



# Work Readiness Academy

March 2026 Monthly Report

## Message from the Director



Dear Families & Supporters,

As the blossoms begin to peek through and the days stretch a little longer, we are thrilled to welcome you to our March edition of the Work Readiness Academy newsletter. This month has been a whirlwind of growth and "springing forward," with our students making incredible strides in both the classroom and at their community internships. We invite you to dive into this month's highlights to celebrate the hard work, resilience, and many "aha!" moments that made March a standout month including celebrating Women's History Month & St. Patrick's Day, and lessons centered around navigating Peer Pressure at work and

using cutting edge tools for the Job Search!

I'd like to express my gratitude to all members of our community (students, families, and staff) who took time to respond to our **NJ School Climate Survey**. Our participation rates were excellent - on all fronts. Your input will help to ensure the Work Readiness Academy and Project SEARCH programs remain safe, supportive, and empowering environments.

See you next month & on the mend,

**Josh Bornstein, Director**

UCESC Work Readiness Academy

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



## Attendance Reporting

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

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

# Instructional Insights

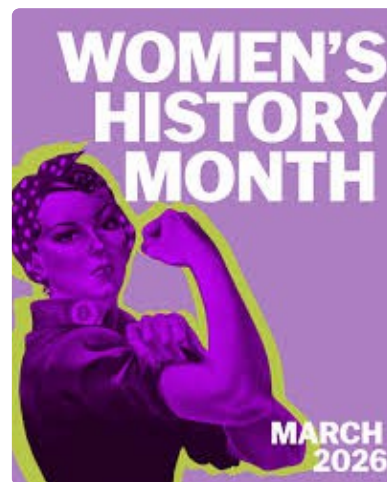
## Blazing Your Own Path

This month at the Work Readiness Academy, our students have been exploring what it means to **blaze their own path** as they prepare for life beyond school. Through classroom instruction, skills center activities, and work-based learning internships, students continue to build the confidence and independence needed to pursue their individual goals and interests.

March also gives us the opportunity to celebrate **Women's History Month**, honoring the women who have demonstrated courage,

leadership, and perseverance while creating new opportunities for others.

Their stories remind us that meaningful change often begins when someone believes in their voice, their abilities, and their right to pursue their dreams.



At WRA, empowerment means helping students recognize their strengths, advocate for themselves, and take meaningful steps toward their future. Whether students are learning new life-skills, problem-solving challenges at internship sites, or practicing communication and collaboration in the community, each experience is another step toward carving out a path that reflects who they are and what they hope to achieve.

By encouraging our students to embrace their talents, take risks, and support one another, we continue to reinforce an important message: **there is no single path to success, each student has the power to create their own.**

*"The most courageous act is still to think for yourself. Aloud."* - **Coco Chanel**

This quote reminds us that empowerment begins with believing in ourselves and having the confidence to share our ideas, our talents, and our voices with the world.

**Rachel Richer, Supervisor of Instruction**

UCESC Work Readiness Academy

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



This month we are proud to recognize **Ben, Anthony, and Nick** for the ways they are blazing their own paths and demonstrating the determination and growth that define the Work Readiness Academy.



**Ben** continues to stand out as a positive and hardworking student who is not afraid to take risks and try new things. Recently, he has been focusing on preparing for part-time summer employment, working diligently to complete job applications and strengthen his interview skills. Ben's willingness to step outside of his comfort zone and take initiative shows great confidence and motivation as he works toward his goals.

**Anthony** has demonstrated tremendous dedication and persistence as he continues to build independence and learn new tasks at his internship sites. Each week, Anthony shows up ready to put in the effort needed to grow his skills and gain confidence in the workplace. His determination and commitment to improvement are helping him take important steps forward on his path to independence.

**Nick** is a kind and thoughtful young man who continues to grow by recognizing when he needs support and asking for help. Through active participation at his internships, Nick has been working hard to improve his communication and productivity, showing that growth happens when we stay open to learning and challenge ourselves.

We are incredibly proud of the progress each of these students is making as they continue **blazing their own paths toward independence and success.**



*Ben*



*Anthony*



*Nick*

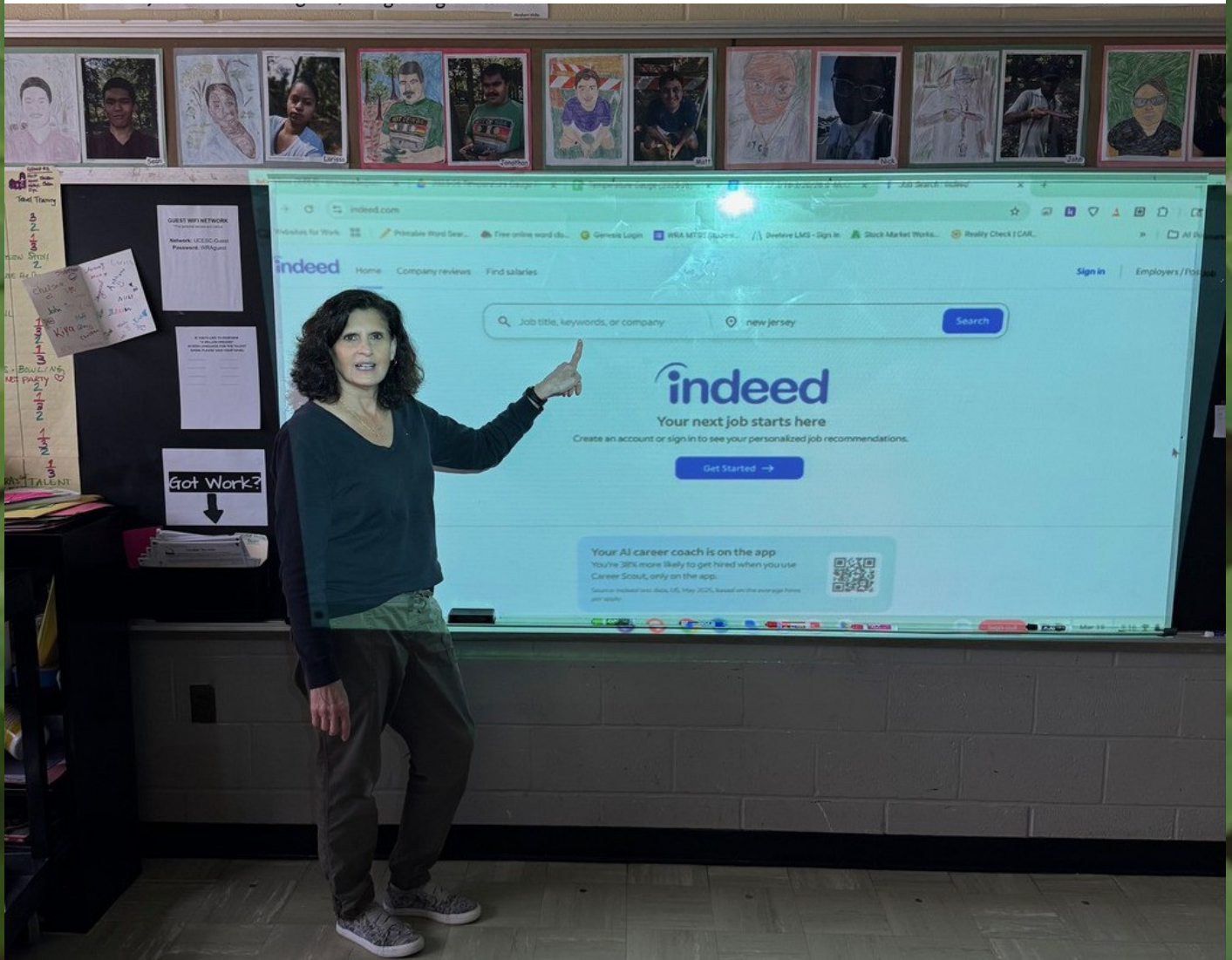


# Welcome to **Our Classroom**

## **Pathways to Employment: Navigating the Job Search**

My class honored Women's History Month by diving into the inspiring story of *Hidden Figures*, a film that illustrates the true meaning of perseverance, the act of achieving success despite major obstacles. Inspired by that spirit of determination, students are also learning the practical skill of using various search engines to find job opportunities that match their interests. After selecting a specific job, they will use the requirements for that role to guide them in crafting and refining their own interview responses. Creating these responses now will help prepare the students for future job interviews while building their professional confidence.





*Sharlene explaining how to use Indeed.com*





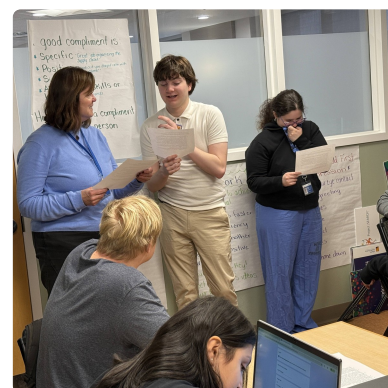
*Jonathan using Indeed.com to search for a job of interest.*

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## Project SEARCH Update

As we say so long to the month of February, the Project SEARCH interns are also saying goodbye to their **2nd internship rotations** at Overlook Medical Center. The students will participate in fun "transition week" activities before starting their final rotations after Spring recess.

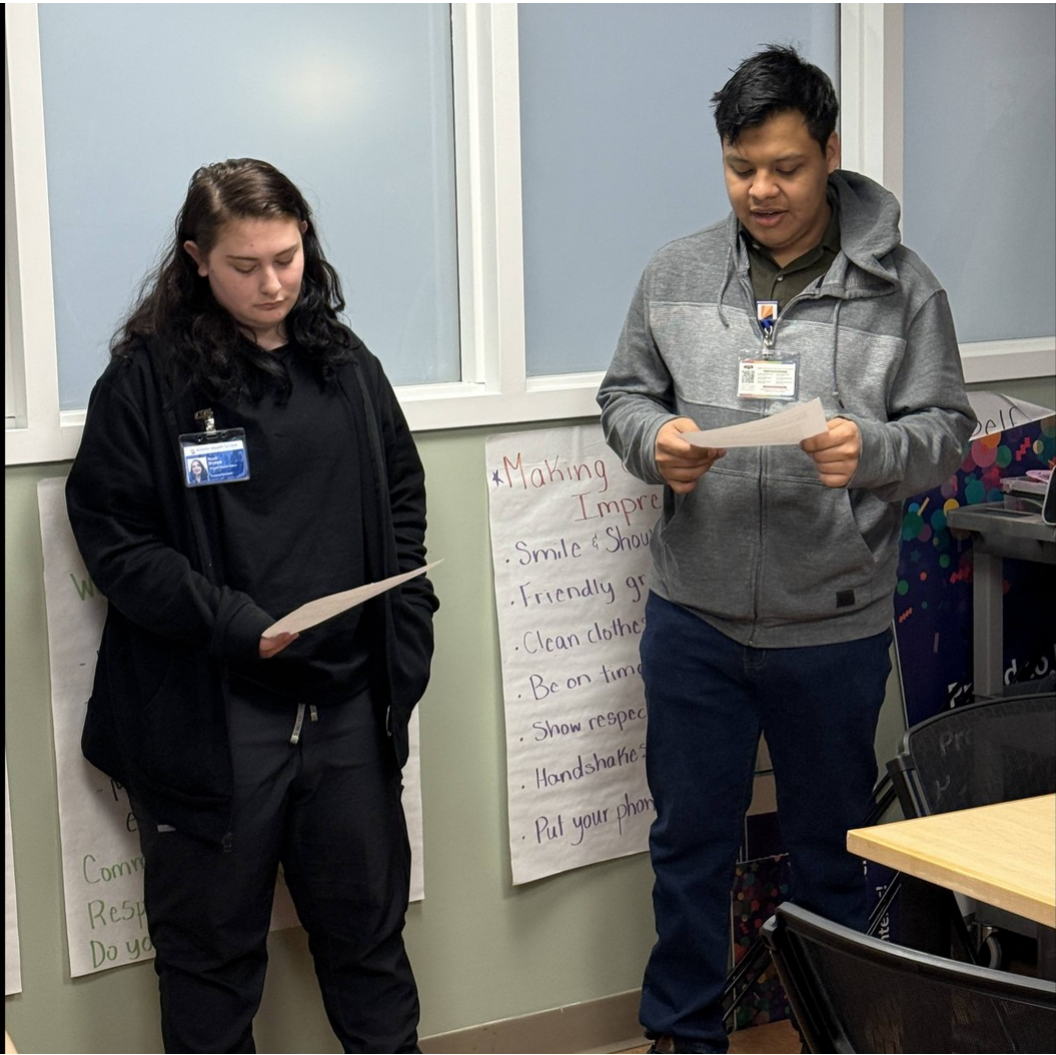
Classroom instruction this month included a week-long unit on Peer Pressure in the Workplace. The students learned about strategies they can use to combat negative pressure they might face from co-workers. The students and staff finished the unit by acting out role-play scenarios related to this topic including identifying the appropriate strategy used.



Finally, we also held our **third 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.









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



### **Project SEARCH Internships for Neurodiverse Young Adults at Atlantic Health**

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

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



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Turning Experience into Opportunity!



*Tige at DSW in Union Plaza*

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*Izzy at Salon Villa Roche in Downtown Cranford*

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*Larissa in Housekeeping at Hilton Garden Inn, Springfield*

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*Jonathan at Barnes & Noble in Union Plaza*





*Kiya in the Pediatric Department at Summit Health, Berkeley Heights*

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*Gisselle at Bovella's Cafe in Mountainside*

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## A Friendly New Face in Our Office!



**Danielle Marchesani**

***Current position at UCESC?***

Secretary for WRA

***How long have you worked for the Commission?***

I've been with the Commission for a few weeks.

***What do you love best about your job?***

So far, what I love most about working for the WRA is that I get to be a part of such an inspiring program and work with so many nice people! I've been so welcomed, and I am so excited for the future

here! I come from a corporate background and I am hoping to apply some of my experience and skill set at WRA.

