



FALL/WINTER 2024

FREEDOM ACRES NEWS

From the Desk of the Principal

WRITTEN BY ANGELA MILLER, PRINCIPAL



The 2024-25 school year began in August, bringing staff and students together to embark on an extraordinary educational journey rooted in the active cultivation of relational capacity. What is the key to achieving remarkable educational and relationship outcomes? It's all about perspective, supported by a foundation of science, trust, and empathy. These elements open both hearts and minds, forming the strong, healthy connections that empower us to grow and thrive together.

At Freedom Acres, we embrace the belief that every individual has potential and value.


This shared vision inspires our efforts to unite staff, students, parents, and community members in meaningful collaboration. Our teachers dedicated the first two weeks of school to building routines, establishing classroom norms, engaging in restorative practices, and addressing the medical and emotional needs of our learners—all with smiles and kind, welcoming eyes. These intentional efforts created a foundation of trust, fostering an environment where students feel safe to take risks, overcome challenges, and celebrate achievements.



Our school community continuously lifts one another up, cheering students toward the finish lines of their personal 5K goals, gait trainer milestones, IEP benchmarks, and beyond. This wraparound approach reflects our commitment to standing beside students and their families as partners in learning and growth. A highlight of this commitment was our back-to-school cookout, where we welcomed parents, students, and a host of community supporters, including Judge Sykes, Officer Skorka, Right Door staff, juvenile court representatives, itinerant service providers, and more. This gathering was a beautiful reminder of the power of connection and the strength of our shared commitment to supporting families in our community.

October brought us a festive fall season, complete with a Halloween celebration that highlighted the spirit of generosity and joy at Freedom Acres. Thanks to the Michigan Department of Corrections, Richard A. Handlon Correctional Facility – MTU, and the thoughtful coordination of Dan Schafer, we received a bountiful donation of pumpkins. These pumpkins not only brightened our own festivities but were also shared with students at the Autism Education Center and ISD MoCI classrooms, spreading cheer throughout our educational community. Through the generous efforts of MDOC volunteers, our students received warm hats, scarves, and beautifully crocheted critters to snuggle. These thoughtful items not only provide comfort during the colder months but also serve as a tangible reminder of the kindness and care that surround our learners.





Partnerships like this enrich the fabric of our school community, reinforcing our shared mission to uplift and support every student. The smiles and excitement these gifts brought to our learners highlight the power of compassion and the incredible impact of working together.

As we continue through this school year, we are reminded that it truly takes a village to nurture and inspire our students. Thank you to MDOC and all of our community partners for being part of the Freedom Acres family. Your generosity makes a world of difference!

As autumn deepened into November, Freedom Acres came together to honor a cherished tradition: Veterans Day. This year, local veterans from the David A. Huhn VFW Post 12082 joined our Severely Emotionally Impaired (SEI) program to guide and teach our learners about the American flag. They shared the meaning behind each fold during the ceremonial flag folding, a powerful lesson in respect and gratitude. This special day marked a milestone as we raised the flag for the first time on our new flagpole.



The new flagpole stands as a symbol of renewal, replacing the one removed during the building's renovation to make way for a safer, more accessible parking lot for parents and buses. Its return to the Freedom Acres landscape is a poignant reminder of the resilience and unity we share as a school community.



November also brought the heartwarming tradition of giving. Thanks to our beloved “Turkey Angel,” we navigated the shopping and delivery of turkey dinners to local families, ensuring that the holiday season began with full hearts and full tables. These acts of kindness embody the spirit of togetherness that defines Freedom Acres.

As we transition into December, the halls of our school have transformed into a magical Grinch-themed wonderland, setting the stage for our annual Christmas celebration on December 19th. The joy and creativity poured into this event reflect the generosity of our private donors, VFW members, and Lady Auxiliary groups, whose contributions help us create warm memories and cheer for our entire school family.



The holiday season reminds us of the power of gratitude, community, and connection. At Freedom Acres, we are grateful for every individual who makes our school a beacon of support and joy. Here's to spreading holiday cheer and wrapping up 2024 with a spirit of giving and celebration!

At Freedom Acres, we truly believe that sharing is caring, and together we are making a difference. As we continue this journey through the 2024-25 school year, we remain grateful for the connections we share and the opportunities to grow, learn, and celebrate as a united community. Thank you for being part of our story!



From the Desk of Your Partner and Principal

To all the people I serve, advocate for, and deeply value:

As the holiday season approaches, I find myself reflecting on the blessings, joys, and growth this year has brought. Personally, I am an eager learner who loves my family, the work I do, and the connections I build with the incredible families we serve at Freedom Acres.

This fall, our family received wonderful news that I'm thrilled to share—my oldest son, Kyle, and his partner, Hannah, are expecting their second child in May! I'm overjoyed to be welcoming a granddaughter into our family. As a mom of three boys, the thought of buying pink, sharing purses, and doll shopping fills me with excitement. Of course, if you know me well, you'll understand that she'll also be learning to play in the dirt, ride snowmobiles, and engage in conversations about bugs, germs, and all the other topics that most people steer clear of.

