

# STAYING IN TOUCH

## WHILE KEEPING OUR DISTANCE

MEETING THE NEEDS OF STUDENTS, FAMILIES AND STAFF

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## Staying Connected

### Typhanie Jackson, Director of Student Services

Staying connected while socially distancing is a concept we are all trying to manage during the course of this pandemic and certainly over the holiday season. How do we manage to do these two things at the same time? What makes us human is our ability to feel and connect to one another. Oftentimes, we take for granted the presence of others; the simple wave or “hello” from a colleague that means so much and goes so far. Many of us have found ourselves with limited personal connections. It is now where we have become creative, looking for online opportunities to connect, utilizing the telephone more than we have in the past, sending a letter, holiday card, or a note simply to say I am thinking of you. As we break for the holiday season, how are we going to show our love and care for one another while keeping our distance? I encourage us all to show your loved ones you care. Check in on family and friends, sign up for a virtual Zumba or cooking class, or create a routine that will help keep order. Go outside and make sure to care for yourself. All of the above are ways to reduce feelings of isolation and to increase connections to others. Staying home helps you protect yourself, your neighbors, and those you care about, but if not careful, can also create feelings of loneliness and isolation. Please stay connected. We are in this together!

**“You’re doing a good job!” [Alicia Keys - Good Job | Cover by One Voice Children’s Choir | A Tribute to Covid-19 Heroes](#)**

*\*Don’t forget about the Student Services website! Here you can find resources and information in regards to COVID-19, SEL, Instruction, PPT Resources, and more!*  
<https://sites.google.com/a/nhps.net/nhps-student-services/>



## STAFF SPOTLIGHTS

### **Pre-K: Gentiana Xhema, Benjamin Jepson**

We would like to recognize Miss Gentiana Xhema, preschool special education integrated classroom teacher at Benjamin Jepson Magnet School. Day in and day out she demonstrates her passion, commitment, and love of her profession. Her knowledge of early childhood education is evident in her lessons. She has taken on the challenge of distant learning with nothing but positivity and compassion for her families. Gentiana provides individual and group lessons to her students thus meeting all of their developmental needs. She has altered her well thought out in person lesson plans and provided all of her students with new and engaging learning opportunities during this time. She has 100% student engagement which is awesome! Way to go!! Throughout all of this, Miss Xhema remains connected to all of her families. She has adapted her teaching practices to ensure that all of her students receive appropriate lessons and activities. Keep up the good work! We appreciate you Gentiana!!

### **K-8: Dr. Michelle Bogart, Lincoln Bassett**

Dr. Michelle Bogart is an all-star when it comes to supporting Lincoln Bassett! Dr. Bogart has been supporting the families of Lincoln Bassett for many years and continues to do so throughout the pandemic. Dr. Bogart has helped to coordinate Special Education services, technology support, and meal pickups for families. She supports disengaged students by reaching out to parents by phone, text, and email. A true believer in the power of relationships, she works tirelessly, countless hours, to maintain them with families so that everyone is supported. You can mention a student's name and Dr. Bogart can rattle off when she has contacted the family and how she will be following up with them.

Dr. Bogart doesn't stop there. She also works to support the Special Education team by offering ideas and suggestions for student support, guidance in personal learning, and helping to problem solve any issues that arise.

Dr. Bogart is an amazing asset to Lincoln Bassett; her dedication to the Lincoln Bassett community is unmatched!

### **High School: Ms. Yonamine, Jen Ciarcia, Danielle Smith, Christina Nelson, Ms. Juluru, Ms. Steele, Ms. Celentano & Mr. Jacobs, Hillhouse High School**

A big shout out to the Hillhouse special education team. Ms. Yonamine has been diligently working conducting PPTs and engaging parents in the process. The resource teachers, Jen Ciarcia, Danielle Smith, Christina Nelson and Ms Juluru, are working hard with students everyday to ensure they are engaged and learning. Ms Steele, Ms Celentano and Mr Jacobs have created individualized work making sure each student can access their learning. Awesome job Hillhouse team!!!!

**Self-Contained: Nicole Cassidy, Clinton Avenue**

Ms. Nicole Cassidy, Self-Contained Teacher at Clinton Ave. School, is hosting Holiday Movie Night for staff, students, and their family (click on the picture for more information). Staff will be delivering hot coco and snacks to homes for the event!!



**Round of applause for the effort our staff is making to keep distance learning engaging and fun for our students!**

## PRINCIPAL'S CORNER

Please enjoy this video that captures various things that Celentano is doing to keep everyone's energy and spirits up. They foster communication and positive connections.

[Thank You Celentano](#)

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING AT HOME

This has been a very stressful year for everyone, and the holiday season can often entail added stressors for parents/guardians and children. Check out this blog by a local psychologist, Alicia Farrell, for more information on how to help your children through the holidays!

