



Crossroads Monthly Newsletter

April 2026

Message from the Administration

Dear Crossroads Community,

We hope everyone had a wonderful and restful Spring Break. It is truly hard to believe that May is right around the corner and we are officially on the final stretch for this school year. As we move through these final months, we find ourselves once again reflecting on our yearly theme of Paving Paths: One UCESC Voice at a Time. Our specific focus for April is Fueling the Journey, which reminds us that every step we take together provides the momentum needed to reach our goals. This theme ties into our social-emotional learning focus on responsibility and self-care. By taking ownership of our growth and remembering to care for ourselves, we ensure that we have the energy and spirit to finish the year strong.



This month also holds a special significance as we celebrate Autism Acceptance Month. At Crossroads, we are dedicated to creating a community where every student's unique voice is heard and valued. Acceptance is the fuel that allows our students to feel seen and supported as they pave their own individual paths. We kicked off this busy month with our Spring Egg Hunt, where students were able to participate in planting seeds, engaging in various arts and crafts activities, and navigating a spring obstacle course.

Our community spirit was further enhanced by several visitors who chose to spend their time with our students. We hosted athletes from Seton Hall who came into our classrooms to share their love of reading. We also welcomed students from Mount Saint Mary's Academy for their Day of Service Learning. They spent the day working side-by-side with our students on a special craft project, creating a meaningful connection through creativity.

We also want to extend our sincere gratitude to everyone who attended our Family Night Out. It was so nice to see so many families gathered together, and we hope it was an enjoyable event for all who joined us. We truly value these moments of connection and look forward to planning more opportunities to gather in the future.

As we approach the busy final weeks of school, please be on the lookout for information regarding our upcoming end-of-the-year celebrations, including Preschool Stepping Up, 8th Grade Commencement, and Field Day. Thank you for being such a vital part of our journey.

Warm Regards,

Matt, Danielle, and Stacey

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Upcoming Dates

- May 4-8, 2026 - Staff Appreciation Week
- May 11, 2026 - 1:00 PM Dismissal (Staff Afternoon PD Day)
- May 14, 2026 - 1:00 PM - Parent Education/Support Meeting (Safety Presentation)
- May 25, 2026 - School Closed (Memorial Day)
- June 3, 2026 - 1:00 PM - Preschool Stepping Up Ceremony
- June 5, 2026 - (10:00 -1:00) - Crossroads Field Day
- June 11, 2026 - 1:00 PM - 8th Grade Commencement Ceremony
- June 19, 2026 - 1:00 PM Dismissal for Students
- June 22, 2026 - 1:00 PM Dismissal for Students
- June 23, 2026 - 1:00 PM Dismissal for Students (Last Day of School)



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Crossroads Student Spotlight

Student of the Month - Richard

We are thrilled to announce that the title of Student of the Month goes to the one and only Richard! This school year, we have been incredibly impressed by Richard’s growing maturity and his dedication to every task he takes on.

If there is one place where Richard truly shines, it’s music class. Whether he’s singing with heart or performing expressively, his passion for the arts is clear to everyone in the room. But his talents

don't stop at the stage; Richard is also a budding chef who loves cooking, baking, and bravely trying new foods.

When he isn't hitting the high notes or mastering recipes, Richard is working hard on his life skills in the apartment, practicing his spelling with alphabet puzzles, and crushing his academic goals. His daily progress is a testament to his work ethic. Known affectionately as "The Mayor of the School," Richard's kind personality makes him a friend to all. Congratulations, Richard,



Classroom Spotlights

Ms. Lauren's Classroom



What an exciting start to Spring we have had in 101! We began April with our Spring break, but brought SUNSHINE and WARMTH back to Crossroads with us upon our return. We have spent as much time as we can taking advantage of the weather by playing outside in the fresh Spring air. We also got to enjoy a field trip to Life Town, exploring and navigating a real-life simulation of a downtown shopping area. We especially loved riding bikes on the "street," buying ice cream, seeing real animals in the pet shop, and nibbling on popcorn at the movie theatre. Although, nothing beat playing in the ultimate indoor playground there- jumping, climbing, and swinging are some of our favorite things!

April was also Autism Acceptance month. We completed a Puzzle Glyph, coloring each piece based on unique information about ourselves. We are individually unique and together complete!



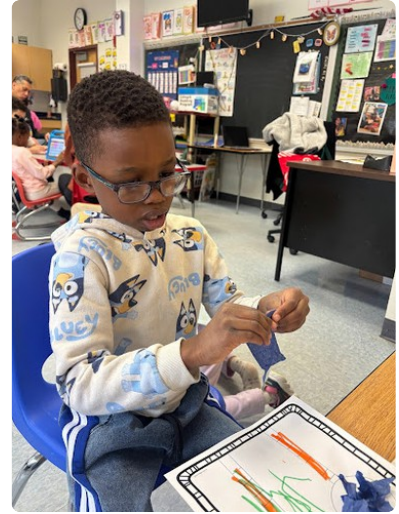
Ms. Alison's Classroom

Happy April everyone! The warm spring weather brought so much joy to Crossroads. We are happy to go outside again for recess, and breathe in the fresh air.

April is also autism acceptance month. We are shifting from just awareness to full acceptance. We are working to go beyond awareness to create inclusive, adaptable and respectful environments for our loved ones with autism. Everyday in the classrooms we see passionate students learning and exploring their abilities. This could be seen as exploring their painting skills in art class. Our

hallways are filled with art work created by our artists at Crossroads! It is also shown in their music and movement expression when students sing and dance to different Super Simple Songs or Go Danny Go.

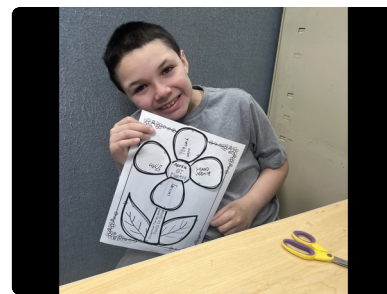
We frequently see students also exploring different athletic abilities while completing their sensory diets designed by the Occupational Therapists. Many students work really hard walking with their weighted backpacks. Crossroads continues to shift and change to ensure our learning environments fit the needs of the diverse crowd that we serve.



Therapy Spotlight

Occupational Therapy - Ms. Dina, Ms. Jessica, Ms. Sara

April is National Occupational Therapy month. We decided to include some OT information in our newsletter article:



How Can an Occupational Therapist Help a Child?

Occupational Therapists are highly-trained healthcare professionals that evaluate and assist

children that are having difficulty participating in meaningful activities or “occupations” that are needed to conduct their daily routines and live their life to the fullest.

For a child, this may include the development of life skills such as learning at school, playing, completing self-care tasks, relating to others, and fulfilling their role as a family member. In the schools, Occupational Therapists address the needs of students experiencing delays, disabilities, or health challenges through therapeutic intervention to promote skill advancement, the use of compensatory strategies, adaptations to the child’s educational environment, and/or modifying the curriculum or activity.

Occupational Therapists also collaborate with teachers, parents and others to identify and modify barriers that restrict a child’s success and model strategies for others to use that will extend the benefits of direct intervention.

Occupational Therapy Skill Areas:

Fine Motor: Holding crayons, pencils and other small objects, stringing beads, using clothing fasteners, manipulating toys

Eye-hand Coordination: Scissor use, puzzles, ball skills

Visual Motor: Printing, drawing, forming shapes, coloring

Visual Perceptual: Sorting, matching, figure ground, scanning, letter reversals

Self-Care: Dressing, feeding, using utensils, tying, bathing & shampooing, grooming

Sensory Processing: Delays in adaptive responses to sights, sounds, movement, taste, touch

Strength: Manipulating resistive materials, moving against gravity, sustaining body positions

Social: Interacting with others, following routines, play skills

To celebrate OT month and the change in the weather, therapy sessions are beginning to focus on sensory motor and outdoor play including scavenger hunts and obstacle courses. Students are using their fine motor skills to fill our bulletin board and therapy gym with paper flowers, and they are exploring cooking and ADL skills with sweet, refreshing treats like frozen lemonade during group activities.



Specials Spotlight

Behavior Team - Ms. Karly & Mr. Andrew, BCBA's

This month is a significant one for our community as we celebrate Autism Awareness and Acceptance Month. While we focus on progress every day, this month gives us a special opportunity to celebrate the unique strengths and perspectives of our students.



We are excited to be collaborating with our Speech Department to provide specialized training for Rutgers dental residents. We will be sharing information on neurodiversity, as well as suggestions for accommodations and behavior strategies to help make dental appointments more successful.

Our Registered Behavior Technicians (RBTs) recently rotated classrooms. This is a great way for our staff to bring fresh energy to different groups and for our students to practice generalizing their skills with different instructors.

Shout-out to our Lead RBT: Jen has been incredibly busy handling intakes for potential new students, ensuring our newest learners feel supported from day one, and leading training for our new staff members.

During recent supervision meetings, our team has been practicing identifying verbal operants (the different ways we use language) within natural environments. Whether it's in the hallway or during play, we are focused on catching and promoting those "teachable moments" where we can promote communication and skill acquisition.

Our BCBAs Andrew and Karly will be co-hosting Elaine's parent support group on 4/30. The topic will be on selective eating and promoting exercise with our students. We hope to see you there!

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April Tips from the Behavior Team

Crossroads School Tips from the Behavior Team

Navigating "Spring Fever" with First/Then

With the arrival of April, we often see a burst of energy in our students. "Spring Fever" is officially here! While we all welcome the sunshine, the change in season and the shift in outdoor light can sometimes make it harder for children to transition from high-energy play back to their daily responsibilities.

To help maintain a calm and predictable environment at home, our Behavior Team wants to share one of the most effective tools in our toolkit: The "First/Then" or "Premack Principle."

What is "First/Then" or "The Premack Principal"?

"First/Then" is a simple communication strategy that clarifies expectations. It helps a child understand that completing a necessary task (like putting away shoes or finishing a worksheet) is the direct "key" that unlocks a leisure activity (like going to the park or playing with a toy).

Why It Works

It reduces negotiation fatigue. Instead of getting caught in a long back-and-forth about why a chore needs to be done, you are providing a clear, logical map to a reward. It shifts the child's focus from the demand to the win.

Put It Into Practice

Whether your child is in Pre-K or Grade 8, the principle remains the same, but the delivery changes:

- **For Younger Students:** Use visual support. Drawing two boxes on a piece of paper, one labeled "First" and one "Then," makes the expectation concrete.
 - Example: "First, put your toys in the bin; Then, we go to the playground."
- **For Older Students:** Keep it conversational but firm. At this age, we often call this "Grandma's Rule" or a "Work-Hard-Play-Hard" agreement.
 - *Example:* "First, get your backpack packed for tomorrow; Then, you can hop on the Xbox with your friends."
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The Golden Rules for Success

1. **Be Brief:** Use as few words as possible. The more we talk, the more we "blur" the requirement.
2. **Be Behavior Specific:** Instead of "First, be good," try "First, put your folder in your bag."
3. **Follow Through:** The "Then" is the motivator! Ensure that as soon as the "First" is completed, the "Then" happens immediately to reinforce that positive behavior.

The April Challenge Next time you find yourself stuck in a power struggle over a transition this month, take a breath and try the First/Then approach. You might be surprised at how much a little clarity can brighten your family's springtime routine!

APRIL TIPS FROM THE BEHAVIOR TEAM: Navigating "Spring Fever" with First/Then



What is "First/Then" or "Premack Principle"?

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Why It Works

- Reduces negotiation fatigue.
- Provides a clear, logical map to a reward.
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PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

FOR YOUNGER STUDENTS: Use Visual Support.



FOR OLDER STUDENTS: Keep it Conversational but Firm.



THE GOLDEN RULES FOR SUCCESS

- 1 BE BRIEF:** Use few words. Long explanations blur the requirement.
- 2 BE BEHAVIOR SPECIFIC:** Instead of "First, be good", try "First, put your folder in your bag".
- 3 FOLLOW THROUGH:** The "Then" is the motivator! Ensure the reward happens immediately after "First" is complete.

The April Challenge: Next power struggle, take a breath and try First/Then. See how clarity can brighten your family's springtime routine!

With Appreciation, The Crossroads Behavior Team

April at Crossroads

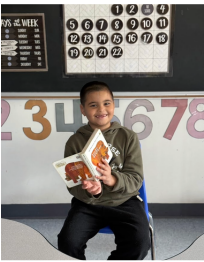
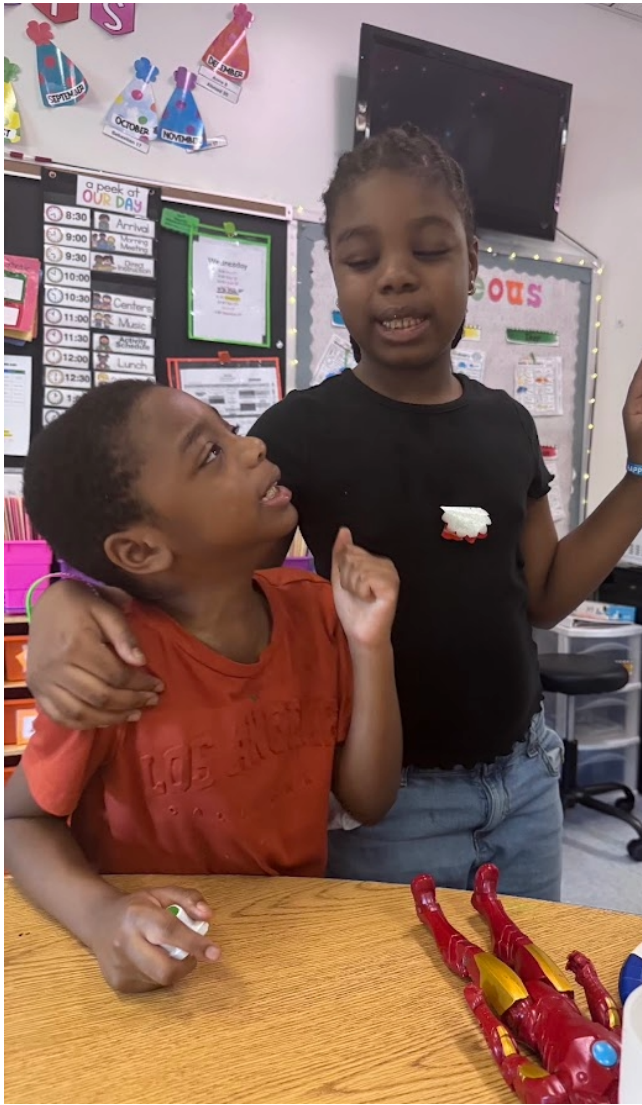


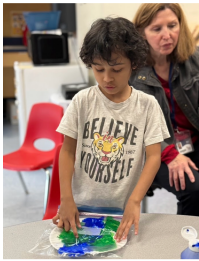














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Crossroads In the Community







April Activities

Spring Egg Hunt







Seton Hall University athletes come to Crossroads to read!



