
SPECIAL SERVICES MONTHLY

908.436.5200



DIVISION OF SPECIAL SERVICES



EPSNJ.ORG

April is



AUTISM ACCEPTANCE MONTH

Autism Acceptance Month signifies a meaningful move from awareness toward a deeper commitment to understanding, inclusion, and respect for lived experiences. It encourages school communities to recognize autism as a natural aspect of human neurodiversity. From this perspective, autistic students are appreciated for their strengths, supported in their individual needs, and regarded as integral members of the school community.

This approach also emphasizes the importance of the environment in shaping student experiences and reminds us that systemic barriers can create challenges. Thoughtful modifications and supports can enhance access and participation for all learners encompasses classrooms and school communities that foster a sense of belonging, flexibility, and respect. It also involves ensuring that autistic voices are acknowledged and valued, while engaging peers, staff, and families in building inclusive environments where all students can succeed. Autism Acceptance Month provides an opportunity to reaffirm the Elizabeth Public School District's dedication to equity, inclusion, and the success of every student.

KNOW YOUR IEP



Sensory Supports

During Autism Acceptance Month, it is an important opportunity to recognize that each student perceives and interacts with the world uniquely. For some students, sensory supports play a crucial role in accessing the learning environment. These may include visual schedules, noise-reducing headphones, flexible seating options, movement breaks, calming corners, sensory tools, or other individualized strategies. When included in a student's IEP, these supports are integral components of their educational plan, designed to help students stay regulated, engaged, and prepared to learn. Autism acceptance emphasizes that students have diverse learning, communication, and response styles, and understanding sensory needs is a key aspect of fostering supportive and inclusive educational settings.

Examples you may see in an IEP:

- Visual schedules
- Timers and countdown displays
- Physical activities to signify transitions between exercises or classroom sessions
- First/then visual board
- Seating the student near the front of the classroom to minimize distractions.
- Access to noise-canceling headphones
- Scheduled movement breaks during the day
- Sensory tools to support self-regulation.
- Provide advance notice and previews of upcoming transitions.
- Designated quiet area or calming space
- Verbal and visual prompts to encourage the use of self-regulation strategies.
- Extended time allotted to process instructions and directions.



A MESSAGE FROM YOUR DIRECTOR OF SPECIAL SERVICES

Dear Special Education Community Members,

April is Autism Acceptance Month. It's a special time for our district community to come together and reaffirm our dedication to inclusion, understanding, and respect for students on the autism spectrum.

Every student brings their own unique strengths and perspectives, and it's a shared journey among schools, families, and community partners, to make sure each learner feels valued, supported, and empowered.

As you engage with this newsletter, I encourage you to take special note of page 5, which features a powerful fictional piece written from the perspective of a student with sensory needs. This firsthand narrative offers meaningful insight into the lived experiences of our students and underscores the importance of empathy-driven practices in our classrooms and schools.

Let's go beyond just recognizing each other and focus on building real, genuine connections. By breaking down barriers together and understanding the many ways our students experience and engage with the world, we can create a more inclusive environment. Acceptance shouldn't be limited to one month, it's about what we do every day and the long-term commitments we make to support one another.

With deepest gratitude,

Director Morales-Frigoletto

Nancy Morales-Frigoletto,
Director

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



PROFESSIONAL SPOTLIGHT

LIVING AN EPIC LIFE



LeDerick Horne

Last year and continuing into this academic year, the Division of Special Services partnered with the Division of Curriculum and Instruction to collaborate with the EPIC program, led by William Davis of Rutgers University and LeDerick Horne, poet, speaker, and advocate for individuals with disabilities. This initiative, titled EPIC: Building Bridges to Inclusive Lives, aims to enhance support for Black and Hispanic students with disabilities and their families. Through student and family engagement, the program emphasizes the development of self-advocacy skills and provides professional learning opportunities for teachers, Child Study Team members, staff, and administrators. The objective is to increase the district's capacity to implement positive behavioral supports and provide meaningful alternatives to suspension for students with disabilities.

As part of this year's activities, Mr. Horne delivered three impactful assemblies at Jefferson, Edison, and Halsey Academies. During his presentation, "Living an EPIC Life," he shared his personal journey of being diagnosed with a learning disability in third grade and encouraged students to look beyond labels and stereotypes. A dynamic spoken word poet and nationally recognized advocate, Mr. Horne inspired students to embrace self-advocacy, resilience, and perseverance both academically and personally. His message supported the EPIC program's mission to empower students, families, and staff throughout Elizabeth Public Schools.