[How to Help Kids Through the COVID Holiday Season and Beyond](#)

## SELF-CARE

### [Self-Care in the Time of Coronavirus](#)

“For parents, prioritizing your own well-being benefits your whole family...” - <https://childmind.org/>

### [Supporting Families During COVID-19](#)

“We know parents are struggling to balance work, child care and self-care while keeping worries — both your children’s and your own — under control. You don’t have to do it alone...” -

<https://childmind.org/>

## RELATED SERVICES

### School Social Work

**Khalilah Abdulrahim**, School Social Worker at Hillhouse High School, created a Christmas Fun Room! This virtual room is appropriate for elementary/multi-disability programs. Awesome job, Khalilah!

### [Christmas Fun Room](#)

### School Psychology

For the last two years, **Ms. Monique Holloway**, School Psychologist at East Rock School, has participated in the “Food for Kids” program. Every week students receive a bag with healthy goodies such as: cereal, soup, crackers, raisins, applesauce, etc. Ms. Holloway warmly greets them and connects with families.



Thank you, Ms. Holloway for your dedication to our community especially during the holidays and these challenging times! Keep spreading kindness and love!



We would also like to give a big shout-out to **Mr. Carl Leger** for these words of encouragement...”Don’t worry about a thing...every little thing is gonna be alright.” Click on the link below to sing along! Happy Holidays!

### [Three Little Birds \(Don’t Worry About a Thing\)](#)

**Speech & Language**

For this newsletter, we would like to highlight and congratulate **Isaalys Ramos Melendez**, a student at James Hillhouse High School and ECA. This photo of her family was featured in the Visual Arts Show at ECA and selected for the cover of the program for the show! Click on the link below to learn more about Isaalys!

[Isaalys's Photograph](#)



We are so proud of Isaalys. BRAVO, BRAVO!!!!

**ACES Extension Therapy Services - OT Time! Holiday Tips**

An oldie but goodie, here are some helpful holiday tips to support children with sensory challenges!

**OT Time!**  
Holiday Tips

**Winter break should be a time for relaxation and fun, not stress! However, we all know a change in routine can be a big disruption for a child with sensory challenges. Use these tips to help reduce sensory meltdowns and enjoy the holiday season with family and friends!**

|   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <p><b>Plan Ahead</b><br/>It's important to know where you are going and what the setting will be like. How many people will be there? Will it be noisier than usual? Are there going to be bright and/or flashing lights? Will you need to sit still for a long period of time? Find out if there will be a quiet room you can use if your child becomes upset. The more information you can gather ahead of time, the better and less stressful your experience is likely to be.</p> | <p><b>Prepare a Calm Down Bag</b><br/>New situations can be extremely overwhelming for a child with sensory challenges, whether it's bright lights, loud noises, or new people. Having a bag full of different soothing items can help keep your child calm when facing these different experiences. Ideas of items to keep in your own calm down bag may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Favorite toy/stuffed animal</li> <li>• Noise-canceling headphones</li> <li>• Fidget toys</li> <li>• Sensory balls</li> <li>• iPad with calming music</li> <li>• Weighted blanket</li> <li>• Favorite snacks</li> </ul> | <p><b>Get Your Child Ready</b><br/>Unfamiliar settings may be upsetting if your child is not properly prepared. Social stories are a great way to familiarize your child with something new. If possible, visit the place ahead of time. If that is not an option, show your child pictures and/or videos of where you will be going and what you will be doing (e.g., holiday lights display). It may help to talk about the event days ahead of time so the activity is not brand new to your child.</p> |
| <p><b>Sensory Friendly Gift Ideas</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exercise/therapy ball</li> <li>• Mini trampoline</li> <li>• Lava lamp</li> <li>• Bubbles</li> <li>• Liquid motion toys</li> <li>• Sweets</li> <li>• Gears sets</li> <li>• Kinesthetic sand</li> <li>• Playdough</li> <li>• Flash/weighted toys</li> <li>• Weighted blanket</li> <li>• Fidget cubes</li> <li>• Vibrating/massage toys</li> <li>• Spinning/rocking chair</li> </ul>                  | <p><b>Simple Snow Slime</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 cup - silver glitter glue</li> <li>• 1/2 cup - liquid starch</li> </ul> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Pour glitter glue into large mixing bowl.</li> <li>2. Slowly add liquid starch and mix until reaching desired consistency.</li> <li>3. Knead with clean, dry hands.</li> </ol>  | <p><b>Specific questions or comments?</b><br/>Contact your school's occupational therapist!</p>  |

**Have a happy and safe holiday season!**

Information compiled by Melissa Lavigne, MEd, OTR/L

## SCHOOL COUNSELORS

### **Beecher Middle School Academic Assistance Program**

The Beecher Each One Teach One Program is designed to support students in grades 6-8 who are experiencing academic and/or social challenges. **Mark Sweeting**, Assistant Principal, initiated the program. It was further developed with collaboration from **Stephen Jefferson**, Youth Family and Community Engagement, and **Alison Atkin**, School Counselor. The student centered program allows student coaches from the 7th and 8th grades to lead the program, coach students with academic and social challenges from lower grades, and create leadership opportunities for themselves in the future. Tutoring will happen after school hours - virtually of course!