***What do you like to do in your free time?***

I just got married in October! After spending a year planning a wedding, I am VERY happy to have free time again (lol). I absolutely love cooking new meals, taking my dog to the park, and spending time with family and friends. On January 1st of 2026 I made a list of goals, trips, and fun things I would like to try this year - some of that has included reading one book per month, trying a ton of local coffee shops, and taking yoga classes every week.

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

One thing that people might be surprised to learn about me is that I am SUPER creative. I originally wanted to go to Art school when I graduated high school but I ended up pursuing an Advertising & Marketing Degree instead. I turned my loft at home into an art studio for painting, drawing, jewelry making, and many more fun projects!



## Follow the Clues for Leprechaun Loot!

Students had a festive and engaging St. Patrick's Day celebration with a school-wide scavenger hunt in search of hidden leprechaun chocolate gold coins. Excitement filled the halls as participants followed clues, worked together, and celebrated each discovery. After the hunt, everyone gathered to enjoy shamrock cookies, making for a fun and rewarding end to a day full of teamwork, problem-solving, and holiday spirit.







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Look Who Was Spotted in the  
Community!



*Former Project SEARCH Intern **Jalen Boyd** mentoring current SEARCH Intern **Caroline** (both students from Township of Union Schools)*



## Picture of the Month

*According to **Nick**, this couch is basically a hug in furniture form and he's currently accepting applications for professional loungers!*



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## Community Resources/Events

### Elizabeth Entry-Level Virtual Job Fair

#### **Find & Register**

Register for a job fair and complete your profile in minutes.

#### **Get AI Matched**

When an employer's job aligns with your experience and skills, you'll receive an invite to request an interview.



#### **Interview on JobFairX**

Employers review requests, accept the matches they like, and meet you by video on event day.

<https://jobfairx.com/job-fairs/new-jersey/elizabeth/642761701543903245>

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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 4<sup>th</sup>

Rahway Recreation Center  
• Wednesday, March 18<sup>th</sup>

Westfield Community Room  
• Friday, March 13<sup>th</sup>

Warinanco Sport Center in Roselle  
• Wednesday, March 25<sup>th</sup>

**Zumba (Ages 12 & up)**

March 5<sup>th</sup> from 6:00pm - 6:45pm  
Cranford Community Center



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

March 23<sup>rd</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>  
Cranford Community Center



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

March 23<sup>rd</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>  
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/](http://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](#)

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## Guardianship Resources

### Guardianship Webinar Replay

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

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

A link to a replay of the webinar is below:

<https://www.facebook.com/share/v/1Dd5UPLsL/>

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

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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 Amadori- Pro Se Coordinator



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

[Download](#)

107.0 KB

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## DDD Services

### Applying for DDD Services

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



**Family Quick Guide to DDD\_English**

[Download](#)

3.0 MB



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

[Download](#)

2.1 MB



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

[Download](#)

8.2 MB



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

[Download](#)

3.6 MB



**DDD Resource Links**

[Download](#)

595.6 KB

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

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

**Click Here for More Information About Events Sponsored by  
Union County's OPDSN**

The graphic features a smartphone displaying the 2NDFLOOR app interface. The screen shows a welcome message: "WELCOME TO 2NDFLOOR" and "Welcome to your safe space". Below this are four options: "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), and "24/7" (Our counselors are here for you any time, day or night). A "Continue" button is at the bottom of the screen. The phone is decorated with a rainbow, a heart, and a smiley face. To the right of the phone, the text reads: "IT ONLY TAKES A SECOND TO GET 24/7 TALK OR TEXT SUPPORT". Below this text are logos for "GET IT ON Google Play" and "Download on the App Store". The 2NDFLOOR logo is also present. The background is light blue with a dotted pattern and decorative wavy lines.

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

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

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

# Understanding Supported Employment Options Available AFTER Graduation

## SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT 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](http://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.

### 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.

### 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](http://bit.ly/njworkability)

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](mailto:rreicher@ucesc.org)

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

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

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

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



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WRA on Instagram!**



**WRA Smore**

WRA is using S'more to create beautiful newsletters



# Crossroads Monthly Report

March 2026

## Message from the Administration

Dear Crossroads Community,

As we watch the first signs of spring begin to bloom, it is the perfect time to reflect on our progress this year. Our school-wide theme, Paving Paths: One UCESC Voice at a Time, has taken on a special meaning this month as we shifted our focus toward blazing our own path. This goal ties perfectly into our March social emotional theme of Empowerment, which is all about giving our students the tools, confidence, and voice to navigate their own unique journeys. This month, we saw that spirit in action through every story read, every race run, and lots of creativity within our classrooms.



We kicked off March with a high-energy Read Across America Week where our students' love for reading was fueled by an incredible lineup of guest readers. We were so lucky to have special guests take the time to share their favorite stories with us, including members of the Westfield Police Department, students from Hillcrest Academy North, our dedicated central office staff, and our own staff family and friends. We were especially honored to welcome Eric LeGrand, whose presence and story truly embodied the spirit of blazing a path. In addition to these wonderful visits, our students were treated to a marvelous activity centered around the book Harold and the Purple Crayon. This was made possible through the hard work and collaboration of our Speech, Occupational Therapy, and Art departments, providing a beautiful example of how our students can use their imaginations to draw the world they want to see.

The energy continued as we celebrated St. Patrick's Day with a vibrant spirit week. Students and staff showed their school pride by wearing crazy hats and socks, dressing in orange and green, and enjoying a cozy day in their pajamas. In addition, we were also incredibly grateful to the Lion's Club

for coming in to assist us with our annual vision screenings, ensuring our students have the support they need to succeed. The excitement reached a high point when we were visited by Scouting America for our annual Pinewood Derby. It was a joy to see the students racing their cars down the track, and we were so glad that many parents were able to join us for the festivities.

As March comes to a close , we want to remind everyone that Spring Break will begin on April 3, 2026. We wish everyone a nice break, hopefully filled with warm weather and a relaxing week to recharge. We look forward to seeing our students return ready to continue paving their paths for the remainder of the school year.

Warm Regards,

Matt, Danielle, and Stacey



## **General Information**

### **Enrollment as of March 27, 2026**

**Actual:** 61

**Changes:** Entered: 0 Exited: 0

**Referrals:** 8

**Intakes Scheduled:** 2

**Accepted:** 3

### **March Drill Schedule**

**Fire Drills:** 3/9/26

**Emergency Drills** 3/12/26 Bomb Threat)



## **Upcoming Dates**

**April 2, 2026** - Spring Rabbit Egg Hunt

**April 3 -12, 2026** - School Closed - Spring Break!

**April 16, 2026** - 1:00 PM - Parent Education/Support Meeting (Behavior Team Presentation)

**April 23, 2026** - 6:00 - 8:00 - Crossroads Family Night Out (Information to Come)

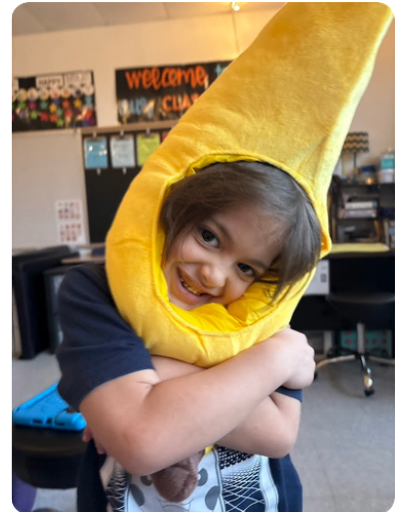


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## Crossroads Student Spotlight

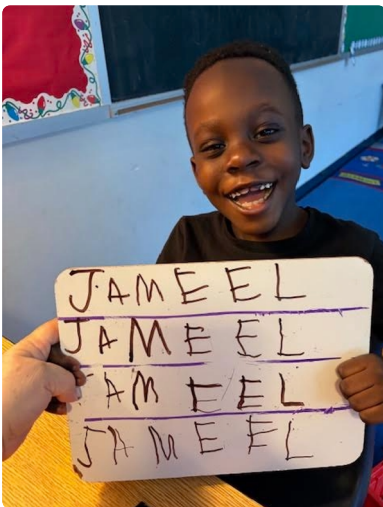
### Student of the Month - Adrian

The whole Room 103 team is so excited to honor Adrian as Student of the Month! Adrian started at Crossroads in September of 2024 and has made so much progress during his time here!! Our little man shines this year by completing independent functional routines, expanding his communication vocabulary, learning staff and student names, and engaging in individual sessions for therapy and specials. He still doesn't love hearing the word "no", but his increased tolerance is something to celebrate! We all love his one-of-a-kind personality, model poses, sneaky genius, and comedy routines.



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## Classroom Spotlights



### Ms. Peggy's Classroom

It has been a productive month in Room 102.! We are so proud of the hard work and resilience our preschoolers show every day. As we move into the final stretch of the year, it is a joy to see how much each child has grown.

Our Circle Time is evolving! We've started doing "Kindergarten-style" activities. The kids are doing a great job stepping up to these bigger challenges, like longer stories and more complex counting. The kids are rising to the challenge with enthusiasm.

A huge highlight this month was the Pinewood Derby! Before the big race, the kids had a great time decorating their own cars during our Social Group with Ms. Elaine. It was so fun to see their creativity shine before watching the cars fly down the track. There was a lot of cheering and excitement—it was definitely a highlight of the month.

Now that the weather has finally improved, we are making the most of our outdoor time. The playground has been a hub of activity as the kids practice their gross motor skills and social interactions in the fresh air.

Our preschoolers have met some big milestones this year. Most of our students have now mastered toilet training! This is a huge step toward independence. We are also seeing so many "big kid" skills emerging. From following multi-step directions to showing increased focus during lessons, our students are proving they are ready for the transition to Kindergarten.

We are seeing steady progress in how the children interact with one another. Our play skills are continuing to develop as the kids move beyond "parallel play" (playing near each other) and into true associative and cooperative play. We are practicing sharing and taking turns with favorite toys, engaging with classmates through imaginative games and conversation, and problem solving together during center time.

We are so proud of all the hard work the students are putting in every day. It is wonderful to see them growing more independent and building such great friendships with one another. We are looking forward to the spring ahead filled with more learning, playing, and fun!



### **Ms. Alexis's Classroom**

March has been an exciting and productive month in Room 109. The students visited the Cranford Movie Theater, where they practiced important social and behavioral skills while participating in a community-based experience. During this trip, students had the opportunity to work on community and functional skills, as well as social-emotional and cognitive development. Everyone greatly enjoyed the movie and sharing popcorn together.

This month, each student also participated in a vision screening. The students did an excellent job sitting patiently and cooperating while their eyes were checked.

In addition, the class went on a field trip to Lifetown. Students explored a variety of interactive experiences, including meeting a guinea pig and a dog, making crafts, riding bikes, getting their nails done, and visiting the bookstore and grocery store. These activities provided valuable opportunities to practice social interaction, independence, and real-world skills in a fun and engaging environment.



To celebrate St. Patrick's Day, the children enjoyed an exciting scavenger hunt around the school, searching for hidden clues and festive surprises. They worked together to follow clues and find each item, filling the space with laughter and teamwork. After the hunt, the class created a colorful craft by stringing Fruit Loops onto pipe cleaners to form bright rainbows. Each rainbow was attached to a fluffy paper cloud, making a cheerful decoration that tied perfectly into the St. Patrick's Day theme.

We are very proud of the students for their participation, positive attitudes, and the progress they continue to make each day. Thank you to our families for your continued support. We look forward to many more exciting learning experiences in the months ahead.



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## Specials Spotlight

### Mr. Aliza - Physical Therapist

The students at Crossroads School are having a great time in PT this month! Each student is actively working towards their individual IEP goals relating to gross motor skills, strength, balance and mobility.

Many of our students are working on stair negotiation during their PT sessions. We practice alternating our feet up and down the stairs, staying to one side and only using one rail.

Obstacle courses are a favorite PT activity and they allow us to work on many skills at once. Our students enjoy using equipment such as the balance beam, balance stones, BOSU ball, hurdles and aerobic steps to construct creative obstacle courses and activities.

We are excited to start utilizing our playground again during PT now that Spring is here!

Overall March has been a productive month in PT as our students continue to show steady progress toward their individualized PT goals.





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## March Tips from the Behavior Team

### Crossroads School Tips from the Behavior Team

#### Small Supports that Make a Big Difference: Supporting Student Mental Health

March includes several awareness days focused on youth mental health, such as Self-Injury Awareness Day, World Teen Mental Wellness Day, and other opportunities to highlight the importance of emotional well-being for children and adolescents. These reminders encourage us to focus on proactive supports that help students feel safe, regulated, and ready to learn.

At Crossroads, many of our learners benefit from structured supports, clear communication systems, and predictable routines to feel successful throughout the school day. One powerful way we support mental health is by maintaining consistent and predictable environments. Visual schedules, clear expectations, and structured transitions help reduce anxiety and increase student confidence. When students know what is coming next, they are better able to engage and participate.

We also focus on supporting communication. When students can express their wants, needs, and feelings, whether through speech, visuals, or devices, they experience less frustration and greater independence. Encouraging students to request breaks, ask for help, or indicate preferences promotes emotional regulation and self-advocacy.

Additionally, sensory and movement supports are embedded throughout the day. Access to movement breaks, calming spaces, and sensory tools helps students regulate and return to learning ready to participate.

### Ways Families Can Support Mental Health at Home:

- Create predictable routines for mornings, after school, and bedtime to help reduce anxiety
- Use visual supports such as schedules, choice boards, or “first-then” language
- Encourage your child to communicate needs (e.g., help, break, finished) using their preferred method
- Provide movement or sensory breaks like walks, stretching, or quiet time in a calming space
- Offer choices to build independence and confidence
- Model and label emotions (e.g., “I feel frustrated, I’m going to take a deep breath”) to support emotional understanding

Small, intentional supports at both school and home can make a meaningful difference. By prioritizing structure, communication, and regulation, we create environments where students feel supported and ready to thrive.



