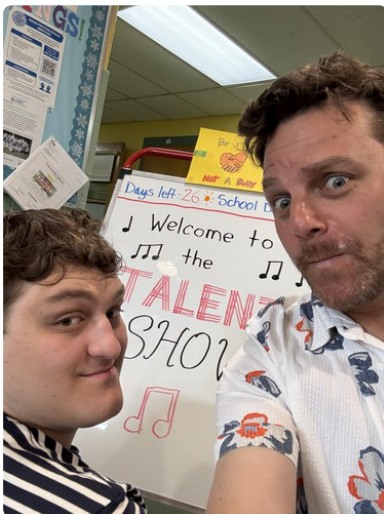




Work Readiness Academy

May 2026 Monthly Report

Message from the Director



Dear Families & Supporters,

Welcome to the May edition of our newsletter!

We have officially entered the "home stretch" of the school year. It is incredible to look back at how much our students have grown, learned, and achieved since September. While the finish line is in sight, these final weeks are often the busiest and most meaningful.

Our calendar is packed with special events, field trips, and end-of-year celebrations designed to honor our students' hard work. Most notably, we are deep in preparation for our upcoming graduation ceremony. To our graduating students and their families: this is your moment, and we cannot wait to celebrate this incredible milestone with you.

Thank you to our entire school community for your continued support, dedication, and enthusiasm. Let's make these final weeks unforgettable!

Tuesday, June 16, 2026 10am-11:30am: Project SEARCH Graduation at Overlook Medical Center

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

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

Warmly,

Josh Bornstein, Director

UCESC Work Readiness Academy

jbornstein@ucesc.org



Attendance Reporting

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

You may also call our main number at (908) 633-2704. If it is

before 8am, please leave a message.

Instructional Insights



My Voice, My Journey

"Your voice is your power. When you use it with confidence, you help shape your own path forward." - Unknown

As part of this month's district theme, "*My Voice, My Journey*," students at the Work Readiness Academy (WRA) have continued to discover the importance of self-reflection, self-advocacy, and using their voices to guide their personal growth and future goals. At WRA, we believe that every student's voice matters, and that

meaningful learning happens when students are encouraged to reflect, communicate, and actively participate in shaping their own journey.

Throughout the school year, students participate in weekly internship feedback reflections and individual conferences with their teachers. During these conferences, students are encouraged to honestly assess their performance, identify strengths, discuss challenges, and set goals for the upcoming week based on their experiences in workplace and community settings. These conversations help students build confidence, self-awareness, and problem-solving skills while reinforcing the connection between effort, reflection, and growth.

Our classrooms also continue to promote authentic student voice through activities focused on communication, goal setting, and self-expression. One of the most engaging examples is our weekly *Student Voice Board*, displayed proudly in our hallway for all students, staff, and visitors to see. Each week, students respond to new prompts and topics by sharing their thoughts, opinions, feelings, and experiences. The board has become a meaningful way to encourage conversation, celebrate individuality, and create opportunities for students and staff to connect through authentic dialogue.

As we continue *"Paving Paths: One UCESC Voice at a Time,"* we are proud of the ways our students are learning to reflect on their experiences, advocate for themselves, and recognize that their voices play an important role in shaping both their present and their future.

Rachel Richer, Supervisor of Instruction

UCESC Work Readiness Academy

rreicher@ucesc.org



UCESC Lights the Way

As part of the UCESC Central Office Bulletin Board Contest celebrating *"The UCESC Way,"* WRA proudly created a board titled *"Light the Way for Those That Follow: Vision, Kindness, Innovation."*

Our interactive display highlighted the importance of student voice through creative and meaningful contributions from students across the program. The board featured light-up headlights symbolizing leadership and guidance, as well as recorded student messages sharing advice and encouragement for others about how to "lead the way."

Inspirational quotes and reflections from students lined the pathway throughout the display, creating an engaging and authentic representation of kindness, perseverance, and the power of using one's voice to inspire others.



2025-26 WRA YEARBOOKS 😊

This school year is quickly coming to an end so is the yearbook sale! The price of the yearbooks is \$10.00. Please be sure to place your yearbook order no later than June 3, 2026. If you have not already placed your order, download and print the order form and hand it to the main office.

WRA Yearbook Order Form

Yearbooks can be purchased by cash or check.
Please make checks payable to Union County ESC.
Please return this form along with payment by June 3rd.

Fee: \$10.00

Name: _____



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

Welcome to Our Classroom



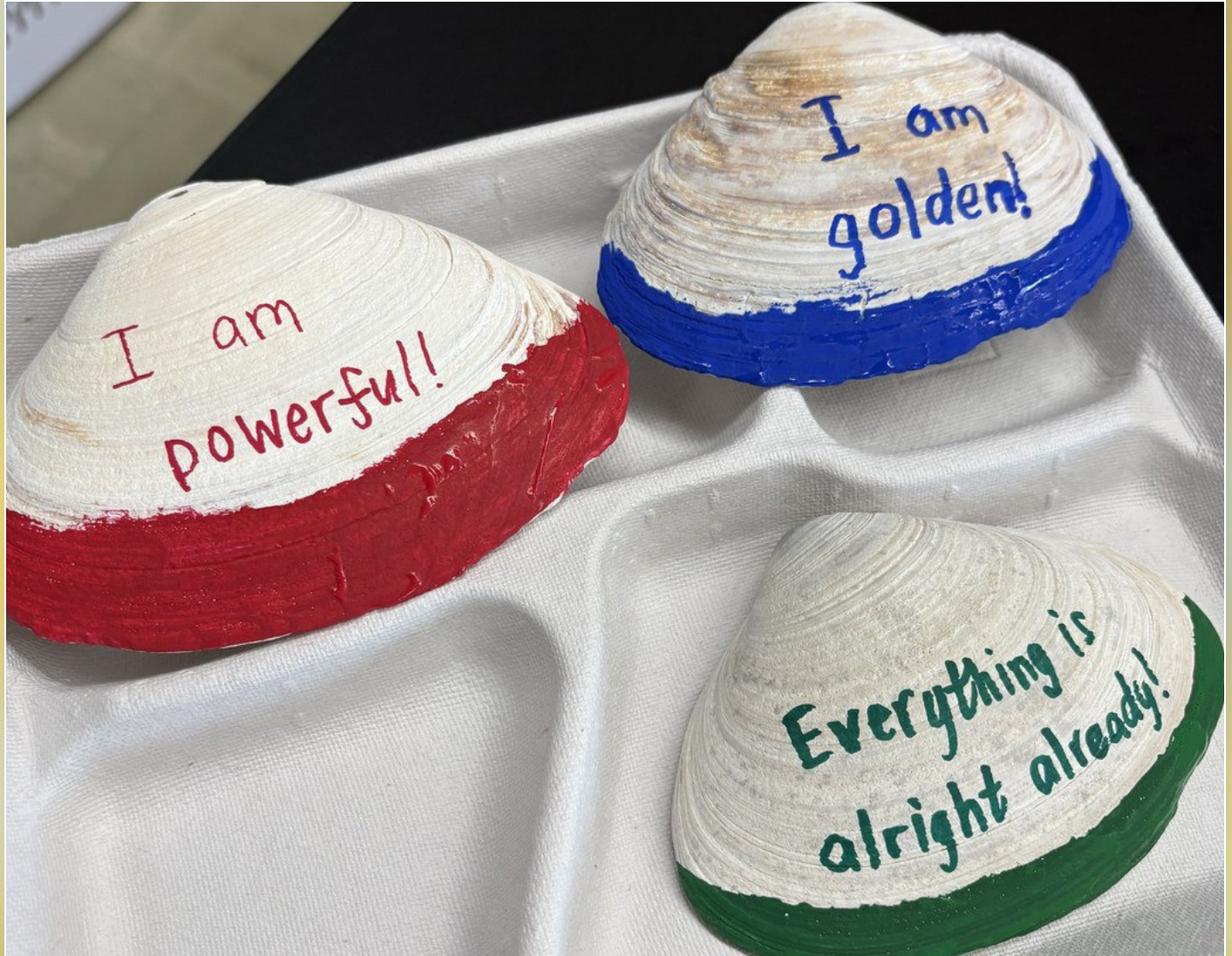
Cultivating Confidence: Our Work Readiness Academy Affirmation Garden

Interns in my homeroom recently celebrated **Mental Health Awareness Month** by creating a "Positive Affirmation Garden" to enhance their independent living and self-management skills. After reflecting on how personal thoughts influence workplace performance and stress management, students utilized creative skills to paint seashells with empowering affirmations. This activity directly supports their development of self-awareness and

self-management—key standards that help our learners regulate emotions and maintain motivation in professional settings. By placing these shells in a garden outside the classroom, interns have established a visual coping mechanism and a community resource that fosters a safe, healthy environment. These photos capture interns from our class demonstrating "functional independence" as they build a foundation for both personal and professional success.

Jodi Klimko, WRA Classroom/SLE Teacher











Project SEARCH Update

The Project SEARCH Reverse Job Fair and Mock Interview Day was held this month! This event flips the script to empower the job seekers and prepare them for real-world hiring processes through two main components:

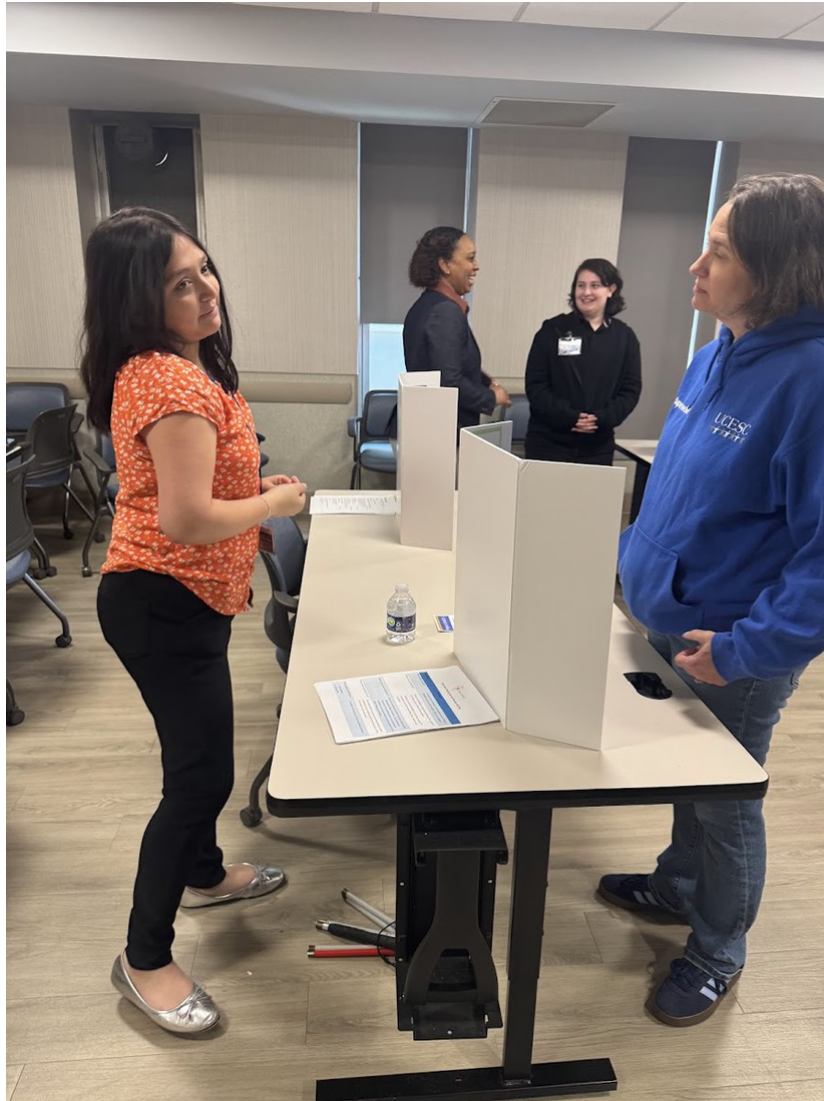
Mock Interview Day

- Interns sit down with business professionals, volunteers, or educators for realistic, simulated interviews.
- Our staff provides the interns with feedback on their communication, presentation, and "elevator pitches," offering immediate, actionable feedback to build confidence and refine their skills.

Reverse Job Fair

- In a traditional job fair, employers sit at tables while applicants line up to speak with them. A Reverse Job Fair flips this dynamic entirely.
- The interns are stationed at individual booths or tables. They set up personalized trifold display boards showcasing their specific job skills, internship experiences, photos of them working, and career goals. Employers Circulate: Local business owners, hiring managers, and HR representatives walk around the room, visiting the interns' tables.
- This setup allows employers to see the candidates' strengths firsthand, review their resumes, and engage in comfortable, low-pressure conversations. It removes the traditional barriers of the application process and highlights what the candidate can do.











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

Confidence, Skills and WBL Career Success



Ariana in Food & Beverage at Summit Medical in Berkeley Heights

.....



Sean in Food & Beverage at Hilton Garden Inn, Springfield

.....



Tina at Terrace Plant Shop in Downtown Westfield



Ben at DSW in Union Plaza

.....