Students from Mount Saint Mary's Academy visit Crossroads School for their Annual Day of Service Learning



Parents Night Out!!





About Us

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

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

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

[Visit us on Instagram](#)



CR Smore

CR is using Smore to create beautiful newsletters



LAMBERTS MILL ACADEMY

APRIL 2026 NEWSLETER



"April is the time to turn over a new leaf."

- Terri Guillemets

Administrators' Message

April 2026

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

Welcome to the April edition of our community newsletter! It is hard to believe we are already in the home stretch of the academic year. We hope that all of our students and their families had a peaceful, restorative Spring Break and returned to us with renewed energy for the busy weeks ahead.

Our students are currently showing incredible focus as NJSLA state testing is well underway. To ensure every student has the best possible environment to demonstrate their knowledge, we have transitioned into small, quiet testing groups. We are so proud of the resilience our learners are showing during these assessments, and we thank our staff for their seamless coordination in keeping the halls calm and supportive.

This month, the gymnasium of LMA were transformed into a vision of the future. We are immensely proud of Mr. Lund and Ms. Wooden, who led and organized our school-wide Science



Fair.

Under their guidance, our students collaborated to design and present a "Smart City" dubbed 'Techtopia.' This project was more than just a science lesson; it required students to research urban infrastructure, organize complex data, and utilize their public speaking skills to present their visions to the community. Seeing our students speak with such confidence and authority on sustainable technology was a true highlight of the year.

As we reach the end of the fourth marking period, the atmosphere at LMA is one of both reflection and excitement. This is a particularly poignant time for our LMA Seniors.

As our graduates prepare to transition out of our halls and into the "real world," we want to express how deeply proud we are of their growth. Whether they are heading toward further education, vocational placements, or the workforce, they carry the spirit of LMA with them. We are eager to celebrate their achievements in the coming weeks.

Thank you for your continued partnership in making LMA a place where students can truly thrive.

Warmly,

Reed & John

Upcoming Events

May 2026 Important Dates

May 5th & 6th - NJSLA Testing for select students

May 11th - Early Dismissal for Students, Professional Development for Staff

May 25th - School Closed for Memorial Day



Student of the Month -Preston

We are proud to present the LMA Student of the Month Award to Preston! Preston is a fairly new student to LMA, but he has quickly adjusted and proven to be a great addition to the LMA community. Preston has shown to be very smart, hardworking, and respectful to both staff and students. Well deserved, Preston!



Staff Spotlight -Mr. Giudice

Mr. Giudice has been a Teacher Assistant at The Mill for two years and works in the Physical Education and Health classroom. Check out the interview below to get to know Mr. G!



What drew you to work at our school, and what do you enjoy most about being part of this community?

I was drawn to Lamberts Mill Academy because of the passion and dedication of the staff, as well as the school's mission to build confidence and integrity in its students. What I enjoy most is the strong sense of collaboration among staff and the opportunity to build meaningful relationships with students. Seeing their progress, whether in the classroom, in their behavior, or in their

confidence is incredibly rewarding.

How would your students describe you in three words?

Reliable, supportive, understanding.

What's something about you that might surprise your colleagues or students?

Something that might surprise them is that I've completed two New York City Marathon races and a Half Ironman competition. I also enjoy karaoke and like to think I make the best popcorn around.

What do you enjoy doing outside of school when you're not working with students?

Outside of school, I enjoy spending time with my family, especially supporting my kids at their MS/high school baseball and volleyball games. I also enjoy attending concerts and sporting events and going to the beach.

What's one piece of advice or a personal motto that guides you in your work and life?

A college professor once told me, "You've got to make it happen," and that's something I've carried with me ever since. It reminds me that growth starts with your own effort and mindset. If you're not willing to take that first step or keep moving forward, opportunities can pass you by. I try to live by that every day by staying consistent, putting in the effort, and encouraging my students to persevere and believe in their ability to succeed.

April at The Mill



UCESC Bulletin Board Contest



Gardening in the Zen Zone

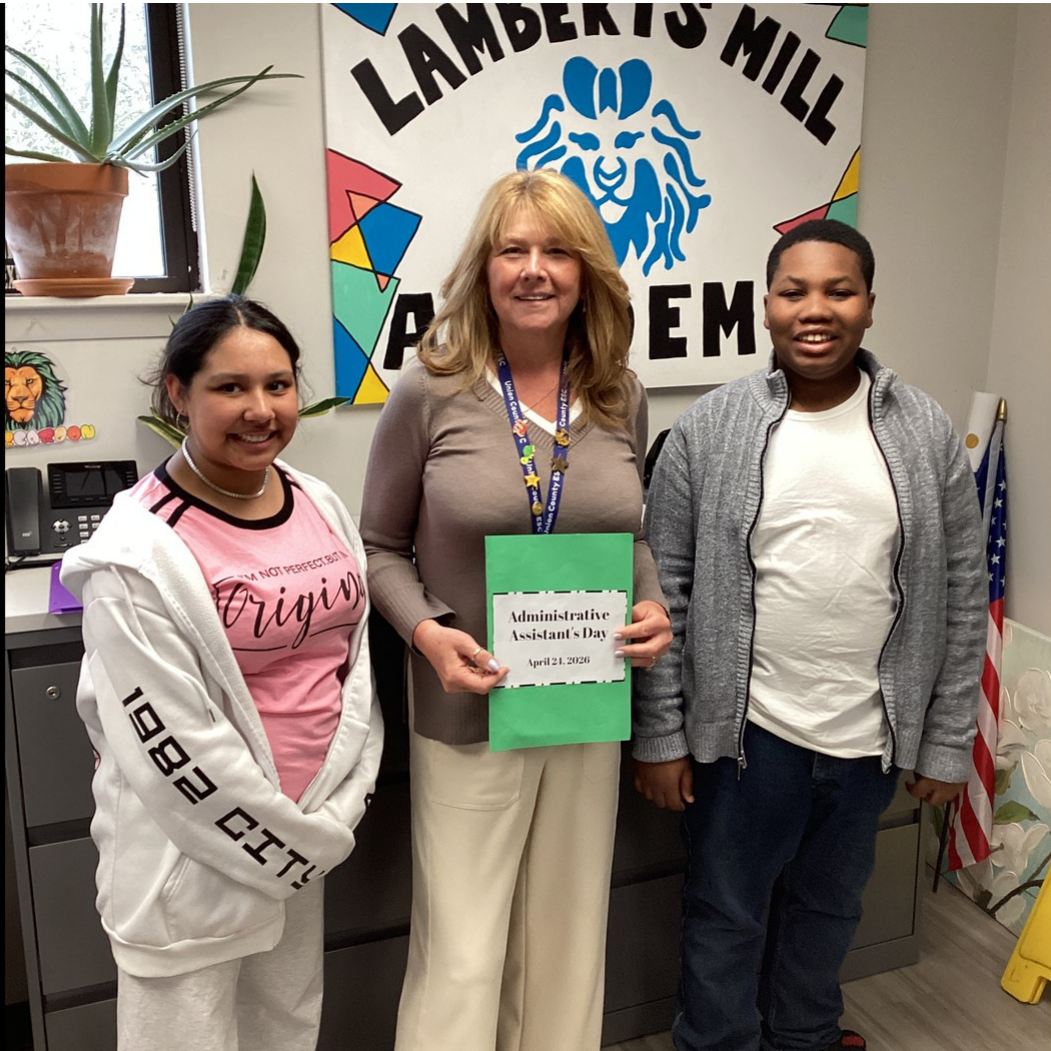


Enjoying time outside

March Madness Winners got to pie staff members!



Administrative Professional's Day!



Thank you Mrs. Reardon for your endless patience, your organizational magic, and the way you care for every student and staff member!

Science Fair

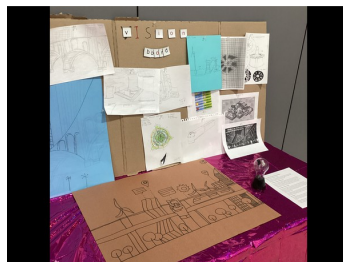
Lamberts Mill Academy recently hosted an innovative, student-driven science fair that brought creativity, collaboration, and real-world application to the forefront of science education. Facilitated by Mr. Lund, the event united students from all science courses in a shared mission: to design, build, and present a futuristic town known as Techtopia. This immersive project challenged students to think critically about the future of sustainable living. Working collaboratively, they explored key topics such as renewable energy, environmental impact,

and mass transportation systems. Each group contributed a unique element to Techtopia, resulting in a cohesive and imaginative model of a forward-thinking community grounded in scientific principles.

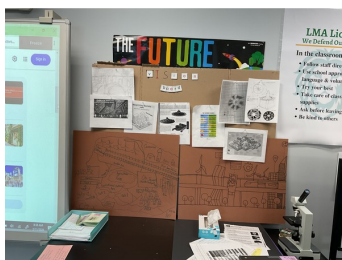
Students were responsible not only for the design and construction of their exhibits, but also for communicating their ideas effectively. The science fair served as a platform for developing public speaking and presentation skills, as students confidently shared their work with visiting UCESC staff members. Their presentations reflected both depth of understanding and a strong sense of ownership over their learning.

The Techtopia science fair exemplifies Lamberts Mill Academy's commitment to experiential learning, cross-curricular collaboration, and student empowerment. By combining scientific inquiry with creativity and communication, the event provided a meaningful opportunity for students to engage with complex global challenges while envisioning innovative solutions for the future.

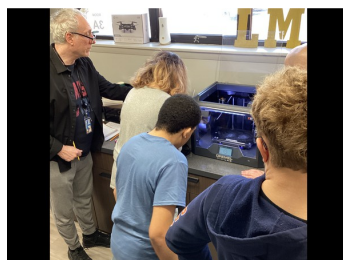
Students presenting Techtopia to UCESC staff and students



The Making of Techtopia



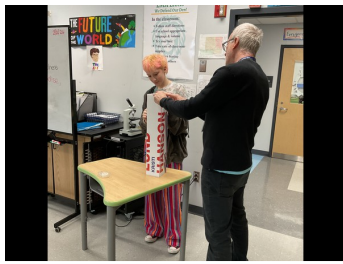
Vision Board



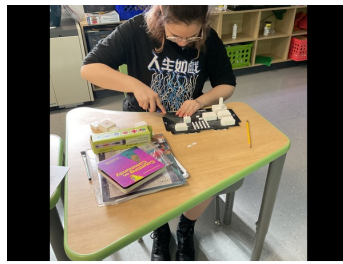
**Learning how to use the
3D Printer**



**Creating the city
buildings**



Early Design Phase



Forming the foundations



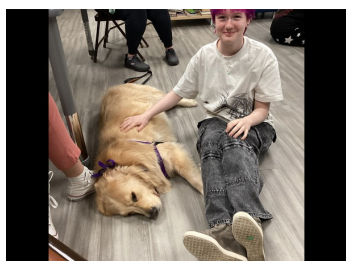
Creating the landscape

Trip to Crossroads School

LMA student mentors went to Crossroads School, a UCESC district school for students with ASD, to assist with their Spring Time Celebration! LMA students set up the activities and then worked with the Crossroads students on a fun craft!



Creature Comfort Pet Therapy



Classroom Spotlights

Work Based Learning

Lamberts Mill Academy is excited to have partnered with Barnes & Noble Bookstore as one of our work based learning sites. This opportunity allows our students the opportunity to gain real life hands-on experience while working within a community setting! Some of the responsibilities include but are not limited to; organizing and maintaining the bookstore's inventory, especially through shelving books in correct alphabetical order, managing price tags of items, and pricing new inventory. This role is important in keeping the store orderly, accurate, and easy for customers to navigate.

This experience also allows students to develop strong organizational skills, responsibility, and attention to detail, while promoting independence at a work site! Our time at Barnes & Noble gives students a better understanding of retail operations and shows them how the behind-the-scenes tasks play a key role in creating a positive customer experience!



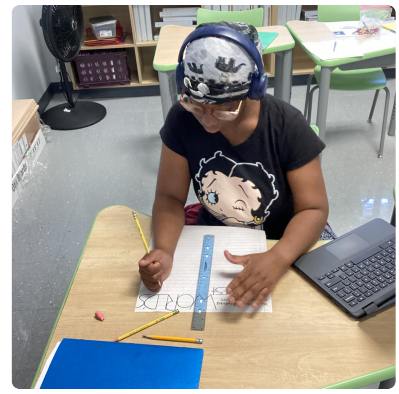
Career Exploration

The 12th graders have just completed their own personal resumes and cover letters that they can now use when applying to jobs! Students are now working on one of the most important skills they will soon need: interviewing! Whether applying for part-time jobs, internships, or college programs, students understood that a strong interview could open doors—and a weak one could close them just as quickly.

Students are exploring common interview questions; using their problem solving and critical thinking skills to appropriately answer each question. Students are also learning about what makes a good first impression as this is a critical step in getting the job! Students are eager to practice these skills and will soon be participating in mock interviews! This opportunity will allow the students to experience the interview process within a comfortable and controlled environment, building student confidence for future success!

Social Studies

It's an incredibly busy time in our history classrooms as we dive into some of the most transformative eras of the past. From the brushstrokes of Florence to the tense standoff of the Cold War, here is what Social Studies students have been exploring in April :



Middle School Social Studies students have officially begun the unit on the American Civil War. We are laying the groundwork by focusing on the "where" and "who." Students are mapping the Union, the Confederacy, and the critical Border States, researching the leaders who defined the era, including Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis, and have been discussing terms like secession, abolition, and popular sovereignty.

World History students have journeyed through the Renaissance as we shift the focus to the Rebirth of culture. Students are examining how artists and writers moved away from medieval styles toward humanism and realism.

US I History students are studying the cause and effect relationship surrounding the American Civil War. Students are categorizing the causes of the American Civil War into long-term and short-term by identifying the simmering tensions over slavery, states' rights, and economic differences between the North and South and examining the immediate catalysts, such as the Election of 1860 and the attack on Fort Sumter.

US II History students are studying the Cold War Era. The focus this month is on the high-stakes diplomacy and domestic fears of the 1950s and 1960s. Students have been investigating how the fear of communism influenced American culture and politics and took a deep dive into the Bay of Pigs invasion and the Cuban Missile Crisis, analyzing how close the world truly came to the brink.