Conner, my middle son, is navigating adulthood with determination and grace. He's expanding his skills in the tool and die trade at Greenville Tool and Die. This September, he'll marry Emily, his high school sweetheart, and we are so excited to welcome her into our family.



Keegan, my youngest and an 11th grader at Belding High School, keeps busy with academics and sports. He's currently focused on bowling but is eagerly looking forward to spring and baseball season. Watching him grow into a young man fills me with pride.

My husband, Jeff, is the rock of our family. He's my constant cheerleader, supporting every challenge and goal I pursue. His dedication shines as he works long days and still finds time to nourish us with delicious meals. We all agree—he's the best cook in the family, and his care keeps us connected and grounded.

Looking ahead, I'm excited about my personal and professional growth. The Horizon alternate track will further my administrative skills, allowing me to better serve our school community. I'm also committed to FAME (Formative Assessment for Michigan Educators), which has strengthened my curiosity, active listening, and paraphrasing skills. These practices enrich my ability to lead and connect.

As we celebrate the close of another year and anticipate the new one, I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to partner with you, our Freedom Acres family. Together, we continue to create a vibrant, supportive community where every individual is valued and empowered to thrive.

Educationally yours,
Angela Miller

WINTER HEALTH TIPS

Health News from Nurse Becky

Avoid the Flu

- Eat a well-balanced diet
- Get plenty of sleep
- Exercise regularly
- Consider getting an Influenza vaccine
- Stay home when you are ill
- Wash hands or use hand sanitizer before you eat or drink touch your face



How the Flu is Spread

People with flu can spread it to others up to about 6 feet away. Most experts think that flu viruses are spread mainly by droplets made when people with influenza cough, sneeze or talk. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs. Less often, a person might also get flu by touching a surface or object that has flu virus on it and then touching their own mouth or nose.

Also please remember to call Freedom Acres 616-527-2921 to report your child's absence.

Thank you for helping to keep Freedom Acres healthy.

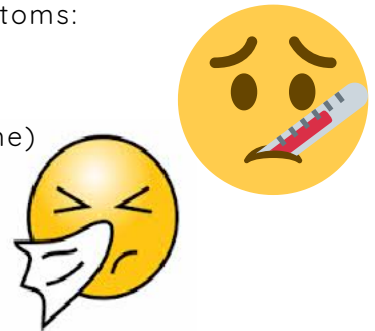
Common Flu Symptoms

Influenza usually starts suddenly and may include the following symptoms:

- P Fever (usually high)
- P Headache
- P Tiredness (can be extreme)
- P Cough
- P Sore throat
- P Runny or stuffy nose
- P Body aches
- P Diarrhea and vomiting (more common among children than adults)

If you experience any of these symptoms stay home until you are feeling better and for at least 24 hours after you have had a fever, vomiting or diarrhea in order to help stop the spread of the flu.

For more information on Influenza go to www.cdc.gov.



BE SOCIAL



WATCH YOUR SLEEP



KEEP MOVING



GET SOME SUNLIGHT



PRACTICE RELAXATION

Note from Ms. Elizabeth

Be curious about learning new ways to make yourself feel well and healthy by trying some of the listed activities! Checking in with yourself daily by keeping a journal to log how you feel, is an excellent self-monitoring tool to help track your moods. You will see where necessary changes may need to be made in your routine to improve your overall health and keep you with a motivated, positive mindset that you carry with you into the Spring!

Be kind to yourself. Be kind to others. Be Inspired.



WINTER HEALTH TIPS

from Mrs. Emily and Ms. Elizabeth

Get Active This Winter!

Embrace the winter chill with a delightful snowball relay! Gather the family for a high-energy, laughter-filled, five-minute activity. Work together as a family to get the snowballs from one place to another. Get creative with your movement and enjoy the fun. If it is too cold, create snowballs out of socks or paper to enjoy the fun inside! This quick and fun activity will get everyone moving and keep you active over the winter break!

Get Regular Exercise!

Exercise strengthens your immune system, releases feel-good chemicals in your body and improves your mental health. You do not need a fancy gym membership to get moving.

Find an activity that you enjoy, whether it is going for a brisk walk outside, yoga, light stretching or just walking up and down your stairs in your house, engaging your body in 30-60 minutes of physical activity will leave you feeling more emotionally regulated and energized! If you are behind a desk all day or work a sedentary job, try setting a timer for every 15-30 minutes to remind you to get up and move.

Be Social!

When feelings similar to depression set in, it is very important not to isolate yourself. Increasing your social interactions with friends and family can boost you and motivate you to engage in the activities that you enjoy! Meet a friend at your favorite coffee shop, ask them to go on a peaceful winter hike in the woods, or go see a movie. Laughing, meaningful conversation between friends and sharing meals together go a long way to maintain a positive, warm outlook during the chilly months.