BUZZ Words

Neurodiversity

Neurodiversity is the idea that people think, learn, communicate, and experience the world in different ways. While this word may not usually appear directly in an IEP, its meaning is often reflected throughout the document. Neurodiversity is the concept that individuals' brains function in diverse ways. Neurodivergence refers to differences in how people learn, think, process information, and experience the world compared to what is considered neurotypical. Neurodivergent individuals often possess unique strengths and perspectives, as well as differences in areas such as organization, attention, impulse control, and daily functioning.

Self regulation: A student's ability to manage emotions, attention, and behavior.

Sensory Diet: A sensory diet is a personalized plan of sensory activities and strategies designed to support a student's regulation throughout the day. It often includes reducing exposure to overwhelming sensory input ("triggers") while increasing access to calming or enjoyable experiences ("glimmers"). The goal is to help students feel balanced, focused, and better able to participate in learning and daily activities.

Executive functioning: Skills used for planning, organizing, remembering, and completing tasks.

Social pragmatic language needs: The support a student may need to use language appropriately in social situations, such as taking turns in conversation, staying on topic, understanding tone of voice or body language, asking for clarification, and knowing how to communicate differently depending on the setting or person.

Featured Community Resource

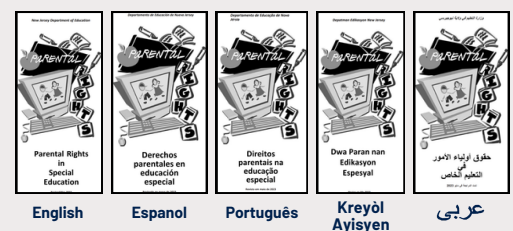


Prevention Links is a community based organization that connects children, families, and schools to prevention, wellness, and support services across New Jersey. In Union County, Prevention Links hosts the Union County Prevention Hub and the NJ4S Hub of Union County, helping connect families to resources, build resilience, and support student well being.

For families, Prevention Links offers access to programs, family support services, and community based resources. Its family programming includes parenting supports offered throughout Union County in schools, community centers, and Family Success Centers, giving families additional ways to connect with helpful services close to home.

This month, Prevention Links is a helpful reminder that strong community partnerships matter. Resources that support mental health, family connection, and prevention can make a meaningful difference for students and caregivers alike.

PARENTAL RIGHTS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION



PERSPECTIVE OF OUR STUDENTS

Dear Stakeholders,

When I walk into my classroom, everything hits me at once.

The lights feel too bright, I can hear other kids talking, chairs scraping, papers moving, and someone in the hallway all at the same time. I might even notice smells that other people don't seem bothered by. It all comes in together, and it doesn't feel like I can turn any of it off.

It's not that I'm trying to be distracted or not pay attention. My brain just takes in a lot of information at once, and sometimes it becomes too much to sort through.

When that happens, my body reacts before I can really think about it. I might feel like I need to move, escape, cover my ears, or shut down. Sometimes I can't find words. Sometimes I feel overwhelmed or upset and I don't know how to explain why.

From the outside, it might look like I'm not following directions or that I'm making a choice not to participate. But inside, it feels more like everything is too loud, too fast, or too much all at once.

What helps me is when the classroom is set up in ways that make things more manageable for me. Things like quieter spaces, breaks when I need them, being able to use tools that help me focus, or having a calmer place to go for a few minutes can make a big difference.

Sensory accommodations don't make things easier because I'm not trying. They make things possible because they help my brain feel safe enough to learn. When I have that support, I can focus more, participate more, and show what I actually know.

