day meet up to come after registration.

REGISTER HERE:

<https://forms.gle/MuN9VuB5daUZhCbc8>

Need more info?

Email: ucsaintpatricksdayparade@gmail.com

<https://unioncountyparade.com/>

The Union County
Board of County Commissioners
invites you to
**Recreational Programs for
Persons with Disabilities & Special Needs**
March 2026

Art for All Abilities 5:30pm - 7:00pm (All ages)



Elizabeth Peterstown Comm. Center
• Wednesday, March 4th

Rahway Recreation Center
• Wednesday, March 18th

Westfield Community Room
• Friday, March 13th

Warinanco Sport Center in Roselle
• Wednesday, March 25th

Zumba (Ages 12 & up)

March 5th from 6:00pm - 6:45pm
Cranford Community Center



Karate (Ages 5 - 12) 7:00pm - 7:45pm

March 23rd and 30th
Cranford Community Center



Karate (Ages 13 & up) 8:00pm - 8:45pm

March 23rd and 30th
Cranford Community Center



For more information about programs and events hosted by the Office for Persons with Disabilities and Special Needs, please call at 908-527-4781 or visit www.ucnj.org/dhs/opdsn/ or scan the QR Code



BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE
UNION COUNTY
BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
Department of Human Services



18+

NJ Department of Human Services, Division of Disability Services (DDS)

DDS serves as a single point of entry for disability-related information and provides self-directed, non-medical personal care assistance for eligible individuals with permanent physical disabilities through its Personal Assistance Services Program (PASP). To learn more, visit: <https://www.state.nj.us/humanservices/dds/home/>

US Social Security Administration, Supplemental Security Income (SSI)

SSI provides a cash benefit that helps people with disabilities and low income to meet basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter. Those receiving SSI are automatically eligible for Medicaid. Young adults with IDD should apply for SSI through the Social Security Administration at age 18. To learn more about applying for SSI, visit: <https://www.ssa.gov/ssi/text-apply-ussi.htm>

21+

NJ Dept. of Labor & Workforce Development, Div. of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS)

Upon graduation, your child may be eligible to receive adult employment services from NJ DVRS, including: career counseling, supported employment, job accommodations, and training opportunities. Your child can apply to determine eligibility for adult employment supports through DVRS 2 years prior to graduating. To learn more, visit: <https://nj.gov/labor/career-services/special-services/individuals-with-disabilities/index.shtml>



NJ Department of Human Services, Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD)

DDD provides Medicaid-funded services and supports that assist adults with DD age 21 and older to live as independently as possible, including: individual supports at home and in the community; family supports; and employment/day services. Your child must be determined eligible for Medicaid and eligible to receive Division services. Your child may apply for eligibility at 18, but will not begin to receive services (if eligible) until age 21. To learn more about applying for DDD-funded services visit: <https://www.nj.gov/humanservices/ddd/>

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 Pro Se Services

Teresa Amoroso - Pro Se 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

WELCOME TO 2NDFLOOR
Welcome to your safe space

- Chat**
Connect privately with our trained counselors through chat or phone calls
- Anonymous**
Communicate anonymously about anything that is on your mind
- Support**
Send and receive support on our community boards
- 24/7**
Our counselors are here for you any time, day or night.

Continue

IT ONLY TAKES A SECOND TO GET 24/7 TALK OR TEXT SUPPORT

GET IT ON Google Play

Download on the App Store

2ND FLOOR

2ND FLOOR

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

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

Get started at 2NDFLOOR.org/download #mentalhealth #support.

Understanding Supported Employment Options Available AFTER Graduation

SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT IN NEW JERSEY

Supported Employment helps individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) secure and maintain **competitive employment**, or work in a setting to prepare for competitive employment. An individual's interests, likes, and dislikes are important factors when considering a job or career path.



KEY TERMS

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)

Federal legislation signed in 2014 to help individuals access education, training, and support services to succeed in the workplace.

Competitive Employment

Work performed on a full-time or part-time basis in an integrated setting that is compensated at or above minimum wage.

Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS)

The state agency which provides vocational services for individuals with IDD or other barriers to employment.

Check out our DVRS Go Bag: bit.ly/DVRSgobag

"Employment First" State

An initiative that outlines that competitive employment is the preferred post-education activity. It presumes that all individuals, including people with IDD, are capable of integrated employment.

EXAMPLES OF SERVICES

- **Pre-Employment Transition Services**
 - Offered to high school students to plan and prepare for entering the workforce.
- **Job Development**
 - Assists individuals with a job search, interview skills, and resume development.
- **Job Sampling**
 - Gives the individual the opportunity to explore different types of employment and identify areas of interest and ability.
- **Job Coaching**
 - Provides assistance with learning essential job tasks, transportation training, social skills, and can act as a liaison between the employer and employee.
- **Long-Term Follow Along**
 - Ongoing support through worksite visits designed to help individuals maintain skills built during job coaching.
- **Trial Work Experience**
 - A workplace readiness assessment administered by a Supported Employment provider agency, such as [Project HIRE](#).

*This is not a fully inclusive list. Services may vary between agencies, school districts, and funding sources.

NJ WORKABILITY

NJ WorkAbility offers people with disabilities who are working, and whose income would otherwise make them ineligible for Medicaid, the opportunity to receive full Medicaid coverage.

Through NJ WorkAbility, individuals can earn up to \$65,196 of gross annual income and maintain less than \$20,000 in assets without threatening their Medicaid status. A couple cannot exceed \$87,900 in gross income and \$30,000 in assets. Learn more about NJ WorkAbility and eligibility requirements at: bit.ly/njworkability

REQUIREMENTS OF COMPETITIVE EMPLOYMENT

Wages

Individuals are compensated at or above minimum wage, and at a comparable rate to coworkers without IDD performing similar duties with similar experience and education.

Benefits

Individuals receive the same benefits as other employees in a similar position with a similar level of service.

Scheduling

The schedule is determined by the needs of the employer, not the availability of the individual.

Integration

Employment takes place in a setting where individuals with and without disabilities have the opportunity to interact and work alongside each other.

Advancement

The same opportunities for promotion and advancement are available for employees with and without disabilities in similar positions with similar experience.

April 2022



Supported Employment Fact Sheet Final.pdf

Click the link to download the attachment

Download

641.9 KB



About the Work Readiness Academy

The Work Readiness Academy serves students ages 18-21 with disabilities and provides a comprehensive employment training experience that incorporates both classroom-based instruction and community-based work-learning experiences. While in the

training classroom, students work cooperatively with similar aged peers to learn critical skills related to employment and socialization. Students also work on career exploration and planning, including the development of a person-centered, post-secondary vision and plan with clear goals and action steps. Program staff remain on-site during the internships to provide and fade support

and assistance as needed. Students also participate in field trips focused on career discovery, independent living skills, recreation and independent travel training.

For more information or to make a student referral, please email Rachel Richer at rreicher@ucesc.org

Email: jbornstein@ucesc.org

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

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

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



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



WRA Smore

WRA is using S'more to create beautiful newsletters



Westlake February Monthly Report

Message from the Administrators

Westlake School Comes to its Senses

We are proud and honored to announce that Westlake School has just opened the newly developed “Wolf Lodge” Sensory Room, thanks to a generous donation from Union County’s Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG). The “Wolf Lodge” offers our students a proactive, therapeutic approach to support those that may experience difficulties processing external stimuli, sensory overload, hyper-sensitivity and/or anxiety when navigating through their daily routine. The Wolf Lodge offers a controlled, inviting and calming environment through the use of soft lighting, sensory-friendly light panels and specialized sensory equipment. Additionally, “On the Go” Sensory bags have been made available for students in transit, complete with noise cancelling headphones, fidget tools, and visual feelings prompts, in an effort to increase overall student focus and awareness and promote mental and emotional well-being for our Westlake student population.



