

EPIC School News

Winter 2024



Go The Distance for Autism 2024

Are you in? The much-anticipated Go the Distance for Autism 2024 will take place on June 2, 2024, at Bergen County Community College in Paramus. This annual run, walk, bike event not only promotes community engagement but is also one of our most important fundraisers.

Event Details:

Date: June 2, 2024

Location: Bergen County Community College, Paramus

Registration opens on 2/5/24.

Visit www.gtd4autism.org for more information.

Go the Distance is a collaborative fundraising initiative with Alpine Learning Group and Reed Foundation for Autism. Funds raised through Go the Distance for Autism contribute directly to EPIC School's mission of creating a positive and inclusive learning environment.

If you haven't already done so, please create your **TEAM PAGE!** If you need assistance getting started, please contact Sandy Rodriguez at srodriguez@epicschool.org.





A special welcome to our newest students!
Michael H. and Ishan N.

Celebrating January Birthdays!

Students:

- Christian
- Mihir
- Ava C.
- Mia

Staff:

- Carly
- Nastasia
- Sandra H.



Celebrating February Birthdays!

Students:

- Tommy

Staff:

- Principal Jen
- Nicole



Many of the decisions that get made at EPIC are decisions that are guided by the NJ Department of Education administrative and fiscal codes. These codes outline how we are to support our students, spend tuition dollars and run our school program. As principal, part of my responsibilities is making sure that the codes are followed and that all of our i's are dotted and t's are crossed.

While this is not always an easy task, I'm always grateful that the guidelines are something that I can refer to when I come across a question for which I don't immediately have an answer. Not long ago, the NJDOE Fiscal monitoring staff spent a few months at EPIC, reviewing documents, staff certifications, time sheets, invoices, contracts and just about every document you can think of. After this rigorous examination, I am happy to say that the monitors concluded that there were no areas of concern and that all was as it should be.

Recently, the NJDOE proposed a number of changes to the Fiscal Code that would have affected EPIC, as well as many other schools like ours, in terms of how we pay our employees, our vendors, and overall how we are able to spend the tuition dollars received to support our program. On February 7th, I joined 70 other participants in Trenton at the New Jersey State Board of Education meeting and presented my testimony about the meaningful and impactful work that EPIC does to prepare our students for their lives beyond EPIC and spoke at length about how the proposed changes to the fiscal code could negatively affect our program. I am pleased to say that some of the proposed changes have already been repealed and others continue to be more thoroughly examined before they are put into effect or repealed.

As a member of [ASAH](#) (ASAH is an advocacy group for legislative and regulatory changes that improve the quality of life for individuals with disabilities and their families. There are some great parent resources on their website.) we were able to stay informed as these fiscal changes were proposed and private schools like ours were able to mobilize and present a united front during the weeks leading up to the public testimony.

As always, if you have questions about this or anything else pertaining to EPIC, please feel free to reach out. I love hearing from you!





EPIC Events:

- Wednesday, April 4th: Alec and Cassandra 8th Annual Autism Fundraiser
- Saturday, April 20th: Westwood Unico 12th Annual Pasta Dinner
- Monday, May 6th – Friday, May 10th: Teacher Appreciation Week
- Sunday, June 2nd: Go the Distance for Autism
- Thursday, June 6th: Graduation Day!
- Friday, June 14th: Last Day of School

WHAT WE'RE TEACHING

by Cassandra Krupski



Stanger Danger! Students learn a wide variety of important skills throughout Community Based Instruction. These include things like shopping from a list or completing check-out procedures.

However, for our students, safety skills are also important. These include skills such as advocating wants and needs, and accurately reporting experiences.

To add to the current research, three EPIC students partook in Abduction Refusal Skills training. These students were taught that when approached by a stranger they should give a 3- part response.

- 1) State "no!"
- 2) Move away
- 3) Report to their teacher or trusted adult, "a stranger came up to me." Local, undercover police officers posed as strangers, along with known adults to other EPIC employees (i.e., family members).

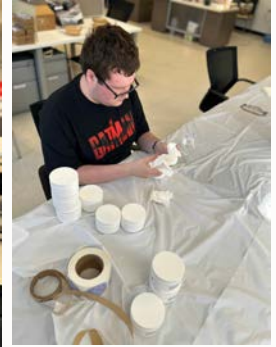
The data from the study illustrated how complex safety skills are with regards to teaching and maintaining, but showed how safety skills are imperative to continue to teach. Thanks to Cassandra and Angela for orchestrating this study for our students.

Interested in doing more to keep your child safe?