Prioritize Sleep!

During sleep, your body is busy working to restore and heal itself, in order to begin anew the next day feeling alert and refreshed. Aiming to get at least 6-8 hours of sleep every night will help prevent moodiness, as well as improve concentration, memory and focus during the day!

Find Your Light!

Light and Sun therapy is a great way to get some necessary Vitamin D that is essential for our bodies to maintain a healthy immune system, bones and muscles while protecting us from cognitive decline. Exposure to sunlight, especially during the morning or midday hours, have been found to help maintain healthy sleep-wake cycles and avoid an afternoon energy slump.

Practice Relaxation Techniques!

Our thoughts are very powerful in the way in which they impact our everyday lives and mood. Explore and learn about different relaxation techniques that work for you such as yoga, meditation, visualization or guided imagery, massage therapy or group/individual counseling support services. All of these strategies can be effective in reducing stress levels which promote emotional health. Practicing one of the previously listed activities for 5-10 minutes a day, will significantly influence your daily thought patterns and boost your overall mood.

Elementary SEI with Ms. April Cavanaugh

Experience with Experiments

WRITTEN BY APRIL, KATHY AND CASSIDY

We are well into our second semester, which does not seem possible. The students are working hard in all subjects, and have been doing lots of holiday activities. There was a lovely Thanksgiving dinner that the high school and middle school rooms shared with us, it was delicious!

The students did NWEA testing in the late fall, I was very pleased with their effort and scores. We will test again in the winter, and spring. I am excited to see their growth.

We love doing science experiments and look forward to some fun winter experiments. The students love to create and have made decoupage masks, and clay figures in their TRAILS group. We look forward to our TRAILS group every Monday, Miss ELizabeth always makes social emotional learning fun and rewarding. We hope everyone had a safe and amazing holiday season. We are hoping to get outdoors and do some sledding, build a snowman and embrace winter. Thank you for all your continued support.



Middle SEI with Mrs. Abby Bailey

Happy 2024 – 2025 School Year!

WRITTEN BY ABBY, KACI AND CASSIDY

Welcome back to Mrs. Bailey's Classroom, where did the summer go? This year kicked off with all of our students being in High School classes! We have 2-10th graders and 2-9th graders.. The students are diligently working through their academics and making progress on their goals. In October, we said goodbye to our HCA Natasha and welcomed Cassidy into our classroom. Cassidy has been a great addition to the room and has started HomeEc lessons that the students seem to appreciate and delight in. (Who doesn't love food?)

At the beginning of the year, the students were introduced to CBI (Community Based Instruction). Students enjoy Bowling on Mondays, and volunteering at IM Kids on Thursdays. We have had the opportunity to return pop bottles at Meijer so the students could use the funds to purchase snacks for the classroom. In September, we were able to reward the students by going to a fast food restaurant and help them purchase food for themselves. We are looking forward to the upcoming holiday activities and what the new year brings.



High School SEI with Mrs. Lisa English

Growing and Glowing Together!

WRITTEN BY LISA, GINA AND MEGAN H

Hey everyone! Exciting news this year—we have a new teacher joining us, Lisa English! She teaches the High School SEI program and had been a substitute with us last year. She absolutely fell in love with Freedom Acres! Lisa has a passion for reading, music, and traveling with her friends and family, and she's always eager to learn new things. Before coming to Freedom Acres, she spent 20 years working with the Department of Corrections and the Department of Health and Human Services. She can't wait to dive into an amazing year with all of you!



Can you believe it's been almost four months of school already? Christmas is just around the corner! Time really does fly when you're having fun! Team English has introduced two awesome Community Based Instruction (CBI) opportunities for our high school students. Every other week, the class gets to enjoy bowling, and on the opposite weeks, they volunteer at IM Kids, helping our neighbors to feed our community. This means our students have a fantastic chance to engage in community activities every week while practicing their skills in a safe and organized way!

Guess what? The Food Buffet is back! Our high school students get to shop for healthy, budget-friendly meals that are prepared in class for our staff to enjoy. They also get to manage the money they collect and possibly earn a pizza party! It's such a great way for the students to learn valuable skills while keeping everyone well-fed—it's a win-win!

Halloween was a total blast! Our high school students helped out with our Fall Festival activities. They set up tables, decorated, and guided younger students with their craft projects. Team English was so proud of our students and their willingness to help out. We truly couldn't have pulled it off without them!



On Veteran's Day, we had the honor of welcoming Veterans to Freedom Acres. They kindly taught our EI students the proper way to care for, fold, and raise the flag on our brand new flag pole! Our EI staff whipped up a delicious chili with 20 lbs of ground beef and all the fixings, and it turned out to be a huge success. Thanks to everyone who made this special day possible!

