

2026

HAPPY NEW YEAR

Staff Anniversaries

January

Karinda Shanes – 7 years

February

Vic Sayers-Hope – 3 years

Farren Toomey – 3 years

Noelle Fiumara – 2 years

March

Mariama McClain – 13 years

Tia Wright – 1 year*

Mallory Gabriele – 1 year

**since re-hire date*

From the Desk of Regional Director, Karinda Shanes

Hello Team, Families, Students, and Community Superstars!

As we look ahead to 2026, we do so with honesty and gratitude. These last few years have brought some tough economic challenges, and many in our community have felt the strain. But if there is one thing we have proven again and again, it is that we do not face hard times alone.

We are resource rich; not just in programs or partnerships, but in compassion, creativity, and the way we show up for one another. When things get difficult, we lift each other. When someone struggles, we step in. When our community needs us, we unite.

This January, we are kicking off the new year with renewed strength, bold ideas, and the same unwavering commitment to every young person who walks through our doors.

Whether you are a staff member working your magic every day, a parent cheering from the sidelines, a student ready to shine, or a community partner helping us widen the path, we see you, we value you, and we are grateful to walk with and beside you.

So let us step into 2026 together (steady, hopeful, and united). This is our year to rebuild, reimagine, and rise as one community: compassionate at heart, resilient in spirit, and powerfully united every day here at Hillside Work Scholarship Connection!

Notes from Mari and Naj

We're excited to welcome the new year by celebrating the incredible work of our team. Their dedication to supporting students and families has shone through in every open house, FAFSA and scholarship night, career fair, and our beloved annual Harvest Dinner. They also brought energy and joy to our schools through fun-filled spirit weeks that strengthened connections and school pride. We are truly grateful for their commitment and thank them for the passion and care they bring to our community each day.

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Binghamton



Please join us in welcoming Sydney to the Binghamton team as our new Youth Advocate! Sydney started in October and has already brought a fun, energetic vibe to our work. Sydney graduated from SUNY Cortland and has years of experience in this field. We are thrilled to have Sydney on board. Welcome, Sydney!



In December, Hillside collaborated with Youth Development to hold a holiday lunch for students before they went on break. During this lunch, students received gifts, were recognized for their academic achievements, and had the opportunity to spend their lunch periods with friends.

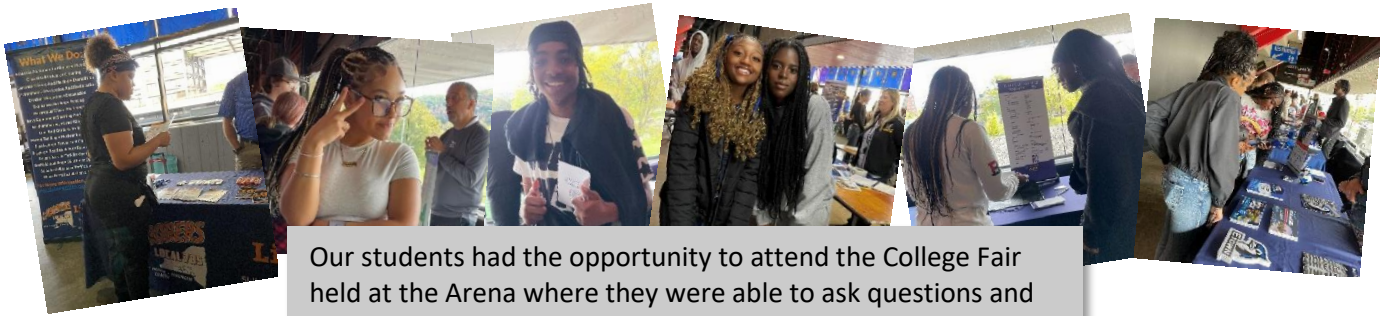
Our students have been busy after school! Activities have included room decorating, pumpkin painting, college fair prep, movie nights, care package making, bowling for groceries, creating heating pads, playing games with friends, writing thankful letters, gratitude journaling, preparing for 2026, attending a holiday lunch, and catching up on schoolwork.



