



Hillside Happenings

January 9, 2026

[Hebrew translation](#)

[Korean translation](#)

[Spanish translation](#)

Staff Update

We would like to share that Ms. Zanin will be taking a leave of absence beginning on February 16. We are grateful for her dedication to Hillside and extend our best wishes to her during this time. During her absence, the Board of Education has approved Mr. Justin O'Neill to serve as her replacement. Mr. O'Neill brings many years of experience as both a classroom teacher and school administrator and is a former Assistant Principal of Tenakill Middle School. We are pleased to welcome him back to the Closter community. Mr. O'Neill will begin transitioning with Ms. Zanin on February 9 and will remain in the role through June 30, 2026.

To Note

- PreK application for the 2026-27 school year is now available on our website [linked here](#).
- [Linked here](#) is important information from the New Jersey Department of Education regarding Type 1 Diabetes.
- For safety and security reasons, if/when you need to pick up your child early, you must **first report to the main office** so the child can be called down. Parents should not go directly to the classroom to retrieve their child (for example, during a classroom celebration that ends before 3:15).

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In The Halls of Hillside

During the year, you will find information about what our students are learning in Music, Physical Education, Art, Spanish, Science, STEM and Library.

From Ms. Pidi, Music Teacher

It's a Happy New Year in Music Class!

The New Year brings new experiences in music class. Our Kindergarten, first, and second grade students have been enjoying music of the winter season. In January, Kindergarten students will begin a unit where they will listen to and learn about the music of Camille Saint Saëns and his Carnival of the Animals. They will also continue to practice singing songs for their songfest which will be presented in the spring. First grade students will learn to read and perform rhythmic notation up to and including quarter and eighth note rhythms. Second grade students are continuing to learn patriotic songs honoring our flag and our country while expanding their notation reading skills to include sixteenth notes.

Third graders are making wonderful progress with their recorders. They can play and read five notes on the treble staff and will be learning to perform songs from various musical genres and time periods while exploring the lives of several composers. Currently they are learning about the life and music of Beethoven and playing a recorder accompaniment to his famous Ode to Joy.

Now that the fourth graders did such a wonderful job and have their Winter Concert behind them, they will begin an extensive unit on African/Caribbean drumming. This activity, which will extend through most of the second trimester, will help students develop their improvisation skills while participating in an engaging drum circle where everyone is enjoying making music together.

Our band students will begin putting instrument groups together for combined band rehearsals on B and F days near the end of January. This will be in addition to their current lunchtime/recess time lessons. More information will be coming home as that date approaches.

From The Health Office

The nurse's office is in need of gently used children's clothing. All sizes are welcome. They are kept on hand in case a student needs a change of clothes while at school.

The Curriculum CUBby

by Ms. Zanin, Assistant Principal (zanink@nvnet.org)

Happy New Year! January is a time for reflection and fresh starts as we continue through the second trimester. In the coming weeks, families of students eligible for our Academic Assistance Program will receive notification.

For planning purposes, please note that the program will run **Tuesdays and Thursdays from February 2 through April 30, from 3:20–4:20 p.m.**

If you have any questions prior to the notices being sent, please feel free to contact me at zanink@nvnet.org

Test Talk

As we begin the new year, we are entering our winter benchmark testing window. Below is the schedule of assessments taking place this month:

Kindergarten & Grade 1 – AimsWeb Early Literacy and Early Numeracy (January 5–16)

Grades 2 & 3 – DIBELS Literacy (January 5–16)

Grades 2–4 – LinkIt! ELA and Math (January 5–16)

These assessments serve as benchmarks to monitor student progress and inform instructional planning. Families of students in kindergarten through grade 3 will receive literacy assessment reports in early February.

From The Counselors

Happy New Year!

To kick off 2026, our students completed a New Year Wishes activity through ICARE. While teachers work with students to set resolutions and goals for the new year, this activity encouraged children to think about their wishes for their classroom community, focusing on kindness, friendship, learning, effort, behavior, and being their best selves at school.

Coming Up: Honoring Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

We are planning a school-wide service activity in Dr. King's honor called "Acts That Shine". Throughout the week of January 19th, students will be invited to complete small acts of kindness and service at school and at home. To celebrate their efforts, each student will share one meaningful act by writing or drawing it on a classroom star. These stars will be displayed in our hallways as a visual reminder that when each student does something kind and helpful, our whole community shines brighter.

There will also be two dress up days during the week of January 19th:

- Tuesday January 20th – "Shine Your Light Day": Students will wear stars, a positive message, or yellow/gold.
- Friday January 23rd – "Dream Big Day": Students wear a positive message or color that makes them feel happy/brave.

Parenting Tip: Starting the Year with Calm and Focus

A new year is a wonderful time to reset routines and expectations at home. A few intentional steps can help children feel calm, confident, and ready to learn:

- Review or create simple family rules (kind words, listening ears, helping hands, bedtime routines).
- Talk about how your family shows respect—through kind words, problem-solving, and handling big feelings.
- Let children share their ideas to help them feel seen and part of the process.
- Post your family rules somewhere everyone can see them and model them consistently.

When expectations are clear and communication is respectful, children feel safe and prepared – two key ingredients for success both at home and at school.

Yearbook Purchase

Use the links below to purchase a yearbook.

[STUDENTS IN GRADES PK-3](#)

[STUDENTS IN GRADE FOUR](#)

ALL orders are due by February 6, 2026.

Upcoming Dates

1/19- Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, school closed for students

Reminders

- If you are utilizing the active drop-off/pick-up lane, **you must remain in your vehicle.**
- We kindly ask for your cooperation in parking only in designated parking spaces. In the upper loop, double parking has resulted in staff vehicles being blocked, creating an unsafe situation. The only approved parking spaces in this lot are those numbered **95 and above**. Your cooperation is essential to keeping our school community safe.



Ms. Dianne M. Smith
Principal