Behavior Coach Ms. Elizabeth Dreja

Building Relationships and Trust

WRITTEN BY ELIZABETH

Greetings Falcon Family! I am so fortunate to serve as the Behavior Coach at Freedom Acres. I have the best job because I work with the best humans in the world as well as the most remarkably talented students! This year has been busy and fun as we have continued to use restorative practices and TRAILS Social-emotional learning curriculum to help students learn and practice new coping strategies to help navigate this crazy journey called, LIFE! Areas of focus during groups include activities and lessons on self-awareness, self-management skills, exercise and relaxation practices. Each day I work to connect with our Falcon students in meaningful ways to help students feel safe, supported, seen and heard. Building genuine relationships with a foundation of trust, respect and dignity, facilitates the development of strong bonds and sense of belonging and community. Go Falcons!!!



The **MORE**
you **REFLECT**
the **MORE**
you **LEARN**

Adapted PE with Mrs. Emily Stall

Building Skills, Building Confidence

WRITTEN BY EMILY



What an exciting year we've had in Adapted Physical Education! Our students have been incredibly active and engaged in a wide variety of sporting activities and community events.

The highlight of our fall semester was undoubtedly the school-wide 5K, where our students demonstrated remarkable determination and teamwork. We've since explored a diverse range of sports and recreational activities, including ping pong, badminton, tennis, pickleball, volleyball, bowling, and fowling. Each activity has provided unique opportunities for students to develop motor skills, build confidence, and enjoy physical activity.

As we approach the holiday season, I wanted to share some exciting personal news. I will be taking maternity leave after Christmas and look forward to hearing about the students' Olympic adventures while I'm away. I am confident that the students will continue to grow, learn, and stay active during my absence. Wishing you and your families a joyful holiday season!



Pingpong Battles in class with friends



Young Professional of the Year 2024 in the state of Michigan for Health and Physical Educators

PreK/Elementary SCI with Mrs. Stephanie Brown

Always on the Go

WRITTEN BY STEPHANIE B, ASHLEY, STACIE, AND TYLER

I am not sure where fall went but it has come and gone! Now snow is on the ground and we are getting ready for our annual visit with Santa! The students have made a variety of fall crafts and have enjoyed singing seasonal songs. We had a successful Fall Festival and Halloween parade. The students enjoyed showing off their awesome costumes. The SCI staff all dressed up as monsters. Don't be fooled by the sounds of laughter coming from our classroom, our students and staff are working super hard at achieving goals! Everyday our students are greeted by cheerful staff that come up with creative ways to teach new skills so that the work seems like play time. We incorporate communication and motor skill practice into each activity.



Happy Holidays

This year we have brought cooking back to the classroom. Each week we look at our recipe and make a shopping list of what we need to get. Then on Wednesdays a student gets to go to the store and help buy the items on our list. Getting out into the community to go shopping is such a great opportunity for our students to practice using their social skills. We cook up our goodies on Friday mornings. The students take turns pouring in ingredients, stirring, and activating a switch that runs the blender/mixer.

We continue to have PT on Mondays, Adaptive Physical Education on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, Speech and OT group every Thursday, Library on Tuesdays, and Reading Buddies with our SEI friends on Thursday afternoons. Most of our students also receive Whirlpool Therapy sprinkled in throughout the week as well. We are BUSY, BUSY, BUSY!!!!

Elementary/ Middle School SCI with Mr. Ben Croel

Nourishment Fuels Our Strength

WRITTEN BY BEN, GYWEN, KIM K, AND HEATHER

The 2024-2025 school year is off to a great start. We are noticing a lot of growth in the students this year and it is really encouraging. Each student brings so much individuality and personality to the classroom environment and I know I speak for the four of us staff in this classroom when I say that we feel very fortunate to have the opportunity to have them enrich our lives each day.

This year we have begun Community Based Instruction (CBI). This is an activity that we have tied in with some cooking activities that we are doing on Friday afternoons. The students engage in this activity through dumping ingredients, pushing a button to run the mixer, and eating the different foods that we make. It is a lot of fun for all of us and, of course, we all love to eat!

Halloween was a blast this year. It is so cute seeing all the students in their costumes and seeing what they have decided to dress up as. The costume parade is always a highlight. We also got to walk around to different stations this year and make crafts and play games. The kids seem to really enjoy the different activities and getting to wander around the school and see their friends in different classrooms. I also want to thank the parents who were able to come to the Halloween festivities. It is always nice to be able to connect with parents outside of just the yearly IEP meetings.



We are looking forward to the upcoming holiday season. We are putting our heads together to come up with fun craft ideas and delicious foods that we can cook in the spirit of the season. I hope your family has the chance to connect with family and enjoy each other this year. It can be really hard but so important to slow down and remember that the people we love are really what make this time of year special.

Thank you so much for sharing your children with us each day. It truly is a source of joy for all of us. Please feel free to contact the classroom with any questions or needs you might have for your student. I hope you have a wonderful holiday season and stay warm and happy this year.