Coming to “Our Senses” doesn’t stop there. As part of the Community Development Block Grant, all Westlake School staff members were provided training by our sensory processing partners, Kulture City, on sensory processing, sensory dysregulation and tools and practices that may be utilized for coregulating and getting our students back to a state of homeostasis and available for awareness and learning. Upon completion of the sensory training, and passing of the competency

assessment, Westlake School earned the Sensory Inclusive certification and designation of proudly being an "All Inclusive Sensory School."

The Westlake School community extends its deepest gratitude to Union County's Community Development Block Grant Program, as well as Union County and the Office for Economic Development for recognizing the importance and need of this project and awarding Westlake this grant. In addition, we would like to thank the Kulture City Organization for providing sensory-inclusive staff training, Sensory Room design and sensory tools and resources, the Westlake School Occupational Therapy and Physical Therapy Department for their sensory expertise and best practices, and Josh Bornstein, the UCESC Director of Special Projects, for his collaboration with the Westlake Administration to help ensure that together, we are all building a future where every student has the environmental and emotional support they need to feel safe, understood and thrive.

Till next time my friends, be good to yourself, each other, and of course your senses!

Claudine T., Stacey K., and Bobby P.





Westlake Information

- Current Enrollment: 55
- Referrals: 4
- Acceptances: 1
- Emergency Management Drill: Feb 18, 2026
- Fire Drill: Feb 2, 2026

Union County Educational Services Commission

September '25						
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
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25	26	27	28	29	30	31

2025-2026



District Calendar

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

February '26						
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March '26						
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April '26						
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May '26						
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31						

June '26						
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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 and sent via the First Alert system.

February Spotlight!

Student of the Month!



Student of the Month



We are excited to celebrate our Student of the Month, M.H., a young man whose "can-do" attitude and love for work inspire everyone around him. He is a truly helpful friend who is always looking for ways to support his peers. Best of all, his signature fist bumps and friendly greetings ensure that everyone starts their day with a smile and a boost of confidence.

Principal Award Winner!



Principal Award Winner



We are so proud to announce our Principal Award Winner, J.J., who truly shines when it comes to the values of cooperation and friendship. Whether she is helping her friends or smiling in the hallway, she consistently works to make everyone feel included and supported.

Staff Shout Out!



Our school hallways are beaming with pride thanks to our new Staff Shout-out Board, which is already overflowing with over 35 heartfelt notes written by colleagues for one another. To celebrate this culture of appreciation, we highlighted seven special shout-outs that were read aloud to honor the incredible work happening across our building. Each of these recognized staff members received a commemorative pin as a small token of gratitude for their dedication and positive impact. It is truly inspiring to see our team take the time to uplift one another and celebrate the everyday kindness that makes our school community so strong.





Sunshine Cafe Employee of the Month!



The Employee of the Month for February is... J.M! We chose him because he works hard and is always learning new things! He has done a great job taking customer's orders in the Sunshine Cafe. We are lucky to have such an amazing worker!



Sunshine Cafe!



Our kitchen is buzzing with excitement as students tackle the ultimate dessert dilemma for the Month of March: why choose between a cookie and a brownie when you can bake both? This "brookie" project is a fantastic way for our team to practice functional math through measuring ingredients and fine motor skills through folding and mixing the thick batter. The best part, of course, is the delicious reward waiting at the end of the timer—a perfectly fudgy, golden-brown testament to their hard work and collaboration.

Throughout February, The Sunshine Cafe shared the love by serving up decadent red velvet cupcakes and cooling strawberry refreshers. These festive specials provided a wonderful opportunity for our students to practice specialty baking and precise beverage preparation, ensuring every order was served with a splash of seasonal spirit and a smile.



Work Based Learning!



Our Work-Based Learning program at the Cranford Movie Theater offers a dynamic, real-world setting where students can master essential vocational skills in a fun and engaging environment. Students take on the responsibility of managing the box office, where they practice handling currency and processing ticket transactions with accuracy. They also gain experience as ushers by taking tickets at the door and politely directing guests to the correct theater for their screening. Behind the concession stand, student workers learn to prepare snacks, manage inventory, and fulfill customer orders efficiently. To make the experience truly authentic, a visiting class acts as the audience, giving our student workers the chance to practice clear communication and social interactions with their peers. This comprehensive training not only builds professional confidence but also helps our students develop the independence needed for future employment in the community.