Sincerely,

One of many students with sensory needs

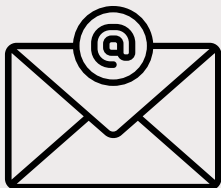
ESEPAC

ESEPAC Executive Officers

President: Emily Gonzalez

Vice President: Gilda Rodriguez

Secretary: Denise Olivera



Contact Information:

ESEPAC@epsnj.org

ESEPAC will be hosting a parent workshop on
May 13, 2026

TRANSITION PLANNING: NAVIGATING OPTIONS AFTER HIGH SCHOOL

Families are invited to attend an upcoming workshop, offered both in person and on Zoom, focused on planning for life after high school for students with disabilities. The transition process can often feel overwhelming, but learning about the systems, timelines, and available supports can help families approach it with greater confidence. This workshop will review transition planning beginning at ages 14 to 16 and will explore options such as entering the workforce with support from DVRS, the New Jersey Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, as well as pathways to college. It will be a helpful opportunity for families to better understand postsecondary options and begin planning for the future.

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT



Mrs. Christodoulou's Transition Program from JVJ Stem Academy visited IKEA on Wednesday for Community-Based Instruction. The students enjoyed ordering and purchasing lunch, locating items in a store, and even found Punch the monkey orangutan!

SPECIAL EDUCATION COMMUNITY

SCHOOL 30 FARM VISIT



Students in the autism program at School 30 recently enjoyed a special visit from Quiver Farm Projects, which brought a petting farm experience right to the school. As part of ongoing efforts to increase social experiences and expand students' exposure to the community, this in school event provided meaningful opportunities for students to engage with peers while exploring a hands on learning experience. Students practiced waiting for their turn, petting and feeding the animals, labeling animals, learning about what they eat, and discussing how to care for them. The visit also supported sensory exploration and social interaction, making it a memorable experience.

SPECIAL EDUCATION COMMUNITY

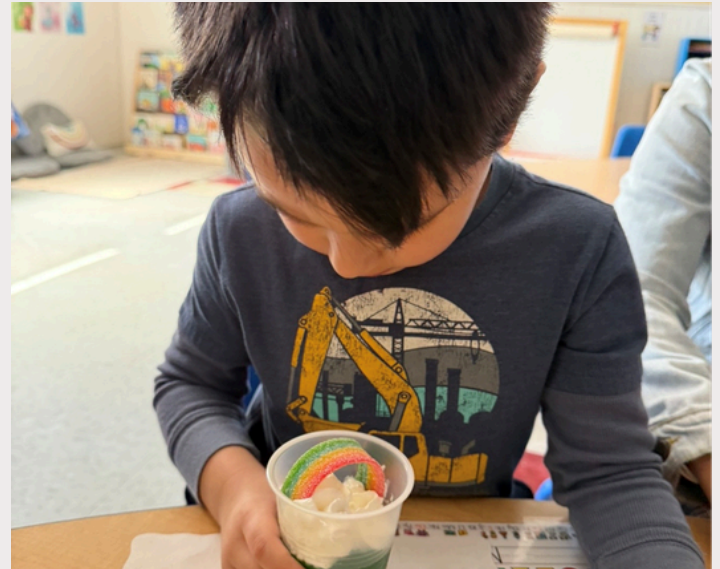
SCHOOL 4 FIELD TRIP



Students in Ms. Palmieri's and Ms. Trapani's PSD classrooms at School 4 recently enjoyed an exciting in house field trip experience with Wildside Zoo of Hazlet. The interactive visit brought a variety of animals directly to our students, giving them the opportunity to observe, learn about habitats and behaviors, and engage in hands on exploration in a familiar and supportive environment. The experience was thoughtfully structured to meet sensory and communication needs, allowing every student to participate meaningfully.

SPECIAL EDUCATION COMMUNITY

SCHOOL 5A KINDERGARTEN



Kindergarten students in Grade K at School 5A in Ms. Roque's class used the theme of St. Patrick's Day to engage in a fun and meaningful learning activity by making rainbow Jell O desserts. Through this hands on experience, students practiced and reinforced important communication skills, including turn taking, requesting, commenting, and participating with peers during the activity. Students also explored early measurement concepts as they helped prepare the dessert, making this a creative way to support both language development and foundational math skills.

SUPPORT STAFF SPOTLIGHT

WELCOME CENTER'S HEAD CUSTODIAN



Josue Coello

We are proud to highlight our head custodian, Josue Coello, who has dedicated more than 33 years of service to Elizabeth Public Schools. A proud husband and father of three, Josue recently welcomed a grandson this school year, adding another joyful chapter to his family life. He is a man of strong faith and values, who leads with humility, kindness, and a deep sense of care for others. Known for his talent for building and collecting items, he has a special ability to restore things others might throw away, giving them new life and purpose. His coworkers describe him as incredibly helpful, reliable, and dependable, always going above and beyond by making sure those around him are cared for, often with food and coffee. Josue's generosity, steady presence, and commitment to others make him a valued member of the EPS family.