Clinical Corner

As spring arrives, April can bring a mix of energy, stress, and anticipation. Between school demands, social changes, and longer days, it's important for teens to take care of their mental health. Here are five simple, effective tips:



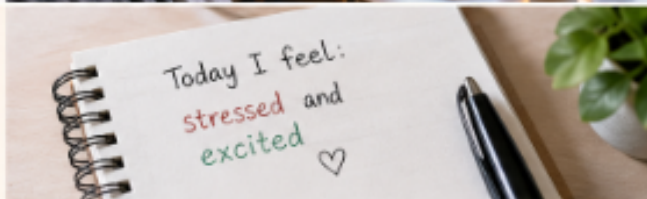
1. Refresh Your Routine

Instead of changing everything at once, make one small adjustment: going to bed a little earlier or waking up at a consistent time. Small changes can make a big difference.



2. Put Feelings into Words

It's normal to feel multiple emotions at once. Try naming what you're feeling, such as "stressed and excited." This can help you better understand and manage your emotions.



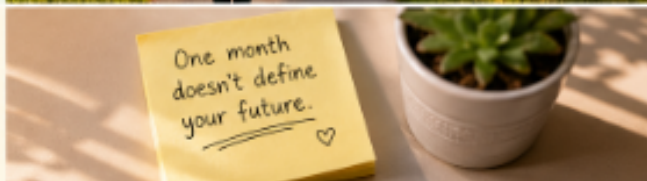
3. Spend Time Outdoors

Take advantage of warmer days. Even a short walk or time in the sun can boost your mood, improve focus, and increase energy levels.



4. Ease the Pressure

End-of-year expectations can feel overwhelming. Remember: one month doesn't define your future. Focus on small, manageable steps each day.



5. Stay Connected

Connection doesn't have to be complicated. Sitting with a friend, sending a quick text, or sharing a laugh all help support your well-being.



Group Therapy



Group therapy continues to be a meaningful space where students strengthen self-awareness, communication, and emotional resilience. This month, sessions have centered on recognizing personal growth and exploring the values that shape students' identities. Through open dialogue and shared experiences, students have practiced expressing themselves authentically while also learning to listen with understanding and respect.

Activities have included guided reflections, team-building challenges, and skill-based exercises focused on managing stress

and navigating peer relationships. Students have also worked on identifying positive influences in their lives and discussing how those relationships contribute to their sense of support and motivation. By engaging in collaborative problem-solving and mindfulness techniques, students are building practical strategies they can use beyond the group setting. The continued consistency of group therapy helps foster trust, connection, and a sense of community, empowering students to support one another while developing confidence in their own voices. Students have also started to enjoy the outdoors now that the weather has been more warm.

Upcoming Community Events



May is Mental Health Month

ANNOUNCEMENTS - Including Walk for Wellness and Recovery and Evening of Excellence Registration

🔗 mhanj.org



WALK & Get Inked 2026 - HIKE for Mental Health

Walk & Get Inked for Mental Health is a two-part, family-friendly fundraiser focused on movement, connection, creativity, and access to mental health resources. Participants are welcome to attend both parts of the event or choose the option that best fits their schedule.

🔗 ihike.org



Wellness Wonderland 2026

The Wellness Wonderland Fair is dedicated to raising awareness and reducing stigma surrounding mental health through interactive activities

🔗 eventbrite.com

Community Resources

UNION COUNTY **Meals***ToYou*



BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE

UNION COUNTY
BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Department of Human Services

Division on Aging

ucnj.org/aging



EXPLORE
UNION COUNTY



<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



<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. Student mentors at Crossroads School

About Us

Contact Information:

Phone: (908)-233-7581

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

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

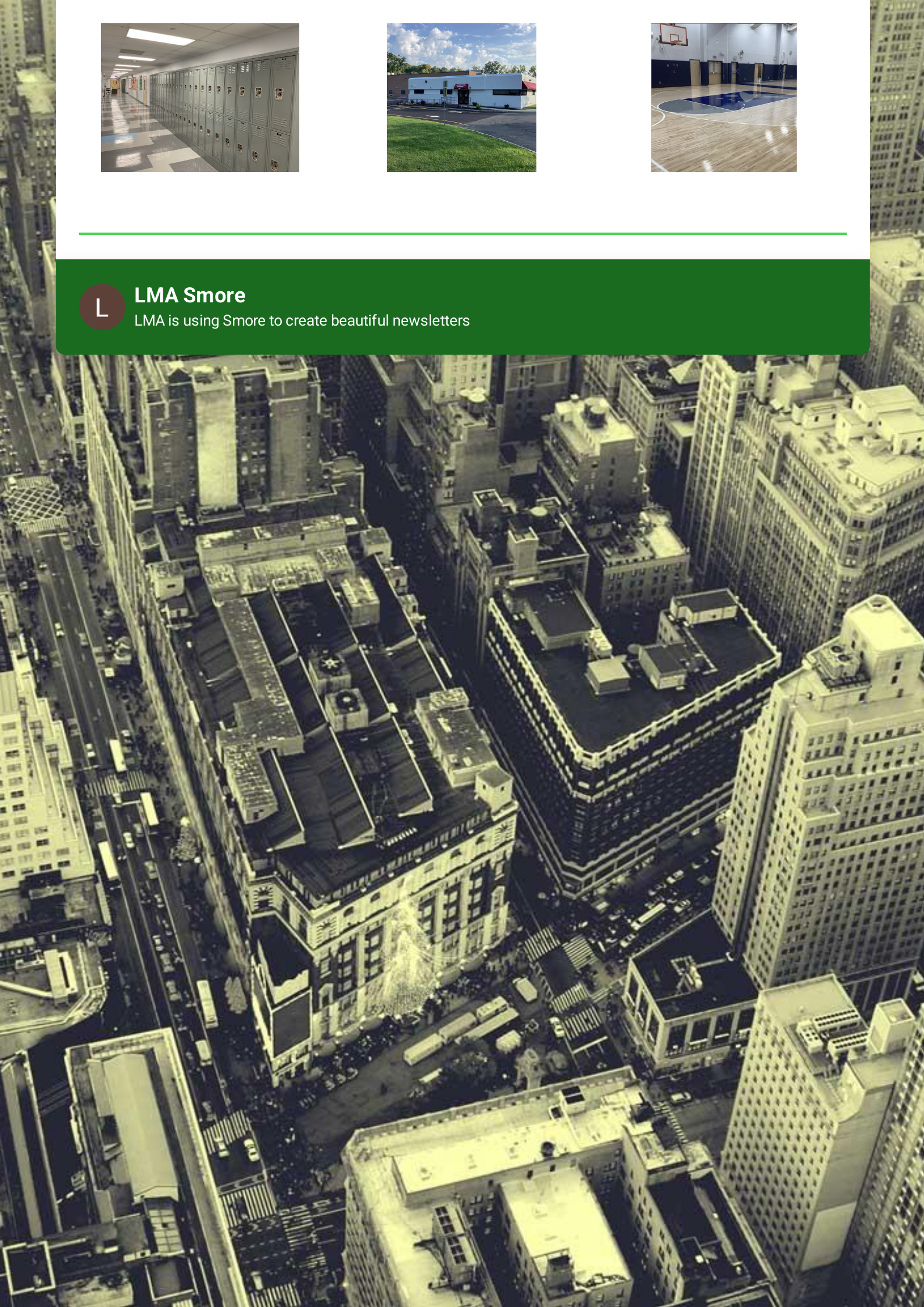
Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/ucesc_lma/?hl=en

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



LMA Smore

LMA is using Smore to create beautiful newsletters





Westlake April Newsletter

Message from the Administrators

"Nothin' But Net"

The energy in the gym was truly electric, as the highly anticipated annual "Westlake School March Madness Basketball game" "bounced off" the beginning of April, transforming the gymnasium into a basketball clinic of edge of your seat chills, cheers and champions!

This wasn't just any ordinary game, it was the culmination of weeks of high energy, hard work, and incredible school spirit. From the first whistle to the final buzzer, Westlake students proved that when it comes to teamwork and sportsmanship, they are in a league of their own. Weeks leading up to the game, The Westlake School Basketball team led by Alexa Renzo and volunteer Assistant Coaches, Mr. Guerrero, Mr. Kelesoglu, Mr. Salinas and Mr. Patrick consistently worked on basketball drills such as dribbling, passing, shooting and of course rules of the game and practicing fair play. While the Cheer Squad coached by Joanna Schiumo w/assistance from volunteer Assistant Coaches, Mrs. Caro-Esposito, Mrs. Petrucelli, Ms. Aimee Swisher and Mrs. Campos ensured the squad was synchronized, harmonized and full of pep and "Big Westlake Energy".

The game started off at a fever pitch when music filled the air and the cheer squad and basketball team lineups were introduced w/unique nicknames such as "The Stifle Tower", "Threeregional Manager" and "Hardwood Hammer" came running out to a roaring, adoring crowd filled with student families, staff members, Westlake classmates, and District representatives.



It was a highly contested back and forth affair, but when the final buzzer sounded, it was not just the athletic skills of our incredible “Westlake Wolves”, but more so the incredible character, resilience and teamwork that each participant displayed that was truly the highlight of the event.

To close out the day, a formal Medal Ceremony was held at center court. Every basketball player and cheerleader received a medal to commemorate their hard work and dedication. While the scoreboard showed the points, the medals represented something much larger: the courage to try, the discipline to practice, and the joy of being part of our Westlake team and community.

Till Next Time My Friends....Be Good To Yourself and Each Other :)

Claudine T, Stacey K, Bobby P.









Westlake Information

Important Dates!

- May 1: Westlake Prom
- May 5: Teacher Appreciation Day
- May 6: Nurses Day
- May 11: 1:00 pm Student Dismissal (Staff Development)
- May 15: Westlake School Spirit Day
- May 17: Westlake Parent Association Mini Golf Outing
- May 18: Speech Pathologist Day
- May 21: Westlake Talent Show
- May 25: Memorial Day (District Closed)



Union County Educational Services Commission

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

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

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

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

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

2025-2026



District Calendar

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

Total Days for Students: 180**

Total Days for Staff: 184**

**Three emergency days are built into the calendar.

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

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

Emergency Closing Information

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

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

*Delayed opening, early dismissal and school closing announcements will be posted online at www.ucesc.org and sent via the First Alert system.

February '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				

April Spotlight!

Student of the Month!



Student of the Month



S.W. is recognized this month for his outstanding commitment to Respect and Self-Care, consistently modeling a friendly and professional attitude for his peers. Whether he is expertly crafting beverages in the school café or representing us with pride across his multiple work-based learning sites, he treats every task and teammate with genuine kindness.

Principal Award Winner!



Principal Award Winner



D.P. has made a remarkable impact since joining our school, quickly becoming a valued member of the community through his commitment to respect and self-care. Despite being new, he has gone out of his way to build meaningful friendships and consistently demonstrates a polite, professional attitude toward all staff members. We are so proud of how he has navigated his transition with such grace and kindness!

Sunshine Cafe Employee of the Month!

SUNSHINE CAFE EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH



Our Sunshine Cafe Employee of the Month for April is... A.S.! We chose her because she is a hard worker and always does her best! She is always happy to help others, and she loves to learn new things in the Cafe. She is an amazing worker and we are very proud of her!

Sunshine Cafe!

The student-led Sunshine Cafe is buzzing with activity this month as our team brings back the crowd-favorite Strawberry Refresher just in time for the warmer weather. In addition to returning classics, the students are proud to debut a delicious new coffee cake that has already become a morning staple for staff and peers. Beyond the kitchen, the team is mastering the logistical side of business by using a formal inventory system to keep the Snack Shack fully prepared for high-volume days. Students are responsible for counting out stock, calculating what products are needed, and gathering the precise amount of product needed to restock the shelves efficiently. This meticulous process ensures the shop remains operational while teaching students the vital "behind-the-scenes" skills of supply chain management and organizational precision. Their dedication to both culinary quality and operational excellence is truly what keeps the cafe shining.

Work Based Learning!



Our Work-Based Learning students are taking their professional skills to the next level by operating the snack cart at Overlook Hospital. This unique placement allows them to navigate a fast-paced medical environment while providing exceptional service to healthcare heroes and visitors alike. Students are responsible for inventory management, professional communication, and handling transactions, all while maintaining a positive and supportive presence in the hospital hallways. By interacting with a diverse range of customers, they are building the confidence and independence necessary for future career success. It is a proud moment for our program to see our students contributing so meaningfully to the local community!





Westlake Parent Organization!

WESTLAKE SCHOOL PTO

UPCOMING EVENTS

MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

JOIN US FOR FUN & FUNDRAISING!

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

ALSO LOOK OUT FOR....

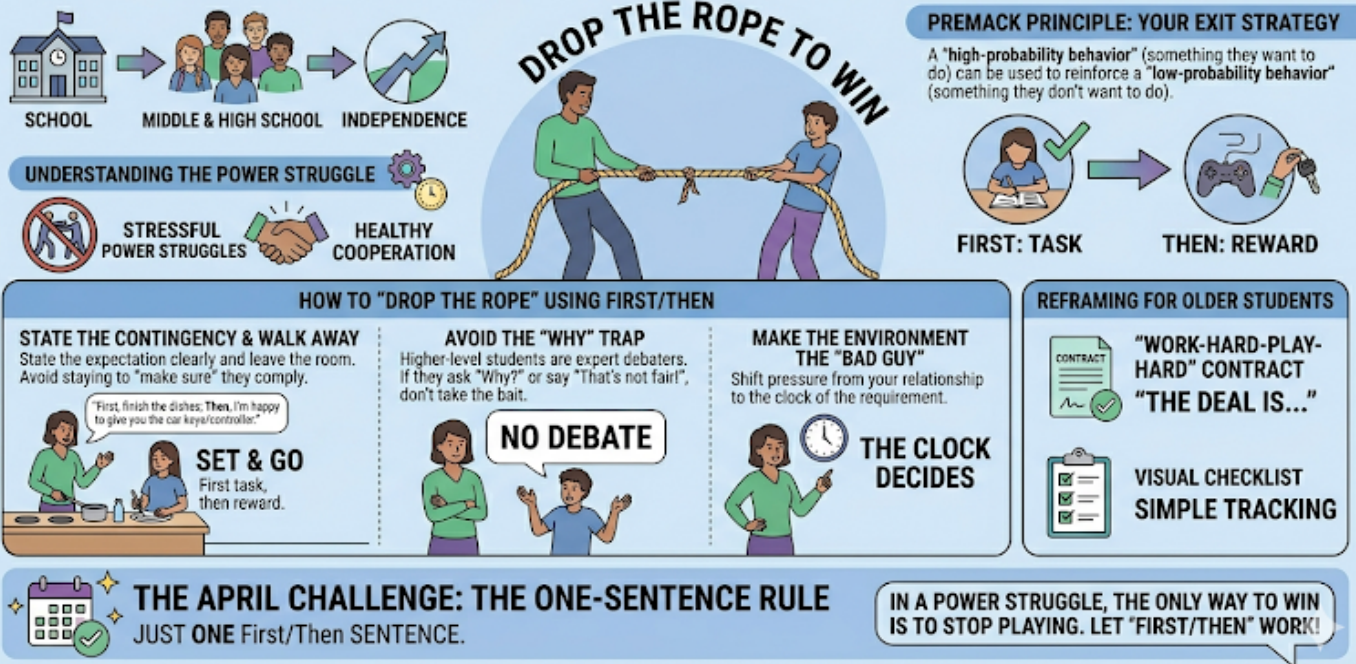
-  Chocolate Bar Sale
-  Box Tops for Education

STAY TUNED FOR MORE DETAILS!