Walgreens!

E.K. and G.R. are sharpening their retail skills at Walgreens, where they've been tasked with using the inventory gun to help set up for the spring season. By scanning items and locating exactly where each Easter product belongs on the shelves, they are mastering the precision and technology required in the workplace. It's a fantastic way for them to build vocational independence while ensuring the store is "egg-stra" organized for the community!





Westlake Parent Organization!



WESTLAKE SCHOOL PTO

UPCOMING EVENTS
MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

JOIN US FOR FUN & FUNDRAISING!

-  **February 20** - Panera Fundraiser Night
-  **February 27** - Family Bingo Night
-  **March 22** - Bowling Event
-  **April (Date TBD)** - Clothes Drive
-  **May (TBD)** - Miniature Golf
-  **June (TBD)** - Ice Cream Party

ALSO LOOK OUT FOR....

-  Chocolate Bar Sale
-  Box Tops for Education

STAY TUNED FOR MORE DETAILS!

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

Get ready to mark your calendars for a season of community fun with our upcoming Family Bingo Night, Bowling outing, and our Annual Clothing Drive. These events are not just about raising vital funds for our students; they're about building lasting memories and strengthening the heart of our school family.

Union County St. Patrick's Day Parade



**JOIN THE
CELEBRATION!**

**UCESC IS INVITED TO MARCH AT THE UNION
COUNTY ST PATRICK'S DAY PARADE**

**MARCH 14, 2026 @
1:00PM, UNION, NJ**

This year's parade is dedicated to People with Disabilities!. Let's come together to celebrate inclusion and showcase the spirit of UCESC! Help us shine a light on our students, families, and staff as we proudly march in the parade.
More details for parade day meet up to come after registration.

REGISTER HERE:
<https://forms.gle/MuN9VuB5daUZhCbc8>

Need more info?
Email: ucsaintpatricksdayparade@gmail.com
<https://unioncountyparade.com/>



*February Tips from the Westlake
Behavior Team!*

SUPPORTING INDEPENDENCE AT HOME



Routines



Choices



Independence



Acknowledge
Effort

UNDERSTANDING BEHAVIOR



Communication



COLLABORATION & GROWTH



The Westlake School Behavior Team

Supporting Independence Through Collaboration at Home ♥

February can be a challenging time for many students and families. Routines may feel harder to maintain, energy levels can be lower, and expectations for independence continue to grow. During this time, consistent collaboration between home and school is especially important. At Westlake School, we believe behavior support is most effective when it is collaborative, respectful, and focused on skill-building, not compliance.

What Families Can Do at Home

Supporting older students doesn't mean expecting perfection. Small, intentional strategies can help reinforce independence and emotional regulation.

Try these at home:

- Maintain predictable routines while allowing flexibility as needed.
- Offer meaningful choices (e.g., preferred activities, order of tasks, break options).
- Encourage independence by allowing extra time and space for your student to complete tasks.
- Acknowledge effort and progress, especially when tasks are challenging.
- Use consistent language across settings when possible (your child's team can help with this).

When Behavior Feels Challenging

Behavior is communication. For older students, changes in behavior may reflect fatigue, frustration, sensory needs, or difficulty managing increased demands. Focusing on understanding and support, rather than consequences, helps students build skills they will use beyond school.

Working Together

Families are a vital part of behavior planning at Westlake. Your insight helps us create supports that respect your student's dignity, promote independence, and prepare them for life after school. Thank you for your continued partnership and trust. Together, we can support growth, resilience, and progress, even during the more challenging months of the year.



