

Inspire. Imagine. Innovate.

ECA SPOTLIGHT Volume 5

January 2026



aces ECA
Educational Center for the Arts

January at ECA: Inspired Beginnings

Stefanie Savo, Principal
Amy Christman, Assistant Principal
Julie Massaro, School Counselor
Marsha Guglielmino, School Nurse
Seth Harris, Technical Director
Ashley Hernandez, Secretary
Nazorine Paglia, Dance Interim
Ingrid Schaeffer, Theatre
Saul Fussiner, Creative Writing
Johanna Bresnick, Visual Arts
Amy Christman, Music

**HAPPY
NEW YEAR
2026**

December truly flew by and what a beautiful, creative close it was to 2025 at ECA.

Across all five departments, our students showcased the heart, talent, and dedication that make this school such a special place. December was filled with moments of artistry, growth, and connection. The energy in our studios, classrooms, and performance spaces was inspiring, and our students continued to challenge themselves while supporting one another as thinkers, seekers, and creators.

We also welcomed families and community members into ECA throughout the month for performances, gallery experiences, and events that highlighted the incredible work happening every day within our walls. Each department shined in its own way, while also contributing to the collective spirit that defines ECA.

One of the most meaningful moments of the month was coming together as a full school community before winter break, celebrating creativity, connection, and the joy of being together. It was the perfect way to pause, reflect, and head into the holidays with gratitude and pride.

As we step into January, we carry that momentum forward with energy, inspiration and excitement for all that lies ahead in the new year.

Thank you to our students, staff, and families for making December at ECA truly unforgettable.

With gratitude and excitement for 2026,
Stefanie

January Highlights

Tuesday, January 13: PACE Meeting - 6PM (Zoom link on PACE page of newsletter)

Thursday, January 15: COLLABORATION: Music, Dance, & Writing Arts Hall 6:30pm

Monday, January 18 NO SCHOOL In observance of Martin Luther King

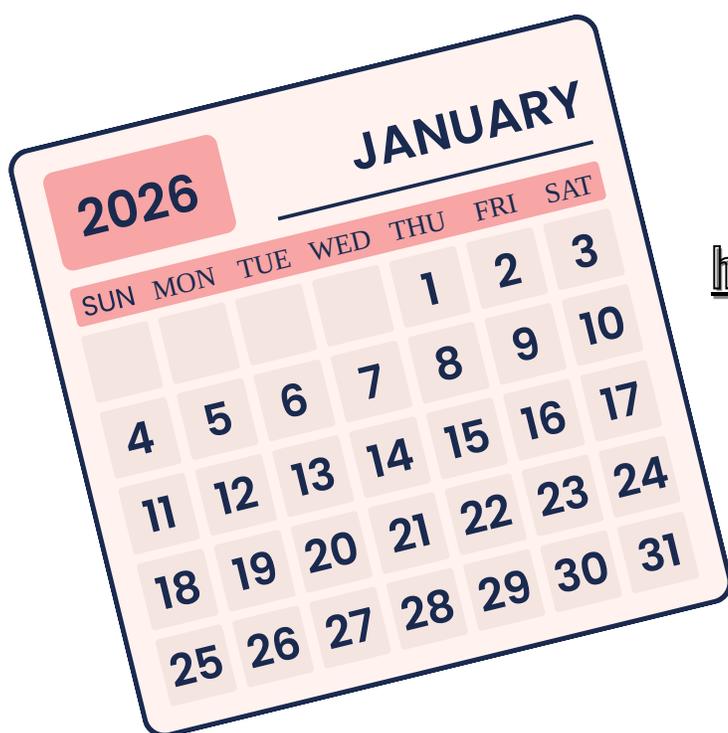
Tuesday, January 20: THEATRE: Peter Loffredo Night at the Improv Little Theatre 6:30pm

Thursday, January 22: CREATIVE WRITING: Winter Readings Arts Hall 6:30pm

Thursday, January 22: VISUAL ARTS 2nd Quarter Gallery Opening 55 Audubon 5:00 – 7:00pm

Monday, January 26: End of quarter. Grades Due.

Wednesday, January 28: MUSIC: Prism Concert Arts Hall 6:30 pm



Get all your tickets right here!

<https://aceseca.ludus.com/index.php>



ATTENDANCE & DISMISSAL REMINDERS

A few quick housekeeping notes as we move into November!