### **K-8 Ceremony Conte West Hills**

**Iris Festa** created a virtual awards K-8 ceremony for Conte West Hills. This was shared with each grade level and teachers viewed it with their students the Wednesday before Thanksgiving. Click on the link below to view the 8th grade celebration!

[Virtual Celebration 8th Grade](#)

## PARA-EDUCATORS ROCK!

### **Maria Zullo**

**7th and 8th grade paraprofessional**

**Brennan Rogers**



Mrs. Zullo is an asset to the 7th and 8th grade team at Brennan Rogers. Her dedication to the students is admirable. Virtual learning has posed many challenges, however, Mrs. Zullo has a way of making the best out of the situation. I am blessed to work with someone who is so flexible and understanding. She approaches all situations with confidence and poise. She meets students at their individual levels and supports teachers and students alike. She has built a positive relationship with all of her students and they are very appreciative of her kindness and support. I am so fortunate to work with such a driven and supportive educator.  
- Brianna Wolkowicz

## SOCIAL JUSTICE

### [Why Social Justice In School Matters](#)

“Meet five educators who are determined to help young people realize their value and power.”



Article & Photo Source: <https://www.nea.org/>



### [Creating Classrooms for Social Justice](#)

“Teach your students about making positive change in the world by connecting with them, discussing real-world problems and multiple perspectives, creating classroom community, and including authentic assessment.”

Article & Photo Source: <https://www.edutopia.org/>

## CELEBRATING DIVERSITY: HOLIDAYS AROUND THE WORLD

### **What is a Holiday?**

It is a festive day.

### **Why do we have Holidays?**

People celebrate due to traditions, important milestones and/or religious beliefs.

### **Does everyone celebrate the same holidays?**

Not necessarily. A group of people can celebrate a particular holiday and others might not depending on their culture, religion, family upbringing and personal morals/values.

*Here are some examples of holidays celebrated around the world!*

- **Christmas**

Christmas is celebrated on December 25 and is both a religious holiday and cultural celebration. During Christmas people decorate pine trees, take pictures with Santa Claus,

feast and exchange gifts.

Want more info? <https://www.history.com/topics/christmas/history-of-christmas>

- **New Year's Day**

New Year's is celebrated on January 1st and is the beginning of the Gregorian Calendar. New Year's festivities begin on December 31 where people count down the last hours of the last day of the year by feasting and waiting for January 1<sup>st</sup>.

Want more info? <https://www.history.com/topics/holidays/new-years>

- **Kwanzaa**

Kwanzaa is celebrated from December 26 to January 1. Kwanzaa was created by Dr. Maulna Karenga based on African harvest festivals from different regions of Africa. Kwanzaa was created after the Watt riots to bring unity among African Americans and to celebrate themselves and their history. Celebration includes emphasizing on the seven principals, candle rituals, decorating the home, and music.

Want more info? <https://www.history.com/topics/holidays/kwanzaa-history>

- **Three Kings Day**

Three Kings Day is also known as Epiphany and is celebrated 12 days after Christmas on January 6<sup>th</sup>. According to Christian beliefs and traditions, three kings gave Jesus symbolical gifts. Celebration includes children receiving gifts.

Want more info? <https://www.countryliving.com/life/a30142058/three-kings-day/>

- **Hanukkah**

Hanukkah is celebrated in December and is a Jewish festival that commemorates the rededication of the Second Temple in Jerusalem. Celebration includes lighting each day one candle on the menorah.

Want more info? <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Hanukkah>

- **Chinese New Year**

Chinese New Year is celebrated based on the Lunar Calendar and typically falls between January 21 and February 20. Celebration includes a Lantern Festival and night parades with dancing dragons.

Want more info? <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Chinese-New-Year>



**What is your favorite holiday? How do you celebrate it?**

## PARENT CORNER

Here are some resources from the Center for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) website regarding COVID-19 & Remote Learning!

- [The Virtual or At-Home Learning Checklist](#): This document “addresses setting up for virtual or at-home learning, planning for virtual at-home learning, and mental health and social-emotional wellbeing considerations.”
- [The In-Person Learning Checklist](#): This document “has points to consider including checking your child’s temperature each morning and monitoring your child for signs of illness, keeping your child home if they’ve had close contact to a COVID-19 case, and making sure your child is up-to-date with all recommended vaccines, including for flu.”
- Resources to Navigate Stress and Uncertainty: Below are resources that can help parents, guardians, and caregivers navigate stress and uncertainty and build resilience for you and your children during the school year.
  - [CDC Stress and Coping During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)
  - [CDC Parent Portal](#)
  - [CDC Children’s Mental Health](#)
  - [Bullying Prevention Resources](#)
  - [Children and Youth with Special Healthcare Needs in Emergencies](#)

\*Source: <https://www.cdc.gov/>

## THANK YOU!

Thank you for “staying in touch while keeping our distance”! We wish you all happy holidays and a safe and happy New Year! Look out for our next newsletter in January 2021!