– The Westlake School Behavior Team



Ms. Dayna's Class



Throughout February, we focused on Friendship and Cooperation, exploring what it truly means to be a supportive classmate and a dependable teammate. Our classroom community continues to grow stronger as students practice kindness, communication, and collaboration each day. One of the sweetest examples of this teamwork was our classroom business! Along with continuing our card sales, we added chocolate treats to our lineup this year: pops, pretzels, and chocolate-covered Oreos. The response was incredible! For Valentine's day, we sold nearly 400 chocolate treats, along with our cards. From planning and designing to dipping, decorating, and packaging orders, every student played an important role. It was amazing to see their responsibility, cooperation, and pride shine through in every step of the process. We also took time to celebrate Black History Month by learning about influential Black leaders who made a lasting impact through courage, perseverance, and leadership. Their stories inspired meaningful conversations about how we can each make a positive difference in our classroom, school, and community.







Ms. Shuimo's Class!



This month, our class focused on building character, celebrating history and applying learning in real-world settings. Students explored the themes of friendship and cooperation by learning about acts of kindness and recognizing them on our classroom chart.

In celebration of Black History Month, each student and staff selected an influential Black figure in history who made a meaningful impact in our world. They shared what they learned and discussed important qualities that helped them create positive change.

In math, we strengthened our skills using the TouchMath strategy and applied money concepts during trips to ShopRite and the Sunshine Cafe, where students decided whether to spend or save their earnings from the Jewelry Shop.

In science, we created crystal snowflakes using three different solutions. Students made predictions about which solution would produce the best result. Afterward, they compared and discussed the results, focusing on what they learned from their observations.









Physical Education with Ms. Alexa!



This month in Physical Education, we have played sports such as football, basketball, and handball. *Flag Tag* was a very popular game we played. We have also been focusing on our hand-eye coordination skills, including dribbling, passing, catching, and shooting a basket. We are currently in our Life-Sized Board Games Unit. Some activities include *Hungry, Hungry, Hippos* and *Connect Four Relay*. These activities have fostered movement, teamwork, communication skills, and strategy. Basketball practices are in full swing and we've had a fantastic turnout! Our athletes are working hard as they prepare for the annual Westlake March Madness game. We hope to see you there cheering them on!

This month in Health, we have been learning about nutrition. We explored the five food groups, the difference between whole and processed foods, key nutrients our bodies need, and the impact of sugar on our overall health. Additionally, we have been focusing on social-emotional learning, including how to communicate positively and how to be a good friend. It has been a productive and exciting month in PE and Health!



Occupational Therapy with Ms. Lindsay!



February is the perfect time to spread a little love—and build important skills at the same time! In OT this month, students have been working on fine motor strength, visual-motor integration, and bilateral coordination through a fun and festive Valentine's heart craft.

Our students created adorable heart buddies using cutting, coloring, folding, and gluing techniques. While it may look like just a cute craft (and they truly are!), these activities help strengthen hand muscles for improved handwriting, refine scissor skills, and support attention to task and spatial awareness.

Using a visual recipe supported independence as students practiced reading and following multi-step directions, gathering materials, measuring, pouring, stirring, and safely operating the microwave with supervision. These activities build executive functioning skills such as planning, organization, and task completion—while also strengthening fine motor coordination.

And of course, the best part was enjoying a warm cup of festive hot chocolate topped with Valentine cheer!

Functional, hands-on activities like this help students build confidence and independence in everyday routines.

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Friendship Dance and Valentine's Day Celebrations!