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## March at Crossroads





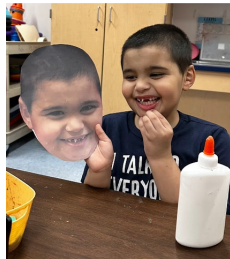


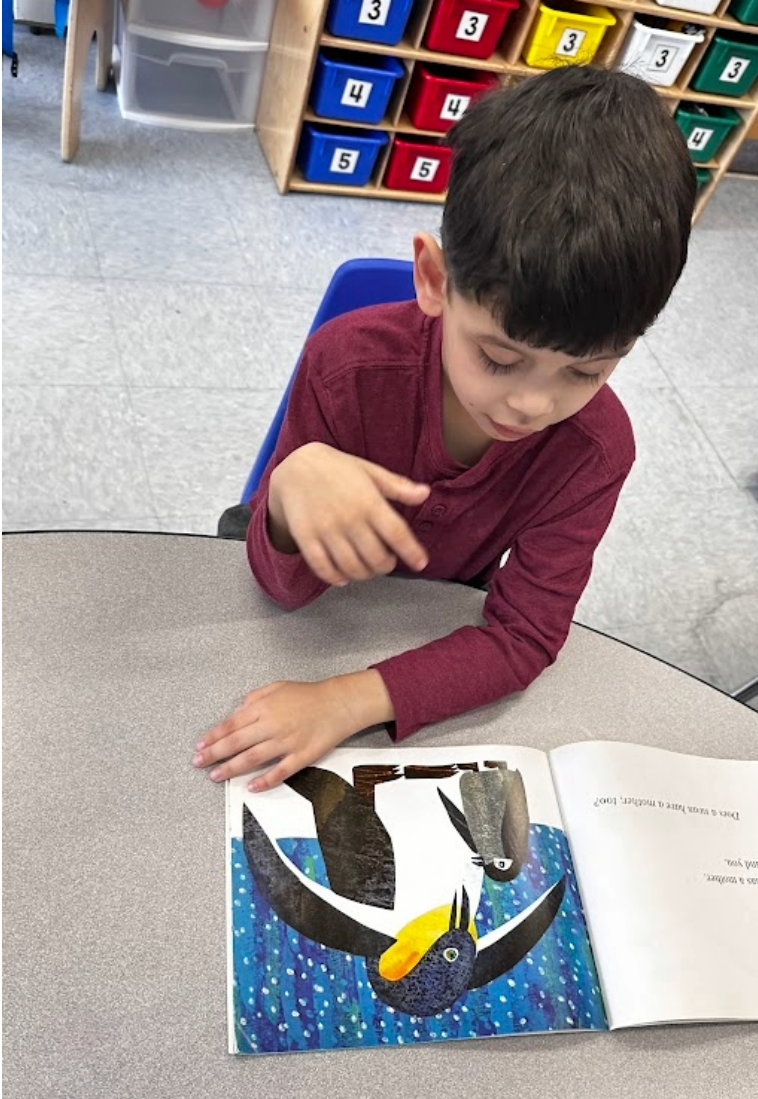
HY FIT IN WHEN YOU WERE BORN TO STAND

















## Read Across America



Students from Hillcrest Academy North came to read to the students at Crossroads during Read Across American Week.



Westfield Police Department reading during Read Across America Week.



Eric LeGrand came to read to the students at Crossroads during Read Across American Week.

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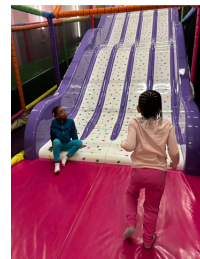
## Pinewood Derby



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## Crossroads In the Community







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**St. Patrick's Day Spirit Week!**







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## Honors and Accolades



Congratulations to Nurse Lynn Ferrante - Crossroads Certified Staff of the Year!!!



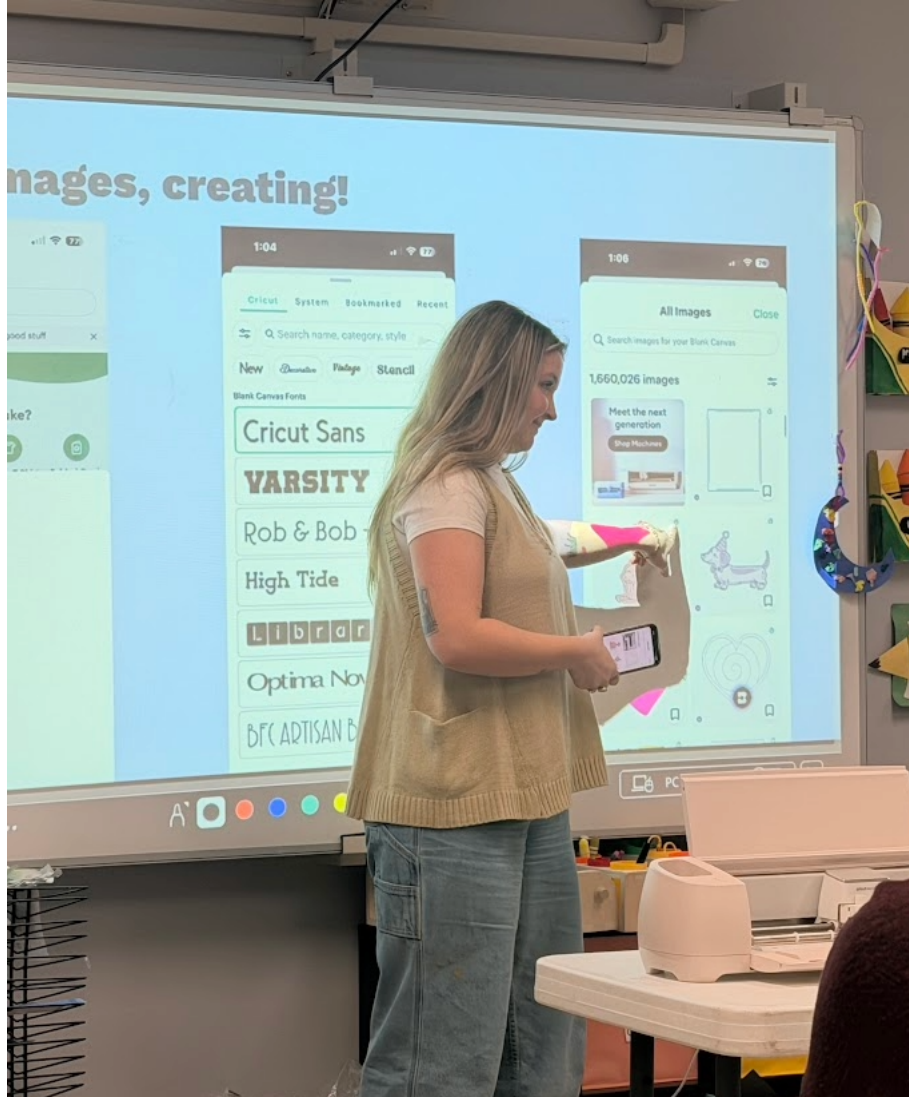
Congratulations to Mary Jane Dell'Andrino- Crossroads Instructional Support Staff of the Year!!!



Congratulations to Fernando Iparraguirre - Crossroads Non-Instructional Support Staff of the Year!!!

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Special thanks to Allison Gebler, Crismely Tapia de Macario, Rich Horn, and Grace Ahern who presented at this year's district staff professional development day!



## Parent Resources

**Spring has sprung at Crossroads!** THE SPRING BUNNY IS VISITING CROSSROADS AND HIDING EGGS.

**Families are welcome!**

**THURSDAY APRIL 2<sup>ND</sup>, 2026 10:00AM-1:30PM**

LAUREN & PEGGY	101/102	<b>10-10:25AM</b>
ALLISON G & HANNAH	103/104	<b>10:30-10:55AM</b>
JENNIFER & ALISON M	110/111	<b>11-11:25AM</b>
GABY, ANNA, & ALEXIS	105/108/109	<b>12:35-1:00PM</b>
DARIA & BRIDGET	220A/220B	<b>1:05-1:30PM</b>

## 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>



## About Us

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

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

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

Visit us on Instagram



**CR Smore**

CR is using Smore to create beautiful newsletters





# Hillcrest North March 2026 MR

March 2026

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

## Principal's Message

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

It's an exciting season at Hillcrest Academy North as our students continue to reach new heights in their academic journeys. From tackling rigorous state testing to producing impressive portfolio work, the halls are buzzing with the sound of hard work paying off. These milestones aren't just about grades; they represent the resilience and dedication of a student body that is committed to

proving what they can achieve when they set their minds to excellence.

This momentum was perfectly captured during our recent Black History Month celebration (moved to first week of March due to the snow!), which was a resounding success. What made this year truly special was that the entire initiative was student-driven. From planning the activities to leading the discussions, our students took the reins, ensuring the celebration was a meaningful tribute to heritage and progress. It wasn't just a history lesson; it was a demonstration of leadership and school spirit that brought the entire building together.

The core theme of the month was empowerment, most visibly seen in the vibrant vision boards now posted throughout the building. Every student created a board to map out their personal dreams and professional goals, serving as a daily visual reminder of their potential. These boards have transformed our hallways into a gallery of ambition, proving that when students are empowered to visualize their own success, the possibilities at Hillcrest Academy North are endless.

Warm Regards,

John Marquet  
Principal

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## Monthly Data

Enrolled - 85

Accepted - 6

Disenrollment - 1

Drills: Fire Drill, Bomb, Drill, Bus Drill

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## Upcoming Dates

April 3rd - 10th - Spring Recess - School Closed

April 13th - School Reopens

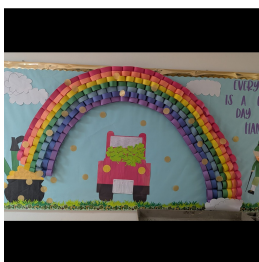
April 14th - Credit Retrieval due

April 20th - 3rd MP ends

April 21st - 4th MP begins

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## Student Awards



Principal Awards



Principal Awards



February Attendance Awards

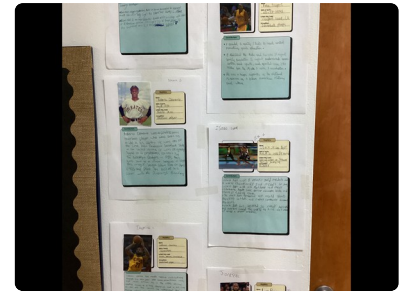
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# Celebrating Black History Month - In March instead of February due to snow!

This February/March, Hillcrest Academy North held a meaningful four-day celebration of Black History Month, an initiative driven by Ja'saad S., a student here at HAN. Ja'saad had a strong desire to bring Black pride and cultural awareness to the entire school.

Ja'saad stated that since grade school and his former teacher Ms R, he had always made it a point to celebrate Black History Month.

With this in mind, he contacted Mr. Kaplan, his US History teacher, and to plan an event for the entire school. Through their discussions, the four-day event aimed to educate, celebrate and show how important Black culture has played in our everyday lives.



## A Four-Day Journey of Reflection and Creativity

The celebration was structured into a series of daily events designed to engage students with history, personal aspirations, and community expression:

- Day 1: Honoring the Past through Biographies. Students kicked off the week by researching important Black figures across various subjects. By writing biographies, students connected with the legacies of those who paved the way in history and the present.
- Days 2 & 3: Dreaming Forward with Vision Boards. The middle of the week focused on the power of vision boards. Recognizing that dreams have historically helped people persevere through oppression, students listed their own dreams on paper to celebrate future possibilities and identify what they are looking forward to achieving.
- Day 4: Decorating the Hallways. The final day was dedicated to a school-wide transformation. Students used their biographies and vision boards to decorate the hallways, turning the school's physical space into a gallery of heritage and hope.





## In The Classroom

### English Class

Students in Ms. Killeen's English class have been reading and analyzing Greek mythology. The final assignment for the Greek mythology unit was to design the bedroom of an important Greek character of their choice. As a way to check their understanding of the characters from the myths they've read, students had to incorporate designs for the bed comforter, two t-shirts, and two posters. Students had to gather information they learned through the myths and by conducting additional research. Along with the creative aspect of this assignment, students had to write out their explanations to justify their design choices.



Through their research, students analyzed their character even further by learning why certain colors, flowers, objects, and symbols represent the character. For example, Isaiah C. chose Prometheus, the titan who stole fire from the Olympian gods and gave it to humanity. In Isaiah's bedroom design for Prometheus (bottom right, picture right) you can see he drew Earth on one poster, fire on the other, and clay stains on one of the t-shirts. Isaiah explained that in addition to the fire, some myths credit Prometheus by creating humanity with clay. This assignment was a great way to wrap up the Greek unit and transition into Norse mythology!

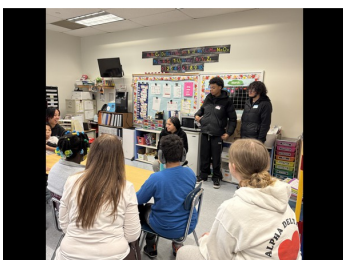
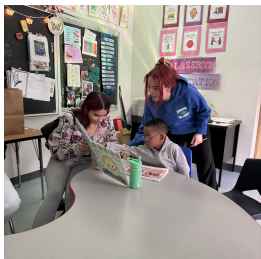


## Read Across America Week - HAN at Crossroads

During Read Across America Week, Ms. Silva, Miss Kelly, and Mr. Manny took a group of ten students on a meaningful field trip to Crossroads. The visit was centered around building connections, promoting literacy, and creating a positive shared experience for all students involved. Our students had the opportunity to read a story aloud, engaging the younger students and encouraging a love for reading in a supportive and welcoming environment. They also handed out cookies, which added a warm and friendly touch to the visit, helping to foster smiles and conversations among everyone.



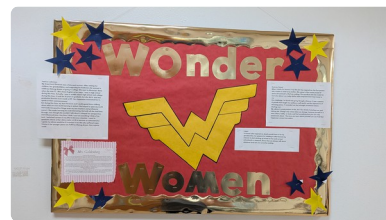
In addition to reading, the students participated in a collaborative art activity. Each student was given a slip of construction paper and asked to color and design it using different shapes and creativity. These individual pieces were later combined to form a long paper chain, symbolizing unity and teamwork. The completed chain is now displayed at HAN as a lasting memory of the visit, representing the connections made and the positive impact of the experience. Overall, the trip was a rewarding opportunity for our students to practice empathy, communication, and collaboration while contributing to a joyful and inclusive celebration of reading.