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

April 🌸 Tips from the Westlake Behavior Team!

FROM THE BEHAVIOR TEAM: BREAKING THE CYCLE OF POWER STRUGGLES



From the Behavior Team: Breaking the Cycle of Power Struggles

As our students move through Middle and High School, they are naturally seeking more independence and autonomy. This is a healthy part of development, but in the classroom and at home, it can often manifest as the "Power Struggle."

When we engage in a back-and-forth argument with an older student, we often unintentionally reinforce the behavior we are trying to stop. This April, the Westlake Behavior Team wants to share how to use the Premack Principle (First/Then) not just as a rule, but as a tool to "drop the rope" and regain a calm household dynamic.

Understanding the Power Struggle

A power struggle occurs when the focus shifts from the task at hand to who is in control. For older, higher-level students, the struggle itself can become a distraction that delays work or chores.

The secret? You cannot have a tug-of-war if one person drops the rope.

The Premack Principle: Your Exit Strategy

The Premack Principle states that a "high-probability behavior" (something they want to do) can be used to reinforce a "low-probability behavior" (something they don't want to do).

By framing your expectations as First/Then, you move from being a "boss" to being a "facilitator of their goals."

How to "Drop the Rope" Using First/Then

1. State the Contingency and Walk Away: The biggest mistake we make with older students is staying in their space to "make sure" they comply. This invites a debate. Instead, state the expectation clearly and leave the room.
 1. "First, finish the dishes; Then, I'm happy to give you the car keys/controller."
1. Avoid the "Why" Trap: Higher-level students are expert debaters. If they ask "Why?" or say "That's not fair!", don't take the bait. Re-explaining your reasoning during a conflict usually just provides more fuel for the argument.
 1. Response: Neutralize the struggle by repeating the contingency once: "I understand you're frustrated. The deal is: First [Task], Then [Privilege]. Let me know when you're ready."
1. Make the Environment the "Bad Guy": Shift the pressure from your relationship to the clock or the requirement.

1. Example: "I'd love for you to get to the movies on time. First, we need the trash taken out; Then, we can leave. It's up to you when we get on the road."

Reframing for Older Students

At the Westlake level, "First/Then" doesn't have to be a literal sentence. It is a contractual mindset.

- The "Work-Hard-Play-Hard" Agreement: Frame it as a professional boundary. "I don't want to nag you about your chemistry homework. Let's agree: once the homework is uploaded, the rest of the night is yours without me mentioning school."
- Visual Checklists: Even high-level students benefit from a written list. It removes the need for you to speak (and thus, the need for them to argue). If the list isn't checked off, the "Then" hasn't been earned yet.

The April Challenge: The "One-Sentence" Rule

This month, try to limit your "demands" to a single First/Then sentence. Once you've said it, resist the urge to have the last word. By staying calm and sticking to the contingency, you preserve your relationship with your student and place the responsibility for their choices exactly where it belongs: with them.

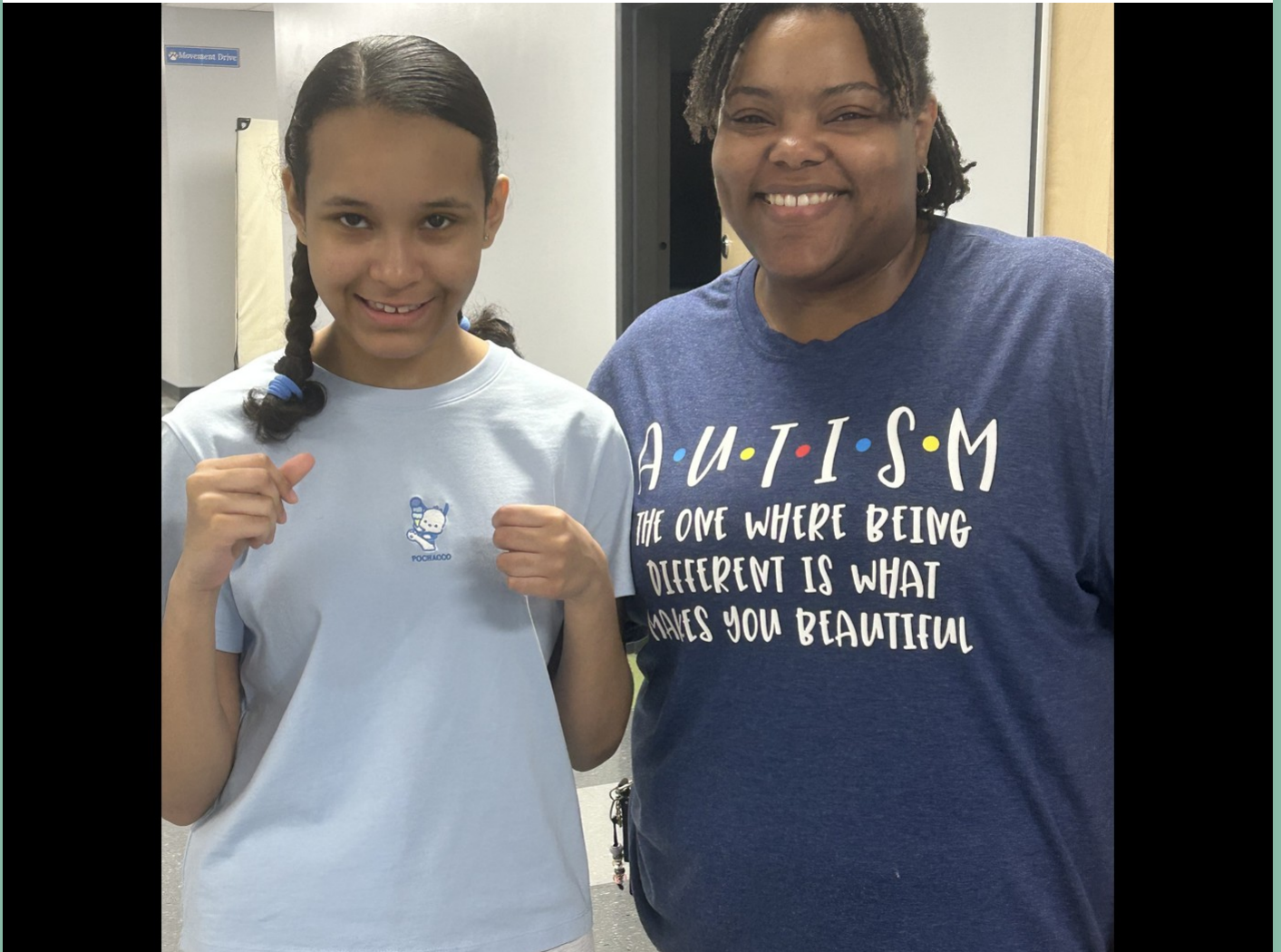
Key Takeaway: In a power struggle, the only way to win is to stop playing. Let the "First/Then" do the work for you!

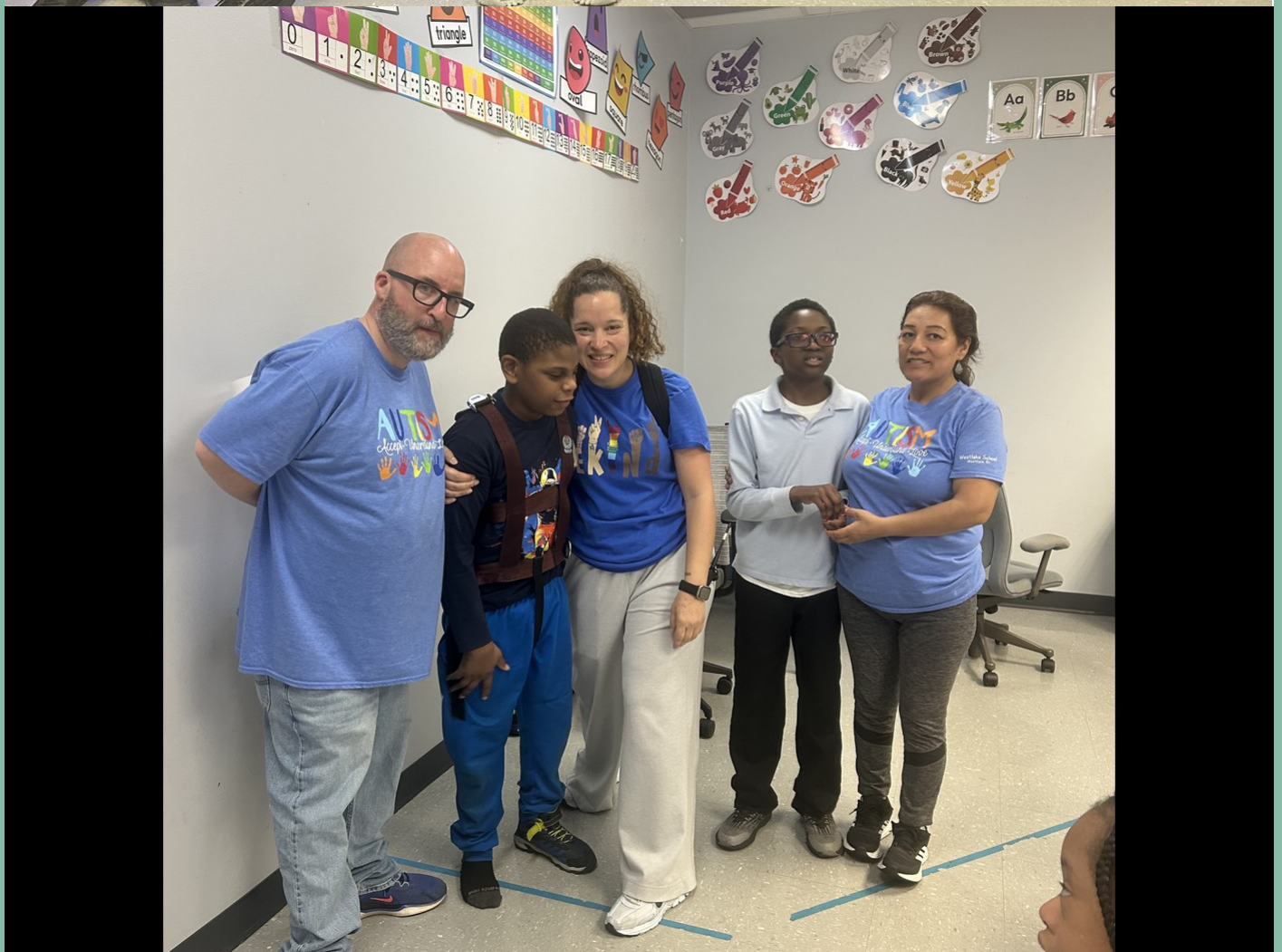


Westlake Celebrating Autism Awareness Month!



To highlight Autism Awareness Month, our school community united by wearing vibrant shades of blue to show support for neurodiversity. The halls were filled with a sea of blue, serving as a powerful visual reminder of our commitment to fostering an inclusive and understanding environment for all students. By participating in this event, we aim to increase acceptance and celebrate the unique strengths of individuals on the autism spectrum.









Ms. Donna our Social Worker



With the Westlake March Madness events still fresh in our minds, we are continuing our Social Peer Networking between Westlake & Hillcrest South.. Each school's social worker teamed up to bring several Hillcrest Students who were excited to share both their basketball skills along with their social skills with a few of our lucky Westlake students. We started this partnership back in February when we invited some Hillcrest students to join us at our February Friendship Dance. Our basketball social was so successful that we are going to continue this as a weekly event through the end of the school year! What a slam dunk!







Mr. Kurt's Class!

The students in W79 have been keeping very busy. Our students participated in the March Madness basketball game as players, cheerleaders and fans. It was a great event!

As the calendar turned to April, the class really enjoyed the Easter Egg Hunt! We have also had fun during our field trips to a local park and to the Recycling Center. Our class has recycled dozens of bags of items!

OT with Ms. Melissa!

April is Occupational Therapy Awareness Month!

This month, we celebrate Occupational Therapy (OT), and the important role occupational therapists play in helping individuals participate in the activities, or occupations, that are meaningful to their daily lives. For children, these occupations include learning, playing, socializing, and becoming more independent at home and in school.

Occupational therapists work with students who may have challenges with fine motor skills, sensory processing, attention, self-regulation, visual motor integration, and daily living skills.

Through individualized support, OTs help students build the skills they need to succeed both inside and outside the classroom.

A school-based occupational therapist specializes in helping students access and participate in their educational environment. OTs also collaborate closely with teachers, parents, and other school staff to create strategies and supports that promote increased independence and student success.

School-based occupational therapy can take place in the classroom, in small groups, or through individual sessions depending on each student's needs. The ultimate goal is to help every child develop the skills and confidence needed to fully engage in learning and school activities.

Here are some activities our students did during this last month in OT:







Ms. Caryn our BCBA!

Behavior Corner: Growing Positive Behavior This Spring

Spring is a time of growth and change—and it's a great opportunity to help children build positive behaviors in new ways. With warmer weather and more time outdoors, children may have more energy and excitement, which can sometimes make it harder to stay focused or manage emotions. This season is the perfect time to “grow” positive behavior habits at home in simple, natural ways.