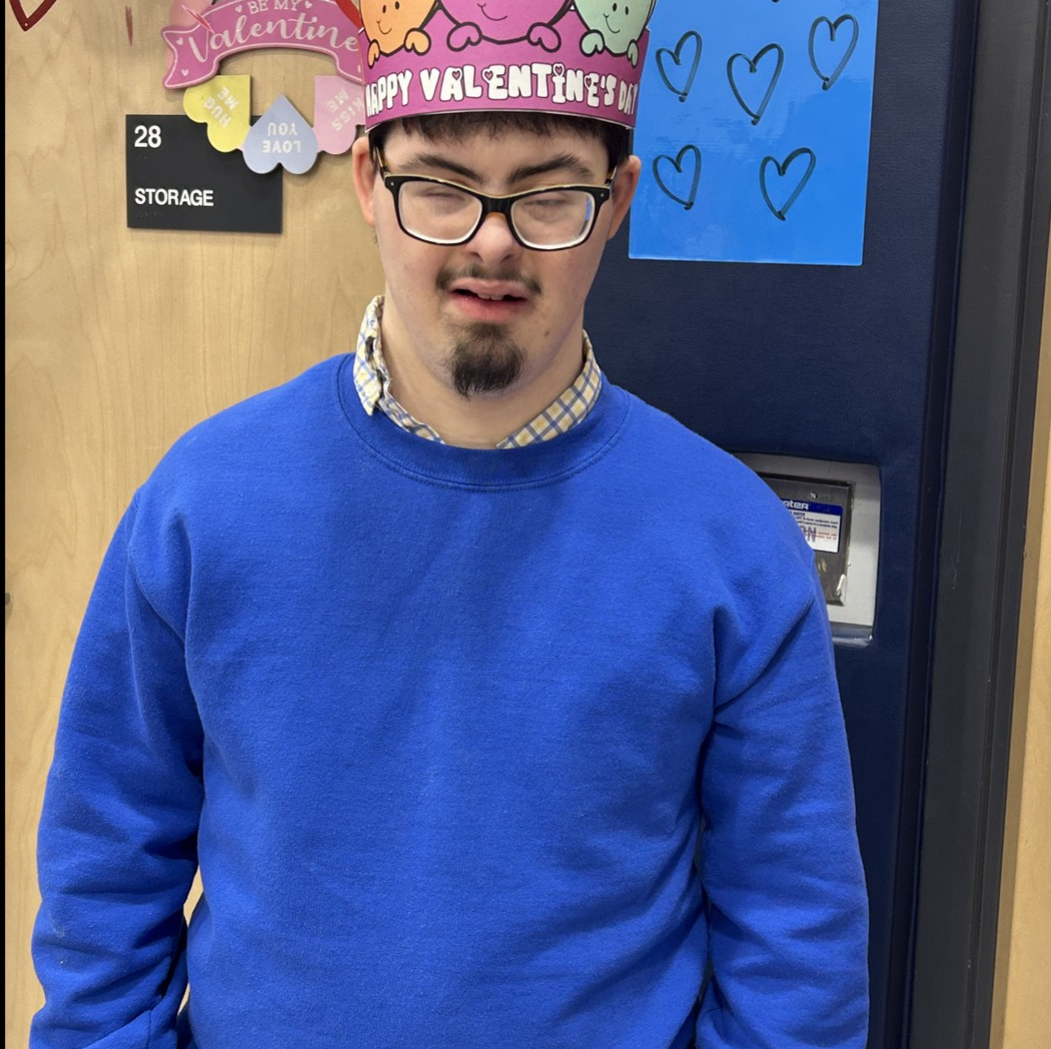