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## Celebrating Women

This month's theme is empowerment, and the Welcoming Committee decided to focus on Women Who Empowered Us for International Women's Month. Teachers were asked to write about a woman who inspired or mentored them and how she impacted their lives, a challenge they faced and how they overcame it, and one piece of advice they would give young women about confidence, leadership and chasing their goals.



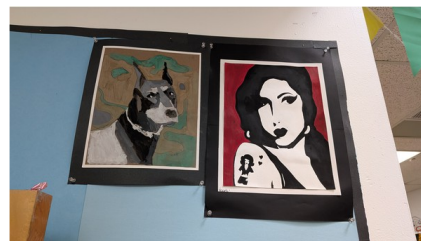
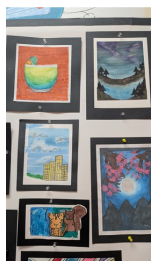
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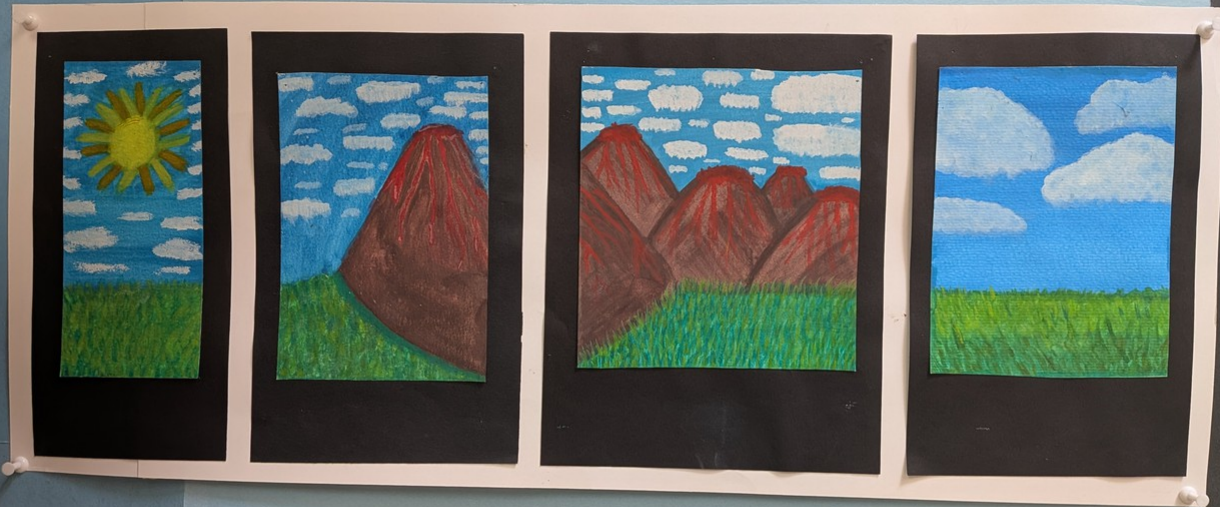
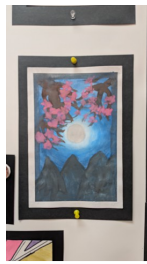
## St. Patrick's Day Parade in Union

HAN teachers Madeline Silva (middle) and Dominica Killeen (left) were at the St. Patrick's Day parade in Union on March 14 representing the UCESC.



## Art Gallery



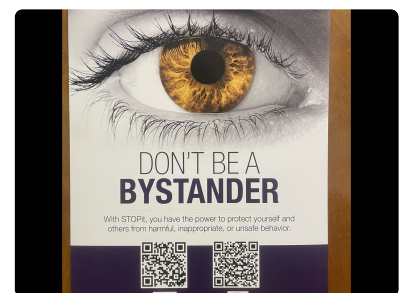


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## STOPit Solutions

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.



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## About HAN



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

is to provide a safe, supportive, and empowering school environment that fosters lifelong learning, mutual respect, creativity, and the joy of learning, with an effective, caring, innovative staff, in partnership with home and the community.

Mr. John Marquet, Principal

Mr. Thomas Van Cleef, Supervisor of Instruction

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

Phone Number: (908) 233-9366

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

## Visit Us On Instagram



### Mission Statement

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

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



**John Marquet**

John is using Smore to create beautiful newsletters



# LAMBERTS MILL ACADEMY

March Monthly Report 2026

"Where flowers bloom, so does hope."  
- Lady Bird Johnson

## Administrators' Message

Dear Staff, Parents, Guardians, Case Managers, and Stakeholders,

As we close the doors on March and look toward the blooming promise of spring, we are filled with immense pride reflecting on the growth and dedication our students have displayed. This month, our therapeutic groups focused on the theme of Empowerment—the process of becoming stronger and more confident, especially in controlling one's life and claiming one's rights. From the testing halls to the art galleries, our students didn't just participate; they led with heart.



March is often a demanding month academically, and I want to extend a huge congratulations to our 11th-grade students for successfully completing the NJGPA state testing. Their focus and stamina during these assessments were exemplary. On the creative front, our students shined at the Union County Teen Arts Festival, showcasing the unique perspectives and talents that make LMA such a vibrant place to learn.

Our commitment to service and collaboration was on full display during Read Across America. It was a joy to see LMA students traveling to Westlake School to read to younger peers, fostering a beautiful connection through the power of storytelling. We also took time to have some fun and build team spirit during our Top Golf field trip with the PE department—a day filled with high energy and great sportsmanship.

It was a landmark month for recognition within the Union County School Boards Association. We are incredibly proud of Kayla Santiago, our Union County Unsung Hero. Kayla's journey of resilience and quiet leadership serves as a testament to the "progress over perfection" mindset we strive for every day.

Additionally, we officially celebrated our Staff Members of the Year. Congratulations to Mrs. Miller (Teacher of the Year) and Mrs. Ma (Teacher Assistant of the Year). These individuals are the backbone of our academy, providing the stability and care our students need to thrive.

As we transition into April, let's carry this momentum of empowerment forward. Thank you to our families and case managers for your continued partnership—we truly are a "family" at Lamberts Mill, and we are better because of your collaboration.

Warmly,

Reed & John

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## Monthly Data

1. Enrollment - 49
  2. Acceptances - 1
  3. New Students - 3
  4. Intakes - 1
  5. Referrals - 8
  6. Disenrollments - 0
  7. Fire Drill - 3/2/2026
  8. Other Drill EM: Bomb Threat (Shelter-in-place) - 3/10/2025
- 

## Upcoming Events

### April 2026 Important Dates

April 2nd: Science Fair

April 3rd - 10th: Spring Break, School Closed

April 28th - 30th: NJSLA Testing for select students



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## Student of the Month - Sam L.

We are thrilled to announce that the Student of the Month for March Award goes to Sam! It has been an incredible month for Sam, who continues to set a high bar for excellence both in the

classroom and within our creative community. Sam is a fixture on the Honor Roll, demonstrating a consistent commitment to academic rigor. Whether it's mastering a difficult concept or turning in a standout assignment, Sam's can-do attitude is a testament to what happens when hard work meets curiosity.

Outside of the textbooks, Sam is a vibrant member of the Art Club. Sam's recent contributions have brought a fresh perspective to our studio sessions. Sam has worked hard to meet both academic and counseling goals. From improving academic abilities to leading collaborative projects, Sam has shown us that there is no limit to what can be achieved with focus and flair.



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## Staff Spotlight - Ms. Sharma

**About Me:** My name is Mrs. Sharma and I'm currently working as a Teacher Assistant at LMA. I hold a degree in Engineering, am passionate about teaching math, and love to interact with kids. I'm also the mother of two lovely kids.

I have multiple years of teaching experience in different forms and I constantly try to create a supportive, engaging, and inclusive learning environment for all of the students. My focus is not limited to academic excellence, but I always try to connect with students for overall success, whether it's through innovative lesson planning, mentoring students, or collaborating with colleagues. I firmly believe that every student is unique, and teaching approaches should be thoughtfully adapted to meet the individual needs of each student.



**Fun Facts :** I have traveled 8+ countries across Asia and Europe. I love camping with my family.



Spring is here! Lamberts Mill Academy transformed into a canvas of joy as we as the staff joined together to celebrate Holi, the annual "Festival of Colors" and "Festival of Love." This celebration marks a powerful moment of renewal and unity for our entire school community. I know that I can speak on behalf of the entire LMA school community and will appreciate these sentiments after the cold, snowy winter that we are experiencing to begin the 2026 school year.

### Ms. Sharma: The Heart of the Celebration

None of this would have been possible without the incredible vision and proactive nature of Lamberts Mill Academy teacher assistant, Ms. Sharma. Her simple gesture will result in a cultural milestone for our school community. As Mr. Leibfried and Mr. Lopreiato often articulates, it is events like this that remind us that when we celebrate our diverse backgrounds, we grow stronger as a team.

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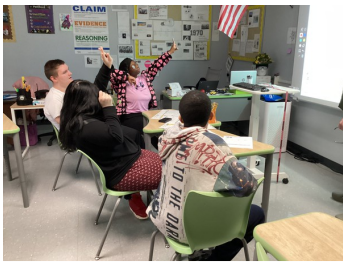
## Unsung Hero Award - Kayla



At the recent Union County Unsung Hero awards, Principal Reed Leibfried had the distinct honor of recognizing Kayla Santiago for her remarkable resilience and quiet grace. Joined by her grandparents, Mr. and Ms. Orglefsky—whose unwavering support has made them vital partners to the UCESC community—Kayla was celebrated for her leadership and her ability to find an expressive "inner voice" through her writing. While Kayla is a known perfectionist, Principal Leibfried reminded the audience that true beauty lies in the "human" aspect of our stories—the progress made through imperfection. Kayla embodies the very best of our school's spirit: the courage to speak, the heart to rise above obstacles, and the strength to keep moving forward. Congratulations, Kayla!

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## March at The Mill



**Students playing a review game in Science Class**



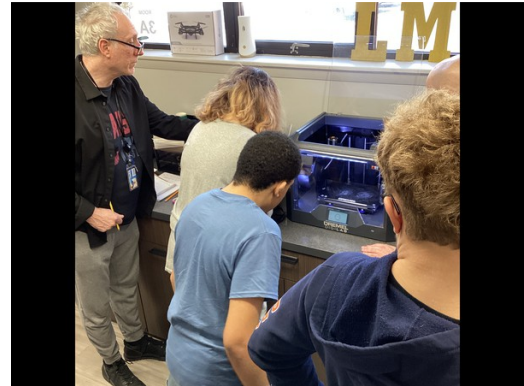
**WBL Opportunity: Post Graduate working at Maschio's Food Services**



**St. Patrick's Day Spirit Day**



**March Madness Viewing Party at The Mill**



**Learning how to use the 3D Printer**

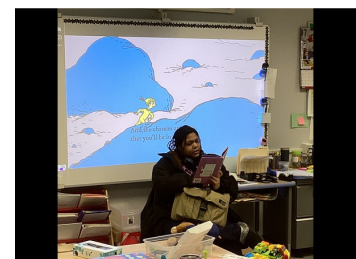
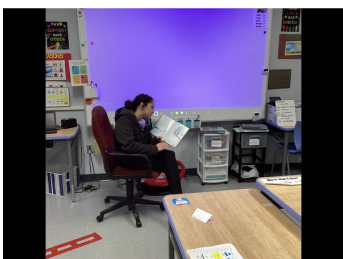
## Read Across America Day

Students from Lambert's Mill Academy paid a special visit to Westlake School for Read Across America Day. The LMA students took on the role of guest narrators, bringing the rhythmic, nonsensical world of Dr. Seuss to life.

This annual tradition serves as a powerful bridge between the programs:

- **Mentorship:** LMA students practiced leadership and public speaking by engaging with their younger peers at Westlake School.
- **Community Building:** It reinforced the bond between the different schools within the Union County Educational Services Commission.
- **Literacy:** The event highlighted that reading isn't just a solo academic task, but a shared social experience.

The energy in the classrooms was a testament to the fact that you're never too old—or too young—to enjoy a good rhyme and a bit of "wocket" in your pocket.



## Weekly Trips to the Sunshine Cafe



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## Creature Comfort Pet Therapy



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## Top Golf Field Trip

Students recently had the opportunity to participate in an exciting and memorable field trip to Topgolf in Edison, NJ. This state-of-the-art, high-tech driving range provided students with a unique, hands-on introduction to the game of golf in a fun and interactive environment.

During the visit, students learned the basics of golf while also experiencing a modern twist on the sport. Topgolf's game-based format allows players of all skill levels to participate and succeed. Using microchipped golf balls, students aimed for large, dartboard-like targets spread across the outfield. Points were awarded based on both accuracy and distance—the closer the ball landed to the center, or "bullseye," and the farther it traveled, the higher the score.

Throughout the trip, students demonstrated excellent sportsmanship, enthusiasm, and respect for the facility. They were outstanding representatives of our school and should be commended for their behavior. Overall, it was a fantastic experience that combined skill development, friendly competition, and plenty of fun.



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## Teen Arts Festival



Lamberts Mill Academy students attend the Union County Teen Arts Festival, held at the Cranford campus of UCNJ. Teen Arts is a great opportunity for students in Union County to submit various arts to display, have critiqued or to perform on site. Select LMA students submitted literary arts to be critiqued, as well as two students performed vocal solos at the Festival!

Both soloists shared the following about the Festival, preparing and what they learned.