Nick at Moving Forward in Mountainside



Steven at Best Buy in Union Plaza

Staff Member Spotlight

Jessica Suckerman

Current position at UCESC?

Part-time Job Coach

How long have you worked for the Commission?

Three years

What do you love best about your job?

Working with amazing students and staff

What do you like to do in your free time?

Spend time with my family and read a lot of books!

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

I have been in the same book club since 2015!



Friday Fun with Purpose

Coffee Cart ☕

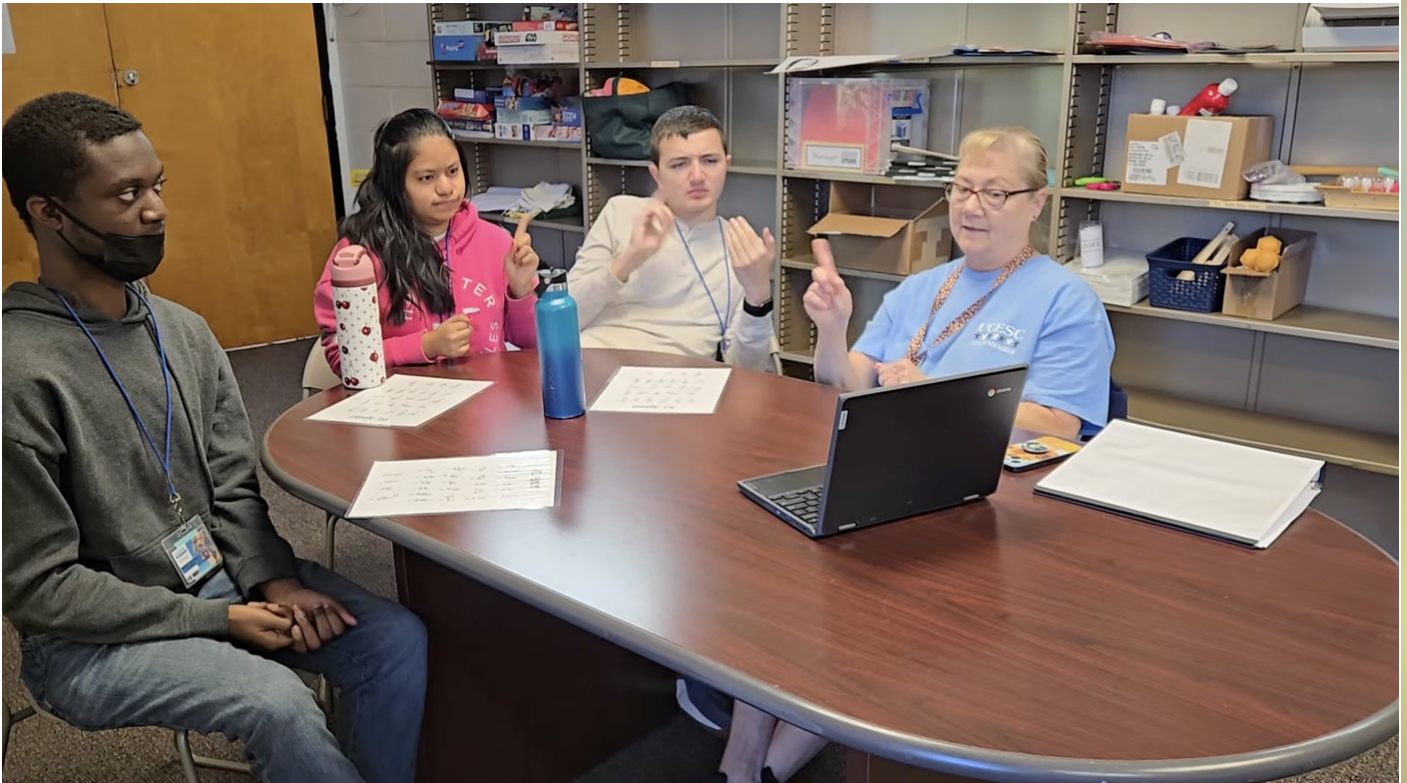
The Coffee Cart elective gives students the opportunity to develop valuable workplace and social skills in a real-world setting. Students work together to prepare and serve beverages, manage orders, handle transactions, practice customer service, and maintain a clean and organized workspace. Through this hands-on experience, students build confidence, independence, teamwork, communication, and job readiness skills while creating meaningful connections within the school community.



Sign Language 🗣️

Students in the Sign Language elective are developing valuable communication skills while building confidence, connection and inclusion. Through interactive lessons, the students are learning basic American Sign Language (ASL) vocabulary, conversational skills, and the importance of accessible communication in the workplace and community. The elective encourages

teamwork, and self-expression, while preparing students to interact with a wide range of people in future employment and everyday life.



Fridays Beyond the Classroom!

Every Friday, students participate in meaningful community-based instruction experiences that promote independence, confidence, and healthy living. Through volunteer opportunities, fitness activities, and real-world learning experiences in the community, students strengthen important life and workplace skills while building social connections and exploring new interests. The weekly outings provide students with valuable opportunities to learn, grow and actively engage with the world around them.



Ben doing some shopping for a professional interview outfit

.....



***Matt** getting some exercise at Strength and Fitness in Cranford*



Chelsea learning to use the ATM machine at Blue Foundry Bank at Kean University in Union



Look Who Was Spotted in the Community!



Current Student, **Anthony**, was spotted calling a baseball game in Cranford with Mr. Klimko! 🧐



Picture of the Month

Erin found the perfect shopping buddy...even if he's a little goofy! 🤪



.....

COMING SOON: WRA/Project Search Got Talent Show Photos!

.....

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**
 - June – 3rd and 10th
- **Location:** Trilside 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.



June 22nd, 2026 – August 28th, 2026
9 am – 2 pm M-F

IDD Summer Program

DDD Approved Come adventure with us! Adults 18+

Aftercare 2:00pm – 5:30pm M-F

Admission
DDD Budget or Private Pay

Activities :

- Music Therapy!
- Outdoor Games
- Animal Bonding!
- Nature Field Trips!
- Farm Activities!
- Crafts & Painting Groups

Allaire Community Farm
1923 Baileys Corner Rd.,
Wall Township, NJ, 07719

Reach Out To: ✉ iddprograms.acf@gmail.com ☎ 848-298-4710



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>

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, NCG - CEO

Jennifer Case, NCG - Director of Probate Services

Teresa Amoroso- Probate Coordinator



Updated Guardianship Fact Sheet (3).pdf

[Download](#)

107.0 KB

DDD Services

Applying for DDD Services

As soon as your child turns 18, you can begin applying for services via the NJ Division of Developmental Services (DDD). The first step is accessing Medicaid; this can be accomplished by applying for 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



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 advertisement features a smartphone screen on a teal background. The screen displays the app's welcome message: 'WELCOME TO 2NDFLOOR' and 'Welcome to your safe space'. Below this, there are four options: 'Chat' (with a person icon), 'Anonymous' (with a lock icon), 'Support' (with a heart icon), and '24/7' (with a smiley face icon). Each option has a brief description. At the bottom of the screen is a 'Continue' button. To the right of the phone, large text reads 'IT ONLY TAKES A SECOND TO GET 24/7 TALK OR TEXT SUPPORT'. Below this text are logos for 'GET IT ON Google Play' and 'Download on the App Store', along with the '2ND FLOOR' logo. The bottom left corner has the '2ND FLOOR' logo, and the bottom right corner has the Union County logo.

WELCOME TO 2NDFLOOR

Welcome to your safe space

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

Continue

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

GET IT ON Google Play

Download on the App Store

2ND FLOOR

2ND FLOOR

UNION COUNTY OFFICE FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES & SPECIAL NEEDS

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

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

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

Understanding Supported Employment Options Available AFTER Graduation

SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT IN NEW JERSEY

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



KEY TERMS

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)

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

Competitive Employment

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

Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS)

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

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

"Employment First" State

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

EXAMPLES OF SERVICES

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

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

NJ WORKABILITY

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

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.

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 rricher@ucesc.org

Email: jbornstein@ucesc.org

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

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

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



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



WRA Smore

WRA is using S'more to create beautiful newsletters



LAMBERTS MILL ACADEMY

May 2026 Newsletter
Mental Health Awareness Month



"It is during our darkest moments that we must focus to see the light."

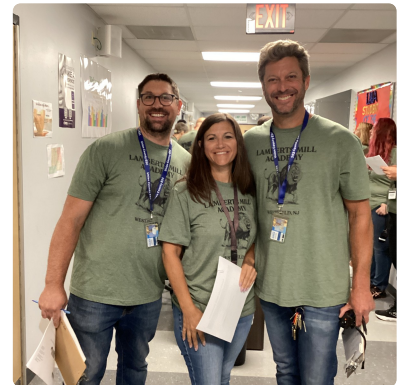
- Aristotle

Administrators' Message

May 2026

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

As we welcome the beautiful month of May, we find ourselves standing at a remarkable vantage point. We are almost at the finish line of another incredible school year. This is a time of natural transition, where the anticipation of summer meets the final push of our academic and therapeutic endeavors.



At Lamberts Mill Academy, our core mission has always been about balance. We understand that true student success doesn't happen by prioritizing academics over emotional well-being, or vice versa. Instead, it flourishes when the two are seamlessly integrated. This past month has been a shining example of how our specialized academic strategies and dedicated therapeutic initiatives work hand-in-hand to help our students thrive.

A perfect reflection of this balance was our recent Scholarly Breakfast. This event was not just a celebration of academic dedication, but a testament to emotional resilience. For our students, showing up, engaging deeply with their studies, and pushing through challenges requires immense psychological fortitude. Seeing our community come together to honor these achievements over

breakfast was a proud moment for staff and families alike. It proved once again that when students feel therapeutically supported, their capacity for academic excellence skyrockets.

The next couple of weeks are packed with excitement as we head into our final end-of-the-year activities. We are also rapidly approaching our favorite highlight of the year: the Graduation Ceremony.

Graduation at Lamberts Mill Academy is uniquely moving. It represents a triumph of the whole child, marking not just the completion of credits, but immense personal growth, self-regulation, and emotional milestones. We look forward to cheering on our graduates as they take their next big steps.

While this season is filled with celebration, we also recognize that the change in routine can sometimes trigger anxiety or stress for our students. To maintain that crucial balance between achievement and mental wellness, here are a few therapeutic tips for the home stretch:

- **Acknowledge the Big Feelings:** It is completely normal for students to feel a mix of excitement, sadness, and anxiety about the school year ending. Validate these emotions.
- **Keep the Routine Steady:** Even as the weather gets warmer and school demands shift, keeping consistent bedtimes and morning routines provides a sense of safety and predictability.
- **Focus on the Present:** When the countdown to summer becomes overwhelming, help your student ground themselves by focusing on one day, or one task, at a time.

As we prepare to close this chapter, we encourage all of our students, families, and staff to get ready to enjoy, reset, and rest. This upcoming summer vacation is a well-deserved opportunity to unplug, recharge your batteries, and practice the self-care initiatives we emphasize all year long.

Thank you for your unwavering partnership, trust, and support throughout this school year. Together, we have created a space where minds are challenged and hearts are healed. Let's finish this year strong!

Warmly,

Danielle, Reed & John

Monthly Data

1. Enrollment - 51
 2. Acceptances - 0
 3. New Students - 0
 4. Intakes - 0
 5. Referrals - 3
 6. Disenrollments - 1
 7. Fire Drill - 5/1/2026
 8. Other Drill EM: Off-Site Evacuation 5/18/2026
-

Upcoming Events

June 2026 Important Dates

June 4th - Senior Field Trip
June 5th - Junior/Senior Prom
June 5th - Underclassmen Field Trip
June 12th - Graduation Ceremony
June 15th - LMA BBQ
June 17th - Pet Therapy
June 17th - Community Meeting
June 19th, 22nd, and 23rd - Early Dismissals for students
June 23rd - Last day of school
June 29th - ESY Starts



Student of the Month -

Willynn

LMA is proud to recognize the May Student of the Month as Willynn. She has started with us at LMA this past February, and has been doing well academically, while working on therapeutic goals. Earning all As & Bs the 3rd marking period, and coming consistently to school, Willynn has shown great growth and effort at LMA. As an 11th grade student, who will be a senior next school year we look forward to watching Willynn progress academically and therapeutically as she starts transition for after high school.



Outstanding Scholars Breakfast

Two graduating Lamberts Mill Academy Seniors, Na'Kier and Elena, represented our school community at the annual Union County Superintendents Roundtable 41st Annual Recognition Breakfast for Outstanding Scholars of Union County. The celebration took place at the Embassy Suites by Hilton in Berkeley Heights, NJ, on May 18th!



Na'Kier

It is a privilege to recognize Nakier, a student who embodies the true definition of a 'top scholar' within our school and district. His ambition is matched only by his work ethic, while maintaining his academic standing, he is also diligently preparing for his future in the U.S. Military by mastering the ASVAB.