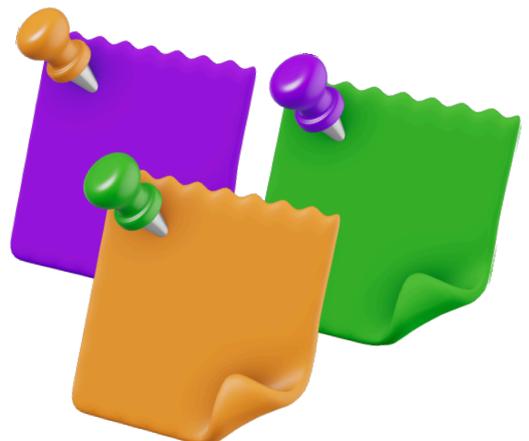
If your student will be absent, arriving late, or leaving early, please call or email the ECA Main Office as early as possible that day. This helps us track attendance accurately and communicate with teachers quickly.

We kindly ask that any dismissal changes or early pick-up requests be made no later than 3:15 PM. our staff, classes, and students are often spread across multiple locations at that time, and therefore we need adequate notice to locate students and minimize classroom interruptions.

When home districts have days off and transportation is not provided, students are still welcome and encouraged to attend ECA. If transportation challenges prevent attendance, the absence will be excused for that day.

Thank you for helping us keep our afternoons safe, and organized for our staff and students!

Your ECA Office Team



Creative Writing News

The Creative Writing department is looking forward to two performances in January.

CONJOINED: a dance/music/writing collaboration will be presented on January 15th. Get your tickets here: <https://aceseca.ludus.com/select.php>

THE WINTER READING, on January 22nd, will showcase the best writings from each student from semester 1.

Get your tickets here: <https://aceseca.ludus.com/select.php>

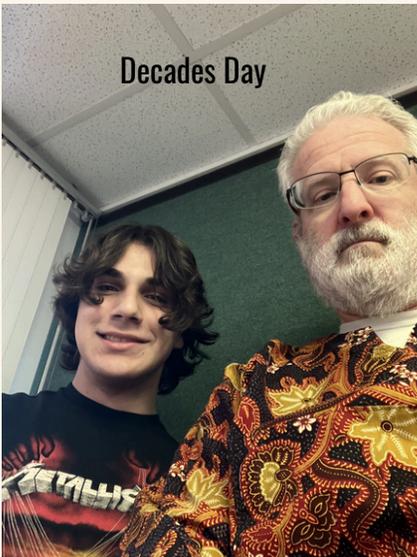


Some Fun Spirit Week Pics

Color Wars...RED



Decades Day



Music News

The music department was busy throughout December, with ongoing curricular work, preparations for our January Prism Concert, and various community performances. Our Vocal Ensemble and String Studio Class shared a lovely performance at The Guilford House, connecting with residents and building community as they shared works in progress and a few holiday tunes. Our full department enjoyed our December Wednesday Workshop, which we opened to families and friends as an informal recital to highlight new works by our student composers (Emilio Donarumo, Cody Voegeli, Noah Terranova, Linus Tsang, Ben Sachar, & Claudia Persinger). Many thanks to guest musicians Logan (bass) & Sonjae Kim (vocals) for helping to bring these pieces to life! Additional performances were shared by our Percussion Ensemble, Vocal Ensemble, String Studio, Chamber Ensemble, and Music Production class, as well as by various soloists including Linus Tsang, Theo North, Audrey Holt, and theatre students Isaac Williams.

We invite you to join us for many upcoming performances, including the Music-Dance-Writing Collaboration Performance on Thursday, January 15 (6:30pm) in the ECA Arts Hall, the CMEA Southern Region Music Festival on Saturday, January 17 (Middletown HS), and at our Music Department Prism Concert on January 28 (6:30pm) in the ECA Arts Hall.



Theatre News

Coming Home to the Classroom: Alumni Return to Give Back in 2026!

The Theatre Department is thrilled to welcome back three accomplished alumni this year—artists who are actively shaping their fields and using theatre to make a meaningful impact in their communities. Each alum will return to campus to lead immersive workshops, offering students the opportunity to learn directly from professionals who once stood where they stand now.