Middle School SCI with Ms. Lindsay Seal

Exciting Beginnings

WRITTEN BY LINDSAY, KIRSTEN, AND HALI



My name is Lindsay, and I'm thrilled to introduce myself as the new teacher of our Middle School SCI skill-based classroom. This is my first year teaching, and I am incredibly honored to be part of this amazing community. Alongside me are my two wonderful healthcare aides, Hali and Kirsten, whose dedication and support make every day in our classroom a success.

Since the start of the school year, our classroom has been buzzing with activity and excitement. Each day, we focus on daily living skills, while each week brings opportunities to practice life skills during fun outings, like bowling, where students learn to engage with people in our community. We also incorporate movement-based activities, such as dancing and singing, which bring so much joy while helping students build essential skills in social interaction, teamwork, and independence.

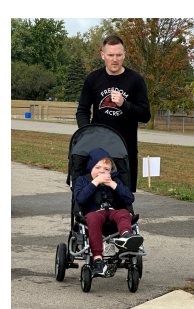
Inside our classroom, we've been hard at work developing speech, language, and communication skills by learning to recognize letters, numbers, and symbols. Each week, we explore new themes and vocabulary, and our walls are quickly filling up with artwork and learning materials. The welcoming energy in our space reflects the unique strengths and talents of each student.



We are incredibly proud of the progress our classroom has made already and look forward to continuing this journey together. Thank you to everyone who has welcomed and supported us. Stay tuned for more updates as we grow, learn, and celebrate each success!



FA ANNUAL 5K





New Experiences with Ms. Kate Alcook & Mrs. Lynne Geiger-Wester

Laughing, Learning, and Lasting Friendships!

WRITTEN BY KATE, LYNNE, JESSICA, KIM, TONY, TRINA, WARREN, AND ZOEY

A new school year brings new experiences! That's exactly what the kiddos of Team Alcook and Team Wester are being introduced to. Our teams have joined forces to create exciting learning opportunities, which provide peer to peer interactions, allowing students to form deeper relationships with others in the school. These opportunities have allowed us to visit each others' classrooms and perform investigations centered around our monthly theme. A few of these explorations included fall-scented slime, a pumpkin experiment/comparison, and learning turkey fun-facts! Enjoy pictures of our fun time learning together.

Know there is much more to come!



Early Childhood SE with Mrs. Khloe Harris

Big Changes

WRITTEN BY KHLOE, ERICA, JILLANNA, KENDRA, TAYLOR, RYLEIGH, MEGAN R

The ASD preschool classroom has had a busy and exciting school year as we have moved into our new classrooms at the beginning of October. Big changes can be hard for our preschoolers but the staff and students have adjusted so well! We are able to utilize the Natural Environment Teaching Room (NET Room) to focus on play and social skills with peers. While also having the opportunities to work on expanding and generalizing the students communication skills to a more naturalistic environment as you would see in other preschool settings. We have different stations in the rooms to work on fine motor, cause and effect and board games. Having the time to be more intentional and purposeful to better prepare our students for when they move onto kindergarten. We are excited to see what the rest of the year will bring!



Speech Therapy with Mrs. Sue Wizorek

Word Wizardry and Growth!

WRITTEN BY SUE

The 2024-2025 school year off to a great start and going by too fast! Our students are growing - in height and skill! Communication is key to helping them to interact with the world around them.

Our Fall Fest activity was a hit, speech, occupational therapy and physical therapy joined together to work with the whole child. We used a light box to help students with language along with fine and gross motor skills. Our ancillary staff, collaborate to make sure that we are looking at the needs of the whole student and meet with each teacher monthly, to discuss the learner's needs.



Our students are making great strides in their language development! We (the entire staff) use fun and engaging activities and are working on both expressive and receptive language skills.



Expressive Language is how your child uses language to communicate their thoughts and ideas. This includes speaking, using speech generating devices, icons, or other supportive language techniques, and using gestures.

Receptive Language is your child's ability to understand language. This includes listening, reading, and following directions.

We also work hard to expand our learner's vocabulary - our "Word of the Week" activities are a fantastic way to practice both skills. By focusing on a specific word each week, we can work on pronunciation, definition, and usage in different contexts.

I continue to provide support to teachers and families in helping our learners find a voice -- any way to communicate! If you have any questions, or would like to talk with me about your learner's communication needs, you are always welcome to contact me at (616) 489-2064.

Occupational Therapy with Jacob Heppe

Creative Fun: Boost Your Fine Motor Skills

WRITTEN BY JACOB, OTR/L AND KARA, COTA

It's hard to believe that fall has come and gone already, brrrr! The school year has started off well here at Freedom Acres. The occupational therapy department has been hard at work to help our students increase their fine motor and daily living skills through a variety of crafts, games, and activities. We continue to see our students both on a 1 on 1 basis and during our weekly OT/SLP/PT group on Thursdays. It is so nice to see our students help each other during group by gathering supplies for others or even assisting each other complete the craft.