Brynne shared about Teen Arts:

**How did you enjoy the art festival?**

*"I LOVED IT!!! I couldn't go last year because of personal reasons, but they held it at the same place as last year so at least I got to experience it!!!"*

**What did you perform, and why did you choose it?**

*"The song I performed was Cher's "If I Could Turn Back Time." I chose this song because I thought it was perfect for my range and also because I have an old soul and Cher played a big part in my life and is one of my biggest inspirations when it comes to music."*

**How did Ms. Schneider support you for your performance?**

*"Ms. Schneider was a big support when it came to how I performed. She taught me breathing techniques, vocal warm ups and even techniques to support my vocals and my overall performance. I want to thank her for supporting me and all she's done for me!"*

Sienna also shared about her experience:

**How did you enjoy the art festival?**

*"I loved it. It was very overstimulating. It was a lot but it was amazing."*

**What does your song mean to you?**

*"It is from my favorite game of all time so it had a special meaning to me."*

**What was your favorite part of the festival?**

*"I really enjoyed performing in it."*

**How did Ms. Schneider support you for your performance?**

*"She taught me this breathing technique to breathe through your stomach and not only did it help my musical performance it helped with coping skills for stress."*

**In the future do you see yourself doing art or music?**

*"Art definitely. I want to do digital art. I've always done it and I find it much easier than traditional. It's just something I always did."*

**Why is art important to you?**

*"It is a big part of my life actually. It is a coping skill. It's just always been there when no one else was."*



## Staff Professional Development





Ms. Berlowitz, Supervisor of Mental Health Services, and Dr. Lockett, Student Assistance Coordinator, presented at the 9th Annual New Jersey Women's Leadership Conference. They presented on the importance of women leaders using their voices to make connections and provide engagement while connecting back to the UCESC theme of the year, Paving Pathways.

## Staff Members of the Year



Congratulations to Teacher Assistant of the Year, Ms. Ma, and Teacher of the Year, Mrs. Miller!

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## Classroom Spotlights

### Physical Education & Health

During the month of March, students have been actively learning and participating in the fast-paced and increasingly popular game of pickleball. Often described as a combination of tennis, badminton, and table tennis, pickleball has quickly become one of the fastest-growing sports due to its accessibility and fun, competitive nature. Using paddles and a perforated wiffle-style ball, students work to strike the ball over the net, sustain rallies, and score points against their opponents.



Throughout the unit, students have focused on developing key skills such as proper serving technique, ball control, shot placement, and overall gameplay strategy. Emphasis has also been placed on communication, sportsmanship, and understanding the rules of play. It has been great to see students improve their confidence and ability as they engage in both singles and doubles matches while supporting and encouraging one another.

In Health, we have begun our First Aid/CPR/AED Unit, which focuses on preparing students with essential, real-world life-saving skills. Students have been learning how to recognize what constitutes an emergency and the appropriate steps to take when responding to one. We have

introduced proper CPR techniques, including hand placement, compression depth, and rhythm, and students are beginning to practice these skills in a controlled environment. Additionally, students have become proficient in using personal protective equipment, such as properly putting on and removing rubber gloves, and understanding the importance of safety for both the responder and the victim. We have also discussed the Good Samaritan Laws and how they protect individuals who provide assistance in emergency situations. As the unit continues, students will build upon these foundational skills and gain confidence in their ability to respond effectively in real-life scenarios.



### WIN - What I Need

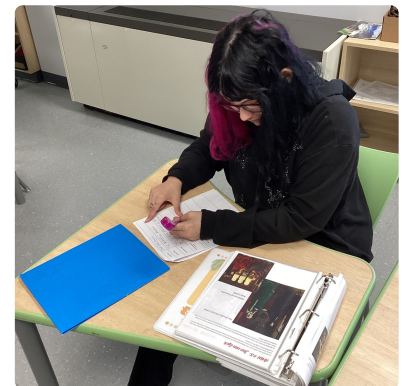
Since March is Women's History Month, students shared their favorite and most inspirational actresses, designers, poets, political figures, music artists, and athletes to decorate our classroom door. Students worked on an "Unsung Change-Maker" project highlighting women who have made significant contributions to the field of the arts and STEM, but received little recognition. Restorative "circles" started off with poems and songs from inspiring women (including an original work from a female student). We have started using "shout out" flowers (hoping that warm weather is on the horizon) and are placing them above classroom doors so that each room has its own flower box garden.

### Social Studies

It has been a busy and thought-provoking month in our Social Studies classrooms as students across all grade levels dive into the moments that reshaped our world.

- **Middle School** students took a trip back to the 1830s, exploring the fight for Texas Independence and the legendary siege of the Alamo during the Mexican-American War.
- **World History** students entered the Medieval Ages, beginning a deep dive into how the Black Plague fundamentally transformed European society and economy.
- **US I History** is tracing the roots of the Civil War, analyzing how the California Gold Rush disrupted the fragile balance between free and slave states.
- **US II History** concluded their World War II unit with a solemn and critical look at the Holocaust, discussing its causes and its lasting impact on modern human rights.

From the gold fields of California to the cathedrals of Medieval Europe, our students are gaining a deeper understanding of how the past informs our present!



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## Mastering the Test: A Family Guide to Standardized Exam Success

Standardized tests can often feel like a looming hurdle, but with the right preparation and mindset, they become a valuable tool for students to showcase their knowledge and potential. As your

student approaches these exams, our goal is to empower both them and your family with effective strategies for success.

### **Test Day: Strategic Execution**

On exam day, it's all about smart strategies and managing energy.

- **Eat a Healthy Breakfast:** Fuel the brain! Opt for complex carbohydrates and protein to sustain energy levels.
- **Arrive Early:** Rushing causes unnecessary stress.
- **Read Directions Carefully:** Test makers sometimes change instructions between sections. A quick read can prevent costly mistakes.
- **Utilize the "Two-Pass" System:**
  - **Pass One:** Answer all the easy and medium-difficulty questions first.
  - **Pass Two:** Go back and tackle the more challenging questions. Don't let one hard question consume too much time or energy.
- **Process of Elimination (POE):** For multiple-choice questions, eliminate obviously wrong answers first. Sometimes it's easier to find the incorrect options than to prove the correct one.
- **No Blank Left Behind:** If there's no penalty for incorrect answers, encourage your student to make an educated guess on every question, especially as time runs out.
- **Stay Calm:** If anxiety strikes, a few deep breaths can help reset focus. Remind your student that one section doesn't define the entire test.

### **After the Test: Reflect and Recharge**

The test is over – celebrate!

- **Relax and Recharge:** Encourage your student to relax and de-stress. They've worked hard!
- **Reflect (Later):** Once scores are released, take time to review the results. This can inform future study plans.

Standardized tests are just one piece of the puzzle in a student's academic journey. By fostering a supportive environment and equipping them with effective strategies, we can help them approach these exams with confidence and achieve their personal best.



## Clinical Corner

The UCESC theme for the month of March is Empowerment. Here are tips on how you can practice self-empowerment and empower those around you.

**Practice Assertive Boundaries**



Learn to say "no" to things that drain and "yes" to what nourishes you.

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**Practice Transparent Communication**



Share information openly so others have the context to act independently.

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**Challenge Limiting Beliefs**



Identify and flip negative self-talk. Instead of "I can't do this," try "I can learn how to do this."

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**Provide Positive Reinforcement**



Publicly recognize achievements and efforts.

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**Set SMART Goals**

Define goals that are **Specific** | **Measurable**, **Achievable** | **Relevant**, and **Time-bound**.

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**S:** Specific | **M:** Measurable | **A:** Achievable | **R:** Relevant | **T:** Time-bound

## Group Therapy



Group therapy provides students with a structured, supportive space to build self-awareness, emotional regulation, and interpersonal skills. Through guided discussions, collaborative activities, and reflective exercises, students learn to share their experiences, listen actively, and develop empathy for others. Students have focused on identifying great women in their life and discussing their strengths. Sessions often incorporate role-playing, mindfulness practices, and problem-solving tasks that help students apply coping strategies in real-life situations. The

group format fosters a sense of belonging and reduces feelings of isolation, while also encouraging accountability and positive peer support. Overall, group therapy has been a crucial component of the therapeutic environment, helping students grow both individually and as members of the LMA community.

## Upcoming Community Events



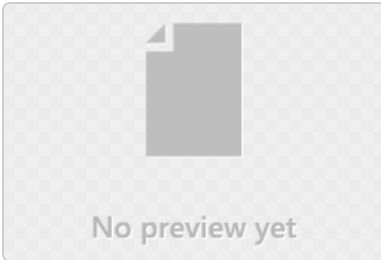
## NJ BALLET SLEEPING BEAUTY SENSORY FRIENDLY THEATER

NJ Ballet's Sleeping Beauty Sensory Friendly Theater Performance is adapted for those with autism & other sensory sensitivities.

Learn More

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

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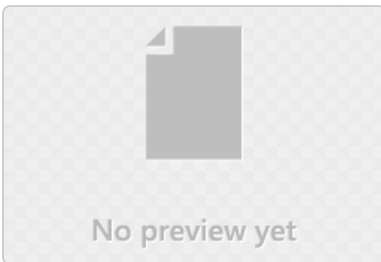


## 2026 IFSS-NAMI Spring Meditation Event - NAMI New Jersey

Join us for a gentle virtual guided meditation designed to help you quiet the mind, release stress, and reconnect with yourself. No experience needed. Come as

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

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## Raising Flags 2026 – Jersey City

April 2nd | 11:30am | Jersey City Free event! Please join Whole Spectrum Autism and Jersey City as we raise the Autism Acceptance flag for April which is Autism Acceptance Month. Please show your support for this amazing cause. RSVP to Attend | Any questions, EMAIL [office@wholespectrumautism.org](mailto:office@wholespectrumautism.org)

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

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## Annual Easter Egg Hunt! - Liberty Hall Museum

Children will explore the grounds of Liberty Hall, searching for plastic eggs filled with holiday treats hidden throughout the landscape!

[libertyhall.kean.edu](https://libertyhall.kean.edu)

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## Newark, NJ Cherry Blossom Festival | Bloomfest Dates & Events

Experience Newark's cherry blossom festival with Bloomfest shows, cultural demos, family activities, and the iconic cherry blossom 10K run.

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



### wellness fair

Buy tickets to at NJPAC. Located in Newark, NJPAC is New Jersey's leading performing arts center.

🔗 [njpac.org](http://njpac.org)



### Stronger Together: A Health & Wellness Series - Jersey City Free Public Library

EDUCATE. EMPOWER. ADVOCATE. Disclaimer: The information on this platform is for general informational and educational purposes only and does not constitute professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified health provider with any questions you may have regarding a medical condition. Your use of this content is at ... Continued

🔗 [jclibrary.org](http://jclibrary.org)

## Community Resources




# UNION COUNTY Meals To You

BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE  
**UNION COUNTY**  
BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS  
Department of Human Services  
*Division on Aging*

[ucnj.org/aging](http://ucnj.org/aging)       

<https://ucnj.org/dhs/home-delivered-meals/>




**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](http://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/>



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

# School in the Community

1. Post Graduate Students working at the Barnes & Noble, Chili's, and Maschio's Food Service.
  2. Students earning a trip to the Westlake School Cafe
  3. Field Trip to Top Golf and the Teen Arts Festival
- 

## About Us

### Contact Information:

*Phone:* (908)-233-7581

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

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

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

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



**LMA Smore**

LMA is using Smore to create beautiful newsletters



# MARCH

*Newsletter 25-26*



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March 2026 Monthly Report Enrollment Data  
Enrollment-98 (as of 3/25/26).  
New Students-3.  
Disenrollments-1. (GED).  
Emergency Drill-3/10/26, Bomb Threat.  
Fire Drill-3/2/26.

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## A Message From Our Principal: Dr. Balsamello













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March was a vibrant month at Hillcrest Academy South Campus (HAS), filled with engaging lessons, state testing, and the first signs of spring. Our students stayed active and motivated through several highlights, including incorporating Women's History Month into our activities, community trips to the Westlake Cafe, School Spirit theme days, and our own version of March Madness. Our staff



continues to go above and beyond. This month, we recognized several team members for "blazing their path" and empowering those around them. We are also thrilled to announce our Staff of the Year recipients—congratulations to these dedicated educators! Additionally, the Unsung Hero gala was a truly special evening as we honored another one of our outstanding seniors. Please enjoy this edition of our newsletter and see all the great things our students are accomplishing. Be well.

## Important Dates

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 Start of Women's History Month 	2	3	4	5 Denim for Dementia 	6 PD for Faculty/Staff Teacher of the Year Announcement Support Staff of the Year Announcement	7
8 Daylight Savings 	9 Women in Leadership Conference Day 1 	10 Women in Leadership Conference Day 2 	11 Unsung Hero Awards Night 	12	13 Pi Day celebration 	14 Pi Day
15	16	17 NJGPA testing St Patrick's Day 	18 NJGPA testing 	19 NJGPA testing 	20 • First Day of Spring • Ice Cream Social • Crazy Socks Day • Eid al-Fitr 	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29 Palm Sunday 	30	31				

## Student of the Month!

### Congratulations Sebastian!

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



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# Faculty/Staff "Getting to Know You"!

## Ms. Santiago's Favorites:

Favorite movie: The Princess Bride

Favorite food: Banh Mi

Favorite color: Green

Favorite book: The Alchemist

Favorite travel spot: Universal Studios

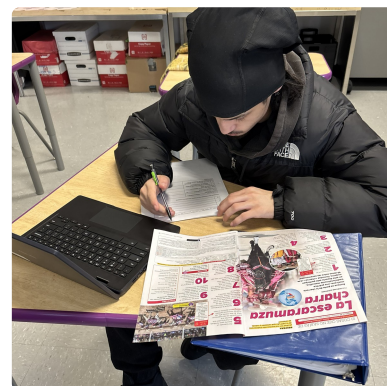


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# Teacher's Corner: Spanish and Phys Ed!

## Sra Flores: Español

This month students in Spanish class have been gaining experience in researching Women's History Month" celebrating Self-Awareness of Hispanic Women, working on finding hispanic descendants (Latinas) who made big contributions in history, culture and society in the United States and around the world, like Celia Cruz, Sonia Sotomayor, Evita Peron and others along with using different Spanish vocabulary to write stories about their findings. Therefore, it is a month that highlights the cultural diversity of our Spanish community.