Nakier's goals are clear, he has worked tirelessly over the years to prepare for his role as a future Combat Arms Specialist. However, what truly sets him apart is his commitment to personal development and self-care. Even when faced with daily challenges, Nakier refuses to be discouraged. Instead, he uses those obstacles as fuel to keep striving for excellence. He is a testament to what can be achieved through persistence and a clear sense of purpose.

Nakier will be accepted into the US Army in the fall of 2026. Nakier, thank you for your service to our community and our Country. Congratulations!

Elena

"My time at Lamberts Mill Academy has taught me quite a bit. I have learned to value myself and my education despite any differences. LMA helped me realize that my need to learn differently doesn't reflect on my intelligence, it just means I am different and I learn differently. I have also learned to accept myself and others as they are. My time at LMA has always been ever changing, and it has been valuable and has helped me grow into myself."

Elena has earned several honors throughout her time at LMA. She has been named Student of the Month, earned Honor Roll multiple marking periods for her academic achievements, and is an active participant in the Mentorship Program with Westlake and Crossroads Schools. Elena has been actively employed at Starbucks during the school year, mastering the school/work balance through effective time management. She looks forward to exploring multiple opportunities in the near future specific to the field of social work. Congratulations Elena!

Staff Spotlight - Clinical Team

Ms. Ruchaevsky, Clinical Director

What's the 'win' from this week that had nothing to do with a breakthrough in a session?

My win for the week is that I was able to connect with students while engaging in our Friday Mental health activities where they were doing something that they fully enjoyed with their friends

When you're 'off the clock' and need to recharge your own battery, what is the one hobby or activity that makes you forget about work entirely?

I love doing anything outdoors especially in the warmer weather. I enjoy tending to my yard and gardening, walking with my dog, and going to the beach.

If you weren't working in a school, what's a totally different career path you've daydreamed about pursuing?

Before becoming a social worker I wanted to go to Vet school



Mr. Leal

What's the 'win' from this week that had nothing to do with a breakthrough in a session?

Being able to attend the field trip to Fitz's Fish Pond.

When you're 'off the clock' and need to recharge your own battery, what is the one hobby or activity that makes you forget about work entirely?

I like to read science fiction and horror.

If you weren't working in a school, what's a totally different career path you've daydreamed about pursuing?

Would like to pursue a trade, maybe something in construction.

Ms. Altamirano

What's the 'win' from this week that had nothing to do with a breakthrough in a session?

Being able to further build therapeutic relationships with the students

When you're 'off the clock' and need to recharge your own battery, what is the one hobby or activity that makes you forget about work entirely?

workout and spend time with family

If you weren't working in a school, what's a totally different career path you've daydreamed about pursuing?

I would have loved to pursue a job in dermatology.



Ms. DeVoe

What's the 'win' from this week that had nothing to do with a breakthrough in a session?



Forming a connection with a student who was previously very closed of

When you're 'off the clock' and need to recharge your own battery, what is the one hobby or activity that makes you forget about work entirely?

Listening to an audiobook and doing a puzzle

If you weren't working in a school, what's a totally different career path you've daydreamed about pursuing?

I would be a librarian

Ms. Kellers

What's the 'win' from this week that had nothing to do with a breakthrough in a session?

Further developing connections with students

When you're 'off the clock' and need to recharge your own battery, what is the one hobby or activity that makes you forget about work entirely?

Watching reality tv shows

If you weren't working in a school, what's a totally different career path you've daydreamed about pursuing?

I daydreamed about being a buyer for a fashion retailer



May at The Mill



Working in the garden



Trip to the Sunshine Cafe



The Chip winners



Field Trip to Fitz's Fish Pond



Science experiment extracting DNA from a strawberry



Spirit Day!

Mental Health Awareness Month Activities

The clinical team led “Feel Good Friday” where the students engaged in a specific activity to help support and promote social, emotional well being through the month of May. Students were able to enjoy outdoor nature activity, engage in creative expressions using paint, drawings and bead art, or calming the mind with mindful meditation.



Principal's Day!



LMA extends its heartfelt gratitude to Mr. Leibfried for his tireless dedication as Principal of The Mill. Day in and day out, his unwavering commitment to the well-being and success of both our students and staff shapes our community for the better.

.....

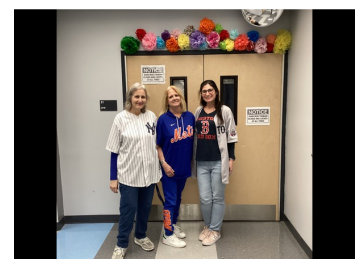
School Nurse's Day!

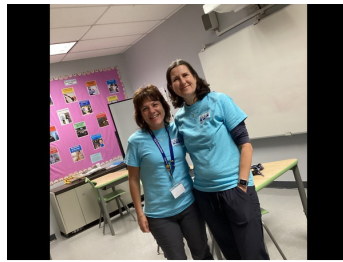


With deep appreciation, LMA honors Nurse Pelaez for her vital role in our community. Her daily commitment to health, wellness, and care doesn't just keep us safe, it builds a stronger, thriving foundation for our entire school community.

.....

Staff Appreciation Week!





Behind Every Success Story at LMA is an Incredible Team

This Staff Appreciation Week, we are shouting out the amazing people who make it all happen. Thank you to our **teachers and TAs** for inspiring minds; our **RBTs, counselors, and social workers** for supporting hearts; and our **safety monitors** for keeping us secure. LMA wouldn't be the same without your dedication, care, and hard work. Thank you for all you do!

Classroom Spotlights

What I Need (WIN)

In "WIN" class, for Mental Health Awareness Month, we were inspired by the quote "keep your head high and your crown straight". Each student designed a crown and their classmates all picked adjectives that best described them. Once the crowns were designed and the adjectives were glued down, the students were able to see their final product as the crowns hung on the bulletin board outside of our classroom. In restorative "circles" this month we read poems related to mental health and discussed topics that fall under the vast mental health "umbrella".



Music

This month, music students focused more on how music makes them feel in the daily music SEL component of class. Great discussions about how music could be used as a coping skill were also discussed. Additionally, students continued working on learning about music from various countries and cultures, gaining insight into what is different and similar between styles of music, and how songs and sounds that are different can still elicit an emotional response from listeners.

Clinical Corner

May is Mental Health Awareness Month, a time to recognize the importance of emotional well-being and to help break the stigma surrounding mental health. Taking care of our mental health is

just as important as taking care of our physical health. Throughout the month, we encourage students, staff, and families to practice kindness, check in with one another, and remember that asking for help is a sign of strength. Together, we can create a supportive school community where everyone feels seen, heard, and valued.



Group Therapy

May is Mental Health Awareness month and this was highlighted all month long. During group therapy students engaged in open discussions and supportive activities focused on increasing awareness of mental health, reducing stigma, and promoting healthy coping strategies. Students had the opportunity to share personal experiences, identify stressors, and explore positive ways to manage emotions such as anxiety, stress, and depression. Much focus was on peer support, communication, and the importance of seeking help when needed, while fostering a nonjudgmental environment

Students Outside The Mill

Kayla is going to Rowan!



This fall, Kayla is taking her passion for food to the next level! She'll be attending Rowan University to major in Culinary Arts and pursue her dream of becoming a chef.

Upcoming Community Events



Juneteenth Festival | Union Township, NJ - Official Website

We're back! Mark your calendars because the 6th Annual Union Juneteenth Festival is just around the corner. Join us on Saturday, June 20, 12pm-6pm at Biertuempfel Park for a day full of community and memories! Click on the video below to see some highlights from our past events.

uniontownship.com



FREE COMMUNITY EVENT: Juneteenth Freedom Experience 2026

Juneteenth Freedom Experience 2026 - Outdoor community celebration hosted by NAACP MEAP Branch. Vendors welcome. June 6 | Edison, NJ.

eventbrite.com



Union Pride | Union Township, NJ - Official Website

Join us on Saturday, June 6th, for an unforgettable Union Pride celebration!

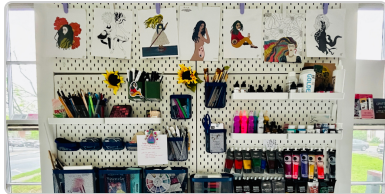
uniontownship.com



Montclair Pride 2026 - Out Montclair

Montclair Pride marks its fifth year as a powerful expression of community and belonging by bringing together thousands across northern New Jersey to honor identity, amplify voices, and support LGBTQ+ life year-round.

🔗 outmontclair.org



Me, Myself and Art (FREE) Reconnecting with the person you're meant to be through creative practice, mindfulness exercises and gentle self-reflection.

Reconnecting with the person you're meant to be through creative practice, mindfulness exercises and gentle self-reflection. Rising Heart Studio

🔗 risingheartcoach.com



Union County Office of LGBTQ+ Affairs

Upcoming Events 2026 Pride Color Run Registration required – Register Online Now The Union County Board of County Commissioners invite all residents to the third annual Union County LGBTQ+ Pr...

🔗 ucnj.org



DISNEY'S LILO & STITCH - SENSORY FRIENDLY MOVIE - 7/10

This screening of "Lilo & Stitch" in Rahway on 7/10 is adapted for children and adults with autism and other sensory sensitivities.

🔗 ucpac.org

Community Resources



KEAN PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES

Kean Psychological Services is proud to offer comprehensive **FREE** psychological services for children, adolescents, and adults!

THERAPY

Treatment:

- School & Home Behavior Problems
- Anxiety, Depression, OCD
- Chronic Pain and Illness
- Adjustment Issues

Therapies offered:

- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)
- Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT)
- Mindfulness & Acceptance-Based Therapies
- Trauma-Informed Therapies
- Couples Therapy

If interested
please call:

908-737-5890



ASSESSMENT

- Early Childhood Evaluations
- Social, Emotional, & Behavioral Concerns
- Learning Concerns / Learning Disability
- ADHD & Autism

Offering in-person &
telehealth services!



Our clinicians are **doctoral student trainees** enrolled in Kean University's Psy.D. Program in Combined School and Clinical Psychology.

Psychological assessment and therapy services are provided **under the close supervision** of licensed psychologists.



UNION COUNTY **MealsToYou**



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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/>

.....



<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

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



May 2026 Monthly Report

May 2026 Monthly Report Enrollment Data

Enrollment-93 (as of 5/27/26).

New Students-1

Disenrollments-2 (1-GED, 1-Work).

Emergency Drill-5/19/26, off-site evacuation.

Fire Drill-5/1/26.

A Message From Our Principal: Dr. Balsamello

May has been a vibrant and productive month at Hillcrest Academy South Campus (HAS), filled with celebrations honoring our dedicated staff and wonderful students. Our campus remained busy

with a variety of exciting events and academic milestones, from special student visitations to the Westlake Cafe and School Spirit days to final preparations for the prom. At the same time, our students maintained a strong academic focus by completing state testing and working diligently on their fourth marking period grades. Please take a few moments to enjoy our latest newsletter to learn about all the incredible experiences and achievements of our staff and students this month. Thank you for your continued partnership and support!



Important Dates

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
26	27	28	29	30	1 PRINCIPAL APPRECIATION DAY	2
3 TEACHER APPRECIATION WEEK	4 MAY THE 4 TH BE WITH YOU	5 TEACHER APPRECIATION DAY CINCO DE MAYO	6 NURSE APPRECIATION DAY TEACHER OF THE YEAR RECOGNITION @ BOARD MEETING	7	8	9
10	11 STAFF PD ½ DAY	12 NJSLA	13 NJSLA	14 NJSLA	15	16
17	18 COUNTY SCHOLARS RECOGNITION BREAKFAST	19	20 TEACHER OF THE YEAR BREAKFAST	21 STAFF NIGHT OUT SCIENCE FAIR	22	23
24	25 MEMORIAL DAY	26	27	28 SENIOR PROM	29	30
31						

Student of the Month!

Congratulations Jennifer!

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

Faculty/Staff "Getting to Know You"!

Ms Lockett's Favorites:

Favorite movie: Eat, Pray, Love

Favorite food: Red Snapper

Favorite color: Nude

Favorite book: The Let Them Theory

Favorite travel spot: Canada

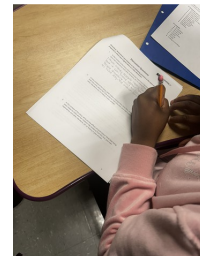
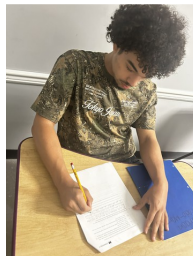
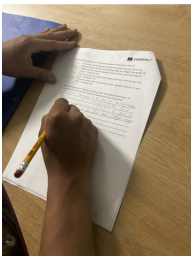
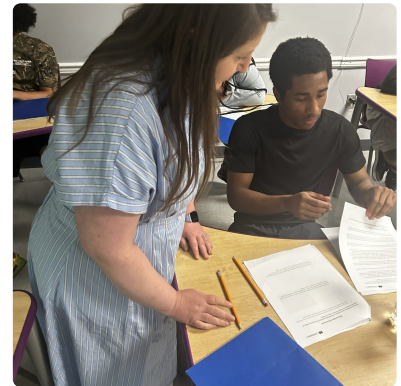
Favorite pastimes: Alone Time



Teacher's Corner: English

Mrs Lobasco: English

During May, English courses continued to work on the Narrative Unit of the English curriculum. At the beginning of the month, classes reviewed the skills needed to analyze narrative stories. Students reviewed characterization, theme, conflict, making inferences, and analyzing figurative language. Classes then honed these skills by reading a series of short stories. For the unit's final writing task, students are reading two short stories that center around teenaged characters living in poverty and how the clothing they wear impacts their self-esteem and relationships with their peers and families. Students will discuss the themes, conflicts, and characters in this essay along with citing supporting evidence with their own analysis.