Try these spring-inspired strategies:

- **Catch the good moments:** Just like plants need sunlight, positive behavior grows with attention. Notice and praise when your child is making good choices, even small ones.
- **Practice patience outdoors:** Use outdoor activities (like playing games or riding bikes) as opportunities to practice turn-taking, waiting, and following directions.
- **Encourage problem-solving:** When small conflicts arise (with siblings or friends), guide your child to think of solutions instead of stepping in right away.
- **Set clear expectations for new situations:** Spring often brings new activities—sports, family activities, or events. Briefly review expectations ahead of time.
- **Channel extra energy positively:** Movement breaks, outdoor play, and hands-on activities can help children release energy in a healthy way.

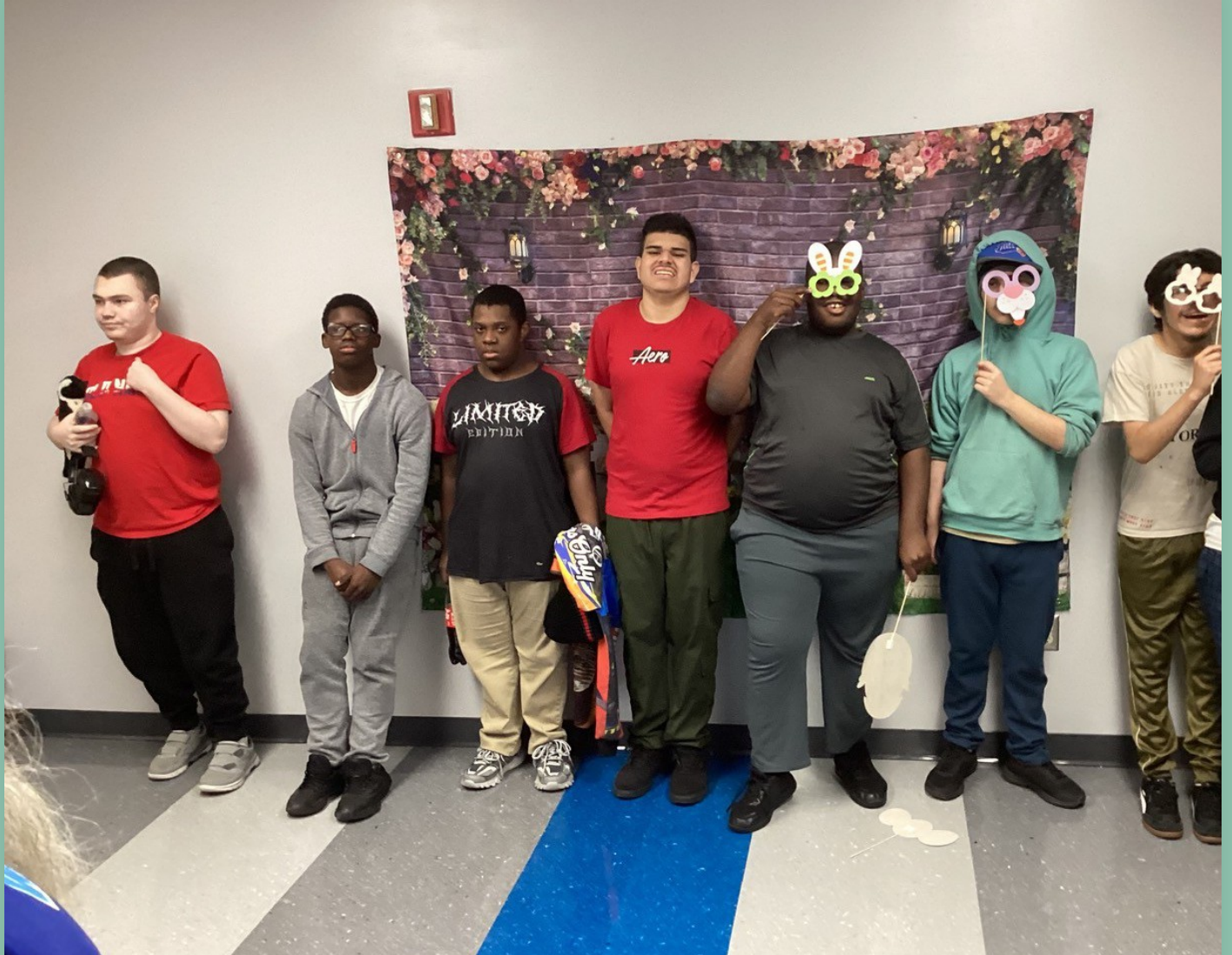
Spring Egg Hunt!



The Sunshine Club organized a wonderful Spring Egg Hunt that brought smiles to everyone as students raced to collect colorful eggs. After the hunt, each student was treated to a basket full of goodies to celebrate their hard work and school spirit. The highlight of the day was undoubtedly our staff members dressing up as the Easter Bunny, adding an extra touch of magic and laughter to the festivities!









Westlake Garden!



Our Westlake Garden garden is officially thriving thanks to the hard work and dedication of Ms. Marshall's team, who are managing every aspect of the growing process. They have taken full ownership of the daily chores, from ensuring every plant stays perfectly watered to meticulously weeding the beds to allow our crops to flourish. The most rewarding part of their labor is finally here as they begin picking the fresh produce, seeing firsthand the literal fruits of their persistence. This hands-on experience is teaching them the value of patience, sustainability, and the joy of growing their own food!









Parent Resources!

TRANSITION THURSDAYS

Webinar Series

NEW JERSEY HUMAN SERVICES



Office of Transition to
Adult Life & Employment

MONTHLY

→ 2nd Thursday: 6PM – 7:30 PM

Intake Process & Transition Resources

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

→ 3rd Thursday: Noon – 1PM

Topic of the Month

Join us every month for a new transition topic

QUARTERLY - OCTOBER | JANUARY | APRIL | JULY

→ 1st Thursday: Noon – 1PM

Welcome Session - General

Learn the basics of accessing DDD services

→ 4th Thursday: 6PM – 7:30 PM

Welcome Session (with Breakouts)

Join breakout sessions covering key transition topics

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



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



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



Department of Human Services
Sarah Adelman, Commissioner



Division of
Developmental
Disabilities

and Special Needs

Programs and Social Events for all ages

PROGRAMS

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

SOCIAL EVENTS

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



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

call: (908) 527-4781

email: opdsn@ucnj.org

visit our website www.ucnj.org/opdsn

Or scan the QR Code!



BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE



Bwo 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:

Rele: (908) 527-4781

Imel: opdsn@ucnj.org

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

Oswa eskane kòd QR la!



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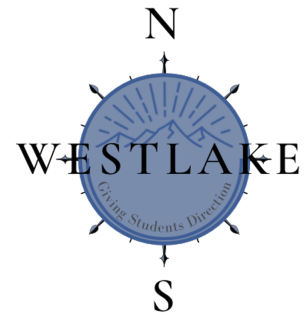


Contact Us!

Website: www.ucesc.org/schools/westlake_school

Location: [1571 Lamberts Mill Rd, Westfield, NJ, USA](#)

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



INSTAGRAM!

Visit us!



Robert Peneno

Robert is using Smore to create beautiful newsletters



April 2026 Monthly Report Enrollment Data

Enrollment-96 (as of 4/28/26).

New Students-2

Disenrollments-5 (1-Move, 1-GED, 1-Transferred from North due to assault then guardian requested another placement, 2-Conduct).

Emergency Drill-4/14/26, Shelter in place.

Fire Drill-4/1/26.

A Message From Our Principal: Dr. Balsamello

April has been an exceptionally vibrant month at Hillcrest Academy South Campus (HAS), filled with meaningful educational milestones and special events that highlight our students' growth and commitment to their community. As we navigated the transition from the end of the third marking period into the beginning of the fourth, our students demonstrated impressive focus and resilience. A significant highlight was our SAT day, where students returned to their Elizabeth academies. Beyond the classroom, our students have been actively engaged in experiences that build character

and foster a sense of responsibility. We celebrated our high achievers with an Honor Roll field trip, recognizing the dedication required to excel in their studies. In honor of Earth Day, students participated in a tree-planting initiative, contributing to the beauty and sustainability of our local environment. Our Career Day provided invaluable opportunities for students to explore various professional paths and hear firsthand from industry experts.

Through a community service field trip, our students put their values into action, supporting local organizations and learning the importance of giving back. I invite you to explore this newsletter and witness the wonderful things occurring daily at HAS. We are incredibly proud of our students' achievements and the positive energy they bring to our school.



Important Dates

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
29	30	31	01 - PASSOVER - APRIL FOOLS' DAY - PARAPROFESSIONALS' DAY	02 - MOVIE DAY - WEAR BLUE FOR AUTISM	03 - SPRING BREAK - GOOD FRIDAY	04
05 EASTER SUNDAY	06 SPRING BREAK	07 SPRING BREAK	08 SPRING BREAK	09 SPRING BREAK	10 SPRING BREAK	11
12	13 SCHOOL REOPENS	14	15 TAX DAY	16	17	18
19	20 LAST DAY OF 3RD MARKING PERIOD	21 - SAT'S - BULLETIN BOARD TRIP - FIRST DAY OF 4TH MARKING PERIOD	22 - ADMINISTRATIVE PROFESSIONALS' DAY - EARTH DAY	23 HONOR ROLL TRIP	24 CAREER DAY	25
26	27	28	29	30 UCC TRIP	01	02

Student of the Month!

Congratulations Oliver!

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

Faculty/Staff "Getting to Know You"!

Mr Solano's Favorites:

Favorite movie: Saving Private Ryan

Favorite food: Chinese Food

Favorite color: Red

Favorite book: Lord of the Rings

Favorite travel spot: Greece

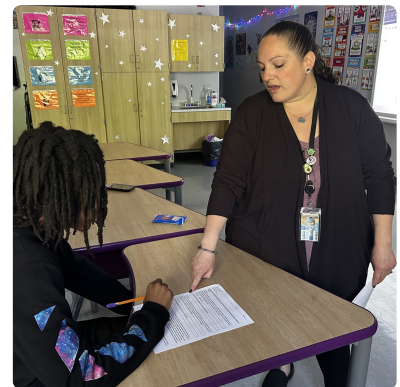
Favorite pastimes: videogames, watching anime, working out, spending time with dogs and wife



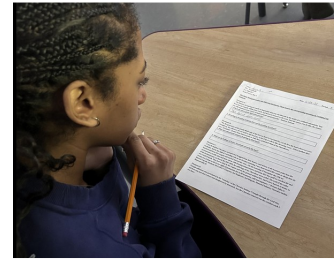
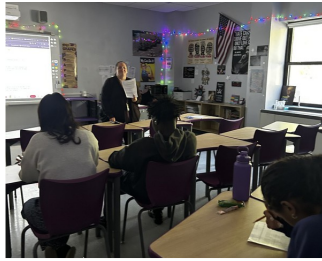
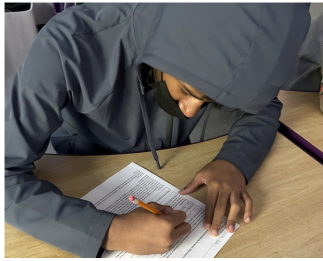
Teacher's Corner: Social Studies

Mrs W: US History I & Economics

For the month of April, Economics classes learned about all the different types of taxes, how to read pay stub and credit card statements, budgeting and making good financial choices. Students then spent a week completing a budgeting simulation where they had to look at budgets for different levels of education such as a four year college degree, a one year certificate program and a high school diploma. Students were assigned a career in those three areas and had to budget real life scenarios. Students then had to record their annual/monthly income, how much savings they should have, the costs of food, housing transportation, utilities, etc. At the end, the students had to answer a series of summative questions that all reflect that a higher level of education coincides with better budget friendly opportunities. The start of the 4th marking period also starts our much awaited stock market unit!

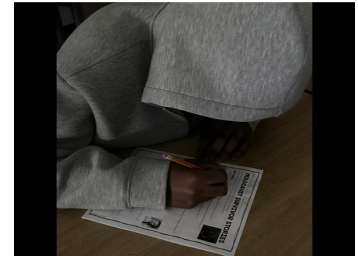
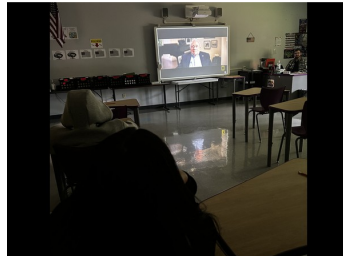
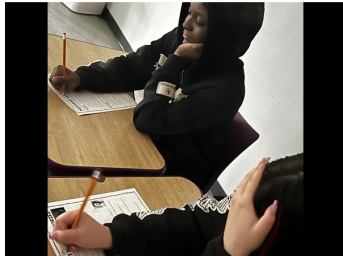


Students in US History I classes have been learning all about Manifest Destiny and Westward expansion. Students learned about topics such as the background of the term Manifest destiny, why the country wanted to expand west, Lewis, Clark and Sacageweaa, the hardships faced, the issues between Americans and indigenous peoples, the Indian Removal Act/ Trail of Tears, Native American boarding schools, etc. Students also learned about the Oregon Trail and were even assigned to play the 1994 version of the game as an assignment with summative questions that reflected how difficult life was moving west.



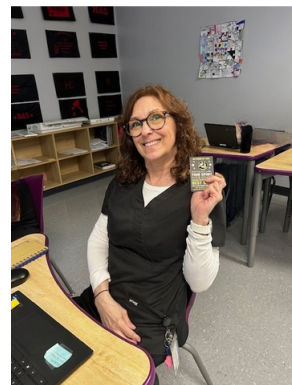
Mr Fritz: World History & US History II

In our US History II classrooms, students have reached a pivotal transition after concluding a comprehensive analysis of the Korean War, and are now diving into the transformative era of the 1960s. To deepen their exploration of this decade's complex social and political shifts, students will be launching a major research project, allowing them to take an investigative lead on the events that shaped modern America. Meanwhile, in World History, students are bringing the study of World War II to a close and preparing to enter the early chapters of the Cold War, beginning with the global landscape of the 1950s. To bridge these two eras, students will engage in a poignant primary source review, analyzing interview footage of soldiers returning home from the front lines. This powerful look at the human experience of reintegration will provide essential context as we examine how the post-war world began to reshape itself in the mid-20th century.



"Paving Paths" Teacher Recognitions

April: Fueling the Journey: Rest & Recharge





Mrs Fern - Math Teacher



Ms V - English Teacher

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

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

How does taking responsibility for yourself and practicing self-care give you the energy to keep moving toward your goals?