James Lewis (2009)



James Lewis, a proud father of two beautiful kids, was last seen in Promethean Ensemble's production of *The Book of Will* as Ben Jonson. Other Theatre credits include: *Titus Andronicus* (Redtwist Theatre), *Native Son* (Lifeline Theatre), *Network* (Invictus Theatre), *The Secret Council* (First Folio Theatre), *The Last Pair Of Earlies* (Raven Theatre, u/s), *Camino Real* (Connelly Theatre, NYC). TV Roles include: *True Blood*, *2 Broke Girls*, *Real Husbands of Hollywood* and *Brooklyn 99*. Will next be seen in Invictus Theatre's production of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Currently nominated for two Broadway World Awards (Best Actor and Best Supporting Actor) and nominated for Chicago Reader's Best Stage Actor of 2024 and 2025. An Alumni of The Theatre School at DePaul University (2013) and Educational Center for the Arts (2009).

Movement to Music

Drawing from his professional experience, James will introduce Ben's class to Movement to Music, a physical theatre technique developed and unique to—The Theatre School at DePaul University. This dynamic approach stimulates the actor's imagination while encouraging experimentation with creative impulse, physical articulation, and emotional range. Drawing from the work of James Donlon, Jacques Lecoq, Viewpoints, and Bartenieff Fundamentals, students will intensify ensemble work, expand expressive possibilities, and strengthen and condition the body. Students will present a 90-second to two-minute audition-style monologue on the first day of the workshop and revisit the same piece on the final day, demonstrating the increased freedom, clarity, and embodiment gained through the Movement to Music process.

Paola Sanchez Abreu (2012)

Embodiment



Paola Sanchez Abreu is a Chicago trained actor, writer, voiceover artist and activist living in New York City. Her theatrical credits include *Tell Them I'm Still Young* w/Andre Braugher (NYSAF), *Little Women* (Primary Stages), and *The Wolves* (Lincoln Center). She has performed in various workshops and productions across New York City. Paola's TV credits include *Chicago Med*, *Madame Secretary*, *The Code*, and *Law and Order SVU*. She has been featured in sketches produced by Jefferson White's Means of Productions, as well as written and performed in multiple live sketch shows throughout NYC. She completed the conservatory and grad revue program at Second City this past year. She was also a part of Gen180's inaugural Climate Comedy Cohort, working to bring more comedy to address the climate crisis, and currently co-facilitates climate storytelling workshops for Latine writers with Generation180. She is an organizer and does urbanization and street safety advocacy in North Brooklyn.

Drawing from her professional experience, Paola will work with Ruben and Erin's class to explore embodied performance, using movement practices rooted in Feldenkrais, Alexander Technique, Chekhov, and other somatic modalities. By tuning into the five senses, students will cultivate a deeper connection to their bodies and learn to translate that awareness into speech, emotional truth, and storytelling.

This workshop provides students with a versatile toolbox of warm-ups and text exploration exercises that can be applied to auditions, performances, and public speaking opportunities.

Aaron Jafferis (1993)



Aaron Jafferis (he/they) is a playwright/lyricist whose works *Activist Songbook*, *(Be)longing*, *Trigger*, *Stuck Elevator*, *How to Break and Kingdom* have been produced or presented by The Old Globe, American Conservatory Theater, Long Wharf Theatre, and many others. Honors include a Creative Capital Award, Richard Rodgers Award, NEA Art Works Grant, NEFA National Theatre Project Grant, and multiple MacDowell Fellowships. Aaron is a former Open Rap Slam champion at the National Poetry Slam Championships.

Forum Theatre

Drawing from his professional experience, Aaron will lead students in Forum Theatre, an interactive and playful theatrical form used to investigate situations of unresolved conflict or oppression, both personal and collective. Through games, scenes, and theatrical debate, students explore multiple perspectives and possible responses to real-life challenges.

By imagining and rehearsing solutions together onstage, participants prepare themselves to take action offstage. Forum Theatre empowers students to see themselves as agents of change, reminding us that every person is an actor in their own life.

Welcoming our alumni back into the classroom reminds us that the Theatre Department is not just a place students pass through, but a creative community they carry with them long after graduation. These workshops offer our students a rare opportunity to learn directly from artists who once stood where they stand now—artists who continue to use theatre as a tool for expression, connection, and change. We are proud to celebrate their work and excited for the inspiration they bring back to us.