Hillside seniors Jaida, Kinora, Liana, and Jaida played in their last high school volleyball game at BHS, marking an important milestone in their high school athletic careers.



Binghamton Cont.



Our students had the opportunity to attend the College Fair held at the Arena where they were able to ask questions and explore their postsecondary options.



We are proud to share that 30 of our students earned High Honor Roll or Honor Roll during the first marking period. This achievement reflects their hard work, dedication, and commitment to academic success.



Over the break, our students enjoyed several fun-filled days, visiting the Roberson Museum, spending time at Dave & Buster's, and going to see a movie.

Nottingham



Our Nottingham students have a great time when they visit our Phoenix Center during after school. They have been enjoying activities like cooking with SU, candle making, Fall Fun Harvest, and Winter self-care bingo. Pictured: A. Barnes, N. Nicholson, S. Muse, A. Smith, M. Carrasquillo, A. Colman, J. Robinson, J. Stanford, and D. Hawkins.



After school isn't just about fun activities, but also prioritizing academics. M. Carrasquillo and D. Hawkins work with the SU tutor on their weekly homework assignments.



This past fall, students attended the OCC Open House and College Fair at Nottingham. Students were able to identify some college prospects. Pictured: R. Rice, Q. Benjamin, D. Hawkins, and M. Jones.



Thank you to I. Cannon, who was one of our student speakers for the Micron/OCC presentation in October. He spoke about his experience in the Hillside program over the last few years and being able to attend Hillside's annual Micron field trip to Virginia.



Congratulations to our Nottingham scholars for achieving either Merit, Honor, or High Honor Roll during the 1st marking period. Keep up the excellent work and continue striving for greatness.

Welcome Mr. Hennessey and Ms. Jones to the Nottingham Hillside team as new Youth Advocates. We are excited to have you both here and eager to see the positive impact you will have on our students.



Congratulations to our most recent Hillside students who successfully completed the Youth Employment Training Academy (YETA) with Hillside. This accomplishment has opened doors for our students to gain employment with our employment partner, Wegmans.

Nottingham

- M. Jones
- O. Konate
- A. Smith
- J. Gandy
- D. Hawkins
- B. Holloman
- I. Cannon
- A. Coleman
- C. Rouse
- J. Torres

ITC

- Z. Adams
- L. Robinson
- O. Watts
- C. Anderson
- J. Cohen
- A. Davis
- S. Everson
- K. Harris

ITC & Clary



Thank you, Mrs. Gilbert, for taking the time to represent Hillside and support the SCSD Family Engagement Make & Take event at ITC.



In November, we hosted our annual Harvest Dinner for our Hillside families. The family of T. Williams were the winners of one of our amazing raffles. This year, we recognized some of our past graduates.

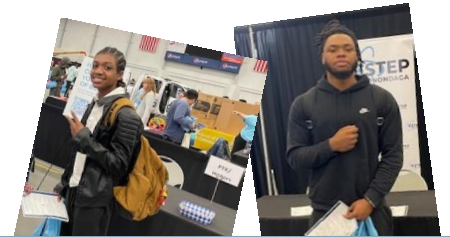
His older brother, J. Holloman, was recognized for his success and accomplishments post high school graduation. Thank you to the Holloman family for your long time support of our agency. Your positive impact truly makes a difference.



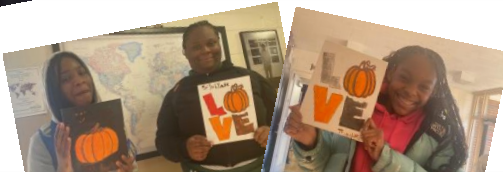
R. Stith was our ITC Student of the Month for October, and A. Davis (not pictured) was our Student of the Month for November. We're so proud of your focus and effort. Keep shining and pushing forward. Congratulations!