If you happened to stop by on Halloween you may have gotten to enjoy a fun sensory activity tracing out pictures through slime. Some of our students were able to even create cool drawings from the light box outlines. Seeing all the different classrooms and departments come together and put on a special day for our students is always a sight to see. Can't wait to see what the rest of the year has in store for us!



Physical Therapy with Brenda Brown

Supporting Your Child's Movement and Growth

WRITTEN BY BRENDA PT AND KACEY PTA

This fall, we've been working hard to create a safe and supportive environment for all students, with a particular focus on maximizing independence for all students here at Freedom Acres.

Key Initiatives:

- **Staff Training:** We've conducted comprehensive training sessions for all school staff on proper lifting and the safe and effective utilization of specialized equipment, including wheelchairs, standers, gait trainers, walkers and bikes. This ensures that all staff members are equipped to support student movement and participation in all school activities.
- **MOVE Curriculum Implementation:** We've continued to implement the MOVE curriculum throughout the school, providing students with regular opportunities to work on independence in sitting, standing, and walking throughout their school day. This is crucial for developing gross motor skills, improving strength and endurance, and promoting overall well-being.

Maximizing Independence at Home:

While we work together at school, maximizing your child's independence also requires consistent support at home.



Here are a few tips:

- **Set Realistic Goals:** Set realistic and achievable goals for movement and independence.
- **Provide Opportunities for Practice:** Encourage your child to practice functional skills at home, such as reaching for objects, transferring from their wheelchair to other surfaces, using assistive devices and using adaptive switches to control devices.
- **Create a Supportive Environment:** Make sure your home environment is safe and accessible for your child to move freely.
- **Positive Reinforcement:** Celebrate your child's successes and encourage their efforts, even with small accomplishments.

Collaboration is Key:

Remember, we are a team! Open communication between home and school is essential for your child's success. Please don't hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns you may have about your student. Kacey Morey is a physical therapy assistant that also works with the students and staff in maximizing student functional mobility. May you all have a blessed holiday season and Happy New Year as we welcome in 2025!! So many things to look forward to!!

Visual Therapy with Margaret Besson

Alternative Communication

WRITTEN BY MARGARET

My name is Margaret Besson and I recently joined the Ionia ISD team at the end of October. I have worked in various education positions for the last 8 years such as Classroom Paraprofessional, Student Teacher, Academic Support Teacher, Autism Coach and 5th grade teacher. I am excited to bring all of my experience to this role with me. I have a Bachelor of Arts in Social Science, and a Master's degree in Elementary Education. Both are from Aquinas College. I will begin taking classes again in January. I am married with one step son. I have a dog and two cats. I enjoy traveling, attending church, reading, and being active. I enjoy watching college football. Go Blue! I grew up in Newaygo County. I moved to Grand Rapids while attending college. In 2016 we moved to Ionia County.



I have spent the past couple of weeks getting to know staff and students. I love seeing your students light up and enjoying the work they are doing. Please reach out if you have any questions or concerns. My phone number is 616-527-4900 and email address is mbesson@ioniaisd.org. I look forward to continuing my work with you and your students



VETERANS DAY

Honoring Our Heroes: A Memorable Veteran's Day Celebration



At Freedom Acres, Veteran's Day was marked by a series of heartfelt activities that both educated and united our community. The day commenced with a special Flag Education class for our SEI learners, where students delved into the significance behind each fold of the American flag and learned the importance of proper flag care. This engaging lesson not only enhanced their understanding of our nation's symbols but also instilled a sense of pride and respect for the flag.

The highlight of the day was a stirring ceremony held outside, where we gathered around our new flagpole. As the American flag ascended, students, staff, and local veterans stood together in solemn reflection, honoring the courage and sacrifice of those who have served.

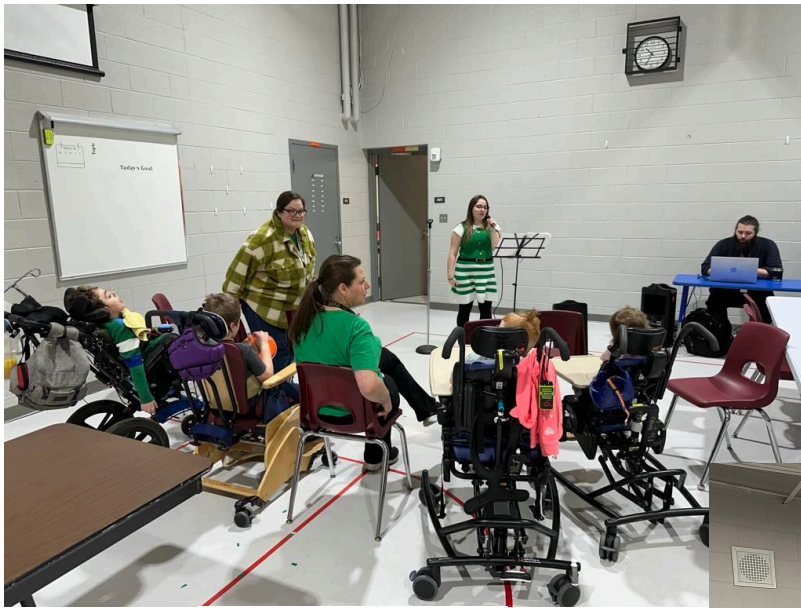
Following the ceremony, everyone joined in a warm and welcoming chili luncheon. This gathering provided an opportunity for students to interact with veterans, hear their stories, and express their appreciation in person. The conversations that unfolded over bowls of chili helped bridge generations and fostered a deeper understanding of the veteran experience.