- When you practice self care it can help your mental health. And when your mental health is in a good state you are more likely to do better at what you are trying to accomplish. Being in a better mental state can even help you start showing up more for people. These things can help you move towards your goal because if your mental health is good, you would be more likely to give your all on whatever you try to accomplish. -JB
- Taking responsibility for yourself is important to give you energy to keep moving toward your goal, because whatever happens you know it'll be because of yourself. It'll help you hold yourself accountable for how your own life ends up. Practicing self-care gives you energy to keep moving toward your goal. It does this because when you take care of yourself before anything else you'll work and be at your best self. It can really make a difference on how you approach things and find solutions to get toward that goal you're trying to reach. - CT
- When I practice self care, like praying every night, going to the gym, and/or eating right, it gives me fuel to keep going. I would either get compliments on the work that I put in or I would even notice it myself! That alone gave me the confidence and the discipline to keep doing what I have to do. - MC
- Taking responsibility for yourself and practicing self care gives you the energy to keep moving toward your goals. It is very important because it defines who you are as a person and it puts a good mindset towards you. Taking responsibility before you become an adult is better than to learn it later in life. Growing up, you will have to take responsibility as an adult like paying bills, paying rent, and buying groceries. These give you the energy to keep going because you have to keep providing for yourself. Practicing self care is important also because you need to make sure your mental health is okay and you are confident in yourself. -KC

What's one responsibility you're proud of handling, or one self-care habit that helps you stay on your path?

- One self-care habit that helps me stay on my path is taking a few minutes each morning for mindfulness or meditation. It allows me to start the day with clarity and focus, reducing stress and setting a positive tone. I'm proud of how this simple practice keeps me grounded and motivated throughout busy days. It reminds me to prioritize my well-being while pursuing my goals. -TS
- One of the responsibilities that I handle is I am the primary care taker for my two dogs. This makes me feel proud because its not an easy task to do consistently every day. It feels good to take a job that nobody in my family wanted. One self care habit that keeps me staying on the path is that I am very conscientious of my sleep schedule. I think its very important to get good sleep because when I don't, I am very tired throughout the day. -LC
- One responsibility I am proud of everyday that I'm handling is getting up and getting ready everyday. Some people don't have the advantages that we do, like sleeping under a roof and sleeping on a bed. Some people don't even have the advantage to eat breakfast everyday. I am very proud of everything I have and own right now because its my responsibility to handle myself everyday. -ER
- One responsibility that keeps me on my path is always helping my mother and seeing her appreciated. It helps me stay on my path because it makes me feel like I'm doing good, not only for myself but for my mom too. When I help with the cleaning, cooking, and all sorts of other chores, it makes me feel like I am able to do things for myself and be a very responsible person. -AP

Administrative Professionals' Day

Administrative Professionals' Day provides a wonderful opportunity to recognize the heartbeat of any educational institution, and at HAS, that pulse is undoubtedly Mrs. Sandra D'Emilio. She serves as the essential glue holding the school community together, moving seamlessly between supporting the faculty's logistical needs, managing complex staff schedules, and providing a warm, welcoming presence for every student who walks through the office doors. Whether she is solving a last-minute crisis or offering a kind word, her tireless dedication and multitasking prowess ensure that the daily operations of the school run like clockwork. Mrs. Sandra's contributions go far beyond mere paperwork; her work ethic and genuine care create a positive environment where everyone feels supported, making her an indispensable treasure to the entire HAS family.



Teacher Assistants' Day

On Teacher Assistants' Day, the entire HAS community takes a moment to celebrate the incredible impact of our TA, Ms Pradel, whose dedication is a cornerstone of our daily success. Serving as a vital bridge between instruction and achievement, she provides tailored support that empowers students to reach their full potential while offering the faculty indispensable classroom assistance. Whether she is reinforcing a complex lesson, managing small group dynamics, or anticipating the needs of the staff before they are even voiced, her proactive approach ensures that the learning environment remains both productive and positive. Ms Pradel's unique ability to balance academic support with genuine emotional encouragement makes her an invaluable asset to the faculty and a trusted mentor to the students, embodying the very best of what it means to be a dedicated educator.



Westlake Basketball Game

The basketball court became a powerful bridge of community and inclusion when the students of HAS were invited by Westlake School for a collaborative game. This event transcended typical competition, focusing instead on the shared joy of the sport and the building of meaningful peer connections. As the HAS athletes hit the floor alongside the Westlake students, the atmosphere was filled with mutual encouragement, high-fives, and a palpable sense of sportsmanship. By participating in this invitational, the HAS students not only showcased their skills but also demonstrated profound empathy and leadership, proving that the most important scores are settled through teamwork and the breaking down of social barriers. It was a day where every basket celebrated friendship, leaving both schools with a deeper appreciation for the diverse strengths within their community.





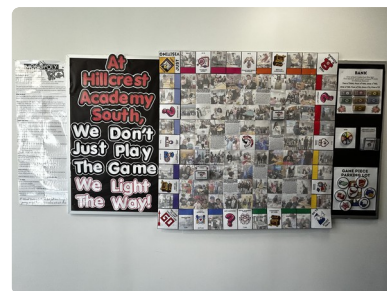
NJ Food Bank

Stepping outside the classroom and into the heart of service, the students of HAS recently spent a meaningful day volunteering at the Community Foodbank of New Jersey to support those in need. With high energy and focused dedication, they took to the assembly lines to sort, organize, and pack essential food items for families facing food insecurity. This hands-on experience offered the students a sobering yet empowering look at the impact of community outreach, as they worked together to ensure that hundreds of nutritious food packs were ready for distribution. By giving their time and labor, the HAS students did more than just fill boxes; they demonstrated a profound commitment to social responsibility and empathy, proving that even a single afternoon of hard work can provide vital relief and hope to their neighbors.



Bulletin Board

Bringing a vibrant spark of creativity and school spirit to the administrative heart of the district, the students of HAS, accompanied by the dedicated Ms. V and Mrs. Fern, recently visited the Central Offices to transform their designated bulletin board into a masterpiece of interactive art. Centered on the inspiring theme "Light the Way," the group designed a HAS-centered Monopoly board that serves as a brilliant metaphor for how the school community leads with kindness, innovation, and a clear vision for the future. This wasn't just a static display; the board was crafted to be fully interactive and playable, featuring custom "properties" that highlight school classes/milestones, "Life Happens" cards (Chance) are filled with real life moments both positive and challenging, and "Community of Care" (Community Chest) prompts that no one is alone on the journey. By "lighting the way" through this playful yet profound project, the HAS team demonstrated that their path forward is paved with collaboration, ingenuity, and a shared commitment to excellence that shines brightly for all visitors of the Central Offices to see.



Earth Day Tree Planting

In honor of Earth Day, Mrs. Arora's science class traded their textbooks for shovels to plant a native sapling on the school grounds, turning a lesson on ecology into a hands-on environmental contribution. Under Mrs. Arora's guidance, students learned about the vital role trees play in carbon sequestration and urban cooling while working together to prepare the soil and secure the new addition to the campus landscape. This living classroom project not only beautified the school but also instilled a sense of long-term stewardship in the students, who left the site with dirty hands and a deeper commitment to protecting the planet's future.





Honor Roll Trip

To celebrate their outstanding academic achievements, the Marking Period 3 Honor Roll students were treated to an exclusive trip to see the highly anticipated biopic, *Michael!* This outing served as a well-deserved reward for the countless hours of studying and dedication these students poured into their coursework over the last several months. As they gathered in the theater to witness the cinematic journey of the legendary "King of Pop," the atmosphere was one of shared excitement and pride. Beyond just a fun morning away from their busy schedules, the film offered an inspiring look at the intersection of raw talent and the rigorous hard work required to achieve global excellence—a theme that resonated deeply with a group of students who have clearly mastered their own commitment to success. It was a perfect afternoon of culture and community, honoring the bright futures of HAS's top scholars.



MARCH MADNESS: and the Winner is.....!

The competitive spirit of March Madness took on a strategic new form this year with the highly anticipated HAS Chess Tournament. After weeks of intense maneuvering and high-stakes matches that saw the field narrow down to the school's most elite players, the championship came down to a thrilling final showdown between Randel and Isaiah. Both players displayed incredible focus and tactical depth, turning the board into a battlefield of complex gambits and calculated defenses. In a nail-biting finish that kept spectators on the edge of their seats, Randel ultimately secured the checkmate to claim the title of tournament champion. While the victory belonged to Randel, the final match was a testament to the skill and sportsmanship of both finalists, capping off a successful event that celebrated the intellectual grit of the HAS student body.

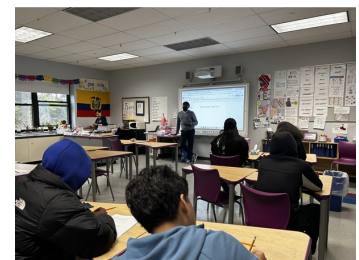


Career Day

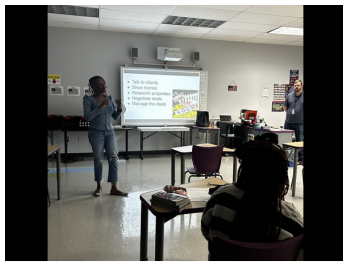
Career Day transformed the high school hallways of HAS into a bustling hub of inspiration and professional discovery, offering students a firsthand look at the diverse paths awaiting them after graduation. Professionals from a wide array of industries, ranging from healthcare and engineering to the creative arts and public service, filled the classrooms. They shared their personal journeys, the daily realities of their roles and the skills necessary for success in the modern workforce. This immersive event allowed students to move beyond textbooks and engage in meaningful Q&A sessions, helping to demystify various career tracks and spark interest in fields they may have never previously considered. By connecting classroom learning to real-world application, Career Day provided the student body with a valuable roadmap for their futures, leaving them motivated to pursue their ambitions with a clearer sense of purpose and direction.



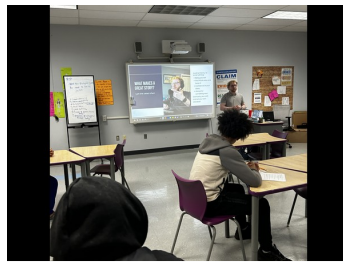
Hairstylist



Therapist



Real Estate Agent



Journalist



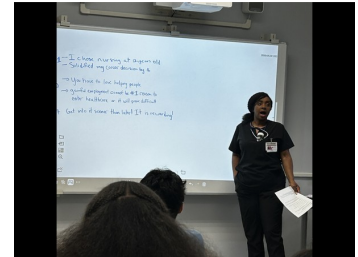
Police



Chef



Photographer/Videographer



LPN (Nurse)

April Fool's Day

Laughter echoed through the hallways of HAS as the faculty turned the tables for a spirited April Fools' Day celebration that left the entire student body doing a double-take. The day kicked off with teachers ditching their usual professional attire to dress as students, sporting oversized hoodies, backpacks, and the latest trends in a hilarious bid to blend into the classrooms. The mischief reached its peak during the final five minutes of each period, when teachers executed a coordinated "digital takeover," playfully blocking computer screens with a collection of absurd and funny websites like "patience-is-a-virtue.org", "everydayim.com", and "endless.horse" that caught everyone off guard. Even the staff room wasn't safe, as colleagues spent the day pranking each other with classic office gags and hidden surprises. This lighthearted break from the academic routine not only showcased the faculty's incredible sense of humor but also strengthened the bond between teachers and students through the universal language of a well-timed joke.

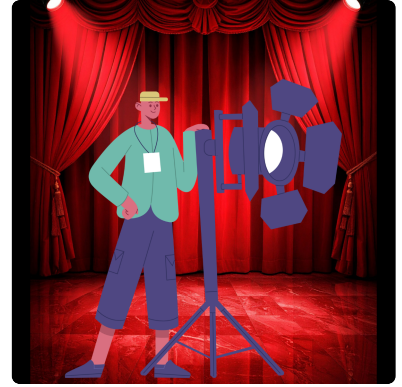


Students Outside of School

Let There Be Light!

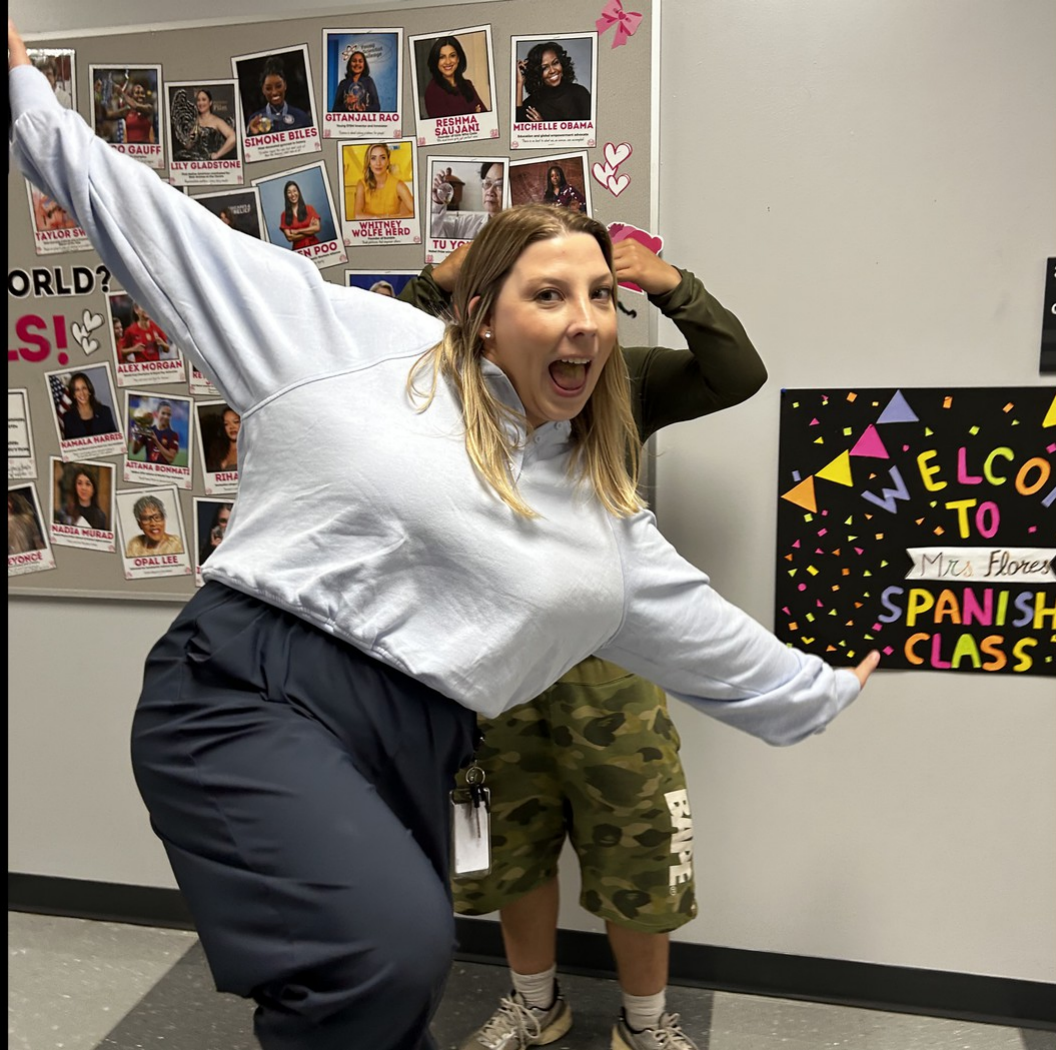
As a dedicated member of the lighting crew at Jefferson High School, Luis plays a vital role in bringing the stage to life through his work with the spotlights. He first discovered his passion for technical theater during his sophomore year, after being encouraged by a friend to give it a try. Since then, he has become a seasoned contributor to the school's productions, ensuring that the

performers are perfectly illuminated during every show. For Luis, being part of this collaborative team is a rewarding experience that provides a unique perspective on the performing arts; he finds the work both fulfilling and "cool," enjoying the behind-the-scenes energy that makes each performance a success.