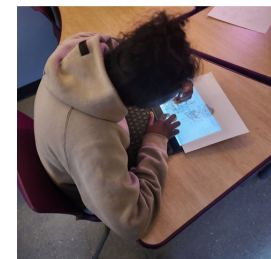
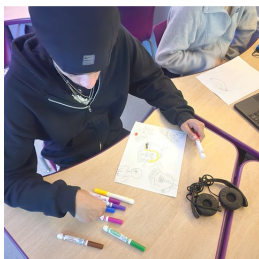
Ms V: English & Creative Writing

This month in Creative Writing, students wrapped up their poetry unit and began the final unit centered around the essential question: How can visual art serve as a catalyst for storytelling? After an introduction to art analysis, students explored major artistic movements including

Impressionism and Surrealism, and will continue with Expressionism and Abstract Art. Throughout the unit, students will be examining a variety of paintings, analyzing artistic techniques and themes, interpreting meaning, and using the artwork as inspiration for their own creative writing pieces. In addition, students are creating original artwork influenced by the styles and characteristics of each artistic movement.

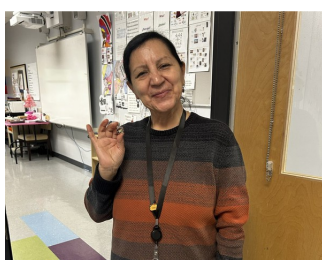


This month in English class, students read short stories in order to explore the essential question: How can language be powerful? Students read *A Sound of Thunder* by Ray Bradbury and examined the concept of The Butterfly Effect. After exploring this concept in the story, students completed projects in which they researched a scenario of their choice and created posters illustrating the chain reaction of events that could unfold from a single event. Scenarios chosen included the continued deforestation of the amazon rainforest, the introduction of a highly invasive species in a major city, prolonged droughts, power outages, or satellite disruptions, and the long term overuse of AI. While reading *Harrison Bergeron* by Kurt Vonnegut, students analyzed themes of individuality, government control, freedom, and the tension between sameness, equality, and equity. Students connected the story to foundational American ideals by examining constitutional amendments and discussing how society and its people define fairness and opportunity. Reflection questions asked students to support their ideas using textual evidence while considering the social implications of the story. Students also began reading *Charles* by Shirley Jackson, focusing on themes of perception, reputation, and the way in which stories are warped as they are retold. Students considered how assumptions about others can shape relationships and influence the way individuals are received and treated.



"Paving Paths" Teacher Recognitions

May: My Voice, My Journey



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.

When you see the theme for this month, "My Voice, My Journey", what do you think of? What does that mean to you?

- When I see the theme of this month, I think of how my voice, options, and thoughts will alter my path and where I go in life. I think of how my actions and choices now will impact my journey down the road and where it'll take me. Making sure I advocate for myself for my wants and needs is a key role in my journey towards where I want to go. -AE
- When I see the quote/theme "My Voice, My Journey" I think of how your voice makes you and guides you during your journey. What I mean by that is, if you don't put yourself out there and let your voice be heard you'll stay in a "shell". You possibly won't get anywhere if you don't make sure your voice is heard and doing it the right way as well. What it means to me is My Voice is who I am, along with my personality, but it shows who you are when you speak and let your voice be heard so this will get me in good places in my life. -JP

Looking back on your journey this year, how has using your voice helped you move closer to your goals?

- My voice helped me by asking for help in my journey. My voice being more positive has been helping me stay focused. It has helped me talk to other people about their ideas and has also helped me understand things I didn't. For example, I was struggling on a worksheet, I used my voice by asking the teacher for help and she proceeded to help me with my work. Asking questions for better understanding has been helping me move closer with my goals. - CC
- My voice has helped me numerous times in my goals and even allowed me to fully achieve them. Using my voice has helped me maintain my grades because I ask questions when I don't know what to do. Using my voice has helped better my family dynamic so there are no misunderstandings. Using my voice has also helped me gain a job which is something I have wanted since I was 14. -JB

What's one thing you've learned about yourself this year that will guide the next steps of your path?

- One thing I've learned about myself this year is that I can be patient and I can lock in if I just focus and push myself to do better. That will guide the next steps of my path by just trusting the process; doing the work when it's given, handing it in when it's due, or finishing a task under 30 mins. I've learned how to manage my time and be patient with myself. When things are rushing, I feel overwhelmed and I won't finish my task. I also learned that not all people are

going to feel the need to take their time on things and want tasks done as soon as possible. - ER

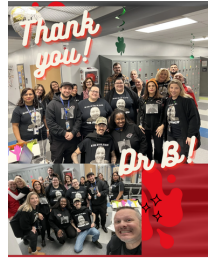
- One thing I've learned about myself this year is that I am stronger and more capable than I thought. I've realized that even when things get difficult, I can push through and keep going instead of giving up. This has shown me that I have the ability to grow, learn from my experiences, and make better choices for my future. Moving forward, this lesson will guide me to be more confident in myself, take more risks, and not be afraid of challenges because I know I can handle them. -CR

"My Voice, My Journey" is about ownership. It's a reminder that you aren't just a passenger in this school year; you are the driver. "Paving Paths" is about impact. It's a reminder that when you speak your truth and map your course, you leave footprints for others to follow. Take a few minutes to look back at where you started the year compared to where you are standing right now. What does your path look like?

- I would say my path looks better than it did at the start of the year. I say this because I can see that I've made progress in my life and in school at South. My path looks like one of succeeding and being peaceful. If I do what I have too, I will stay on the path that'll get me there. My path isn't over so I'll see what's to come. In the meantime, I'll just have to do what's needed to get to the end of it. - CT
- Comparing to who I was back at the beginning of the year, I am a whole different person. I changed a lot not only at school but even at home. This year, I tried to put effort into my work at school and this change has brought me to a different path compared to the one I was in before. I know that this was all worth it because all my effort means that I didn't give up. Even in my bad times and in my struggles, I didn't give up. I know that all that I did to be where I am right now was worth it. I know I am a person that is making my parents proud. -MH

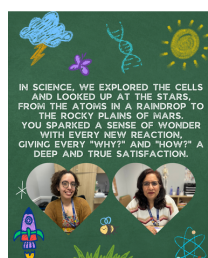
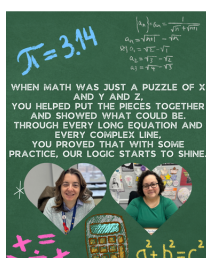
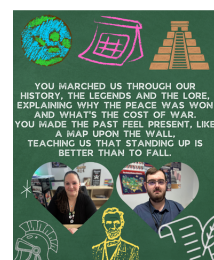
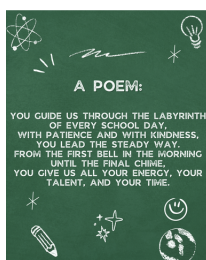
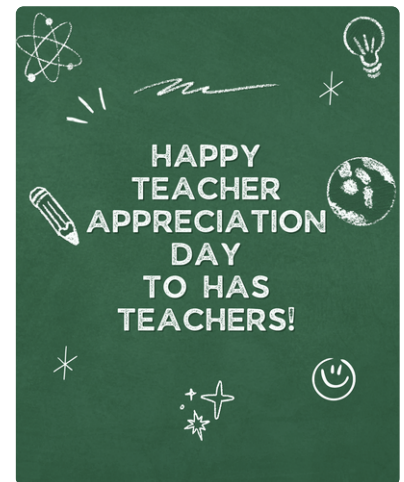
Principal Appreciation Day

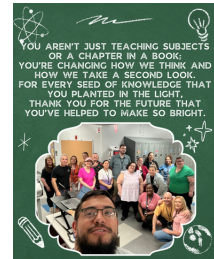
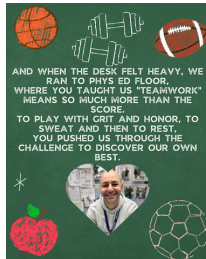
Principal's Appreciation Day is a dedicated moment to recognize the visionary leaders who serve as the heartbeat of our educational communities. Beyond the administrative duties of scheduling and budgeting, Dr B is the primary architect of the HAS culture, balancing the diverse needs of students, teachers, and parents with unwavering grace. Dr B is the steady hand during challenges and the loudest cheerleaders for every student achievement, often working long before the school day starts for anyone else and after the final bell has rung to ensure a safe, nurturing environment for learning. By celebrating his dedication, we acknowledge that Dr B's leadership doesn't just manage a building, it inspires the next generation and provides the foundation upon which academic excellence is built. Thank you so much Dr B for being the fearless leader of HAS and for all that you do!



Teacher Appreciation Week

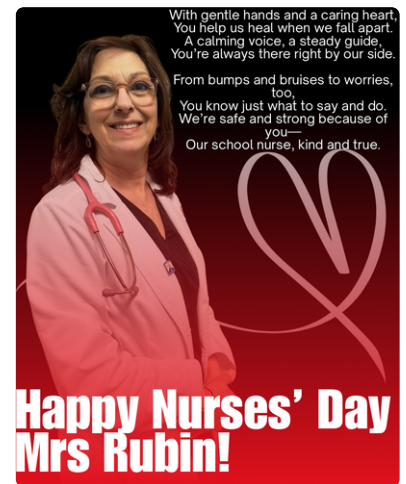
Teacher Appreciation Week transformed HAS into a vibrant hub of gratitude, where educators were finally given the spotlight they deserve. This year, the festivities kicked off with an energetic scavenger hunt, as students dashed through the hallways interviewing staff to uncover the graduation years of their favorite teachers. The celebration continued with a well earned break from the daily grind, featuring a free luncheon of sub sandwiches and salads and, perhaps most joyfully, the cancellation of all after school meetings to give teachers back their precious time. Between the stacks of heartfelt, special notes from kids that are hung up on the bulletin board and an array of free gifts ranging from personalized keychains and tumblers, the week served as a powerful reminder of the profound impact these mentors have on their students' lives.





Nurse Appreciation Week!

School Nurse Appreciation Week serves as a vital tribute to the healthcare heroes who navigate the intersection of medicine and education every day. Mrs Rubin does far more than bandage scraped knees, she is the frontline responder for chronic condition management, mental health support, and public health safety within the HAS halls. With a unique blend of clinical expertise and steady compassion, Mrs Rubin provides a "safe harbor" for students, ensuring that physical and emotional wellness never take a backseat to academics. By honoring her vigilance and care, we recognize that her presence is essential not only for keeping HAS students healthy but for ensuring they are truly ready to learn and thrive.



Teacher of the Year Recognition!

The HAS community is absolutely thrilled to celebrate our school nurse, Mrs. Rubin, as this year's Teacher of the Year. This is a well-deserved recognition for someone whose impact extends far beyond the health office. While she is an expert at managing medical needs, Mrs. Rubin has proven to be so much more than just a nurse to our students and staff. She is a trusted confidante, a calming presence in moments of stress, and a tireless advocate for the well being of every individual at 1571. Whether she is offering a listening ear to a student in need or providing steady support to her colleagues, her compassion and dedication create a safety net that strengthens the entire school. This honor highlights the vital role she plays as an educator of health and heart, making HAS a better, kinder place for everyone.



Honored at the Board
meeting

Celebrating at the
Teacher of the Year
Breakfast

Recognized at the Staff
Night Out event

It's Show Time!

Diaisha delivered a truly phenomenal performance at Thomas Jefferson Academy during the highly anticipated "Senior One Acts," showcasing her impressive range and stage presence. Taking on a key role in the student directed adaptation of "Waitress," she brought depth and authenticity to the production, which was helmed by a talented high school senior. Her contribution was vital to the success of the skit, captivating the audience and highlighting the creative synergy between the performers and their peer directors. It was a standout moment in an evening dedicated to celebrating the theatrical arts and the hard work of the graduating class. Bravo!



Environmental Field Trip!

Ms. Santiago recently organized an enriching field trip for the HAS high school Environmental Science class, taking students on an immersive journey to the Trailside Nature and Science Center in Watchung. Joined by Mr. Van Cleef and a group of select students from Hillcrest North, the group explored the lush landscapes of the Watchung Reservation to deepen their understanding of local ecology. The trip centered on a detailed study of animal habitats, allowing students to observe firsthand how indigenous species interact with their environment and the vital importance of biodiversity conservation. This collaborative outing not only bridged the two school communities but also provided a hands on laboratory in the great outdoors, turning complex scientific concepts into a memorable, real world experience.



