

NAVIGATING THE WORLD  
**COOKE STUDENTS  
IN THE COMMUNITY**

**2024-2025**





## Dear Students and Families,



When parents talk to me about the growth and development of their child over the years at Cooke, from Kindergarten through adulthood, they often use words like “magic,” or “incredible” to describe the metamorphosis they witness. As their child learns, grows, develops, and cultivates new interests and advocates for themselves, it may seem like magic from the outside. But from my vantage point, I see all the planning, teaching, off-site educational experiences, and collaboration with parents to get our students to the finish line—only to find that the finish line never ends and that lifelong learning is the goal and reward of a Cooke education.

To help peel back the curtain a bit on how this happens, especially the confidence-building and vocational readiness skills we instill in students, we should look at the concept of Transitions programming (which includes adaptive skills, social-emotional readiness, internships, academics, and the arts) as part of a continuum. Transition services start in Kindergarten and progress incrementally over time. Every teacher and clinician plays a role, from teaching functional math like counting to managing internship checks and banking; from using words to tell stories to using them in mock interviews for employment; and from making new friends based on shared interests to advocating for their wants and needs as adults. During every phase, students are supported by members of the Cooke community: teachers, clinicians, staff members, internship supervisors, and family members.

Our students' trajectory after graduation is as varied as they are. First and foremost, we cherish and value the children who find a home at Cooke, and we work with parents, community partners and supportive internship hosts to expand their skills and educational options in multiple directions. That's the transformative value of our transitions work—work that Cooke has helped shape and define within the educational landscape since its inception.

Please enjoy the following stories illustrating what a path to independence looks like at Cooke. Have a happy and productive school year!

Warm regards,

**Dr. Francis Tabone**

Cooke Head of School



“The internships helped me follow my dreams and become the butterfly I am now.”— Skyer Williams, Class of 2016, speaking at the 2024 Food for Thought Gala



# SEPTEMBER

In collaboration with GallopNYC last year, a Cooke Middle School class engaged in a pilot program providing weekly equestrian lessons for students during the school day at their stable in Queens. Because of this initiative, students learned to ride with PATH Intl. Certified Therapeutic Riding Instructors.



Sunday

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Thursday

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Saturday

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LABOR DAY  
School Closed

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STUDENT  
ORIENTATION & ICE  
POP SOCIAL  
Madison Avenue  
NEW STUDENT  
ORIENTATION  
Transitions

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FIRST DAY  
OF SCHOOL  
All Students

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BACK TO  
SCHOOL NIGHT  
Transitions

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BACK TO  
SCHOOL NIGHT  
Madison Avenue

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"I wanted to share the love of horses and riding I had as a child with my students. I saw so much progress in the short time that they took lessons. They overcame their fears and really developed a bond with their horses!"—Cooke Middle School Assistant Teacher, Ms. Diaz



**At Cooke Summer Academy**, students traveled to the 47-acre Queens County Farm Museum to try herbs picked directly from the garden, observe a honey bee colony, picnic beside a field of sunflowers, and survey the farm from a traditional tractor-pulled hayride. The highlight of every class visit, no matter their age, was feeding the goats! Larger, more populated venues are intentionally chosen for our summer off-site learning experiences because fewer school groups are present at that time, facilitating a more productive engagement for our students.

**OCTOBER**

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ROSH HASHANAH  
School Closed

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ROSH HASHANAH  
School Closed

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STAFF DEVELOPMENT  
Noon Dismissal  
PARENT WORKSHOP  
Madison Avenue

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INDIGENOUS  
PEOPLES DAY  
School Closed

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FAMILY FORUM

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PARENTS SOCIAL  
K-12  
Madison Avenue

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FALL DANCE  
Grades 9-12

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A young girl with dark hair in a bun, wearing a bright green t-shirt and purple shorts, is looking intently at a wall of colorful magnetic tiles. The tiles are arranged in a grid and include various colors like blue, red, purple, and orange. In the background, another child in a green shirt and orange hat is visible, also interacting with the tiles. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting an indoor play area.