Afterschool fun with Hillside at the Phoenix Center! The students enjoyed cooking with SU, playing Winter Self-Care Bingo, learning to sew, making candles, using their Hillside dollars to purchase snacks, and so much more. Pictured: L. Figueroa, Z. Adams, E. Harrison, A. Coplin.



Students N. Wink and C. Anderson attended the OCC Open House this fall and were able to begin planning their post-secondary steps.



Students enjoyed our fall crafts during after school. Beautiful artwork, ladies! Pictured: L. Ellebre, S. Rice, and T. Flagg.



Students participated in an engineering activity at the MOST, learning about civil engineering through hands-on games and challenges. Our Clary students competed against Lincoln, Brighton, and Frazer Middle Schools and won the spaghetti tower competition. Pictured: H. Adamy, C. Morales, J. Shugers, and H. Logan-Manning.



Our Clary advocate, Ms. Wright, had a spooktacular time celebrating Halloween with her students and creating memorable moments they'll cherish all year. A special shout-out to the Men in Black for stopping by Clary's Trunk or Treat and helping keep the event safe from any unexpected alien visitors!



Congratulations to our Clary Hillside Students of the Month for October and November, H. Adamy and D. Butler. Keep striving for greatness and being positive role models for your peers.



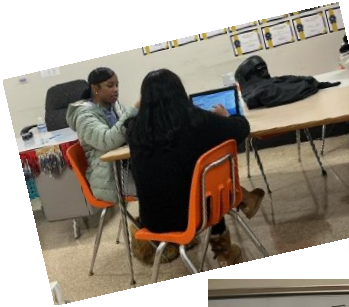
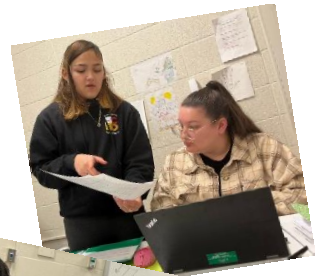
L. Ellebre and S. Rice attended a movie day with Hillside this fall to see TRON with their Hillside advocate, Mrs. Wright.



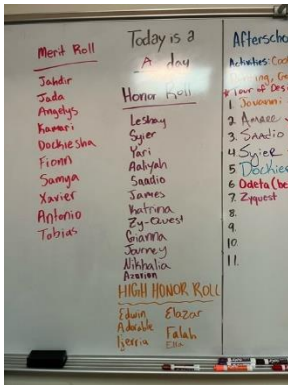
Corcoran, PSLA & Grant



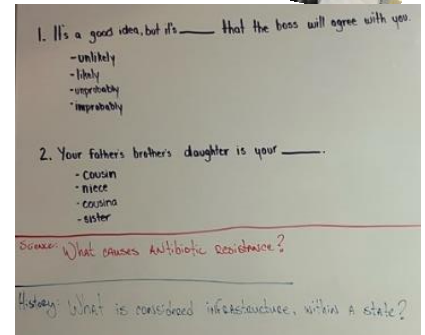
Corcoran celebrated 53 students who achieved an 80 plus GPA or higher! Advocates created a Wall of Honor to acknowledge those students and encourage others to give academics their all. Way to go, Cougars!



YA II's O'Sheonia and Noelle have been working diligently with students, assisting with homework and making post high school plans. Students have increasingly been coming to the Hillside office during free blocks and lunches to take part in calming coloring, card games, or simply signing up for Hillside after school enrichments.



PSLA is proud to acknowledge their students who achieved an 80 or higher GPA for the first marking period! We are so proud of these students' achievements!



PSLA staff continue to utilize their smart board to create "drop in" ELA, science, or history trivia. Students complete the task or questions listed, then erase them before friends give it a try. This "drop in" trivia has been quite a hit! Students challenge and congratulate each other as they participate!



Students at PSLA have also enjoyed after school enrichments this school year. They volunteered and chatted with seniors at Sunnyside Nursing Home. YA II Farren facilitated a wreath making enrichment after school, which students were able to bring home to their families.