UCNJ

Mrs Schulhafer, our school counselor, led an enthusiastic group of seniors on an informative tour of the UCNJ Cranford campus. The visit provided these prospective students with a firsthand look at the collegiate environment, allowing them to explore academic buildings, student resources, and the overall campus culture. By navigating the grounds and learning about available programs, the seniors gained the clarity and confidence needed to finalize their plans for Fall class registration. This initiative served as a vital bridge between high school and higher education, ensuring the students are well equipped to transition smoothly into their next chapter at UCNJ.



Cinco de Mayo

The festivities for Cinco de Mayo went off as smooth as flan, providing a vibrant and seamless celebration for everyone involved. The HAS community had a fantastic time honoring the occasion through a diverse lineup of activities, ranging from flavorful food tastings and creative arts and crafts to high energy sports and traditional music. One of the day's highlights was a spirited and delicious debate over the ultimate champion between the taco or the burrito! A huge thank you goes out to Señora Flores for her incredible dedication in putting together such an engaging and well rounded program that brought everyone together in the spirit of the holiday.



Scholars Breakfast

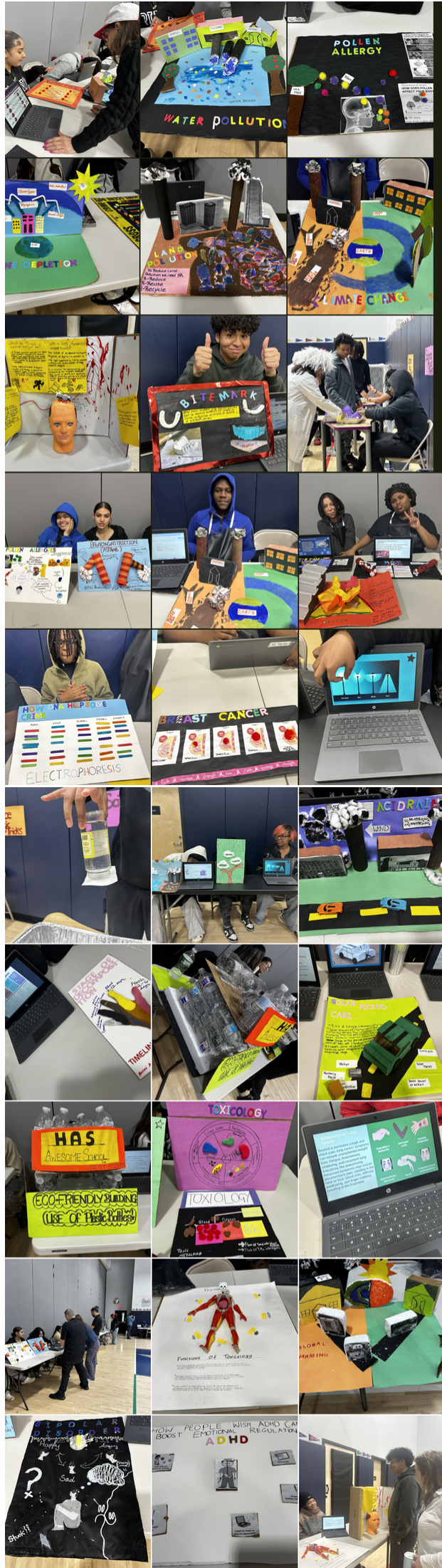
This month marked a significant milestone for the HAS community as two exceptional students, Oliver and Orlando, were celebrated for their unwavering commitment to academic excellence. On Monday, May 18th, they were the guests of honor at the annual Breakfast for Outstanding Scholars, a prestigious event designed to recognize students who have demonstrated a superior work ethic and resilience throughout the school year. Chosen for their impressive grades and tireless determination, the duo stood out as role models for their peers. This distinction is far more than just a celebratory meal, it serves as a profound honor and a powerful addition to their resumes. It is also a signal to future universities and employers that these high school seniors possess the grit and intellect to succeed in any endeavor they choose to pursue.



Science Fair

The gymnasium of 1571 buzzed with a palpable sense of intellectual energy as students proudly unveiled the culmination of months of rigorous investigation at the annual Science Fair. Under the dedicated mentorship of Mrs. Arora, whose guidance helped transform initial curiosity into sophisticated experimental design, the young scientists tackled a diverse array of pressing global and local issues.

The exhibits showcased an impressive breadth of scientific inquiry. For the subject of Biology, students displayed their knowledge on different diseases and cellular malformations like cancer. Students expressed their concern for air, land, and water pollution for their Environmental projects and some even recycled materials for their projects. With Forensics being a popular subject, students were extremely eager to demonstrate blood spatter analysis and the chemical intricacies of latent fingerprint recovery. The event served as a testament to the students' persistence and Mrs. Arora's commitment to fostering a culture of critical thinking. Whether they were defending their data during teacher interviews or explaining complex variables to their peers, the students displayed a level of professionalism and passion that signaled a bright future for the next generation of researchers.



Students In and Out of School!

For the past five years, Dwayne has dedicated himself to the sport of boxing, a journey that unexpectedly began with an inspiration from anime. In the ring, he specializes as a counter-puncher, a role that requires sharp focus and the ability to react precisely to an opponent's movements. Beyond the physical challenge, this hobby has a profound impact on his mental state; engaging in the sport provides a unique sense of discipline that allows Dwayne to feel calm at all times.



Blooper Pic of the Month



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](#)

Facebook: [Hillcrest Academy South](#)

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



Message from the Administrators

Celebrating Growth, Reflection, and Mental Health Awareness

Dear Families,

As we enter the final stretch of the school year, May provides us with an important opportunity to celebrate the growth, resilience, and accomplishments of all our students who continue to demonstrate perseverance, creativity, and determination every day.



This month, our students have been focusing on **self-reflection and learning strategies** that help them become more independent learners. Through guided reflection activities, students are identifying their strengths, recognizing areas for improvement, and developing tools that support their academic success. Teachers and support staff have been working closely with students to encourage goal setting, organization skills, self-advocacy, and positive problem-solving techniques.

Some of the learning strategies students have explored include:

- Using visual schedules and graphic organizers
- Practicing self-monitoring and goal tracking
- Building communication and self-advocacy skills
- Developing coping strategies for challenging tasks
- Celebrating personal progress and effort

May is also recognized as **Mental Health Awareness Month**, an important reminder that emotional well-being is essential to student success. At our school, we are committed to creating a safe, supportive, and inclusive environment where every child feels valued and understood. This month we began using Hazel Health. It is a platform for students to have access to therapy.

Throughout the month, students have participated in activities and classroom discussions focused on:

- Recognizing and expressing emotions in healthy ways
- Building positive peer relationships
- Practicing mindfulness and stress-management techniques
- Understanding the importance of kindness, empathy, and self-care

We encourage families to continue these conversations at home by checking in with your child regularly, celebrating their achievements, and reminding them that asking for help is a sign of strength.

We are incredibly proud of the progress our students have made this year. Their hard work, courage, and dedication inspire our entire school community. Thank you to our teachers, support staff, and families for your continued partnership in helping every child thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

Wishing all of our families a healthy, positive, and successful end to the school year.

Sincerely,
Claudine, Bobby and Stacey



Westlake Information

Fire Drill: 5/1/26

Off Site Evacuation Drill: 5/18/26

Enrollment: 57 students

Intakes: 3

Acceptances: 1

Union County Educational Services Commission

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

October '25						
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12	13	14	15	16	17	18
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November '25						
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30						

December '25						
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28	29	30	31			

January '26						
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25	26	27	28	29	30	31

2025-2026



District Calendar

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

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.

February '26						
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
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22	23	24	25	26	27	28

March '26						
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22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

April '26						
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			1	2	3	4
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12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30		

May '26						
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24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						

June '26						
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
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14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				

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.



May Spotlight!

Student of the Month!



Student of the Month



We are proud to name E.J. as our Student of the Month in recognition of his outstanding dedication and hard work. Throughout this past year, he has shown monumental progress both academically and personally, consistently rising to meet every challenge with determination.

Principal Award Winner!



Principal Award Winner



Congratulations to M.B, the proud recipient of this month's Principal's Award! In his very first year here at Westlake, he has adapted seamlessly to our school community and pushing himself to excel both academically and socially.

Staff Shout Out!



*Staff Shout
Outs Pins!*



Sunshine Cafe Employee of the Month!

SUNSHINE CAFE EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH



The Sunshine Cafe Employee of the Month for May is... E.K.! We chose him because he always has a positive attitude no matter what. He comes to work everyday and works hard with a smile on his face. When E.K. won, he said, "I have pride and honor in myself working in the cafe." We are so proud of him!



Sunshine Cafe!



☞ The Sunshine Cafe Unveils Its New Spring Refresher!

Spring is in full bloom, and The Sunshine Cafe has been buzzing with creativity! This month, our talented team stepped into the flavor lab to develop the ultimate seasonal beverage, hosting a taste-test to find the perfect recipe.

Of course, a premium drink deserves premium hospitality. In tandem with crafting the perfect recipe, the Sunshine Cafe crew dedicated the entire month to sharpening their professional serving skills. From mastering the art of the perfect pour to practicing tray-balance and greeting guests with a smile, the staff is fully prepared to serve up this new spring favorite with flawless execution.



Work Based Learning!



Through a dynamic Work-Based Learning partnership, students collaborate daily with Maschio's Food Service to gain valuable, real-world culinary and organizational skills. The hands-on experience begins as students carefully follow a checklist to pack fresh breakfast bags designated for the all commission schools. Once the packing is complete, dedicated Westlake students take on the responsibility of delivering these breakfast bags every morning and later returning to collect them. Beyond the breakfast routine, students actively assist the kitchen staff with essential lunch preparation by portioning out ingredients like cheese, vegetables, and sauces. This meaningful collaboration not only supports the school's daily food operations but also empowers students with vital vocational and independent living skills.



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Westlake Parent Organization!



A Fun Day on the Green

The Westlake Parent Organization recently organized a fantastic afternoon of mini-golf for families at Hyatt Hills in Clark. It provided a wonderful opportunity for students, parents, and staff to connect outside the classroom while enjoying some friendly competition. Smiles and laughter filled the course as participants of all ages putted their way through the beautifully designed holes. Thank you to our amazing Parent Organization for planning such a successful and memorable community-building event!





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!

May Tips from the Westlake Behavior Team!

Dropping the Rope: From the Westlake Behavior Team

Collaborating Beyond the Power Struggle

As we head into the final stretch of the school year, Spring Fever looks a bit different for older students and young adults. Changes in weather, looming transitions, and anticipation of summer routines can cause stress levels to rise. For teenagers and young adults with complex learning needs, autism, and mental health challenges, this anxiety often manifests as a desire for control. During these high-pressure windows, it is incredibly easy for any parent to fall into a common trap: The Parent-to-Young Adult Power Struggle.

Whether it is a disagreement over doing a household chore, participating in daily life skills, taking care of personal hygiene, or completing vocational tasks, power struggles follow the same rhythm. They shift the focus away from building independence and onto a stressful, exhausting battle of wills.

This May, the Westlake Support Team wants to share a favorite behavioral strategy to help navigate these complex moments. It is all about applying the Premack Principle (a tool we use daily in our classrooms and learning spaces) to our home interactions: "Drop the rope."

Recognizing the Tug-of-War with Teens & Young Adults

With older students, a power struggle isn't always a loud tantrum. When anxiety, mood changes, or sensory overload hit, the tug-of-war often looks like:

- The Refusal Loop (Passive Resistance): Shuts down, refuses to move, or uses phrases like "Make me" or "No way."
- The Logic Trap: Attempting to debate, argue, or over-explain a rule to a teenager who is already too emotionally dysregulated or anxious to process logic.
- The Escalation Escalator: Tensions rising on both sides as we repeat a demand with increasing frustration, and they push back harder to assert control.

The reality is just like on a sports field or in a classroom, you cannot have a tug-of-war if one person drops the rope. Dropping the rope isn't giving up or letting them off the hook. It is a deliberate, therapeutic choice to prioritize de-escalation over winning the argument.

Strategies for Home: The "First/Then" Mindset

To move from a standoff to cooperation, we rely heavily on clear, predictable "First/Then" contingencies. This reduces emotional weight, clarifies expectations, and gives your young adult an internal roadmap.

1. Keep it Neutral and Concrete (Cut the Clutter)

When a teen is highly anxious or resistant, extra words feel like an attack. Strip away the lectures, the reminders of past behavior, or warnings about the future. Keep the language neutral and matter-of-fact.

- Instead of: "You are 18 years old and you need to learn to do this chore. If you don't empty the dishwasher now, you aren't getting your phone later, and you know how important responsibilities are!"
- Try: "First empty the dishwasher, then you can have your phone." (Then, walk away and give them processing space).

2. Acknowledge the Feeling, Stick to the Rule

For students navigating mental health spikes or autism, their feelings of frustration, anxiety, or burnout are very real. We want to validate their emotions without bending the safety boundary or expectation.

- The Strategy: Validate then State Contingency then Pivot.
- The Script: "I hear you, you are really overwhelmed and tired today. I get it. We still need to finish our task, but we can do it together. First, finish this stack, then you can take a 10-minute break in your room."