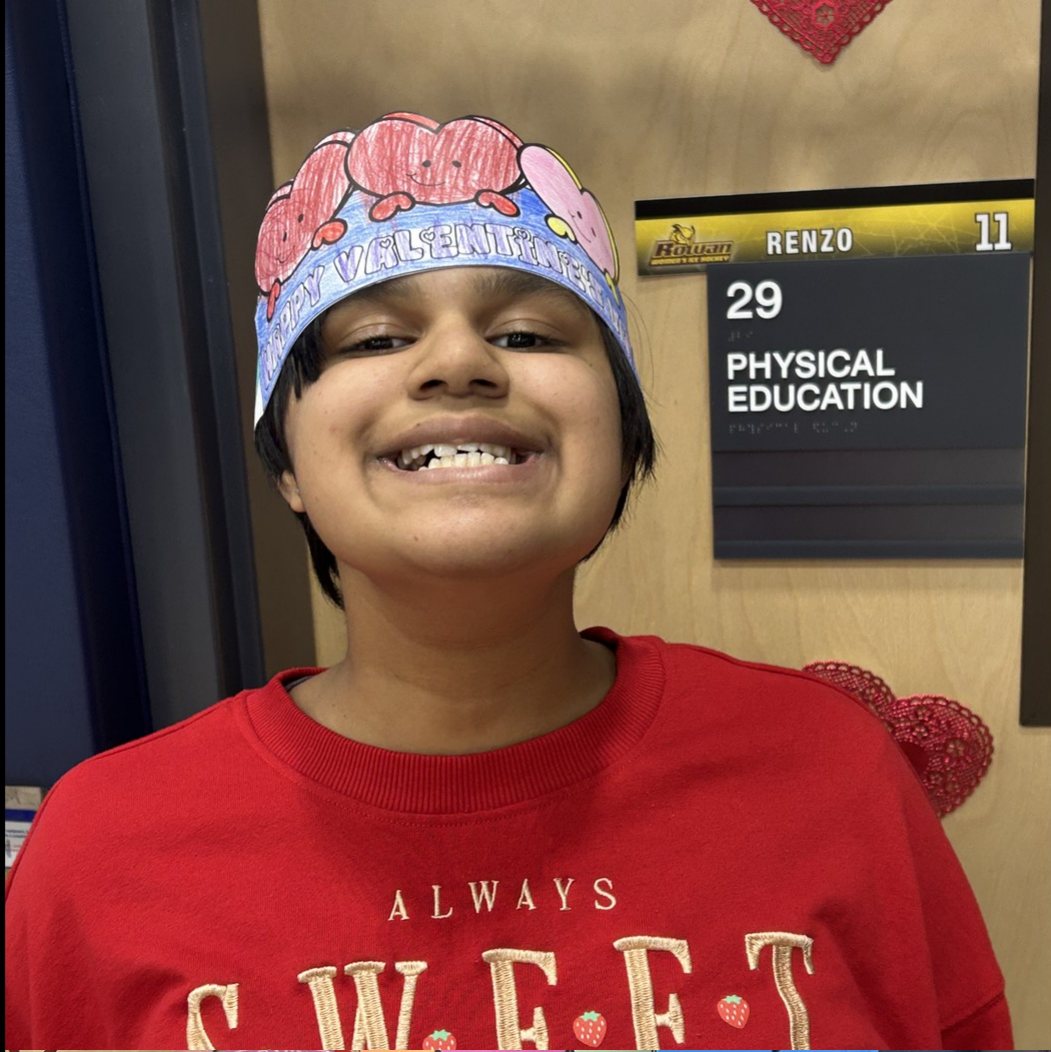