Old to us, new to you! Veteran YA II Rachael Acosta has transitioned to Grant Middle School! Rachael has begun recruiting students and getting acquainted with staff. Welcome, Rachael! We are excited to have your expertise and skills shared with the Grant community.



Grant Middle School stars, Angel and Qoy, enjoyed the new SpongeBob SquarePants movie over winter break! In Destiny's new reclining chairs, with complimentary popcorn and drinks, they watched SpongeBob explore new territory after finally growing to "big guy" status.



Angel also got messy after school in Hillside's DIY Edible Playdough enrichment! Using just powdered sugar and frosting, he created this playdough mess, then effectively cleaned it up while being able to eat it too! Angel then solely represented Grant in Hillside's sugar rushed relay games and led his team to victory! Running, hopping, or crab walking could not slow Angel down!

Henninger, Brighton & Lincoln



Many of Ms. Brown's students participated in Spirit Week, bringing their creativity and school spirit to life. From recognizable characters to fun twinning outfits, they truly embraced the theme. It's always exciting to see the incredible creativity of both students and staff during this time of year.



We would like to welcome Tyler Eysaman, who will be joining us as a Supervisor, and Anari Otis, who will be a Youth Advocate, as we return to STEM Middle School at Blodgett. We are excited to have them on board and look forward to the great work ahead!



The students from Henninger High School, along with students from other schools in the Syracuse City School District, spent part of their holiday break visiting the Sunnyside Care Center, where they brought residents handmade holiday cards created at Hillside's Phoenix Center. La'Shea (Brighton), Aviannah, and Saddio (PSLA) are seen here solving a puzzle with a resident.



Some of Mr. Taylor's students are part of the JV basketball team at Henninger, and recently they played an exciting game against Corcoran. Mr. Taylor was there to cheer on his students and show his support from the sidelines!

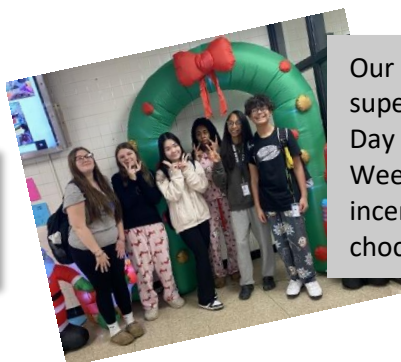


Congrats to our Brighton Academy students who attended The MOST afterschool activity and won the spaghetti tower-building challenge!



YA II Vic Sayers-Hope attended her first Harvest Fest for Brighton Academy. There was an awesome turnout of parents, students, and former students, and even more merchandise was given out than at the first event she attended this school year. It was a long but exciting day, with great food and plenty of opportunities to connect with parents.

We proudly recognize S'von and Jamar for earning Merit Roll honors. Through their dedication in the classroom, commitment on the basketball court, and leadership among their peers, they exemplify excellence and character within our school community.



Our Lincoln 8th graders were super cozy on Comfy/Cozy Day during our Holiday Spirit Week! They enjoyed incentives along with hot chocolate and popcorn!



Congratulations, Isandra! We are proud to celebrate your recognition with the Hispanic Heritage Month Award at the Board of Education meeting. Your dedication and contributions make a lasting impact, and this honor is well deserved.

Phoenix Center



Welcome Our New Team Member: Asia James!

The PSC Programming Team is excited to welcome Asia James as our newest Enrichment Specialist! She brings an awesome mix of experience, creativity, and a true passion for uplifting others. Asia's positive energy, creativity, and genuine care for our community make her a wonderful addition to the team.

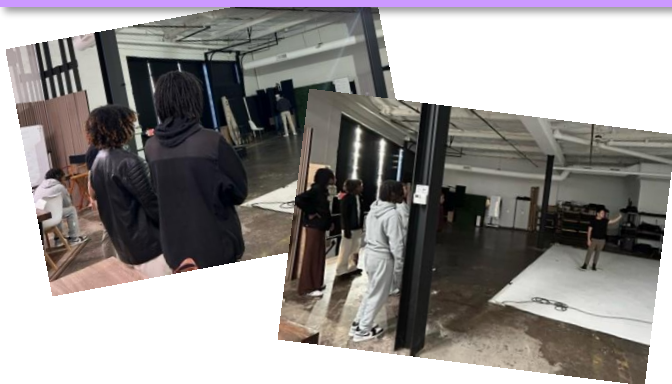
We're truly thrilled to have her on board and look forward to the fresh ideas and meaningful connections she'll bring to our programs.