Blooper Pics of the Month





About Us

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

Website: www.ucesc.org

Instagram: [ucesc_has](https://www.instagram.com/ucesc_has)

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

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

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

Visit us on Instagram



HAS Smore

HAS is using Smore to create beautiful newsletters



Work Readiness Academy

April 2026 Monthly Report

Message from the Director



Dear Families & Supporters,

Welcome to the April edition of our newsletter! While the calendar felt a bit shorter this month due to our Spring Recess, the energy at the Work Readiness Academy remained as high as ever. I am incredibly proud of how our students jumped right back into their routines, maintaining their productivity both within the classroom and during our community-based work-based learning experiences.

For many of our families, this season brings a mix of excitement and reflection. We have been actively engaged in collaborative transition planning meetings for those students preparing to move on from the Academy this June. Our Project SEARCH families are preparing for their final round of Employment Planning Meetings next month. Our goal is to ensure that every student and family feels fully supported, confident, and prepared for the next chapter of their journey. If you have any questions about anything related to this process please reach out to us:

For the WRA: Please contact Rachel Richer at rrricher@ucesc.org

For Project SEARCH: Please contact me at jbornstein@ucesc.org

Looking ahead, we have a very special week on the horizon. The first week of May is **Staff Appreciation Week!** Our dedicated team works tirelessly to create a supportive and innovative environment for our students, and we are so looking forward to recognizing their hard work and passion. If you would like to join us in showing appreciation for the staff, here are a few suggested ways to participate:

- **Send in a Treat:** Send in a breakfast item or a sweet treat for the staff to enjoy during the week.
- **Write a Note:** Help your child compose a thoughtful card or note of thanks to share with the staff members who work with them each day.
- **Luncheon Donation:** Make a cash donation toward our planned staff appreciation luncheon. Donations can be made via Venmo to **@josh-bornstein-3** or by sending in or dropping off cash in a marked envelope. We cannot accept checks.

Thank you for your continued support of our program and for helping us celebrate our wonderful team!

Save the Dates. Our program graduation dates are confirmed!

Wednesday June 17, 2026 10am-12pm: WRA Graduation & Recognition Ceremony

*All WRA Families and Case Managers are welcome to join us at the WRA for this celebration

*Every student will receive a certificate and we will be honoring our Community Partners of the Year

Thursday, June 18, 2026 10am-11:30am: Project SEARCH Graduation at Overlook Medical Center

RSVPs will be sent out towards the end of May.

And finally, a big high-five to **Ariana** who landed her first part-time job at Dunkin Donuts! The WRA now officially "Runs on Dunkin". A big thank you to our staff who were intimately involved with supporting Ariana towards achieving this outcome.

I hope you enjoy the rest of this month's newsletter.

Warmly,

Josh Bornstein, Director

UCESC Work Readiness Academy

jbornstein@ucesc.org

April 2026 Data

Enrollment as of April 28, 2026

Actual: 28

Changes: Entered: 0 Exited: 0

Referrals: 4

Intakes Scheduled: 4

Accepted: 3



Drills

4/17/26 - EM (Shelter in Place)

4/28/26 - Fire Drill



Attendance Reporting

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

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

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Instructional Insights

Fueling the Journey: Responsibility, Self-Care, and Dignity in Action

*"Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation." —
Audre Lorde*

At the Work Readiness Academy, this month's theme, *Fueling the Journey*, reminds us that growth is not just about moving forward, but about how we sustain that progress along the way. A key part of that fuel comes from our social-emotional learning focus on responsibility and self-care, two essential skills that empower our students to navigate school, work, and life with confidence and purpose.



Responsibility at WRA goes far beyond completing tasks; for us it means understanding how our choices impact ourselves and others. Students are practicing ownership of their goals in the classroom, demonstrating accountability at internship sites, and reflecting on their progress across settings. At the same time, we are emphasizing the importance of self-care, helping students recognize when they need support, take breaks, advocate for themselves, and develop strategies to manage stress and maintain well-being.

In recognition of Autism Acceptance Month, our work this April has been especially intentional. As a staff, we have engaged in ongoing learning and reflection to ensure that dignity and respect for our students remain at the forefront of every decision we make. This commitment is evident in how we design instruction, support students in community-based and work-based learning experiences, and interact with one another each day.

Fueling the journey means creating environments where all students feel valued, understood, and empowered. It means honoring individual strengths, supporting areas of growth, and ensuring that every student is treated with the dignity they deserve. As we continue this important work, we are proud to model and foster a culture where responsibility, self-care, acceptance, and respect guide the path forward for every member of our WRA community.

Rachel Richer, Supervisor of Instruction

UCESC Work Readiness Academy

rricher@ucesc.org



May 4-May 8 - Staff Appreciation Week!

May 8 - Reverse Job Fair & Mock Interviews at Project SEARCH

May 11 - Staff Development - 1pm Early Dismissal

May 25 - Memorial Day - SCHOOL CLOSED

May 29 - WRA and Project SEARCH's Got Talent Show

June 16 - Project SEARCH Graduation - 10am-11:30am

June 17 - WRA Graduation - 10am-12pm

June 19, 22 & 23 - 1pm Early Dismissal

June 23 - Last Day of School

Students Leading the Way at Work

Fueling the Journey: Growth in Action

This month, we are proud to recognize **Nick, Steven, and Christian** for the incredible ways they are *fueling their journey* through responsibility, self-care, and a deep commitment to personal growth.



Nick

has shown tremendous growth in his ability to be open and honest about his feelings. He consistently communicates his needs with staff and demonstrates responsibility by making meaningful adjustments when given feedback. Nick's dedication and hard work toward achieving his goals truly reflect his commitment to growth and self-awareness.

Steven

brings a positive attitude, energy, and enthusiasm to everything he does. He remains authentically himself while confidently following his own path. Steven's ability to stay true to who he is, while contributing to a supportive and respectful environment, is something that positively impacts everyone around him.

Christian

continues to impress us with his open-mindedness and willingness to try new things and embrace new experiences. He prioritizes his self-care and shows great courage in advocating for himself. His perseverance and determination to turn his dreams into reality are a powerful example of what it means to stay focused and resilient on your journey.

Together, these students exemplify the values of dignity, respect, and acceptance that we strive to model each day at WRA. We are so proud of the way they are fueling their journey with confidence, purpose, and heart. Well done!



Nick



Steven



Christian

Welcome to **Our Classroom**



April has been an exciting and productive month for our Project SEARCH interns at Overlook Medical Center. From hands-on learning experiences to launching new internship rotations, students have been building the skills they need for success in the workplace and beyond. Throughout the month, there has been a strong focus on preparing students not just for internships, but for long-term employment and independence.

Students spent time developing essential job readiness skills that will support them in gaining and maintaining employment. They practiced how to communicate their availability in a professional and flexible way, learned how to identify and overcome barriers to employment, and explored job

opportunities using tools like Indeed. In addition, students worked on strengthening their interview skills, including making positive first impressions, maintaining eye contact, and clearly communicating their strengths. Through role-play activities, discussions, and real-world scenarios, students learned how to present themselves as reliable, capable, and confident employees. In honor of Autism Awareness and Acceptance Month, students participated in meaningful activities and discussions focused on understanding and celebrating neurodiversity in the workplace. We emphasized why individuals with autism can and should be part of the workforce, highlighting strengths such as attention to detail, reliability, consistency, and strong focus. Students also explored companies that actively hire and value individuals with autism, helping them recognize that inclusive workplaces benefit everyone and that their unique strengths are an asset in many industries.

April marked the start of our third internship rotation, giving students the opportunity to explore a variety of departments throughout Overlook Medical Center. Students are now gaining hands-on experience in areas such as Wound Care, Panera Bread, the Infusion Center, Patient Transport, Central Sterile, Food Services, Materials Management, the Gift Shop, and Endoscopy. We are especially excited to announce a new partnership with 2AB, the Orthopedic and Surgical Unit, which provides students with exposure to a specialized healthcare environment - and the 3D Printing specialty area within the Clinical Engineering Department.

Across all rotations, students are focusing on building and demonstrating the skills needed for success in each department. They are learning specific job tasks, increasing their independence and responsibility, and improving their communication and teamwork. Each student is working toward mastering individual internship competencies, helping them grow into confident and capable employees. We are proud of the dedication, resilience, and growth our students continue to demonstrate every day and appreciate the continued support from staff, partners, and families in making Project SEARCH a success.

Please keep an eye out for reminder emails about our final round of Employment Planning Meetings coming up May 19-21!

Jourdan Spencer, Teacher

Project Search Program at Overlook Medical Center



Caroline interning in the Gift Shop and Bloom



Alfi preparing patient materials for Wound Care



***Tiago** learning how to take vitals in the Infusion Center*



Simon working the cash register at Panera Bread



*Former student, now employee, **Steven Lopez** mentoring **Adrian** in the Infusion Center*



Roman sanitizing and making beds in Endoscopy



We are still accepting applications for the Project SEARCH Class of 2026 cohort for the 2026-27 school year! The deadline is May 15, 2026. 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



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Real-World Ready: Students Thriving at WBL Internships



Kevin in the Athletic Department at Kean University



Nick at Sweet & Fancy Emporium in Downtown Cranford



Chelsea in the Housekeeping Department at the Hilton Hotel at Newark Airport



Anthony at Barnes & Noble in Clark Commons

.....



Christian in the Mailroom at Summit Medical Center in Berkeley Heights



Erin at Home Power Yoga in Downtown Cranford

Staff Member Spotlight

Karen Yoon

Current position at UCESC?

Part-time Teaching Assistant

How long have you worked for the Commission?

This is my 5th year

What do you love best about your job?

I love being able to work and get to know the students!

What do you like to do in your free time?

In my free time, I like to read, watch TV, and play some brain games!

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

Most people would be surprised to know that I have 4 sons!



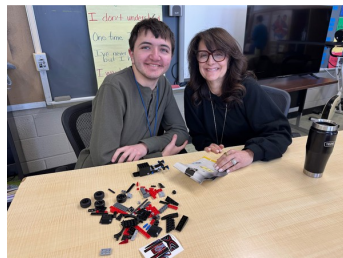
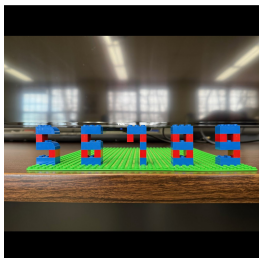
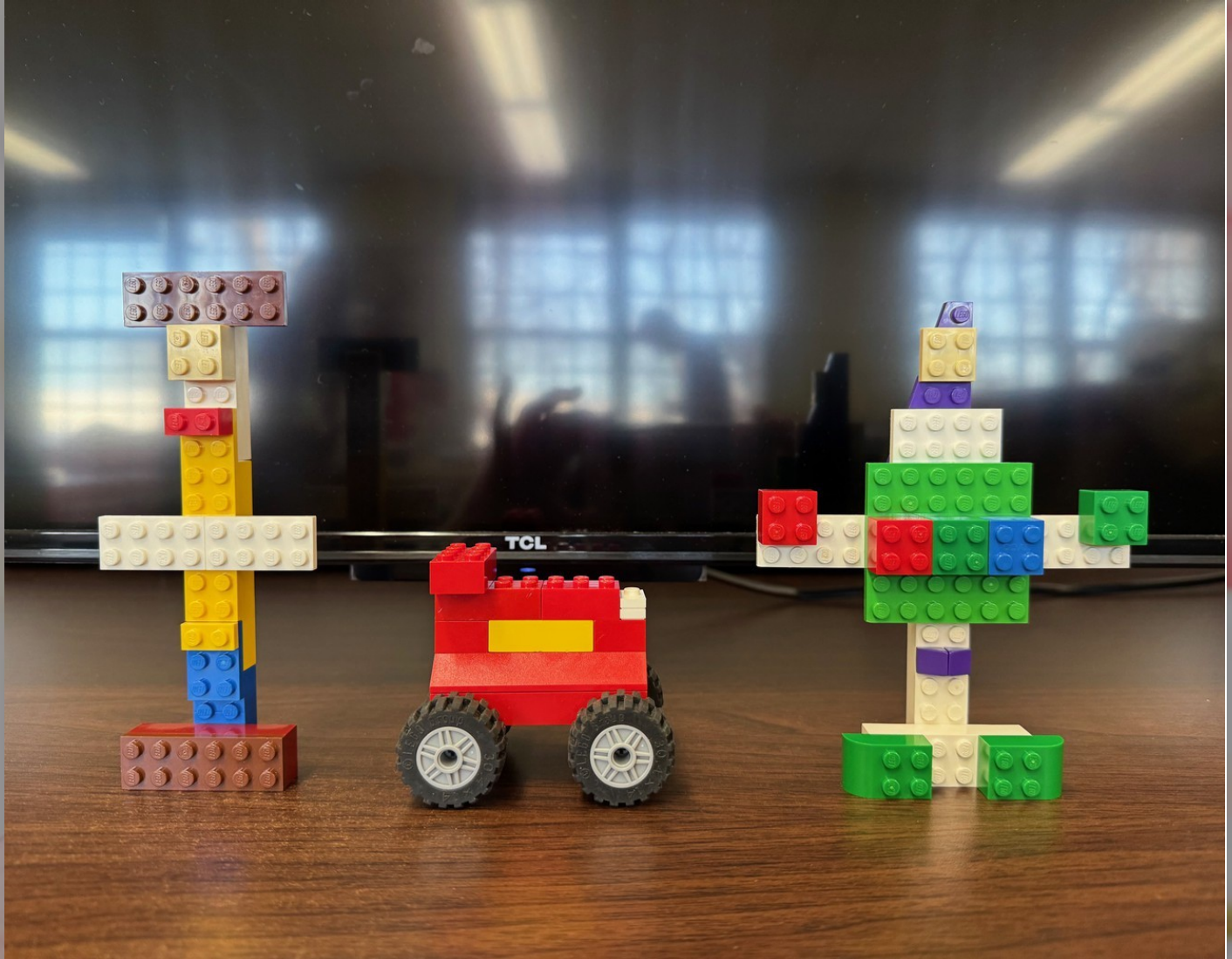
Fun, Friday Electives!