3. Make the Routine the "Third Party"

In a power struggle, it feels like My Will vs. Your Will. To break it, remove yourself as the "bad guy" and let a visual schedule, a written checklist, or a timer be the boss.

- The Strategy: Point to a visual chore chart, their daily calendar, or a timer.
- The Benefit: It is hard to argue with a checklist. It removes the personal friction between parent and child and places the focus squarely on the objective task at hand.

The May Challenge: The "First/Then" Pause

This month, when you feel that familiar rise in blood pressure during a difficult moment or transition at home, take a deep breath and drop the rope.

Pause, strip away the extra words, and state a calm, clear First/Then contingency. By lowering our emotional energy and keeping boundaries predictable, we help our young adults feel safe, lower their anxiety, and guide them toward the independence they are working so hard to achieve.

In a power struggle with a young adult, the "winner" is the person who de-escalates the situation. Let's drop the rope and move forward together.

With Appreciation,

The Westlake School BehaviorTeam



Talent Show!



Our annual school talent show was on May 21st. The event, which featured over 21 different acts, was organized and run by our wonderful speech therapist Ms. Kristen and dedicated teacher assistant Mr. Ahmad. Mr. Chris from the technology department worked tirelessly behind the scenes to set up the perfect sound system. Meanwhile, our music teacher Mr. Patrick also spent weeks mentoring the students, helping them polish and perfect their incredible performances. The stage truly came alive as students proudly showcased an array of unique talents, including singing favorite songs, high-energy dancing, and thunderous drum solos. The crowd was also treated to a vibrant live DJ set and captivating presentations from students eager to showcase their deep knowledge on various subjects.

Adding a burst of athletic flair to the show, several students wowed the audience with their sharp soccer tricks and impressive basketball skills. Literary talent shined brightly as well when a student took the microphone to share a captivating original story they had written. In one of the evening's most moving and inclusive performances, another student beautifully expressed a song using American Sign Language (ASL).

Thanks to the collaborative effort of our amazing staff and the brilliant creativity of our performers, it was an unforgettable celebration of our school community's diverse gifts.











Mr. Wasserman's Class!



This year has been eventful. The students in W83 not only work hard, but they also play hard. The Westlake basketball game was very exciting. We were on a roll at Garwood Lanes and caught some flicks at the Cranford movie theater. We got creative with our guests from Union Catholic during an art activity. We learned to freestyle rap with the help of a UCESC teacher, Myster-E. We chilled out during ice cream socials. The students traveled the world virtually every day as we explored various customs, holidays, traditions, and current events. Students also showed off their amazing, unique skills during our talent show. The students also had the opportunity to try a variety of cultural foods from around the world (peanut- and tree-nut-free, of course). We will finish the year out strong and look forward to a fun summer.

Mr. Wasserman's class

W83



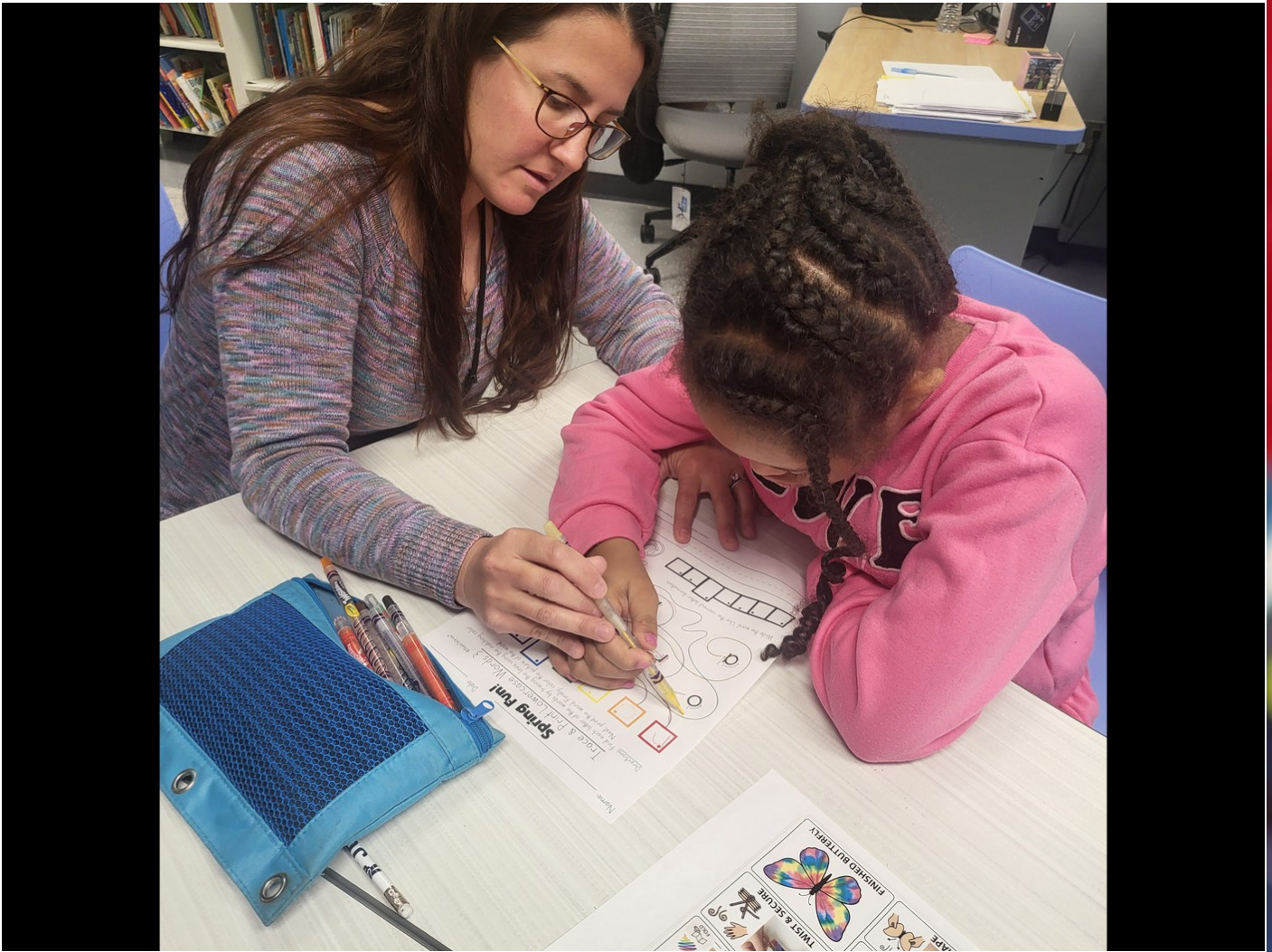
Mr. Deryl's Class!



W81 has had quite the wonderful Spring. Students have been using the new die-cut machine to make letter and shape cut-outs for signs throughout the building. We participated in the Talent Show by signing the words to the song "The More We Get Together" as a group, as well as having students perform on the bells and piano. During the end of May we went on two community outings - "Lego Batman" at the Cranford Movie Theater, and bowling in Garwood. The students had a blast!



OT with Ms. Sara!



May News from the Occupational Therapy Department!

May has been an exciting and active month in Occupational Therapy! As the school year begins to wind down, our students have continued building important skills through engaging spring-themed activities, creative projects, and hands-on learning experiences.

Throughout the month, students worked on strengthening their fine motor skills through activities such as painting, cutting, coloring, and manipulating small objects. These tasks help improve hand strength, coordination, and control, which are essential for handwriting, self-care tasks, and classroom participation.

We also focused on sensory exploration and movement-based activities to support attention, regulation, and body awareness. Students enjoyed participating in sensory bins, movement breaks, and outdoor activities such as scavenger hunts, that encouraged visual attention. Incorporating movement into sessions helps students stay regulated and engaged.

In addition, students practiced following multi-step directions and problem-solving skills through collaborative games, spring crafts, and simple cooking activities. These experiences support independence, sequencing, social interaction, and confidence in completing everyday tasks.

As we approach the end of the school year, we are incredibly proud of our students. Their hard work, perseverance, and enthusiasm continue to shine in every session.

We hope everyone enjoys the warmer weather and the many opportunities May brings for outdoor activities, creativity, and family time!

— The OT Team





Ms. Kristen our Speech Therapist!

This month, the Speech Therapy Department had a busy and exciting time supporting our students in a variety of engaging activities. One highlight was assisting students as they prepared for the school talent show. Students worked hard learning song lyrics, practicing dances, perfecting sports tricks, and preparing trivia performances. Participating in the talent show provided students with meaningful opportunities to build confidence, strengthen communication skills, and showcase their unique talents in front of peers and staff.

The Speech Department also embraced the spring season by planting wildflowers. Students participated in sequencing the steps needed for planting and charting the growth of their flowers over time. The activity encouraged language development, following directions, and observation skills. Students showed great enthusiasm and motivation, eagerly checking in each day to see if their plants were growing.

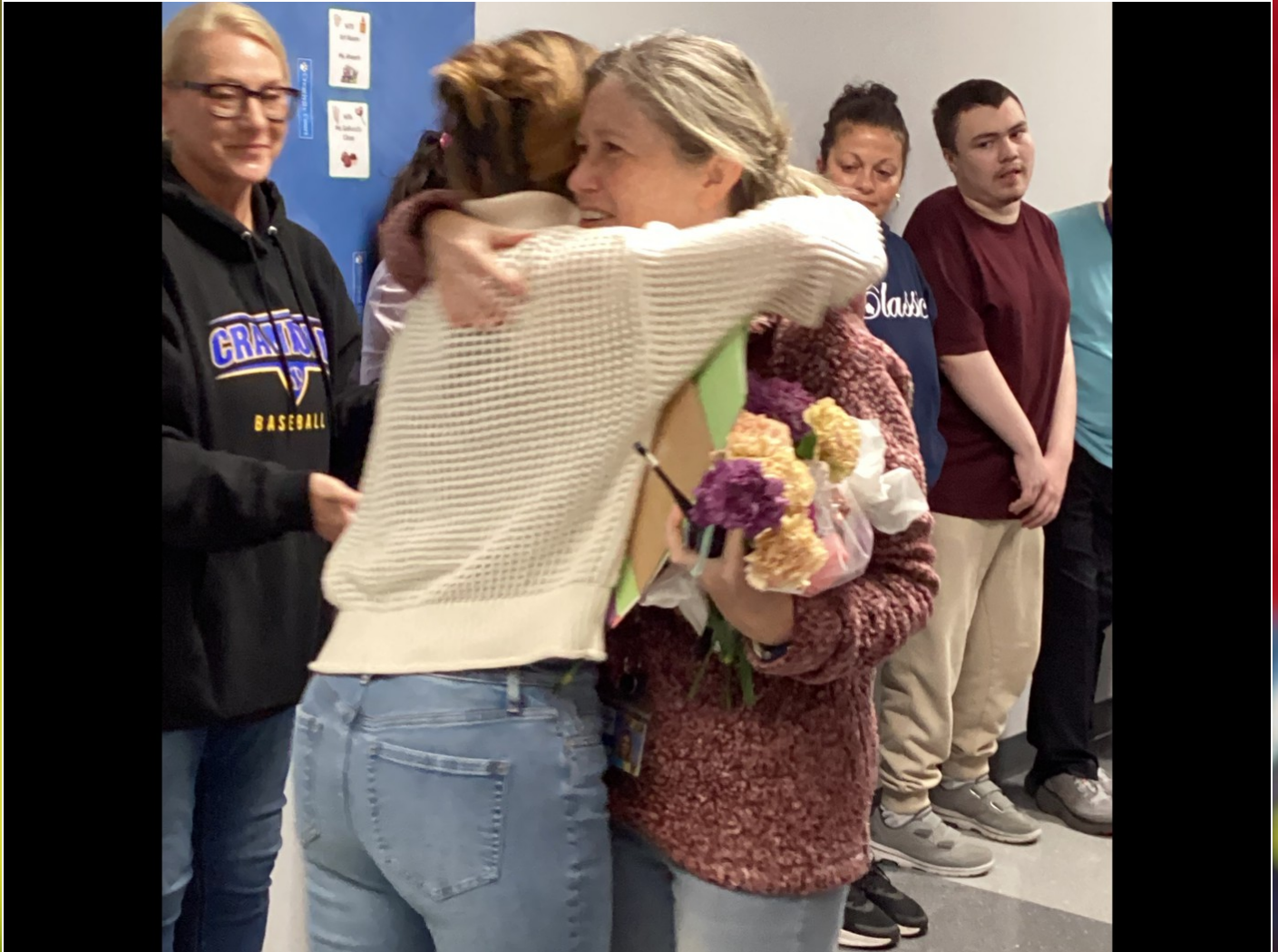
In celebration of Cinco de Mayo, students learned about the history and significance of the holiday and completed themed speech and language activities related to the topic. These activities helped promote vocabulary development, listening comprehension, and cultural awareness.

Additionally, we continued to focus on building social communication skills in both individual and group settings. Students practiced gaining attention appropriately, asking and answering questions, and making meaningful comments during conversations and activities.

We are proud of the students' hard work and growth this month and look forward to more exciting learning experiences ahead!



Appreciation Celebrations!