Please join us in giving Asia a warm and enthusiastic welcome. We're so glad she's here!



325 Productions Tour

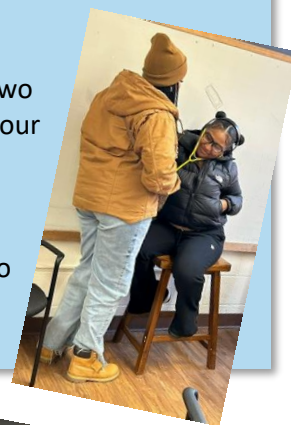
A group of Hillside students had the chance to explore the world of video production and marketing at 325 Productions, a content-based marketing agency in Syracuse, NY! Their host, James Domroe, gave a tour of the studio and allowed students to get a firsthand look at the process of audio recording and video editing while the staff worked on a project for Syracuse University.



Career Exposures: Wax Specialist & Physician Assistant

This fall, Hillside students had the opportunity to explore different career paths through our Career Exposure program. In November, we welcomed a former Hillside student, Chyna, to PSC to share what it is like to own a business. Chyna, a wax specialist and graphic designer, talked about the challenges and rewards of starting her own business and shared the educational journey and hard work that helped her get to where she is today.

We were also excited to welcome two local physician's assistants (PAs) to our after-school program. They shared insights about their profession and engaged students with hands-on activities, giving them a glimpse into the skills needed to work in the medical field.



The MOST Workshop: Construction & Civil Engineering

We were thrilled to begin a partnership with The MOST to involve our students in workshops focused on different STEM fields. Our middle school students participated in a construction and civil engineering workshop, where they completed activities to help them understand some of the skills engineers and construction workers use. They also got to hear from a professional in the field, and after the presentation, they explored the educational museum exhibits!

Cayuga Community College Tour

Students had the exciting opportunity to tour Cayuga Community College (CCC) for the first Hillside college tour of the semester! They had a great time exploring campus, learning about the different programs offered, and spending time with a CCC student. He answered lots of questions about CCC's majors and athletics and made our students feel very welcome on campus.



Our annual Harvest Dinner was a joyful and welcoming evening that brought students, families, staff, and community partners together at the Hillside Phoenix Student Center (PSC). The event created space for families to connect with their youth advocates, learn more about available programs and supports, enjoy a shared meal, capture family photos, and engage with the many resources available to them.

We were proud to welcome an incredible group of community partners who shared their time and expertise with our students and families, including Onondaga Community College's Educational Opportunity Program, the Food Bank of Central New York, Contact Community Services, 911 Emergency Communications, the Syracuse Fire Department, and Equitable. Their presence and commitment made the evening especially meaningful.

We would also like to extend our sincere thanks to Wegmans for their generous donation in support of the event, and to Zeta Phi Beta Sorority for volunteering their time and serving food to our students and families. Their contributions helped make the evening a success.

The celebration also included a special moment of recognition as we honored seven Hillside alumni graduates. We are deeply grateful for their continued connection to Hillside and inspired by the paths they are forging.



HWSC Syracuse and Binghamton Special Santa 2025 Wrap Up!

Special Santa "wrapped" up in time for students and their families to receive gifts for the holidays. This was Hillside's 50th season of Special Santa. Some highlights from the HWSC Syracuse and Binghamton region include:

Number of Families Served: 66

Number of Youth Served: 224

Total Gifts Distributed: 448

Thanks to everyone who helped make this year a success and a special thanks to PetSmart for their generous donation to HWSC Syracuse and Binghamton, for the sixth year in a row.