January

In addition to these exciting alumni workshops, January also brings our first Peter Loffredo A Night at the Improv on Tuesday, January 20 at 6:30 PM on the Loffredo Stage at the Little Theatre and our annual Shakespeare Competition, on Thursday, January 22. This year's competition is open to the entire student body. First-place and runner-up winners will advance to the English Speaking Union State Competition in Greenwich on Wednesday, March 4. And finally, we will be attending Yale Repertory's production of *ha ha ha ha ha* on Wednesday, January 28 at 2:00 PM. All great ways to launch 2026!

A “Funtivity” to kick off 2026!



Dance News

Dear ECA Community,

We are approaching our third quarter, and students have successfully completed their final Rough Edges performance. The performance was a great success, with students doing a spectacular job presenting their final projects in Jazz, Choreography, Hip Hop, West African, and Tap.

Faculty Repertory will be our primary focus for Quarter Three, with the final performance scheduled for the second week of March. In addition, our MLK Day of Dance event will take place on January 19 at ECA from 8:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. We are looking forward to hosting the MLK Day of Dance and hope you can join us for the performance following the master classes.

If you are interesting in being part of MLK day and taking classes, please sign up below.

Please register through this form, <https://forms.gle/3JHEDeXbVj7kzwXE7>

Warm regards,

Nazorine Paglia



Visual Arts News

Please join us in celebrating the wonderful work Visual Arts students made this quarter on Jan 22, 5-7pm! Student attendance is required- families and friends welcome!

If you are interested in helping us with this event or supplying refreshments, please reach out in Parent Square or email Hanni at jbresnick@aces.org

SENIORS! Please take your portfolios home. If you had work in the City Gallery show, it is now back at ECA and ready to go home as well.

10th and 11th grade students who had work in the SOFT SYSTEMS City Gallery show: your work is back at ECA. You can bring it home - or arrange with me to store it at ECA. You will need to have it at ECA for your portfolio in the fall of your senior year so please take care of it!

Hope to see you on the 22nd!