Our school gym transformed into a festive wonderland for our Valentine's Day Friendship Dance, featuring stunning decorations with heart motifs, vibrant balloon displays, and a dedicated photo shoot area for capturing memories. Students danced the afternoon away thanks to our DJ, and each guest headed home with a sweet bag of cookies as a party favor. A huge heartfelt thank you goes out to our Valentine's Day Dance Committee for their tireless work in planning such a memorable celebration of friendship and community!









Chinese New Year



Our staff gathered for a vibrant celebration of Asian culture, enjoying a magnificent Chinese New Year lunch that brought everyone together over a shared feast. The spread was truly impressive, featuring a variety of Pot Stickers, savory Lo Mein, Fried Rice, and delightful desserts, with inclusive gluten-free options ensuring every team member could participate. A special "thank you" to Ms. Yoomi, Nurse Veronica, Mr. Stanley, and Ms. Valerie for their hard work in hosting this wonderful event and fostering such a welcoming community spirit!

















YEAR OF FIRE
HORSE



HAPPY
LUNAR
NEW
YEAR
2026

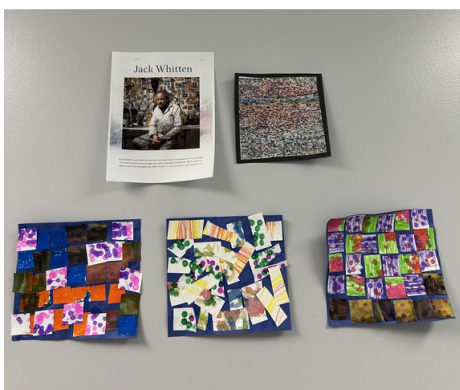
What Is Your Chinese Zodiac Sign?
(Chinese Zodiac Chart)

 Rat	 Ox	 Tiger	 Rabbit	 Dragon	 Snake	 Horse	 Sheep	 Monkey	 Rooster	 Dog	 Pig
1912	1913	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919	1920	1921	1922	1923
1924	1925	1926	1927	1928	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935
1936	1937	1938	1939	1940	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945	1946	1947
1948	1949	1950	1951	1952	1953	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959
1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971
1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031
2032	2033	2034	2035	2036	2037	2038	2039	2040	2041	2042	2043

Ms. Grace's Art Classes Study Black
History Month!



Ms. Grace's art class has been celebrating Black History Month by diving deep into the vibrant legacies of several iconic Black artists. Students are busy recreating the rhythmic, mosaic-style patterns of Alma Thomas and exploring the intricate, process-driven textures found in the works of Jack Whitten. From the whimsical, narrative folk art of Clementine Hunter to the energetic, geometric abstractions of Charles McGee, our young creators are gaining a powerful appreciation for the diverse voices that have shaped the American art landscape.





Parent Resources!

TRANSITION THURSDAYS

Webinar Series

NEW JERSEY HUMAN SERVICES



Office of Transition to Adult Life & Employment



MONTHLY

→ **2nd Thursday: 6PM – 7:30 PM**

Intake Process & Transition Resources

Learn about the DDD intake process and transition resources for students and families

→ **3rd Thursday: Noon – 1PM**

Topic of the Month

Join us every month for a new transition topic

QUARTERLY - OCTOBER | JANUARY | APRIL | JULY

→ **1st Thursday: Noon – 1PM**

Welcome Session - General

Learn the basics of accessing DDD services

→ **4th Thursday: 6PM – 7:30 PM**

Welcome Session (with Breakouts)

Join breakout sessions covering key transition topics

Register at www.nj.gov/humanservices/ddd/individuals/transition/transitionevents.shtml



Scan our QR code with your phone camera to join our listserv!



State of New Jersey
Phil Murphy, Governor
Tahesha L. Way, Lt. Governor



Department of Human Services
Sarah Adelman, Commissioner



Division of Developmental Disabilities

and Special Needs

Programs and Social Events for all ages

PROGRAMS

- Yoga
- Karate
- Zumba
- Ceramics
- Golf
- Spray Park & more

SOCIAL EVENTS

- Fishing Derby
- Paint by the Pond
- Summer Festival
- Summer Camp
- Barn Dance
- Skating with Santa & more



For more information or to be placed on our mailing list to receive brochures and program details:

call: (908) 527-4781

email: opdsn@ucnj.org

visit our website www.ucnj.org/opdsn

Or scan the QR Code!



BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE

...wo pou moun ki gen ankap ak bezwen
espesyal

Pwogram ak Evènman Sosyal pou tout laj

PWOGRAM YO

- Yoga
- Karate
- Seramik
- Dans Zumba
- Gòlf
- Espre Pak ak plis ankò

EVÈNMAN SOSYAL

- Konpetisyon Lapèch
- Penti bò Lak la
- Festival ete
- Kan ete
- Dans Granj
- Patinaj ak Santa akplis ankò



Pou plis enfòmasyon oswa pou yo mete sou lis adrès nou an
pou resevwa bwochi ak detay pwogram yo:

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vizite sit entènèt nou an: www.ucnj.org/opdsn

Oswa eskane kòd QR la!



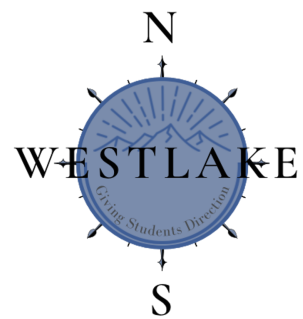
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