HOLIDAY CELEBRATION

A heartfelt thank you to the Jackson Mutschler Post VFW Auxiliary 4461 for their incredible generosity and unwavering support of our annual holiday celebration on December 19! Stay tuned—a festive photo book is coming your way!



THANKFUL FOR DONATIONS



Richard A. Handlon Correctional Facility

Daniel Schafer from the Richard A. Handlon Correctional Facility sprinkled some pumpkin magic our way! Rain or shine, we transformed our space into a cozy indoor pumpkin patch, where every student scored a hefty pumpkin to take home, the teachers snagged one for a crafty project, and we even had one for a grateful pumpkin in the office to keep things festive!

As winter rolled in, Mr. Schafer upped the ante with a treasure trove of hand-crocheted hats, scarves, mittens, and adorable stuffed animals. We're over the moon with gratitude for your generosity and unwavering support for our students and their families!

MONETARY AND OTHER DONATIONS

MDOC

FREEDOM ACRES PTO

EMME'S AVENGERS

TURKEY ANGEL

AMY BAGNASCO - for supporting our families during the holiday season and volunteering her time to support our learners

CHRISTEE McNEIL - for supporting our families during the holiday season and volunteering her time to support our learners

KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS NO. 11113 SARANAC

PEWAMO KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS COUNCIL #8071

AMERICAN LEGION POST 175 SARANAC

LAKE ODESSA KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS COUNCIL #14404

ISD ADMINISTRATIVE CABINET

DAVID HUHN POST #12082 - SHOP WITH A VET



CULTIVATING EXCELLENCE THROUGH ONGOING TRAINING

At Freedom Acres, our staff's dedication to growth and learning reflects our unwavering commitment to providing the best possible support for our students. This school year, our team has embraced an impressive array of training opportunities, ensuring we are equipped with the knowledge and skills needed to foster success and well-being in every learner.

From enhancing safety practices to adopting innovative teaching strategies, our staff have actively engaged in professional development that directly benefits our school community. This year's training highlights include:

- **Youth Mental Health First Aid** - Strengthening our ability to recognize and respond to the mental health needs of our students.
- **First Aid and CPR** - Ensuring the safety and care of our learners with essential life-saving skills.
- **Ukeru** - Focusing on trauma-informed, restraint-free crisis management techniques.
- **NCI (Nonviolent Crisis Intervention)** - Promoting safety through de-escalation and proactive strategies.
- **Bal-A-Vis-X** - Incorporating balance, auditory, and visual exercises to enhance coordination and focus.
- **MOVE (Mobility Opportunities Via Education)** - Empowering students with physical disabilities to develop greater independence.
- **Opening Day with Debbie McFalone** - Kicking off the year with inspiring leadership strategies and a renewed sense of purpose.

Through these comprehensive training efforts, our staff continuously cultivate their skills to meet the diverse needs of our learners. By embracing innovation, compassion, and collaboration, we strive to create an environment where every student feels supported, understood, and valued.

Thank you for trusting us to grow alongside your children and for being part of our Freedom Acres family. Together, we are building a brighter future!

CELEBRATING OUR INCREDIBLE PTO

FREEDOM ACRES PTO

Join us for more info on Facebook at

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/301521012754939>



A heartfelt shoutout to our devoted Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO) for their unwavering dedication to honoring and uplifting both staff and students at Freedom Acres! Their work goes beyond the ordinary, wrapping around families during moments of grief, providing thoughtful treats for learners and staff, and creating extra-special memories during the holidays with treat bags and thoughtful gifts.

The PTO's commitment to fostering a positive and supportive community is truly remarkable. Whether it's through their Facebook updates that keep us all connected, the school store items available for purchase in the office, or the countless thoughtful gestures that brighten our days, their impact is felt in every corner of our school.