Lego Club

Lego club offers a supportive and engaging space to build, create and connect. Through hands-on activities, students develop problem-solving skills while expressing their creativity. The structured, low-pressure environment allows students to participate at their own pace...one brick at a time.



*Talent Show sneak peak of Lego Creations by **Jonathan***



Student- Run Newsletter Club

The student-run newsletter gives our students a meaningful platform to share their voices, ideas and experiences. Students take part in writing, editing, design and building communication and workplace-ready skills in a supportive, structured environment. By collaborating on each issue, they gain confidence and take pride in creating something that informs and connects their school community.



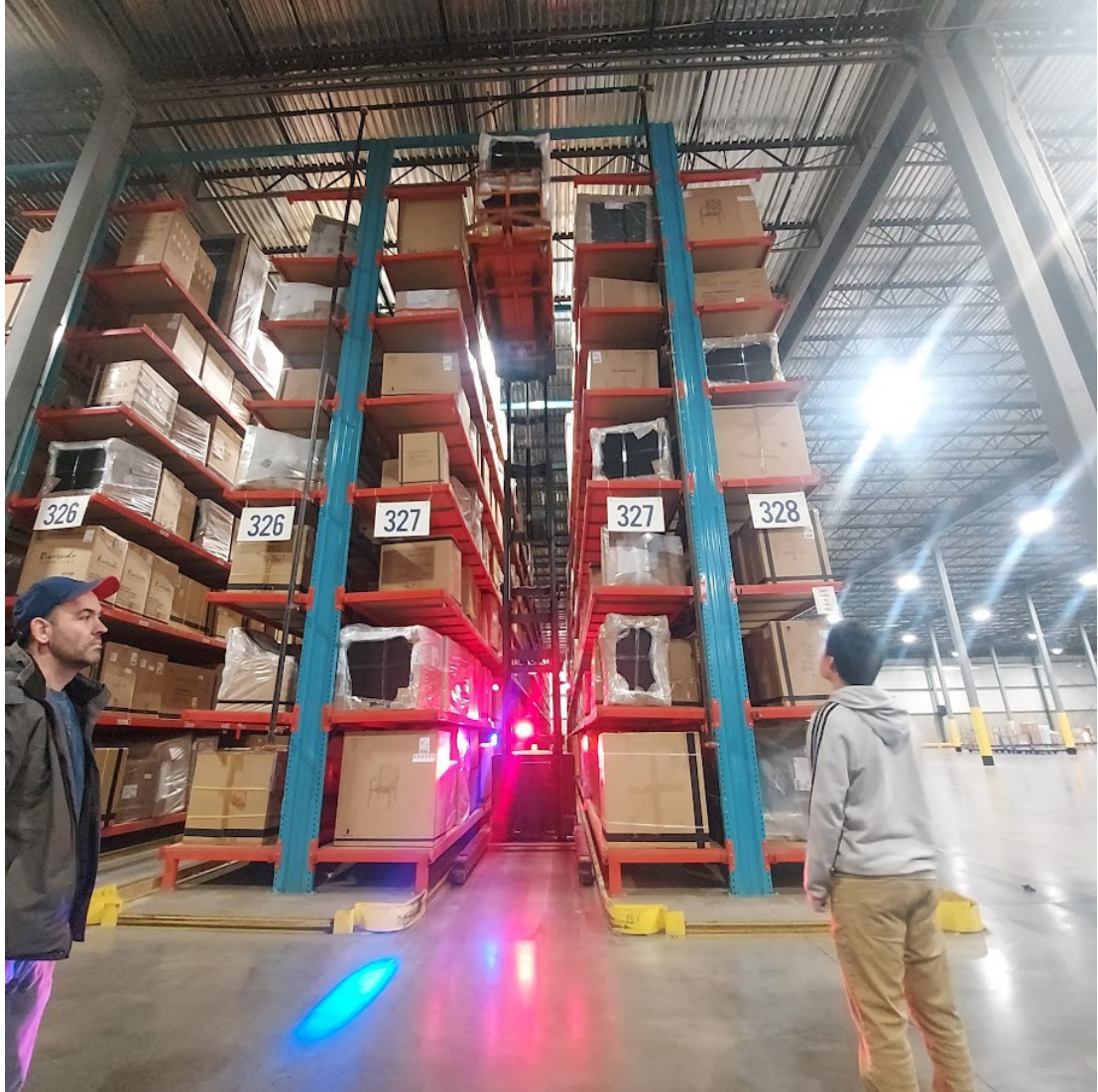
Where It All Happens: Students Discover the Power of the Supply Chain at Macy's

The students and staff traveled to Raritan Center in Edison for a tour of the Macy's furniture warehouse. Our tour included information about how a piece of furniture is ordered either in the store or online and how it is delivered to the customer's home. All of us were given the opportunity to see how various equipment is used to "pick" the furniture from the shelf and travels from the warehouse to the home. Everyone was treated to some "merch" by the wonderful employees. A good time was had by all!





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*Former Student, **Ian McCormack**, was spotted working at Johnny Napkins in Union.*



Picture of the Month

***Matt** tipping his hat to hands-on learning at Burlington Coat Factory!*



Community Resources/Events



YOGA FOR ALL AGES!

This program focuses on gentle movement to support strength, flexibility, and relaxation. Participants will learn simple breathing techniques to calm the nervous system, with each session ending in guided deep relaxation to promote overall well-being.

- **Time:** 5:30 pm – 6:15 pm
- **Wednesdays**
 - May – 13th, 20th and 27th
 - June – 3rd and 10th

- **Location:** Trailside Nature & Science Center, Mountainside NJ

Caregivers are welcome to attend and provide support or participate as needed.
Space is limited and registration is on a first-come, first-served basis.



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:
May 14: [Transition to Adult Services and DDD Intake Process](#)

Guardianship Resources

Guardianship Webinar Replay

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

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

A link to a replay of the webinar is below:

<https://www.facebook.com/share/v/1Dd5UPLEsL/>

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

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

pro se guardianship video



Guardianship Options

Presented By:

Judy McDonough, NCS - CEO

Jennifer Case, NCS - Director of Pro Se Services

Teresa Amadori- Pro Se Coordinator



Updated Guardianship Fact Sheet (3).pdf

Download

107.0 KB

DDD Services

Applying for DDD Services

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



Family Quick Guide to DDD_English

[Download](#)

3.0 MB



Family Quick Guide to DDD_Spanish (Espanol)

[Download](#)

2.1 MB



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

[Download](#)

8.2 MB



Full DDD Application-for-Eligibility-English

[Download](#)

3.6 MB



DDD Resource Links

[Download](#)

595.6 KB

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

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

[**Click Here for More Information About Events Sponsored by Union County's OPDSN**](#)



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

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

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

Understanding Supported Employment Options Available AFTER Graduation

SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT IN NEW JERSEY

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



KEY TERMS

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)

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

Competitive Employment

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

Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS)

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

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

"Employment First" State

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

EXAMPLES OF SERVICES

• **Pre-Employment Transition Services**

- Offered to high school students to plan and prepare for entering the workforce.

• **Job Development**

- Assists individuals with a job search, interview skills, and resume development.

• **Job Sampling**

- Gives the individual the opportunity to explore different types of employment and identify areas of interest and ability.

• **Job Coaching**

- Provides assistance with learning essential job tasks, transportation training, social skills, and can act as a liaison between the employer and employee.

• **Long-Term Follow Along**

- Ongoing support through worksite visits designed to help individuals maintain skills built during job coaching.

• **Trial Work Experience**

- A workplace readiness assessment administered by a Supported Employment provider agency, such as [Project HIRE](http://ProjectHIRE.org).

*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

April 2022



Supported Employment Fact Sheet Final.pdf

Click the link to download the attachment

Download

641.9 KB



About the Work Readiness Academy

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

training classroom, students work cooperatively with similar aged peers to learn critical skills related to employment and socialization. Students also work on career exploration and planning, including the development of a person-centered, post-secondary vision and plan with clear goals and action steps. Program staff remain on-site during the internships to provide and fade support and assistance as needed. Students also participate in field trips focused on career discovery, independent living skills, recreation and independent travel training.

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

Email: jbornstein@ucesc.org

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

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

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



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WRA Smore

WRA is using S'more to create beautiful newsletters



HAN Newsletter

April 2026

April 2026

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

Principal's Message



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

This month at Hillcrest Academy North, we have focused our energy on the theme of responsibility. I am incredibly proud of how our students have stepped up to embody this value in their daily lives. From taking full ownership of their academic coursework and demonstrating leadership in our hallways and classrooms, their maturity is evident. Our students have shown responsibility by keeping our common spaces clean, supporting their peers in collaborative projects, and consistently showing up with a

mindset ready for growth. It is inspiring to see them understand that their choices today directly shape the successes of tomorrow.

Our students have been working toward their academic and personal goals, and this dedication is especially visible in our Senior Class. As they push through their final marking period and prepare for the home stretch, our seniors are demonstrating a remarkable level of focus and grit. They are not just working to reach the finish line, they are actively planning for their bright futures. This

involves navigating college applications, exploring career paths, or preparing for vocational programs. We remain committed to supporting every student as they finish the year strong!

Warm Regards,

John Marquet
Principal

Upcoming Dates

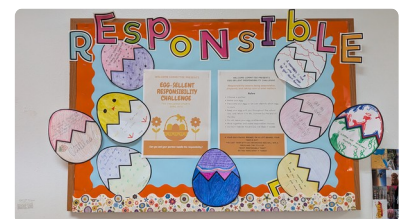
May 1st - Principal's Day
May 4th - May 8th - Teacher Appreciation Week
May 11th - 1pm Dismissal - Staff Development Day
May 11th - Social Studies NJ Veterans' Memorial Trip
May 12th - May 14th - NJSLA Testing
May 18th - May 22nd - Spirit Week
May 20th - Science Fair
May 25th - School Closed - Memorial Day
May 28th - Senior Prom
May 29th - Attendance Matters! Trip - Bowling

JUNE EVENTS

June 3rd - Awards Night
June 10th - Senior Recognition Dinner
June 19th - Student BBQ
June 19th, June 22nd, & June 23rd - 1PM Dismissal
June 23rd - Last day of School

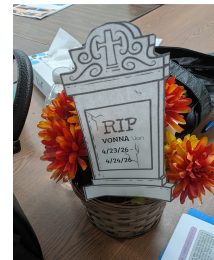
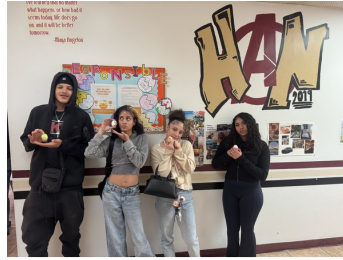
Egg Responsibility Challenge

The Welcome Committee facilitated an outdoor Egg Responsibility Challenge designed to promote connection, teamwork, and a sense of belonging among both new and current students. The activity took place outside in an open and relaxed environment, which helped students feel more comfortable and engaged outside of the traditional classroom setting. Students began with guided icebreaker questions such as “What will you name your egg?” and “What role will each of you play in protecting the egg?”, encouraging them to break the ice, share ideas, and begin building trust with their partner. Students were then paired with peers they had not previously met and worked together to creatively design and personalize their egg, fostering collaboration, communication, and shared decision-making.



Throughout the activity, students were actively engaged as they laughed, brainstormed, and worked through ideas together while figuring out how to best protect their egg. The hands-on and creative

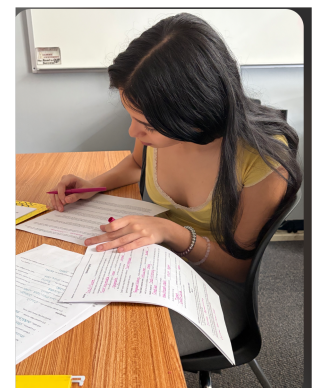
nature of the challenge made the experience both enjoyable and meaningful, as students took responsibility for something they would continue caring for as a team until the end of April. Overall, students responded very positively to the experience, building new connections and strengthening their sense of community while developing teamwork, communication, and collaboration skills within Hillcrest Academy North.



In The Classroom

Economics Class

Students in Mrs. Walgren's Economics class have been exploring the fundamentals of credit, including how credit scores work and the potential risks and benefits of using credit. Through engaging, real-world scenarios, students analyzed how everyday financial decisions can impact a person's credit score, both positively and negatively. They also examined the risks associated with credit use and participated in interactive risk-assessment activities, helping them build practical decision-making skills for their financial futures. This is perfect timing since April is Financial Literacy Month.





Physical Education Class

During PE/Health class, my class has been focusing on basketball skills. Students have been working on dribbling with both hands and practicing making layups. For students who have already mastered the lay up portion, they have moved on to learning how to properly shoot a basketball. They are learning the fundamentals and will slowly incorporate those skills to shooting from the free throw line.

UCESC Bulletin Board Contest

The "Light the Way" Bulletin Board Contest at the central office was a resounding success, showcasing the incredible talent and dedication of both our students and staff. HAN's entry reflected a high level of creativity and thoughtful interpretation of the theme, transforming the hallway into an inspiring gallery of vision and hope. It is clear that our students and staff poured significant hard work and heart into their designs, resulting in a display that truly brightens our environment. We are immensely proud of the collective effort and the professional, imaginative spirit displayed by everyone involved.



STOPit Solutions

Students and staff were introduced to STOPit Solutions, a program that allows students and staff to report any concerns about unsafe, harmful, or inappropriate behavior to the HAN Safety Team.

Students and parents/guardians are encouraged to download the STOPit App onto their phones.



About HAN



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

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

Mr. John Marquet, Principal

Mr. Thomas Van Cleef, Supervisor of Instruction

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

Phone Number: (908) 233-9366

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

Visit Us On Instagram



Mission Statement

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

ucesc.org



John Marquet

John is using Smore to create beautiful newsletters