# NOVEMBER

**As an expansion of the popular learning activities with magnetic tiles** in their classrooms, Lower School students built structures in a community setting at Genius Gems. The Soho magnetile playspace houses more than 100,000 tiles and students could contribute to standing structures up to six feet tall or build their own! Students also created interactive maps with models of iconic destinations like the Eiffel Tower, and designed trains and child-sized tunnels in the Glow Room.



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School Closed

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STAFF DEVELOPMENT/  
ELECTION DAY  
No Students

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POST ELECTION  
DAY PARTY  
Transitions

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PARENT WORKSHOP  
Madison Avenue

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PARENT TEACHER  
CONFERENCES  
(REMOTE)  
No Students

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PARENT TEACHER  
CONFERENCES  
Noon Dismissal

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FALL PSA  
MOVIE NIGHT  
Madison Avenue

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Noon Dismissal  
POTLUCK  
Transitions

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THANKSGIVING  
School Closed

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THANKSGIVING  
School Closed

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**To Infinity and Beyond!** Students visiting the Intrepid Museum this summer blasted off for an adventure in the special exhibit, *Apollo: When We Went to the Moon*. They left footprints on a virtual moonwalk, pretended to be crew members inside a spacecraft, and climbed aboard a Lunar Rover model.

**DECEMBER**



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RING CEREMONY  
Grade 12

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FAMILY FORUM

HOLIDAY PARTY  
Transitions  
PARENT WORKSHOP  
Madison Avenue

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WINTER BREAK  
School Closed

WINTER BREAK  
School Closed

WINTER BREAK  
School Closed

WINTER BREAK  
School Closed

WINTER BREAK  
School Closed

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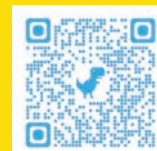
31

WINTER BREAK  
School Closed

WINTER BREAK  
School Closed



SUPPORT YOUR SCHOOL!  
A year-end donation by December 31 qualifies as a  
tax-deductible contribution on your 2024 taxes.



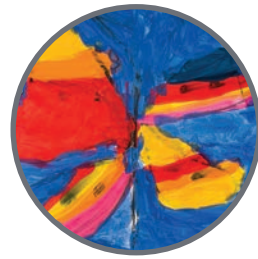
**As beautiful as our school building on Madison Avenue is**—located blocks from the Central Park Conservancy, it is beautiful!—much of the important work happening at Cooke School

occurs outside the walls of the classroom.

Cooke students traverse the five boroughs frequently and boundlessly. From Day One, they have opportunities to discover their passions and expand their worldview at venues like the Hayden Planetarium in the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH), the Congo Gorilla Forest at the Bronx Zoo, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Temple of Dendur. Cooke programming makes full use of the resources available to active, contributing citizens of the best city on the planet. More than mere field trips, these off-site learning adventures are woven seamlessly into Cooke's academic curriculum.

Robust off-site learning is also vital in preparing for a life of independence. Our graduates feel confident navigating the city because they have spent so much time there. Since Kindergarten, they have benefited from the structure and support of personalized coaching on the unwritten rules of engagement out in the community—a full engagement that fosters a life-long love of learning and comfort in the world.

On a recent trip to the SlooMoo Institute, Lower School students grappled successfully with the hustle-and-bustle of a noisy, fun, open, public play space with the assistance and assurance of their teachers and service providers. Our favorable student-to-teacher ratio options, with the flexibility of an additional floater, give every student the ability to negotiate novel environments.



# PHASE 1

Engaging in the greater NYC community, generalizing skills learned in the classroom



**At Cooke, the Upper School represents this liminal space in career development** where students receive personalized coaching and the time to embark on a journey of self-discovery. For the first two years of Upper School, that journey includes hands-on career investigation and discovery on campus that points towards their future independence.