Cheers, Hanni



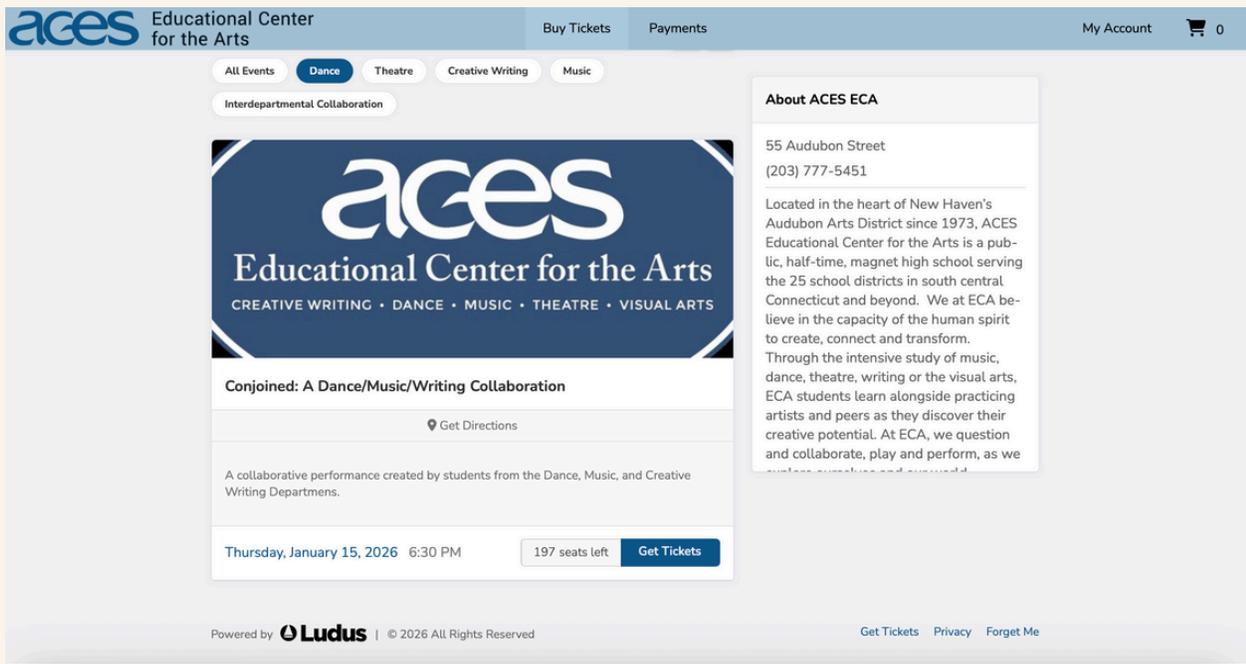
Tech News

Behind the Scenes: LUDUS at ECA

This year, ECA officially transitioned to LUDUS, our centralized platform for ticketing, event registration, and donations which has already made a tremendous impact on how we share and celebrate our work with the community.

A huge thank you goes to our Technology Director, Seth Harris, who has been working tirelessly behind the scenes to ensure that the LUDUS site is efficient, user-friendly, and reflective of the incredible events happening across our campus. From performances and showcases to data tracking and streamlined access, LUDUS allows our families, alumni, and community members to stay connected while supporting ECA with ease.

We are grateful for the care, time, and expertise Seth has dedicated to making this platform such a success for our students, staff, and families and we look forward to continuing to grow and improve how we share our work with the world.



The screenshot displays the ACES Educational Center for the Arts website. The header includes the ACES logo, navigation links for 'Buy Tickets', 'Payments', and 'My Account', and a shopping cart icon. Below the header, there are category filters for 'All Events', 'Dance', 'Theatre', 'Creative Writing', and 'Music'. A featured event banner for 'Conjoined: A Dance/Music/Writing Collaboration' is shown, with details including the date 'Thursday, January 15, 2026' at '6:30 PM' and '197 seats left'. A 'Get Tickets' button is visible. To the right, an 'About ACES ECA' section provides contact information: '55 Audubon Street' and '(203) 777-5451', along with a description of the center's history and mission. The footer includes 'Powered by Ludus' and copyright information for 2026.

check it out!

<https://aceseca.ludus.com/index.php>





PACE (Parents for Arts Centered Education) is gearing up for The Great Give, our biggest fundraiser of the year – and we could really use your help! Whether you can spare an hour, join a small planning task, or offer support on the day of the event, every bit makes a meaningful difference for our students. The funds we raise directly support field trips, senior celebrations, classroom needs, performances, yearbook expenses, prom, and so much more.

There are also plenty of ways to get involved throughout the year – from teacher appreciation efforts to helping at performances to joining our fun, welcoming board. No pressure, no judgment – just a community of parents coming together to lift-up our young artists. If you're interested in joining us, please reach out anytime: Ppace.eca@gmail.com.

Ali & Amy, PACE Co-Presidents

 [PACE Website](#)

 [PACE on Facebook](#)

 **Upcoming Tuesday Meeting Dates and zoom link : [Click Here To Join!](#)**

- **January 13, 2026**
- **February 10, 2026**
- **March 10, 2026**
- **April 14, 2026**
- **May 12, 2026**
- **June 9, 2026**

Please join us online on Tuesday, January 13, at 6:00 PM for our next parent Zoom meeting!



PACE put together a beautiful and delicious Hot Chocolate bar with goodies for our staff before break!

Thank you, PACE!



Brown Girls Bloom Empowerment Program



What is Brown Girls Bloom?

Brown Girl Bloom is a 12-week empowering mentoring, mental health, and wellness program for Black and Brown girls in Connecticut. It is designed to nurture identity development, emotional healing, and personal empowerment motivating each girl to discover her strength, embrace her voice, and blossom into her fullest potential.

Girls are grouped by age for developmentally appropriate care:

- Blossoming Roots: Ages 12-14
- Rising Bloom: Ages 15-16
- Full Bloom: Ages 17-18

Programs include:

- Weekly 60-minute sessions, all held in person.
- Creative expression, identity mapping, and vision

Who can refer youth?

- Schools
- DCF
- Court/Probation Programs
- Community-Based Organizations

Contact us

+1(475)302-1557

Shatteringglassceilings94@gmail.com



Valerie Quarles, PhD, LCSW
Tonya Irby-Langley, MSW, LMSW



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THIS PROJECT IS PART OF PROPELLER, WHICH IS A PART OF THE FEDERAL AWARDS NUMBER 84220100186 AWARDED BY THE STATE OF CONNECTICUT OFFICE OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AS PART OF THE

Farnam Food Distribution



Farnam

162 Fillmore Street, New Haven, CT 06513

Every other Thursday
9:15am - 10am

Free packaged food, produce, snacks and more for children and families in our community. Everyone is welcome!