In addition, students are working on the unit "*La Escuela y las Tradiciones*" in Spanish class. Students distinguished the similarities and differences between the patterns of celebrations of the target culture related to activities, holidays, and celebrations of the local culture in different Spanish countries. This unit fits precisely in the social studies component of high school standards, where students are exposed to different experiences, traditions, and lifestyles of other people around the world. In the area of social emotional learning, students have been exploring the reading and writing process working on sentence structure about different Spanish countries in Spanish, using the Scholastic "El Sol" magazines, reading "*La Escaramusa Charra*". Students are able to demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between practices of the culture studied. For instance, students have multiple opportunities to compare and contrast "*La Escaramusa Charra*" from Mexico and The United States, which is one of the oldest traditions celebrated in Canada, Mexico and the United States, dating back since the rule of the Aztec Empire and "*Los deportes*". Then, as an assessment students will write and illustrate their own version of the "*Las Escaramusas*".

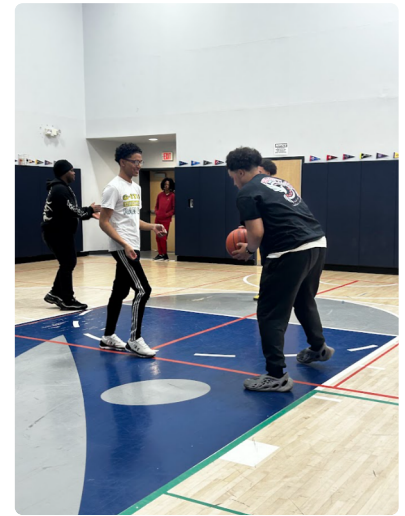
Finally, the students will take an assessment about the "School and Traditions" unit to measure what students know and what they accomplish at the end of the unit to enhance their learning. Students are learning how to practice vocabulary, listening, reading and writing along with all the

different pronunciations associated with them. While students are practicing vocabulary, having them work on reading and writing has shown them how creative they can be on their stories.



## Mr Barone: Phys Ed & Health

Students have been actively engaged in learning about the importance of nutrition and how it impacts their overall health and performance. In **Health** class, we explored balanced diets, reading food labels, and making informed choices to fuel both body and mind. In **Physical Education**, students have been building their skills through basketball units, focusing on teamwork, game strategy, and sportsmanship, while also participating in fitness activities designed to improve strength, endurance, and flexibility. Together, these experiences are helping students develop lifelong healthy habits and a deeper understanding of how physical activity and proper nutrition work hand in hand.



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# "Paving Paths" Teacher Recognitions

March - Blazing Your Own Path





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

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

### **What choices can you make this year that will empower you to take ownership of your own path?**

- Choices I can make this year that'll empower me to take the ownership of my own path is just stay focused and remain humble. Meaning to continue to push until graduation. After graduation, I plan on getting my car and license, go to school/college, work, and just stay locked in grind mode and mindset all year around. -JP
- I'll have to stay disciplined and focused, leave alone all the distractions, and really be dedicated to what I want to do because nobody else will do it for me. This is what it will cost if I want to be where I need to be in life. Having a lot of courage and confidence will also be useful because that'll make me stronger mentally to get there. Motivation is a good thing to have but it runs out eventually, but discipline will stay forever if really dedicated. I would need to do what I have to regardless of how others feel cause people will praise you once they see it's working. -CT
- A choice I can make this year that will empower me to take ownership of my own path is to be a leader and not a follower of my own path and journey. I can empower myself to take ownership of my own path and to believe in myself throughout my path to success. I can have the courage to get through the tough times that will come along as I go through this path and journey ahead. Also another choice I can also work with others and to take when offered but to be true to who I am and to always be myself no matter what the situation is or what the circumstances are. -KA

### **Think of a time you trusted yourself to make a decision. How did it help you feel stronger or more confident?**

- Trusting myself to make that call was a turning point. It wasn't just about the result; it was about the fact that I chose it. That independence gave me a massive boost in confidence. I realized I don't need a green light from the world to move forward—I just need to trust my own judgment. Now, I feel stronger because I know I'm the one in the driver's seat. -MM
- The time I trusted to make a big change for myself, I had to leave those who was holding me back. When I did it helped me to be the person who I am today. In order to break through those

walls, you need to be able to trust yourself and belief that you can move pass the fears holding you back in order to make your goals come true. -EC

- When I think about a time I trusted myself, it was the first decision I had to make by myself. It felt good because it meant I was able to think and make future choices for myself. That also meant that I'm mature enough to not need anyone to "think for me"; I get to make decisions on my own. That is what makes me feel confident, independent and strong. -AP

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## 2026 HAS' Unsung Hero!

When the call for Unsung Hero Award nominations reached the main office, the response from the principal, counselors, and staff was immediate and unanimous: Kyon was the clear choice. Since joining HAS in 2023 from one of Elizabeth's academies, Kyon has undergone a profound transformation, turning early struggles with attendance and academics into a story of remarkable resilience.

Though he faced significant personal obstacles and academic hurdles upon arrival, he refused to give up, instead choosing to persevere through every bit of adversity. Today, Kyon stands as a pillar of the school community, recognized not just for his dramatic improvement, but for the quiet determination and positive influence he offers those around him. As we celebrate his growth and character with a well-deserved round of applause, we look forward to the many accomplishments his bright future surely holds.



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## Teacher of the Year

In a remarkable tribute to her expansive impact on the school community, HAS nurse Mrs Rubin was nominated and voted as the 2025-26 Teacher of the Year! This prestigious honor reflects the staff's deep appreciation for the way she turns her office into a space for vital health education, teaching resilience, self-care, and wellness to every student who walks through her door. By casting their votes for her, the HAS community recognized that Mrs Rubin's "curriculum" of compassion and medical expertise is just as essential to student success as any traditional subject. This award celebrates her not only as a healthcare provider but as a dedicated mentor whose daily lessons in empathy and health have left an indelible mark on the entire school.



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## Staff of the Year

In a testament to his vital role within the school community, Safety and Security Monitor Mr DiOrio was officially named the Non-Instructional Support Staff of the Year for HAS. The recognition

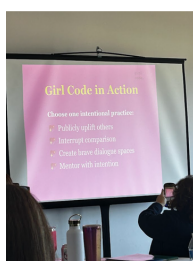
began with nominations from colleagues who highlighted his unwavering commitment to students well-being and his ability to maintain a secure, welcoming environment with a calm and professional demeanor. When the final votes were cast, the result was a clear reflection of the deep respect Mr DiOrio has earned across the hallways. He is seen not just as a monitor, but as a trusted mentor and a reliable presence who goes above and beyond his daily duties. By honoring Mr DiOrio with this award, HAS celebrated the essential "behind-the-scenes" work that keeps the school running smoothly and ensures that every student and teacher feels protected and supported.



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## Women in Leadership Conference

In honor of Women's History Month, Mrs Fern and Mr Van Cleef attended the 9th Annual NJASA/NJPSAFEA Women's Leadership Conference, an event centered on the powerful theme of "Leading with Vision, Voice, and Value." Their participation in this inspiring two-day summit allowed them to engage in deep learning and meaningful connection, celebrating the progress of female leaders while developing the tools to further equity in education. By focusing on how to amplify diverse voices and lead with clear purpose, Mrs Fern and Mr Van Cleef honored the legacy of the women who came before them while actively investing in the next generation of leadership. The conference served as a perfect tribute to the month's mission, providing an energizing space to reflect on the vital contributions of women and the continued importance of visionary leadership in every community.

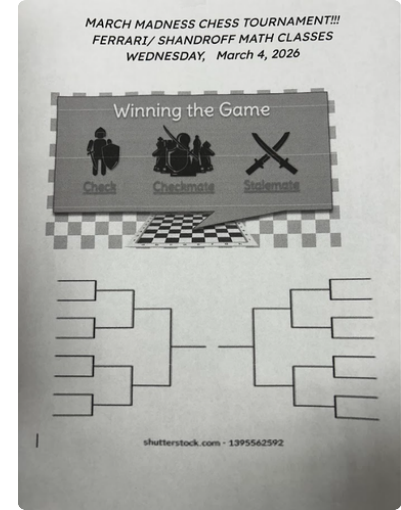


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## MARCH MADNESS!

Inspiration from basketball's March Madness, Mrs. Ferrari's math classes began participating in the annual single elimination Chess Tournament. With the help of Mr Shandroff, students began to understand the fundamentals of chess starting from the pieces to the moves. This will then provide the students with a foundation to build on the future lesson to be learned, the decay model. The decay model and an elimination bracket will help them visualize the decay model  $c(0.5)^r$ . The  $c$  in the formula represents the number of contenders,  $0.5$  represents the rate of elimination

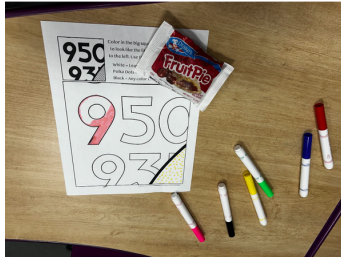
and the  $r$  is the number of rounds. In addition, there is a great deal of mathematics when playing the game of Chess. Ricken wrote an article titled, "Chess and Mathematics." The article says that "Chess is a game based on mathematical concepts such as logic, probability, calculations, and strategic thinking. Players must perform complex calculations to predict possible moves and their consequences." In observing the students play the game it is evident that this description is accurate. Also, the students enthusiasm and desire to play a board game make the tournament fun! Stay tuned to find out who is the winner!



## Pi Day!

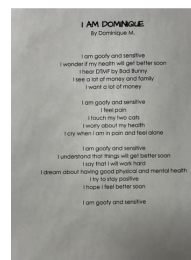
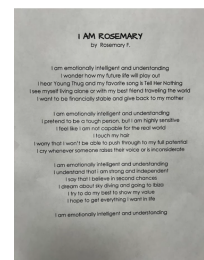
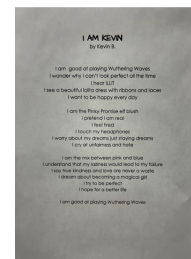
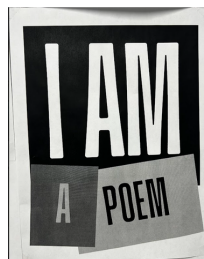
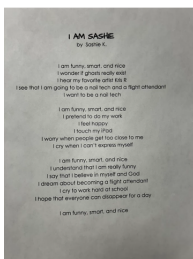
In a vibrant fusion of geometry and gastronomy, Mrs Ferrari's and Mrs Fern's math students came together to celebrate **Pi Day** (\$3.14\$) with equal parts creativity and appetite. The classrooms were transformed into collaborative art studios as students worked in teams to color individual sections of a massive Pi poster, each segment meticulously coded to represent different digits of the infinite number. As the colorful mosaic began to take shape on the wall, the focus shifted from the theoretical to the delicious, with students enjoying a variety of pies brought in for the occasion. Whether they were calculating circumferences or simply debating the merits of apple

versus cherry, the event succeeded in making complex constants feel tangible, sweet, and—above all—communal.



## I am...

Ms V's Creative Writing class, in a creative burst of self-expression, took part in a unique literary exercise where they bridged the gap between the writer and the written word. By beginning their compositions with the bold declaration, "I am...". Students shifted their perspective from mere observers of art to art itself. This prompt encouraged them to view their own experiences, flaws, and dreams as rhythmic verses and vivid metaphors, transforming their personal identities into living stanzas. As they filled the page, the classroom became a gallery of human experience, proving that every student carries a unique internal cadence and a story worth "reading" aloud.



# Strawberry DNA

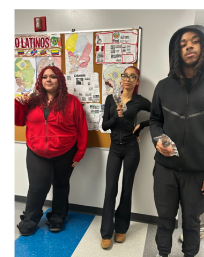
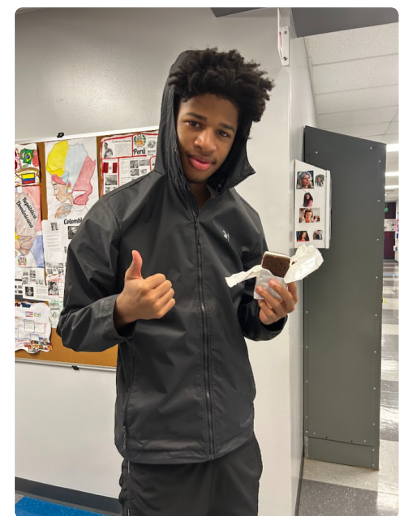
In Mrs Arora's biology class, the typical scent of markers and worksheets was replaced by the sweet aroma of ripe fruit as students tackled the hands-on challenge of extracting DNA from strawberries. Working in groups, they meticulously mashed the berries, adding a soapy extraction buffer to break down the cellular walls and release the genetic material inside. The real magic happened during the final step: as chilled isopropyl alcohol was slowly layered over the filtered strawberry juice, thin, white, cloudy strands of DNA began to precipitate and float to the surface. Spooling the translucent fibers onto wooden toothpicks, the students were able to see the physical building blocks of life firsthand, turning an abstract concept from their textbooks into a tangible, "strawberry-scented" reality.



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# Spring and Ice Cream

As the first day of spring arrived, HAS buzzed with a renewed energy, punctuated by a sweet celebration to mark the change in seasons. Students gathered to enjoy a variety of ice cream treats, which they had carefully selected earlier in the week through a school-wide Google Form. This digital "pre-order" ensured that everyone from students to staff received their favorite flavors, turning 8th period into a coordinated and festive event. Laughter filled the air as peers traded stories over melting cones and ice pops, embracing the warmer weather and the sense of community that comes with a well-deserved seasonal break on the horizon.



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# Students Outside of School

## I scream, You scream, We all scream for Ice Cream!

Working at a local ice cream and pastry shop, Herlin has embraced a versatile role where she thrives by doing "a little bit of everything" to keep operations running smoothly. She initially sought out the position to foster her own independence, and since then, she has become an integral part of a supportive team that she credits with helping her grow as a person. Herlin finds immense joy in the community aspect of her work, noting that seeing the smiles on customers' faces is a highlight of her day. For her, the job is more than just a list of tasks; it is an entertaining and fulfilling experience that keeps her engaged while allowing her to give back to those around her.