For five-seven weeks as Lowerclassmen, they work for several hours a week as internal interns at school. Among their many internship options are to organize art supplies in the art therapy room, or purchase flowers at the market and arrange them into vases for weekly Dollar Days sales to faculty and staff.

Career exploration is organized around six clusters: Culinary, Child Care, Animal Care, Maintenance, Retail, and Clerical, and our students are encouraged to try internships in all of them. At the same time, they are increasing their financial literacy in math class and learning to discern the difference between fact versus opinion in English Language Arts.

Here is an example: Elvis' two-story dwelling in the Vocational Skills Lab is maintained in part by Cooke Upper School interns as an important component of our programming. Through their responsibilities for cleaning the chinchilla's cage, freshening his bedding, and feeding him his hay, students cultivate care skills, empathy, and comfort around animals. They explore their interest in a potential role in the Animal Care profession organically by performing some of the tasks associated with that field.



# PHASE 2

Sampling and learning to perform tasks on campus typically encountered in internships



The last two years of Upper School are such an exciting time for our students! Amidst time-honored traditions like Senior Prom, the Ring Ceremony, and Graduation, our Upperclassmen also get to work several hours a week as paid interns for 10 weeks. Students complete a survey the previous May expressing their work and skill set preferences organized around career clusters that they have already explored on campus in Phase 2. They are encouraged to challenge themselves to push beyond their comfort zone in charting their course. We place our students with a wide range of employers including My Happy Tummy Club, Children's Aid, and (pictured here) Beacon's Closet where they refine their professionalism and build confidence in a welcoming work environment.



# PHASE 3

Paid internships in the community!

**In Transitions, all of the skill acquisition and real-world experience developed in secondary school comes into play.** Expectations and job tasks become more complex than they were in Upper School. Students increase their work hours per week. They make a full year commitment with their internship sponsor for October through June.

With the guidance of Cooke staff and mentors, Transitions students manage the same challenges that everyone faces in the workplace: What do I do when I don't feel like working that day? How do I advocate for myself if I have a question about the assigned tasks? What do I need to do in the morning to arrive on time for work?

In addition, Transition students establish bank accounts for their paycheck deposits and learn to operate ATMs as well as interact with bank personnel regarding transactions or issues with their accounts. They use some of their earnings to enjoy lunch once a week with their school friends at their choice of restaurants sprinkled throughout the West Village near the Transitions campus. With the support of their Community Inclusion Assistant (CIA), students master negotiation of the city's public transportation system. They practice mock employment interviews with internship hosts like Trane.

Prior to graduation, Transitions students are assessed using the Work Readiness Assessment (WRA), setting them up to work successfully in hospitals, offices, and restaurants in a pursuit of the goal of living independently first established in Lower School.



# PHASE 4

Internships and employment as adults



*Thomas Brewsher, Transitions Class of 2024, (pictured above) passed the Algebra 1 Regents exam in June and is attending Kingsborough Community College this year.*

Transitions students focus on cultivating their soft skills in the workplace: Punctuality, Attendance, Workplace Attire, Taking Initiative, Communications Skills, Quality of Work, Response to Supervision, Teamwork, Critical Thinking, and Alignment to Company Culture.

# JANUARY

## **A Dragon Visits the Classroom**

On a day when Cooke Summer Academy students were not traveling to the Intrepid Museum, the Brooklyn Zoo Parkour Gym, or a performance at the New Victory Theater, the NYC community came to them! Hermit crabs, doves, gerbils, lizards, bearded dragons, and other members of The Art Farm petting zoo visited the Cooke campus accompanied by their expert handler.

While stroking the bearded dragon's back, Lower School students learned that the reptile responds to a threat of danger by inflating and turning its neck black. Students peering inside a shell spotted a shy hermit crab staring back at them.