Farnam, a program of Clifford Beers, is a pre-school and recreational community center with martial arts, basketball, homework help, and more! To learn about our programs, please visit: <https://cliffordbeersccc.org/farnam-neighborhood-house/> or contact Shubhra Gupta at sgupta@cliffordbeers.org.

2025 Schedule:

January | 2nd, 16th & 30th
February | 13th & 27th
March | 13th & 27th
April | 10th & 24th
May | 8th & 22nd
June | 5th & 19th
July | 3rd, 17th & 31st
August | 14th & 28th
September | 11th & 25th
October | 9th & 23rd
November | 6th & 20th
December | 4th & 18th

Dates are subject to change



Gender Affirming Care: Overview and Recommendations for Providers

This webinar is designed to equip healthcare professionals with the knowledge and skills necessary to provide supportive and inclusive care for transgender and non-binary individuals. The training takes a comprehensive approach, emphasizing foundational gender identity and expression terminology, the use of respectful communication practices, and the incorporation of proper pronoun usage and inclusive language.

Objectives:

- define foundational gender identity and expression terminology while demonstrating respectful, affirming, communication practices with trans and gender diverse clients
- identify common experiences and barriers faced by transgender and nonbinary individuals in healthcare and mental health settings, including stigma, discrimination, and minority stress
- develop action steps and practical strategies for integrating best practices into clinical work

Your Presenter:

Robin P. McHaelen, MSW is the founder and former Executive Director of True Colors, Inc. The recipient of numerous State and National awards, Robin has co-authored two books, a book chapter, several articles on LGBTQ+ youth and is considered a nationally recognized thought leader. She has provided interactive, universally well-received training to more than 30,000 teachers, administrators, child welfare professionals, health care providers, corporations, and various non-profit organizations over the past 25 years. She is an adjunct professor at Central Connecticut State University, teaching Intergroup Communications, Human Sexuality and Social Work with LGBTQ+ Clients. She is an appointed member of Connecticut's Hate Crimes Commission and is Secretary of the LGBTQ Justice and Opportunity Network.

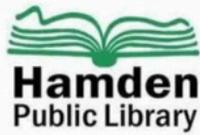
For additional information, please contact:
Amanda.Krist@carelon.com or stbho@carelon.com



REGISTER
HERE

Tuesday,
December 16th 2025
1 pm - 3 pm
Virtual, Webex

This event is pending approval for two (2) CT NASW continuing education credits (CECs). Carelon Behavioral Health is an approved trainer for the Connecticut Certification Board (CCB).



Little Free Pantries

All three Hamden Library branches are now home to Little Free Pantries! Please feel free to visit and help yourself to anything you need or leave any non-perishable items you are willing to donate.

Spread the word and visit any of our branches to donate to or use a Little Free Pantry.

hamdenlibrary.org



In the absence of a parent/guardian, schools can address student mental health/behavioral crises by sending the youth to the Urgent Crisis Center or by calling Mobile Crisis Intervention Service via 211.

Mobile Crisis Intervention Services:

We come to you!

- Call 211 (Infoline) and press option 1 and then option 1 again to connect to a 211 staff person. They will connect you with a Wellmore clinician.
- Call the parent/guardian to let them know that you have asked for this assistance.
- A clinician will arrive at your school as soon as possible, but no later than 45 minutes.
- We will do follow up calls or home visits with the family to support the family after we leave.
- We will coordinate with current providers and provide referrals if additional support is needed.

Urgent Crisis Center for Youth

You come to us!

- We are located at 141 East Main Street in Waterbury (across from Palace & next to UConn Waterbury).
- Our phone number is 203-580-4298.
- Families do not need an appointment—they can just show up when they need immediate access to mental health support.
- A parent/guardian must be present with the youth and participate in the assessment (a parent can give consent verbally if there is a trusted adult present and involved).
- We will coordinate with existing providers during our assessment (when possible) and make clinical and supportive referrals as indicated.

If a child is behaviorally escalated or out of control at school and you need to call 911, it is now possible to have the youth transported to the Urgent Crisis Center instead of the Emergency Room.