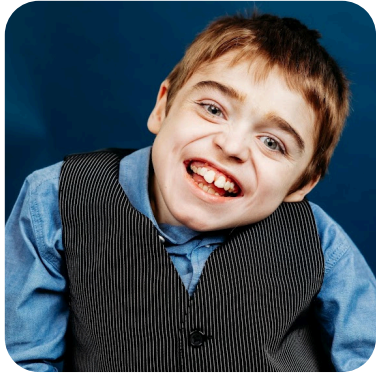
Their efforts remind us of the power of a united school family, where every heart is made whole through kindness and service. We are incredibly fortunate to have a PTO that models care, generosity, and a deep sense of community for fellow parents, students, and staff.

Thank you, Freedom Acres PTO, for everything you do to make our school a place where every individual feels valued and supported. Your commitment is truly inspiring, and we are so grateful for your partnership!

IN LOVING MEMORY

Carl Lee Cole

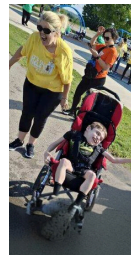
September 22, 2010 - June 8, 2024



Carl Lee Cole, passed away surrounded by his loved ones on June 8, 2024 at the age of 13. Carl was born on September 22, 2010 in Lansing, Michigan. He loved watching fireworks, going for walks, and riding the rides at the Ionia Free Fair. He love the time he

spent riding on the mower with his Papa and he enjoyed going to school with all his friends. Carl was able to explore the world with his walker- he brought light and joy into any room he entered.

Surviving Carl are his mother, Brittany Cole (Adam Lee); grandparents, Bryan and Leona Simon; sister, Bella Dean; and the staff and Carl's friends at Freedom Acres.



Jasmine Kay Underwood

July 7, 2007 - August 19, 2024



Jasmine Kay Underwood, age 17, of Ionia, passed away on Monday, August 19, 2024. She was born on July 7, 2007, the daughter of Jesse Underwood and Jennifer Emard in Lansing, MI.

Jasmine enjoyed listening to music, watching Disney movies and spending time with her family.

She is survived by her parents, Jesse Underwood (Taylor Erickson) of Portland and Jenny Strause (Dan Mygrants) of Ionia; grandparents, Al and Virginia Emard of Eaton Rapids, Duane Nobis and Leo Underwood; siblings, Terry (Mary) Darnell of Birmingham, Jon Center of Ionia, Joseph Strause of Ionia, Hailey Center of Ionia, Hanna Underwood of Ionia and Addy Underwood of Portland.

Jasmine was preceded in death by her grandma, Janice Nobis; aunt, Shannon, and cousin, Trevor Delafuente.



FREEDOM ACRES SCI, SEI & ECSE 2024 - 2025

AUGUST

- 19 NO SCHOOL
Staff DPPD #1
- 20 NO SCHOOL *Staff Work*
- 21 First Day of School
- 29 Back to School
Cookout
- 30 NO SCHOOL
Labor Day Weekend

SEPTEMBER

- 02 NO SCHOOL
Labor Day Weekend
- 16 NO SCHOOL
Staff DPPD #2
- 17 NO SCHOOL
Staff DPPD #3
- 25 Freedom Acres 5K

OCTOBER

- 02 Picture Day *Count Day*
- 14 End of 1st Marking
Period **SCI**
- 25 End of 1st Marking
Period **SEI / ECSE**
- 31 Half Day *Morning Only*
EA Staff work PM

NOVEMBER

- 01 NO SCHOOL
Staff DPPD #4
- 27 NO SCHOOL
Thanksgiving Break
Nov. 27-29

DECEMBER

- 05 SEI Program -
NO SCHOOL
Staff Alternate DPPD
- 19 Freedom Acres
Christmas Party
- 23 NO SCHOOL
Winter Break
Dec. 23 - Jan. 3

JANUARY

- 01 Winter Break Cont.
Dec. 23 - Jan. 3
- 09 End of 2nd Marking
Period **SCI**
- 17 End of 2nd Marking
Period **SEI / ECSE**
- 20 NO SCHOOL
Staff DPPD #5

FEBRUARY

- 13 Sweetheart Dance
- 14 NO SCHOOL
Mid-Winter Break
Feb. 14 - 17

MARCH

- 10 Half Day *Morning Only*
EA Staff work PM
- 21 NO SCHOOL
Staff DPPD #6
- 25 End of 3rd Marking
Period **SCI**
- 28 End of 3rd Marking
Period **SEI / ECSE**

APRIL

- 04 NO SCHOOL
Friday before Spring Break
- 07 NO SCHOOL
Spring Break
Apr. 7 - 11
- 18 NO SCHOOL

MAY

- 23 Half Day *Morning Only*
All Staff - Morning Only
- 26 NO SCHOOL
Memorial Day

JUNE

- 04 Last Day of School
Half Day *Morning Only*
All Staff - Morning Only
- 04 End of 4th Marking
Period **SEI / ECSE**
- 26 End of 4th Marking
Period **SCI**

OFFICE HOURS:

7:30 AM - 3:00 PM

STUDENT HOURS:

8:00 AM - 2:05 PM

TO REPORT ABSENCES:

(616) 527-2921

CALENDAR SUBJECT TO CHANGE