What a spectacular month of appreciation and community spirit! From honoring our leadership to indulging in well-deserved treats, the Westlake family truly went above and beyond to make our staff feel valued. Here is a look back at our May highlights:

- **Principal's Day (May 1st):** We kicked off the month by showering **Ms. Tantillo** with appreciation. Thank you, Ms. Tantillo, for your unwavering leadership, guidance, and dedication to making Westlake a wonderful place to learn and grow!
- **May the Fourth Be With You (May 4th):** The Force was strong with **Mr. Peneno** this year! To celebrate Star Wars Day, he was gifted a magnificent, fully completed Star Wars puzzle—a perfectly epic tribute for a stellar educator.
- **Teacher Appreciation Week:** Our staff felt incredibly spoiled thanks to the phenomenal **Westlake PTO and our generous parents**. The spectacular lunch spread and decadent dessert buffet kept everyone fueled, smiling, and deeply grateful all week long.

Thank you to everyone who contributed, donated, and helped turn these moments into lasting memories. We have the best community around!



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

espesyal

Pwogram ak Evènman Sosyal pou tout lay

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!



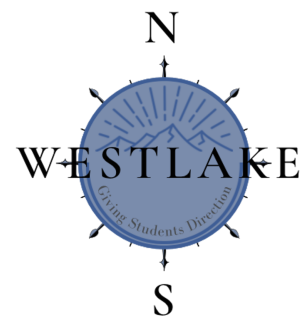
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Contact Us!

Website: www.ucesc.org/schools/westlake_school

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

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



INSTAGRAM!

Visit us!





Robert Peneno

Robert is using Smore to create beautiful newsletters





Crossroads Monthly Newsletter

May 2026

Message from the Administration

Dear Crossroads Community,

We can't believe we are already putting May in the rearview mirror and that June is officially here. This school year has flown by, and May was a beautiful reminder of how far we have come together. They say that April showers bring May flowers, and that is exactly what this month brought to Crossroads. In line with our monthly SEL theme of self-reflection, our students took time to look back on their growth this year. Speaking of growth, we have been busy getting our hands dirty in the Crossroads flower and vegetable garden. We have been working incredibly hard prepping the soil and bringing some vibrant color to our school, and we are already looking forward to the harvest when our tomatoes, cucumbers, zucchini, and peppers are ready to be picked.



This month also tied perfectly into our district theme of Paving Paths: One UCESC Voice at a Time, with May's specific focus being My Voice, My Journey. In celebration of Better Speech and Hearing Month, our amazing team of speech-language pathologists created a fantastic, fun-filled activity that allowed our students to express themselves, celebrate their unique communication styles, and honor their individual journeys.

We also kicked off the month by celebrating our incredible staff during Staff Appreciation Week. We are all so grateful to the families who generously sent in items for the staff luncheon. Your kindness filled our plates and our hearts, and it reminded us how lucky we are to have such a supportive community.

As we enter the final stretch of the school year, June is a time of celebration, and we have several exciting events on the horizon. For those families who have preschoolers, we will be celebrating

their stepping up on June 3rd. For our eighth-grade families, we will be celebrating our end-of-the-year commencement milestone on June 11th. Formal invitations for both of these special events should already be out to families. Additionally, our end of the year Crossroads Field Day is scheduled for June 5th from 10:00 - 1:00. Parents and siblings are warmly welcomed to join us for the festivities, which will include bounce houses, slides, an ice cream truck, music, and food. We are looking forward to a wonderful day of fun.

It is beautiful to reflect on the paths we have paved together over these past several months. Let us make this final month of the 2025-2026 school year the best one yet as we finish the year strong and celebrate the last month of the school year together.

Warm Regards,

Matt, Danielle, and Stacey



Upcoming Dates

- 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)



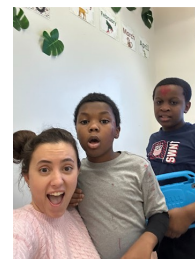
Crossroads Student Spotlight

Student of the Month - Kyroh

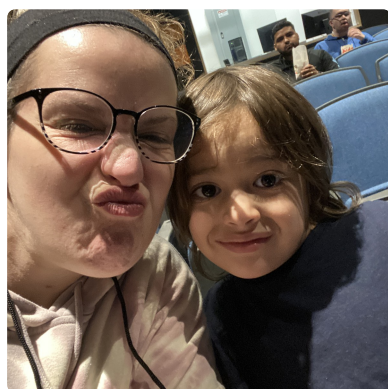
Kyroh is our student of the month! Kyroh is finishing up his first year at Crossroads and has blossomed into such a bright young boy. Kyroh comes to school each day ready to learn and has such a positive attitude and big smile. His personality shines as bright as a star (and those who know him know his favorite thing in the world is drawing a star!). As a classroom, we are beyond impressed with how much he has grown, especially with his conversational skills. Kyroh has been consistently expressing his favorite things such as colors, snacks, shapes, and songs. He is incredibly affectionate and is willing to do anything for tickles and adult attention. Kyroh loves to play with his classmates and is super curious about what others are doing. Whether participating

in classroom activities, helping classmates, or taking on new challenges, he always puts forth his best effort.

We are so proud of Kyroh in 105 and cannot wait to see what else he does!



Classroom Spotlights



Ms. Allison's Classroom

May has sped by in our classroom! We've had so much fun this month celebrating Mother's Day, starting Music Groups with some of our boys, and taking our final trip of the year to LifeTown. The Alphabet Countdown to summer has started and we'll be focusing on a different letter each day until we Z for ZOOM into summer!

We're focusing on sticking to the routines we've built this year, expanding our friend group to include students from other classrooms, and making sure to get as much movement as possible. Individually, our little guys gang have been doing some big things! Mouctar and Khairo are continuing their diaper-free toilet training schedules so they can become even more independent. Jon is practicing putting on his own socks and shoes. Jonas has been trying more challenging activity schedule bins to show off his skills. Adrian has been starting to take responsibility for his own first-then board by choosing between work activities and picking his reinforcers. Jonathan is learning to advocate for his sensory needs using vocalizations and his AAC device. The entire 103 team is so proud of our students and can't wait to enjoy all the end of the year fun we have planned!





Ms. Daria's Classroom

Room 220A has been incredibly busy lately! Our Community-Based Instruction (CBI) trips have taken us all over the area, including Clark Commons, the Cranford movie theater, ShopRite, Costco, and even a visit to Westlake School. Back in the classroom, students are sharpening their daily living skills by practicing how to make beds, fold laundry, set tables, and sort utensils. We've also enjoyed seasonal lessons on kindness and the life cycles of flowers and butterflies, which included a wonderful outdoor class in the garden. With the arrival of spring, we've been loving our time on the playground! Finally, the class has been working hard running the school store to fundraise for our upcoming middle school trip, while also staying busy fulfilling prevocational supply orders for classrooms across the building.



We have been working hard on our social-emotional learning with trying to express our feelings in different ways, including matching how we feel to pictures throughout the classroom. With learning to express our emotions, we have also been working on different ways to regulate ourselves, including asking for a break, taking deep breaths, and going for walks.

We are excited for the end of the school year and getting a little break before coming back to start ESY!



Therapy Spotlight

Speech Therapy - Ms. Alayna, Ms. Jillian, Ms. Tara, and Mr. Damon

With spring in full swing, it is time to celebrate all things communication! May is Better Speech and Hearing Month (BSHM) and the speech-language therapy department celebrated by educating both the staff and the students on speech, language, and communication. Did you know that educators have a higher rate of voice disorders since they use their voices all day every day and are more likely to have voice disorders than any other occupation because of overuse!? Blow Pops with vocal hygiene tips were displayed by the front office for the staff as reminders to take care of their most used tool, their voices. Simple ways to encourage vocal hygiene include: drinking water regularly, vocal rest, and reducing whispering or yelling.



The speech-language therapy department planned an afternoon full of hands on speech and language activities for Crossroads students! These activities included speech and language skills targeted during weekly therapy sessions. The students followed directions incorporating core words "stop/go" during freeze dance, used core words throughout each game based and interactive station, such as: "my turn/your turn", "more/all done" "yes/no" paired with fringe (topic specific) vocabulary, and used "I" statements to talk about how they feel during speech. The afternoon was filled with learning, socializing, dancing and fun!



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Specials Spotlight

Ms. Lynn - School Nurse



Heat Hacks & Sun Smarts

Summer is almost here! As temperatures start heating up, here are some easy tips, tricks, and sunny-day reminders to help you and your family stay safe while still having fun in the sun.





Avoid Peak Sun Hours

Try to stay out of direct sunlight between **10:00 AM** and **4:00 PM**, when UV rays are strongest.



Wear & Reapply Sunscreen

Use a broad-spectrum, water-resistant sunscreen with SPF 30 or higher. Reapply every 1–2 hours and after swimming or sweating, even if the sunscreen is labeled waterproof. Don't forget commonly missed areas like the tops of the feet, ears, backs of the hands, and backs of the knees.

Please provide sunscreen for your child if you would like staff to apply it before outdoor activities.

Cover Up



Wear:

- UPF or lightweight protective clothing
- Wide-brimmed hats
- Sunglasses with UV protection

These help protect both your skin and eyes from harmful UV rays.



Stay Hydrated

Carry a water bottle and drink fluids often. Sweating helps cool the body, but it also causes loss of water and electrolytes. Staying hydrated is one of the best ways to prevent heat-related illness during summer activities.



DIY Air Conditioner

Place a bowl of ice directly in front of a fan for a quick cooling breeze.

Cool Your Pulse Points

Apply ice or a cool cloth to your:

- Wrists
- Neck
- Behind your knees

This can help lower body temperature quickly.



Freeze Your Pillowcase or Bedsheets

Place pillowcases or folded sheets in a sealed plastic bag and place them in the freezer for **10–60 minutes before bed**.

The cool fabric can help you relax and fall asleep more comfortably on hot nights.



Medication & Sun Sensitivity

Some medications can make your skin extra sensitive to the sun, increasing the risk of severe sunburn or rashes. Always check prescription warning labels or ask your pharmacist if your medication may cause sun sensitivity.



May Tips from the Behavior Team

Dropping the Rope: From the Crossroads Behavior Team

Collaborating Beyond the Power Struggle

As we move into the final stretch of the school year, "Spring Fever" is in full swing. Changes in routine, unpredictable weather, and anticipation of summer can bring a shift in energy both at school and at home. During these high-pressure moments, it is incredibly easy for any parent to fall into a common trap: The Parent-to-Child Power Struggle.

Whether it is a battle over putting on shoes, transitioning away from an iPad, or sitting at the dinner table, power struggles follow the same rhythm. They can quickly shift the focus away from teaching a skill and onto a stressful battle of wills.

This May, the Crossroads Behavior Team wants to share a favorite strategy to help navigate these moments. It's all about applying the Premack Principle (which we use every day at school) to find a peaceful way forward: "Drop the rope."

Recognizing the Tug-of-War

With children who are non-vocal or have emerging communication skills, behavior is communication. A power struggle at home usually starts when a child is trying to tell us they are overwhelmed, tired, or wanting control, and it often manifests as:

- **The "No-Go" Loop:** Dropping to the floor or physically resisting a transition.
- **The Escalation Escalator:** Tensions rising on both sides as we repeat a command louder and they protest harder.
- **The Negotiation:** Trying to reason or bargain with a child who is already too dysregulated to process complex language.

The reality is you cannot have a tug-of-war if one person drops the rope. Dropping the rope isn't letting them win or giving up. It is a intentional, loving choice to prioritize calming the situation over winning the argument.

Strategies for Home: The "First/Then" Mindset

To move from a standoff to cooperation, we rely heavily on visual and verbal "First/Then" contingencies. This reduces the language load for your child and makes expectations crystal clear without the emotional weight.

1. Keep it Concrete (Minimize the Words)

When a child is resisting, over-explaining or negotiating adds fuel to the fire. Keep your language simple, predictable, and paired with a visual or object if possible.

- *Instead of:* "If you don't put your shoes on right now, we are going to be late, and you won't get to go to the park, and I've already asked you four times!"
- *Try (with visuals/gestures):* "First shoes, then park."

2. Neutralize the Pushback with a Pivot

If your child is protesting a necessary routine (like brushing teeth or sitting down for a meal), avoid the urge to force the issue in the heat of the moment. Acknowledge their motivation, stick to the rule, but stay neutral.

- *The Strategy:* "First [What Has to Happen], Then [What We Want to Happen]." The Script: "I see you want the iPad. iPad is paused. First brush teeth, then iPad." (Then, give them a moment of space to process without adding more verbal pressure).

3. Let the Visual Be the "Boss"

In a power struggle, it feels like Me vs. You. To break it, shift the focus to a third party: a visual schedule, a First/Then board, or a timer.

- *The Strategy:* When a transition is tough, point to the visual schedule rather than arguing. It is hard for a child to argue with a picture. It removes the personal conflict and shows them exactly when their preferred item will be available.

The May Challenge: The "First/Then" Pause

This month, when you feel that familiar rise in stress during a difficult transition at home, take a breath and drop the rope.