Sunday

Monday

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Saturday



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WINTER BREAK  
School Closed

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School Resumes

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SCHOOL  
PICTURE DAY  
Upper School

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SCHOOL  
PICTURE DAY  
Lower and  
Middle School

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PARENT WORKSHOP  
Madison Avenue

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FAMILY FORUM

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MARTIN LUTHER  
KING DAY  
School Closed

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STAFF DEVELOPMENT  
No Students

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LUNAR NEW YEAR  
School Closed

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The students in the **Cooke Open Studio Club** have initiated a button-making project to raise awareness that art is essential and art is for everyone! This project allows our students to share their messages and original art with the world while earning a stipend for their creativity. For his internal internship, Joey assumed responsibility for transforming his fellow students' creations into wearable art using the school's button machine.

# FEBRUARY

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Cooke's buttons are available for purchase at Beacon's Closet in Manhattan. Beacon's Closet is a major supporter of Cooke School.

" My dream for Cooke Open Studio would be to establish a community of artists with disabilities who have their own art studio space to socialize, exhibit, create a career in art or body of work."— Cooke School Art Therapist Ms. Rayas



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BLACK HISTORY DAY  
CELEBRATION  
Transitions

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PARENT WORKSHOP  
Madison Avenue

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WINTER CONCERT  
Lower & Middle School  
Madison Avenue

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PRESIDENT'S DAY  
School Closed

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MID-WINTER BREAK  
School Closed

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MID-WINTER BREAK  
School Closed

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MID-WINTER BREAK  
School Closed

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MID-WINTER BREAK  
School Closed

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FAMILY FORUM

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CULTURAL  
EXTRAVAGANZA  
Transitions





Acting as sous chef to some of New York's most celebrated chefs at Cooke's annual Food for Thought Gala is one of the most cherished traditions of our Transitions students. Outfitted in official Cooke aprons, they play a role that evening whose preparation begins in the Vocational Skills Lab in Upper School. Students assist in plating and serving signature dishes for the event's strolling dinner and present the official Cooke gift to the donor chefs.

# MARCH

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The fun never ends at Cooke's annual *Food for Thought* Gala! To purchase tickets or to become a sponsor for this year's foodie paradise on May 7, check out our website at [cookeschool.org/gala](http://cookeschool.org/gala).



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PARENT TEACHER  
CONFERENCES  
Noon Dismissal

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PARENT TEACHER  
CONFERENCES  
(REMOTE)  
No Students

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PARENT WORKSHOP  
Madison Avenue

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FAMILY FORUM

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SPRING PSA  
MOVIE NIGHT  
Madison Avenue

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School  
Closed

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**Lower School students visited the American Museum of Natural History's new Butterfly Vivarium** this spring. This off-site educational experience was a natural progression of their study of the life cycle of the butterfly in a project-based program in their science classroom. At Cooke, they cared for caterpillars and chrysalises, and observed their metamorphosis for weeks before setting adult butterflies free in the school's backyard garden.

In the Vivarium, students viewed hundreds of butterflies—up to 80 species!—in flight as well as feeding on rotting fruit platters equipped with magnifying lenses or directly on the nectar in flowers. Rows of live chrysalises were presented for view in the nursery window of the pupae incubator. Curious students also had an opportunity to ask the guide questions about moths and butterflies while she held a giant moth for them to examine.

In addition to augmenting their science knowledge, students also developed social skills in their role as guests of the museum through their interactions with their peers, museum personnel, and the displays.

# APRIL



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STAFF DEVELOPMENT  
Noon Dismissal

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SCHOOL MUSICAL  
Madison Avenue

HEALTH AND  
WELLNESS DAY  
Transitions

PARENT WORKSHOP  
Madison Avenue



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SPRING BREAK  
School Closed

SPRING BREAK  
School Closed

SPRING BREAK  
School Closed

SPRING BREAK  
School Closed

SPRING BREAK  
School Closed



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FAMILY FORUM

CAREER DAY  
Transitions

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**Traveling on buses to the heart of Soho,**

Cooke Summer Academy students encountered a feast for the senses at the Sloomoo Institute. They played with different combinations of texture, color, and fragrance among the 25 giant vats of slime, and then each student created a personal batch to take home adhering to their own custom specifications that included a choice of embedded charms.