- Communicate with us. Raise concerns, share experiences, let us know of any new or worrying behaviors. We will work on safety together.
- Practice what we teach. When we teach safety at school, practice at home!
- Introduce yourself and your family to your local police and fire department. Ask if you can take some pictures so you can get your child accustomed to faces.
- Introduce your child to employees at local businesses that you regularly frequent. It's helpful when you are not the only looking out for your autistic child.

Students at Work in our Community!

Fresh Grocer
 Beloved Bath
 Applebees
 Valley Hospital
 Michael's
 Fair Lawn Senior Center
 Stew Leonards
 Greens Do Good
 Bergen Volunteers
 Juicy Platters Paramus & Hackensack
 7-Eleven
 Nino's Pizzeria
 Englewood Hospital EMS
 The UPS Store



EPIC Inclusive Communities by Peter Gerhardt

On February 7, 2024, the front door to the newly leased EPIC Inclusive Communities (EPIC-IC) was unlocked (see photo), signaling a new era in the provision of quality autism services by the EPIC Programs. EPIC-IC will be offering day habilitation, community inclusion, and employment-related services to autistic adults over the age of 21. Nigel Chan Wai Hong is the Program Director at EPIC-IC.

EPIC-IC's services will, like those provided by the EPIC school, be based on the principles of applied behavior analysis (ABA). Other aspects of EPIC-IC, however, will be quite different from the school. For example, the school is supported by tuition, which is the same for every student. EPIC-IC will be supported by a fee-for-service model where we will bill Medicaid in 15-minute increments of time, at different rates depending on the adult's "funding tier". The school is a 1:1 program. EPIC-IC will be a 2 or 2.5:1 program. The school has 7 BCBA's which, at least initially, is 7 more than EPIC-IC will have. These differences, however, are not necessarily "bad," and none of them is expected to impact the quality of services provided by EPIC-IC.

We are looking at a late March/early April opening for EPIC-IC. There will, of course, be an open house at some point, and I hope you will be able to join us. In the meantime, get your "Go the Distance" fundraising page up and, well, raise money. Good adult programs are not cheap; EPIC-IC needs and deserves your support.



EPIC-IC is located at 224 Midland Ave, Saddle Brook, NJ 07663



by Isaiah Labarrere



Photo by Sweet nothings! in Summit, NJ

A special thank you to
Sweet nothings!
26 Beechwood Road
Summit 908-522-0888
Monday-Saturday 10-5:30



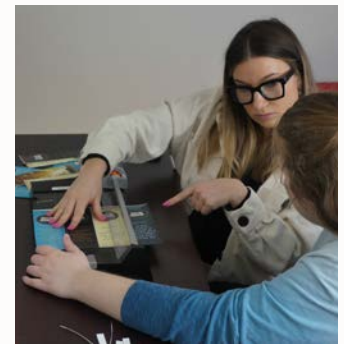
Epic Favors was created to build a partnership between our learners and our surrounding communities. Our students enjoy working, learning, and taking on new challenges, while helping a local family prepare for their big day! The best part? Epic Favors offers this service **at no cost**.

Seamless from start to finish, favors are thoughtfully and carefully assembled by our hard-working learners. With local delivery and pick up offered, we can pick up the materials and drop off the finished product right to an event or home.

Our Goal is to provide **meaningful employment experiences** for our learners, while also providing a service that will save our neighbors in the community time and money.

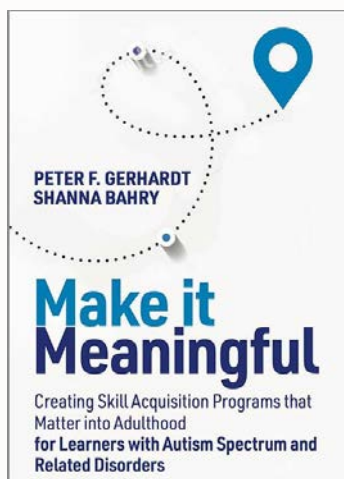
Celebrations like communions, bar/bat mitzvahs as well birthdays and anniversaries parties pick up in the spring as the weather improves.

Help students gain experience while helping friends and family prepare for their celebration. Recommend EPIC Favors. When your friends and family hand out their favors, they can share with guests that the favors are a gift that gives back.



Please send inquiries and orders to favors@epicschool.org. We offer local pick up and delivery!

The Book Nook



Outcomes in adulthood for individuals with autism spectrum and related disorders have remained poor for decades in the areas of independent living, employment, personal relationships, integration into the community, and other measures that greatly contribute to quality of life. This is largely in part to the relatively little education and training provided to practitioners when it comes to what skills to teach and how in order to positively contribute to a meaningful adult life. While many skills-based assessments and curricula exist already, Make it Meaningful is intended to fill the void that exists for information guiding practitioners to create individualized programming to ensure each learner maximizes their instructional time to adequately prepare them for the rest of their lives.