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# Blooper Pic of the Month



## About Us

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

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

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

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

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

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

Visit us on Instagram



**HAS Smore**

HAS is using Smore to create beautiful newsletters



# Westlake March Monthly Report

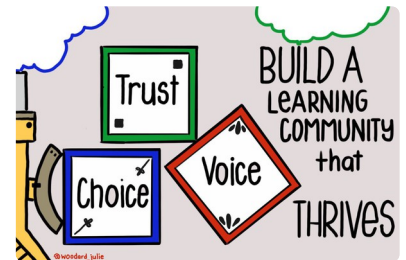


## Message from the Administrators

### WESTLAKE BLAZING OUR OWN PATH

Westlake School builds a thriving learning community by intentionally creating spaces where students feel safe, respected, and empowered to be themselves. Trust is at the foundation of every interaction, as staff cultivate strong, consistent relationships that help students feel secure in taking risks and engaging in

learning. Students are given meaningful opportunities to make choices throughout their day, fostering independence and a sense of ownership over their growth. Just as importantly, their voices are actively encouraged and valued—whether through communication systems, classroom discussions, or decision-making opportunities—ensuring that every student has a way to express their thoughts, preferences, and needs. Through this commitment, Westlake nurtures confident learners who know they belong and understand that their voices matter.



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



Westlake School Celebrates World Down Syndrome

Day!



Westlake proudly celebrated World Down Syndrome Day by embracing inclusion, kindness, and awareness, highlighted by student G.R.'s thoughtful gesture of bringing in bookmarks, pens, bracelets, and keychains to share with his classmates. Students with Down syndrome bring unique strengths, perspectives, and joy to their school communities, reminding us of the importance of acceptance and belonging. Westlake supported this meaningful day by fostering a culture of empathy and celebration, ensuring every student felt valued and included while recognizing the contributions and individuality of students with Down syndrome.



## Westlake Information

- Current Enrollment: 57
- Fire Drill: 3/2/26
- Emergency Management Drill: Bomb Threat 3/10/26
- Acceptances: 0
- Referrals: 1

Union County Educational Services Commission

**September '25**

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

**October '25**

Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
		1	2	3	4	
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

**November '25**

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

**December '25**

Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

**January '26**

Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
			1	2	3	
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

2025-2026



Building Partnerships for Tomorrow

District Calendar

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

**February '26**

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

**March '26**

Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

**April '26**

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

**May '26**

Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						

**June '26**

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

Total Days for Students: 180\*\*

Total Days for Staff: 184\*\*

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

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

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

Emergency Closing Information

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

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

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



# March Spotlight!

## Student of the Month!



## *Student of the Month*



A.G. shines as our Student of the Month, bringing a warm, friendly energy that empowers everyone she meets to be their truest selves. Much like her favorite anthem, "Let It Go," she approaches every challenge with a fearless spirit and the confidence to lead with her heart.

## Principal Award Winner!



## *Principal Award Winner*



L. P. earns this month's Principal's Award for her work ethic and the vibrant energy she brings to Westlake. Whether she's mastering a tough task or leading the charge on theme days with her creative costumes, she proves that working hard and having fun go hand-in-hand.

## Staff Shout Out!



## *Staff Shout Outs Pins!*



As we head into our second month of shout-outs, it's the perfect time to celebrate the collective hustle and heart that every one brings to this building. From the hallways to the classrooms, the staff shout board highlights the incredible work everyone is doing and ensures the whole team knows just how much they are truly appreciated.

## Sunshine Cafe Employee of the Month!

# SUNSHINE CAFE EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH



The Sunshine Cafe Employee of the Month for March is... Soraya! We chose her because she has shown a lot of improvement and is a hard worker. She always tries her best and goes above and beyond. We are very lucky to have her in the cafe!



Sunshine Cafe!



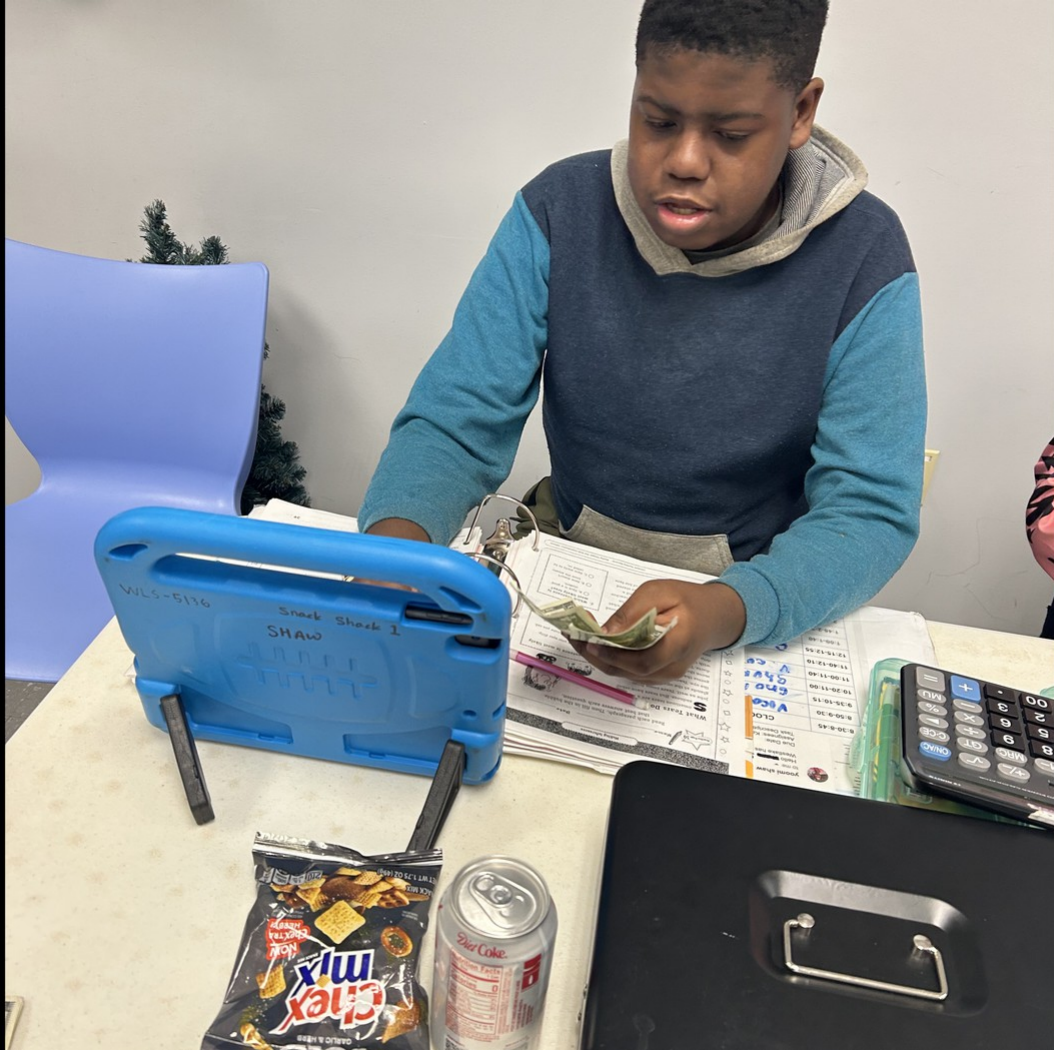
**After a full month of "rigorous" testing and recipe-tweaking, our perfected Brookie is finally making its grand debut on the menu this month! We're also keeping the festive vibes alive with our St. Patrick's Day refresher, the perfect lucky charm to help you power through the day!**



**Point of Service System at the Snack Shack!**

Our students are officially leveling up their professional skills as they master the Point of Service (POS) system at the Snack Shack. By navigating the same digital interfaces used in modern restaurants, they are gaining high-stakes, real-world experience right here at Westlake. From accurately keying in orders to clearly communicating totals, they are learning all about professional customer interaction. The real magic happens at the cash drawer, where students practice the essential math of calculating and making change in real-time. This hands-on training transforms a simple snack break into a powerful lab for financial literacy and career readiness. It's truly inspiring to watch them step up, take charge, and run the shop like seasoned pros.





# Work Based Learning!



Our Work-Based Learning program is giving students incredible opportunities to grow through diverse, hands-on roles within our community. Staff Pizza Friday is a weekly favorite where students manage the whole process with help from the Teacher Assistant, from taking staff orders and making change to picking up fresh pies from Tony's Pizza Delight in Union. At the Clark Library, students are behind the scenes unboxing new materials, maintaining organization on the shelves, and mastering the essential task of breaking down boxes. Meanwhile, at Complete Care nursing home, our students focus on the power of connection by visiting with patients and sharing creative coloring sessions to brighten their day. Each of these sites provides a unique environment for building professional social skills, physical stamina, and attention to detail. Collectively, these experiences ensure our students are not just learning about the world, but actively participating in and contributing to it.







Westlake Parent Organization!

**WESTLAKE SCHOOL PTO**

# UPCOMING EVENTS

**MARK YOUR CALENDARS!**

**JOIN US FOR FUN & FUNDRAISING!**

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 **February 20** - Panera Fundraiser Night

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 **February 27** - Family Bingo Night

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 **March 22** - Bowling Event

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 **April (Date TBD)** - Clothes Drive

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 **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!**

A massive thank you to our incredible Parent Teacher Organization for hosting a fantastic bingo night and an afternoon of bowling that brought our entire community together. These events provided the perfect setting for staff, families, and students to connect, laugh, and build memories outside the classroom walls.





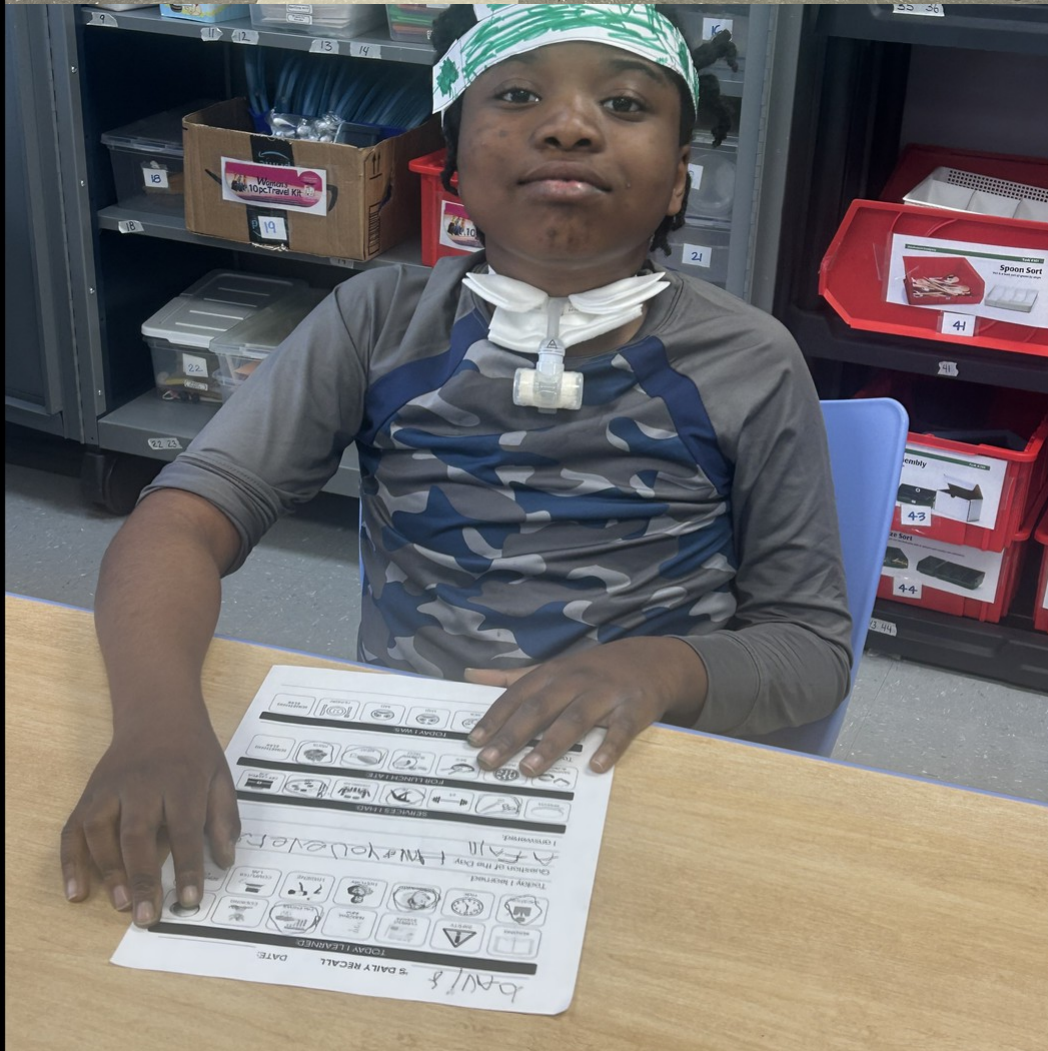
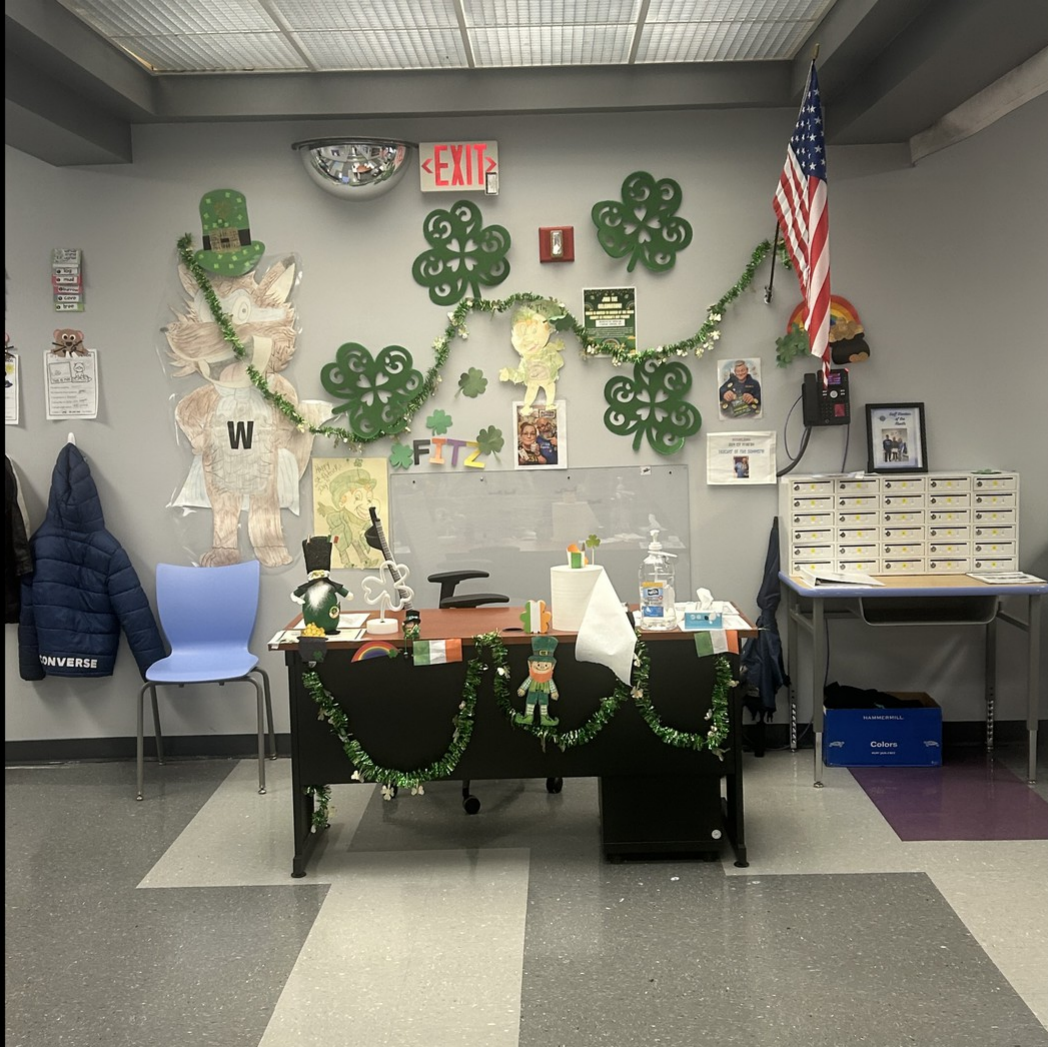