**MAY**



Sunday

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Thursday

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Saturday



Also at the Sloomoo Institute, students enjoyed beautiful autonomous sensory meridian response (ASMR) moments crafted by composer Pei Pei Chung with soothing sounds piped into fur-lined booths of blue, orange, purple, hot pink and yellow.

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STAFF DEVELOPMENT  
Noon Dismissal  
SPRING FLING  
Grades 8-12

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COOKE FOOD FOR  
THOUGHT GALA

PARENT WORKSHOP  
Madison Avenue



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SPRING CONCERT  
Upper School  
Madison Avenue

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FAMILY FORUM

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MEMORIAL DAY  
School Closed

# JUNE

In his second year of internship with the **Riverside Park Conservancy**, **Transition student Diego** has cared for several green spaces throughout the city. He rakes leaves and other debris in the fall and gardens in the spring. Pictured here with his NYC conservancy manager **Eli**, Diego is learning to identify Mugwort, an invasive plant species that can spread aggressively if not controlled. Last spring, he assisted Eli in weeding the rose gardens at Riverside Park South.

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PROM  
Grades 11-12

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School Closed

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STAFF DEVELOPMENT  
No Students

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MOVING UP CEREMONY  
Eighth Grade

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GRADUATION  
12th Grade

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GRADUATION  
Transitions

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FIELD DAY  
Transitions

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LAST DAY  
ALL STUDENTS  
Noon Dismissal

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JUNETEENTH  
School Closed

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LAST DAY  
STAFF

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**SUPPORT YOUR SCHOOL!**  
A fiscal year-end donation by June 30 qualifies as a tax-deductible contribution on your 2025 taxes.



# JULY



**As a lowerclassman last year**, this student chose the career cluster, CLERICAL, for his internal internship. His main project was to organize Cooke's Vocational Services online photo gallery. He identified the students in each digital photo and followed a defined naming convention in cataloging the files and accompanying folder system. He also performed traditional paperwork duties as assigned by the department.

For his next external internship as an upperclassmen, he is considering trying a career cluster in MAINTENANCE so he can work outside.

Sunday

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FIRST DAY OF  
SUMMER ACADEMY  
Madison Avenue

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FOURTH OF JULY  
Summer Academy  
Closed

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A young woman with long dark hair, wearing a striped shirt and a black skirt, is walking a large German Shepherd dog on a leash. She has a large, shiny, purple and blue sequined backpack. Next to her is a man with a beard and glasses, wearing a green jacket. They are standing on a sidewalk in front of a wall covered in colorful graffiti. The graffiti includes the year '2024' and other abstract shapes in blue, yellow, and red. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting it's daytime.

**Transition student and seasoned NYC traveler, Annika, had a lesson in the value of flexibility last spring** during one of her 45 minutes trips from internship work in Harlem back to school in the West Village. Without warning, the A train skipped her stop! When her CIA Luis Maldonado asked her what she should do when something like this happens, she said “Be flexible!” Luis agreed, “Stay calm and be flexible. You just disembark at the next stop, switch platforms, and take the next train going the other way back to your stop.”

Each student is assigned a CIA who travels with and supports them on the job. For her internship, Annika provides dog walking services for two clients with PAWS NY: the families of Bestiva and Axel.

# AUGUST

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**Travel training, a foundational skill in every Cooke students' drive towards independence,** begins in Kindergarten when our students explore the city on buses and on foot for their off-site learning experiences. Annika, a Transitions student who regularly travels from the Cooke West Village campus to Hamilton Heights for her paid dog-walking internship, is an avid MTA connoisseur. She loves exploring different train routes for her jobs and is currently calculating which itineraries have the highest probability of sporting MTA's new train cars.



**Cooke School & Institute**

(Lower, Middle and Upper School K-12)

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(Ages 18-21)

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