Pause, strip away the extra words, and use a simple First/Then statement. By staying calm, reducing our language, and letting the routine do the talking, we help our children feel safe, understood, and successful.

In a power struggle, the "winner" is the person who de-escalates the situation. Let's drop the rope and move forward together.

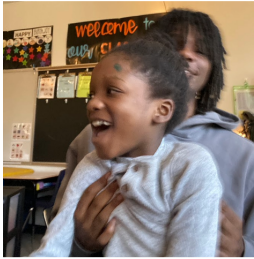
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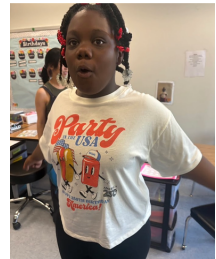
May at Crossroads



















Crossroads In the Community









Staff 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



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HAN Newsletter May 2026

May 2026

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

Principal's Message



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

As we enter the month of May, the energy at our school is higher than ever. Our seniors are currently working incredibly hard to cross the finish line and complete their final graduation requirements. Beyond the classroom, our students have been deeply engaged in experiential learning, recently participating in two highly successful History field trips that brought their lessons to life. We also hosted a fantastic, student-led Science Fair, where our young scientists proudly demonstrated their creativity, critical

thinking, and passion for discovery.

Looking ahead, the next two weeks will be filled with well-deserved celebrations and milestone events. We are eagerly anticipating our upcoming Awards Night, where we will honor the outstanding academic and personal achievements of our student body. Following that, we will gather for the Senior Recognition Dinner to celebrate our graduates and reflect on their journey before they take their next big steps into the future.

It has been a remarkable school year, filled with growth and resilience. I am immensely proud of our dedicated students, talented teachers, and tireless staff who have all worked together to make this year so special.

Thank you for your continued partnership and support.

Warm Regards,

John Marquet
Principal

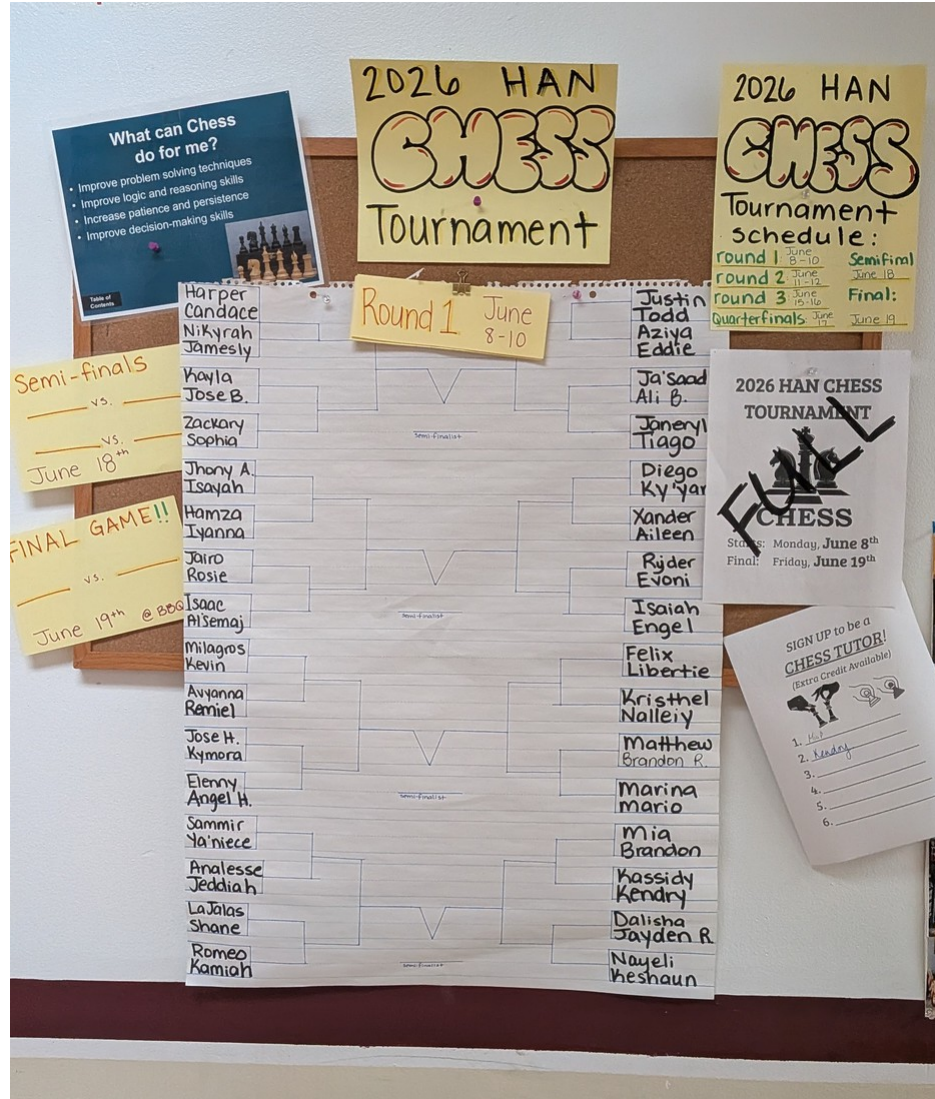
Upcoming Dates

- June 3rd - Awards Night
- June 10th - Senior Recognition Dinner
- June 18th - Chess Semi-Finals
- June 19th - Student BBQ and Chess Finals
- June 19th, June 22nd, & June 23rd - 1PM Dismissal
- June 23rd - Last day of School

HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION/CLASS AWARDS CEREMONY

High School Graduation: Dunn Sports Center	Date	Time	Arrival
John E. Dwyer Technology Academy	Wednesday, June 24	8:30am	7:30am
Thomas Jefferson Arts Academy	Wednesday, June 24	11:30am	10:30am
Katherine Johnson, Dorothy Vaughn, Mary Jackson STEM Academy	Wednesday, June 24	2:30pm	1:30pm
Alexander Hamilton Preparatory Academy	Wednesday, June 24	5:30pm	4:30pm
Admiral William F. Halsey, Jr. Health & Public Safety Academy	Thursday, June 25	8:30am	7:30am
J. Christian Bollwage Finance Academy	Thursday, June 25	11:30am	10:30am
Elizabeth High School – Frank J. Cicarell	Thursday, June 25	2:30pm	1:30pm
Thomas A. Edison Career and Technical Academy	Thursday, June 25	5:30pm	4:30pm

Chess Tournament Starting in June



Honor Roll

The third marking period marks the largest number of Honor Roll recipients we have had all year. We attribute this to our and our students ongoing commitment to our school and to our Attendance Matters! program. Our students have worked hard to get these honors! The following students are

Honor Roll and High Honor Roll.

High Honor Roll

Harper A **
 Nevaeh G **
 Isaac L **
 Irina R **

Honor Roll

NiKyras A **
 Jah'mir B **
 Keshawn B
 Milagros C
 Isaiah C **
 Faith D *
 Juliana E *

Jairo F
Chloe F **
Kamiah J
Brandon L
Hector L **
La'Jalas M *
Tiago P
Brandon R
Jayden R *
Kassidy S
Jason S
Ashley V **
Diego V **

Students with * have been on Honor Roll one time this school year prior to MP 3.
Students with ** have been on all three Honor Roll lists this year.

Union County Scholar's Breakfast

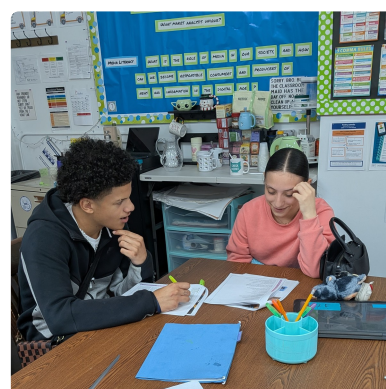


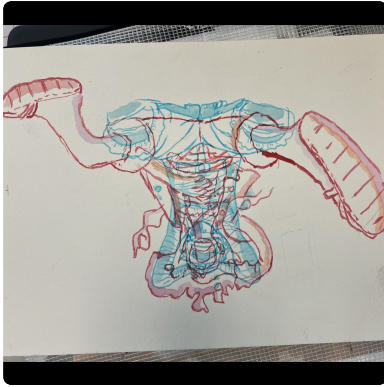
On May 18th, our Valedictorian, Ashley Velez, and our Salutatorian, Diego Viglianti, were at the Union County Scholar's Breakfast at the Embassy Suites in Berkeley Heights to be awarded with a plaque for their achievement. Both students were there with their families to celebrate the moment and to recognize their success.

In The Classroom

Media Literacy Class

The Media Literacy class has been watching **Social Studies**, a documentary that looks at social media use in an LA school the first year back to school after Covid. The series takes a close look at the students who have grown up in the digital age and how it has shaped their lives. The series, and the materials that are provided with it, delves deep into concepts that have been around a while, but have become exasperated with social media use. Our class has been focusing on learning about social comparison, FOMO, social justice, identity affirmation, conspiracy theories, disinformation, and social approval. Through discussions, readings, videos and activities, students are exploring the implications of social media use on their lives.

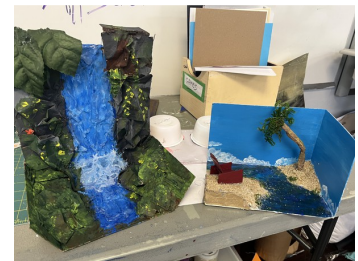
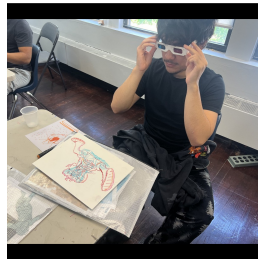




Art Class

Hillcrest Academy North's art program is in its final stages of the year. After a long semester learning about art and different mediums, students are making their final works based on their favorite mediums and interests. Presently, there are many different projects being made in the art room right now. Several new ideas were presented to the class to choose from; some with optical illusion attributes. The first was an agamograph, which is an accordion style painting that combines two separate images.

Each painting is viewable at opposite angles. The second was a "hidden image" ink drawing. Two images were painted, one in cyan ink and the other in red, orange or pink. However, they are overlapped on the same page and each is only viewable through the red or cyan side of 3D glasses. Students portrayed subjects in the theme of "before & after" and "transformation". Other students had fun re-designing a playing card or tarot card using the character of their choice. They learned about card design and tarot archetypes. Independent projects also emerged. Two students chose sculpture and created 3 dimensional environments; a project requiring knowledge of building and the ability to work in many different mediums. Also, sewing was offered this month and several students are creating their own designs or have upcycled clothing into something new.



HAN's First Annual Science Fair

Ms. Silva's science classroom transformed into a bustling hub of discovery during the recent student-led Science Fair. Enthusiastic student volunteers guided visitors through an array of impressive interactive exhibits. Environmental science students showcased detailed dioramas of extreme weather conditions, capturing the raw



power of exploding volcanoes and swirling dust storms. In the laboratory zone, guests got to step into the role of researchers by extracting strawberry DNA and exploring dynamic microscope stations with Forensic science students. One popular station challenged visitors to a guessing game to identify mystery specimens under the lens. Under the careful supervision and expert guidance of our student scientists, guests of all ages safely participated in hands-on experiments, making the event an unforgettable celebration of scientific curiosity. A huge round of applause to Ms. Silva and her incredible science students for a great success!



Aileen and her "Storms in a Jar"



**"Waterstorm" "Duststorm"
"Thunderstorm"**



Kymora and her "Dust Storm"



"Dust Storm"



Chloe and the Volcano



**Neveah, Todd and Chloe
explaining science to Ms.
Arora**



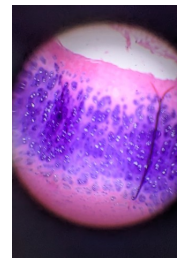
**Chloe showing the stages
of a volcano eruption**



Analisse, Eddie and Remy with their "Microscope Slides"



Guessing the 3rd slide



The 3rd Slide - bone cell



Irina, Candace, Ni'Kyrah and Josue and their "Strawberry DNA Extraction"



Ky'yara extracting DNA



Ni'Kyrah demonstrating how to extract DNA

Lives Eliminated, Dreams Illuminated

Our students spent a full and powerful day at LEDI (*Lives Eliminated, Dreams Illuminated*), an immersive exhibition honoring girls and young women whose lives were stolen during the Holocaust. Upon entering the gallery, students were surrounded by striking portraits inspired by archival photographs, each one reimagining the dignity, dreams, and humanity of individuals who never had the chance to live out their futures.

Throughout the visit, students participated in a series of interactive activities designed to deepen their understanding of Holocaust history. These hands-on experiences encouraged them to think critically about identity, memory, and the consequences of hatred.

Guided discussions helped students explore not only the events of the Holocaust, but also broader patterns of injustice and the ways people have been mistreated across history.

The day offered a meaningful blend of art, history, and reflection. Students left with a stronger sense of empathy, a clearer understanding of the past, and a renewed awareness of the importance of standing against prejudice in all its forms.

The exhibit is at the Mana Contemporary in Jersey City.





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://ucesc.org/schools/hillcrest_academy_north)

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