St. Patrick's Day!







February Tips from the Westlake 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. Stephanie's Class



Our classroom has been busy with many engaging learning opportunities. Students have been actively using our indoor greenhouse to grow plants, taking responsibility for planting and watering them each day. This hands-on experience has helped them build independence while learning about plant care. We have also begun a new vocational task of making soap, which students are excited to explore as they practice following steps and working with materials. In addition, students have been enjoying several opportunities in the community. This month we practiced community-based instruction at ShopRite, went to the movies and bowling, and had a wonderful trip to Color Me Mine at the Menlo Mall. Students loved choosing their ceramics and selecting colors to paint their pieces, and they are eagerly looking forward to picking up their fired pottery soon. We have introduced ice cream pop-up shops and plan to sell herbs grown in our garden to staff, giving students another meaningful opportunity to practice vocational and social skills.



# Nurse Veronica!



Spring is the season for health screenings performed by Nurse Veronica at Westlake School. It is important to ensure students' height, weight, blood pressure, vision/hearing are monitored for maintaining health and identifying any issues requiring further evaluation by their physicians. Many students are eager to learn if they have grown taller and are very cooperative when getting measured and having vital signs checked like their blood pressure. Screening for abnormal vital signs, vision or hearing results also serve as tools to help the school nurse maintain a healthy student community and serve to identify issues of concern early by communicating with parents/guardians and following up periodically. All throughout the year it is also monitored per requests of teachers and parents who express concerns that interfere with their ability to learn in the classroom like vision and hearing.

Here's to spring and a healthy rest of the school year!



Speech with Ms. Amanda!



March was a busy and exciting month in the Speech Therapy Department! With the arrival of Spring, students enjoyed a nature walk where they searched for seasonal items such as twigs and flowers which gave them opportunities to practice descriptive language, vocabulary, and following directions. We also celebrated St. Patrick's Day with fun activities. Students answered riddles that encouraged inference skills. They also had many opportunities to interact with their peers while working on turn-taking, and answering WH-questions. In addition, students participated in speech activities for March Madness, International Women's Day, and Read Across America Day, incorporating reading, storytelling, and discussion into our sessions. Throughout all of these engaging experiences, we continued to target important goals such as improving articulation, expanding expressive and receptive language, strengthening social communication skills, and building confidence in conversations. It's been wonderful to see so much growth while having fun along the way!



Ms. Grace's Art Class!

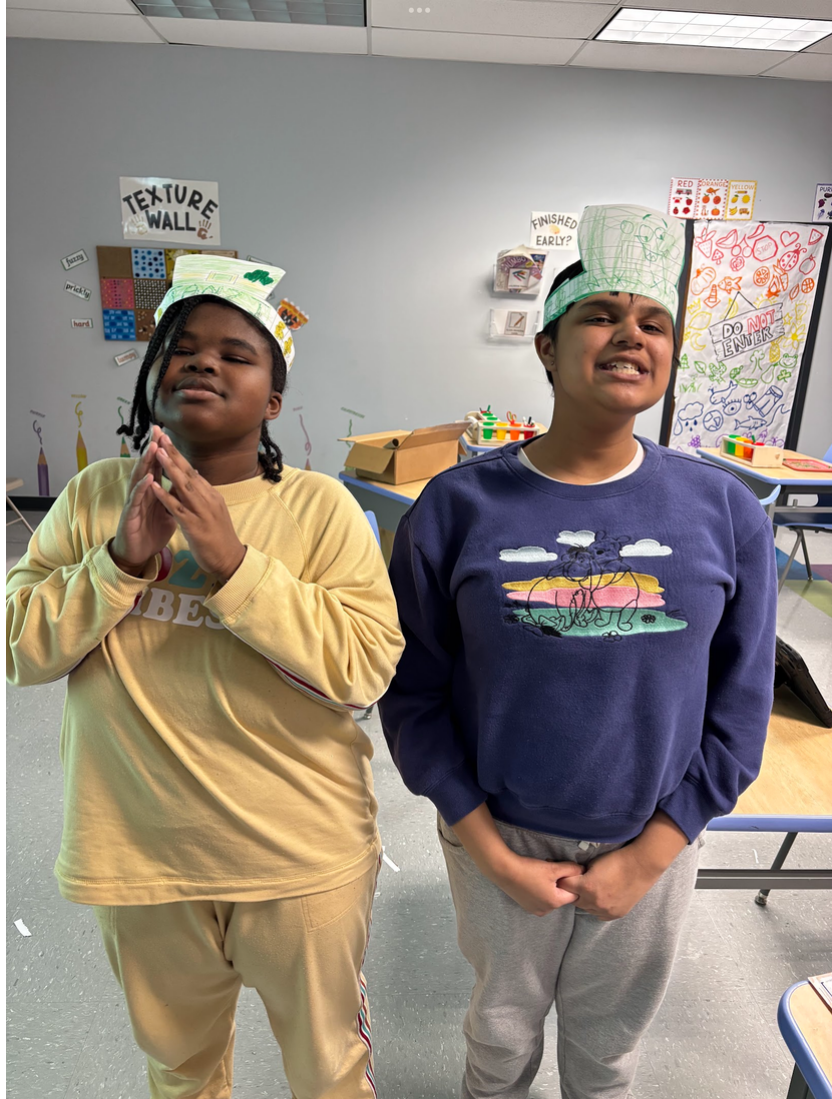


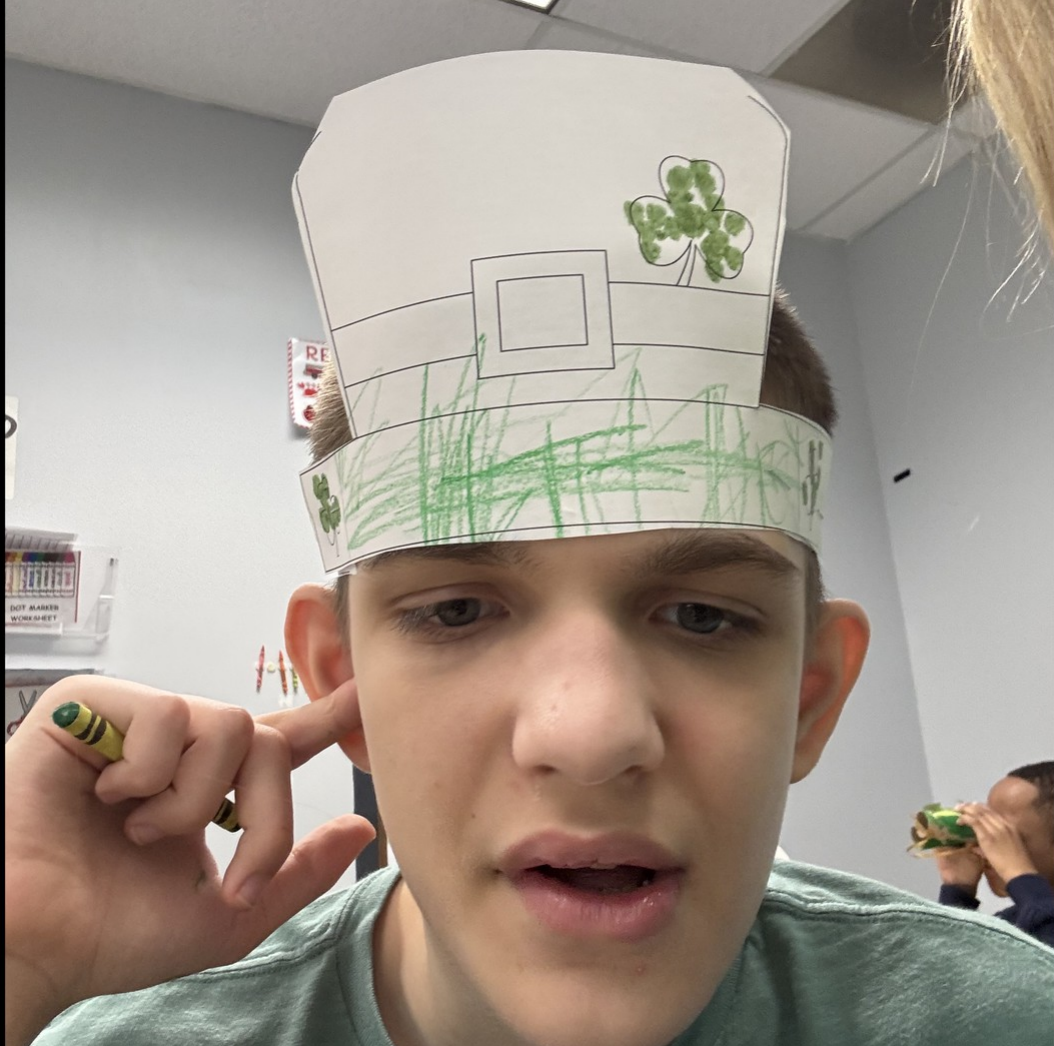
Last month our school spent time celebrating Black History Month and Valentine's Day through art and creativity. As we moved into March, we shifted gears and welcomed a little St. Patrick's Day fun! 🍀

This month's theme is Empowerment. Our students created vision boards to express their individual goals, dreams, and voices. It was such a special way for everyone to reflect on what matters most to them and what they hope for in the future. 🌟🌟

We also had some fun getting creative with leprechaun traps for St. Patrick's Day! The students showed amazing imagination, problem-solving, and teamwork while designing their traps. Take a look at some of our vision boards and leprechaun trap creations — we're so proud of the creativity and confidence shining through their artwork! 🍀🍀









## Countdown to March Madness!



Our beloved school tradition reaches a new level of excitement this March 31st, as we expand the game to include four teams. These dedicated athletes and staff have been hitting the court since

Christmas break, honing their skills and teamwork for this very moment. Adding to the energy, our cheerleading squad has been tirelessly practicing cheers and dance routines to keep the crowd's spirit high. We warmly invite all families to come out, fill the stands, and cheer on our hardworking students in this high-energy community celebration!









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## Cooking with Ms. Shaw!



Our students rolled up their sleeves to master the art of healthy snacking by preparing crispy roasted chickpeas from scratch. They practiced essential kitchen safety and motor skills by using

hand-held can openers, rinsing and thoroughly drying the beans before seasoning them for the oven. To round out the lesson, the class also blended their own creamy hummus and carefully peeled fresh carrots for a perfectly balanced, crunchy pairing.







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](http://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](mailto:opdsn@ucnj.org)

visit our website [www.ucnj.org/opdsn](http://www.ucnj.org/opdsn)

Or scan the QR Code!



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...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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Imel: [opdsn@ucnj.org](mailto:opdsn@ucnj.org)

vizite sit entènèt nou an: [www.ucnj.org/opdsn](http://www.ucnj.org/opdsn)

Oswa eskane kòd QR la!



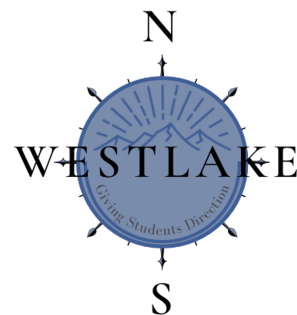
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## Contact Us!

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

Location: [1571 Lamberts Mill Rd, Westfield, NJ, USA](https://www.google.com/maps/place/1571+Lamberts+Mill+Rd,+Westfield,+NJ,+USA)

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



## INSTAGRAM!

Visit us!



Robert Peneno