TEACHER SPOTLIGHT

UNION COUNTY TEACHER OF THE YEAR, DR. ALICE DEBOWSKI



Congratulations to Dr. Alice Debowski, Special Education In Class Support Teacher at J. Christian Bollwage Finance Academy, on being named the 2026 to 2027 Union County Teacher of the Year. Dr. Debowski was honored during a surprise schoolwide celebration surrounded by students, colleagues, district leaders, and community members. This recognition highlights her outstanding dedication to students with disabilities, her compassion, and the meaningful impact she makes each day by helping students feel seen, supported, and capable of success.

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

4th Annual Autism Flag Raising Event, April 2, 2026



Students from J. Christian Bollwage Finance Academy

Students, families, educators, and community members came together for the 4th Annual Autism Flag Raising in front of City Hall on Thursday, April 2nd, hosted by the Mayor Bollwage, the City of Elizabeth and Councilwoman-At-Large Patricia Perkins-Aguste. The gathering offered a meaningful opportunity to honor Autism Acceptance Month and celebrate the strengths and contributions of individuals on the autism spectrum. Two students from Bollwage Academy shared a meaningful message during the event. The event was a heartfelt expression of unity, inclusion, and community support.



FAMILY TIPS

Supporting Transitions at Home

Transitions are a routine part of daily life. For some children, moving from one activity to another can be challenging, particularly when they are leaving a preferred activity, entering a new environment, or adapting to a change in routine. Implementing simple strategies can help make transitions smoother and less stressful for children and families alike.

Keep routines predictable

Children tend to perform best when they understand what to expect. Strive to keep daily routines predictable and, when possible, discuss the schedule for the day with your child.

Give advance warnings

Inform your child about upcoming changes before they occur. For example, you might say, "In five minutes, we will start cleaning up," or "After dinner, it will be bath time." This approach helps children prepare mentally for upcoming transitions.

Use visual supports

Visual schedules, pictures, checklists, or "first-then" statements can assist children in understanding current activities and what follows. For instance, saying, "First homework, then outside time," provides clear guidance.

Use simple language and give one direction at a time.

Use simple language and deliver one instruction at a time. Clear and brief directions are often easier for children to follow, especially during busy or stressful moments.

Use familiar transition routines

Using routines such as songs, countdowns, timers, or consistent phrases can make transitions more predictable. Repeating the same routine each time helps children know what to expect.

Offer positive reinforcement

Acknowledge and praise successful transitions. Statements like "You cleaned up quickly" or "You moved to the next activity calmly" reinforce positive behavior and encourage continued progress.

Allow Extra Time When Possible

Some children require additional time to process instructions and adjust. Planning ahead and permitting a few extra minutes can help reduce frustration for everyone involved.

Maintain a Calm and Supportive Demeanor

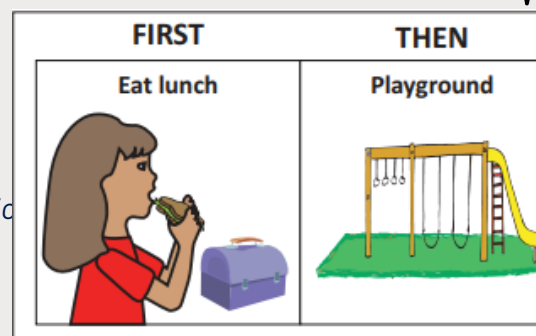
Children often respond best when adults remain calm and consistent. During challenging transitions, offer reassurance and keep your expectations clear to foster a supportive environment.

Prepare for Routine Changes

When changes are anticipated, inform your child in advance whenever possible. Discussing upcoming alterations helps reduce anxiety and fosters understanding.

Recognize that Development Takes Time

Transitions are a skill that develops gradually. Through consistent practice, patience, and support, children can gain confidence and foster greater independence over time.



UPCOMING EVENTS

The Union County Board of County Commissioners Presents

UNION COUNTY FAMILY CLINIC

THE UNION COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS REMINDS RESIDENTS THAT FREE IMMUNIZATIONS ARE AVAILABLE FOR ELIGIBLE CHILDREN AND ADULTS.

Eligibility Requirements:

- Uninsured, underinsured, or covered by Medicaid Plan A
- County of Union Resident
- Documentation
 - Child's Birth Certificate
 - Parent's Photo ID
 - Proof of Address
 - Lease
 - Electric Bill
 - Water Bill
 - Gas Bill
 - Notarized letter from the person whom you are living with and one of their utility bills.
- School Referral (if applicable)

**Monday - Friday
8:30 AM - 4:30 PM**

40 Parker Rd
Elizabeth, NJ 07208

For more information contact us at
908-965-3627 / 3868
email us at ucclinic@ucnj.org,
or visit ucnj.org/clinic

Pre-Register now!

BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE UNION COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

SWIMMING LESSONS

Whether you are new to swimming or want to improve your swimming skills, our experienced instructors will guide you step by step.

PROGRAM FEATURES:

- Experienced instructors
- Progressive curriculum
- Safety-focused

REGISTER TODAY

- ElizabethPool.org
- bklynswimclub@gmail.com
- Communityaffairsbureau@elizabethnj.org
- Det. Banks 908-677-0364

Registration 6:30 PM
February 25 & 28, 2026
Swimming skills assessment
600 Pearl St. Elizabeth NJ
Dunn Sports Center Swimming Pool

Swimming assessment will be conducted while in the shallow end of the pool

IS YOUR HOME LEAD-SAFE?

Lead-based paint in homes poses serious health risks, particularly for young children. Lead poisoning can be prevented. We can help.

United Way of Greater Union County's **Lead Remediation & Abatement Program (LRAP)**, funded by a grant from the NJ Department of Community Affairs, helps address this health crisis by identifying and remediating lead-based paint hazards in homes built before 1978 that are occupied by low- to moderate-income households.

Services are FREE to eligible homeowners and tenants

Services provided:

- Initial lead testing at your home
- Comprehensive inspection to identify lead-based paint hazards
- Remediation or abatement of hazards at no cost, within program limits

To learn more and apply for the Lead Remediation & Abatement Program, scan the QR code or contact:

Kamila Cordero, Outreach Coordinator
1081 353-7171 ext. 101 • kamila.cordero@unitedwayguc.org
219 Central Ave. Rahway, NJ 07065

The Incredible Years ADHD Group

This evidence-based early intervention program offers two separate groups for children and their caregivers to meet on Wednesdays at 6 p.m.

For children:

- Ages 5 to 11 who present with ADHD symptoms.
- To improve academic, social and emotional skills.
- To encourage positive behavior.

For parents/caregivers:

- To enhance parenting skills.
- To strengthen caregiver/child interactions.
- To connect with other parents with similar concerns.
- Offered in English and Spanish.

Childcare is available for siblings.

When: Wednesdays at 6 p.m.
Where: New Point Campus
655 East Jersey St.
Elizabeth, NJ 07206

For more information or to schedule an appointment:
Sandra Linares
908-994-7223

RWJBarnabas HEALTH
Trinitas Regional Medical Center

THE UNION COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS AND THE DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES COORDINALLY INVITE YOU TO OUR ANNUAL

2026 AUTISM ACCEPTANCE

Celebration & Resource Fair

SATURDAY, APRIL 25, 2026 | 10AM - 12PM
TURF FIELD | WARINANCO PARK, ROSELLE
RAIN LOCATION: WARINANCO SPORTS CENTER

PUT ON YOUR BEST COSTUME AND JOIN IN THE CELEBRATION!

LIVE DJ • GAMES • TOUCH-A-TRUCK • SNACKS • FUN!

BRINGED TO YOU BY THE UNION COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

ELIZABETH PUBLIC SCHOOLS
THE SERGIO GRANADOS CIVIC ASSOCIATION

FREE EVENT
SCAN TO REGISTER

Date:
April 26, 2026

Location:
Lombardi Field at Carl Sandburg
3439 County Road 516
Old Bridge, New Jersey 08857

Time:
9:00 am – 1:00 pm
Middlesex & Union County
Track and Field



Qualified, Competent Translators

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

Important Document Notice

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

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



We value the thoughts of our community members.

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

Send to: dssnewsletter@epsnj.org