

## Opening Message from Assistant Superintendent Patti Camper

Greetings and a very Happy Spring to all!

As the flowers bloom and the sun graces us with some warmth, the Program for Students with Exceptionalities is busy gearing up for a summer filled with opportunities. With both Extended School Year (ESY) and summer Covid Compensatory Services (CCS) on the horizon, we are fully dedicated to ensuring a successful and enriching experience for every student.


In our commitment to fulfilling CCS hours, we are pleased to offer a variety of options for parents, guardians, and students to consider this summer. As we prepare, we kindly request that all registrations be completed by May 15th, 2024. This will enable us to streamline communication, organize transportation arrangements, and confirm program enrollments well in advance of the end of the school year. Please visit the CCS Webpage [COVID Compensatory Services 2.0](#) to see current opportunities and view the full list of options coming in April.

In closing, we deeply appreciate your ongoing support and invaluable feedback as we continue to learn and grow. Warm regards,

**Patti Camper**  
Assistant Superintendent  
Program for Students with Exceptionalities (PSE)  
[Pcamper1@pghschools.org](mailto:Pcamper1@pghschools.org)

**When you speak, we listen!**

If you have feedback on this issue of the Newsletter or have suggestions for the future Newsletters, please let us know. Scan or click on the QR code below.



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## Parent Training Opportunities

### Quarterly Update on Parent Training Opportunities

- Have you ever heard about CITY Connections? Possibly you have but were not sure what it was, who it is for, or the benefits of Pittsburgh Public CITY Connections. If you are interested in learning more about CITY Connections from the Program Coordinator, Lindsay Del Conte please plan to register for ***Creating Individualized Transitions for Youth - CITY Connections*** on May 2, 2024, at 11:00 A.M. - 12:00 P.M. The deadline to register is Thursday 4/25/24. Please reach out to Lindsay Del Conte at [ldelconte1@pghschools.org](mailto:ldelconte1@pghschools.org).



- Do you have questions about what an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is? Maybe you have questions about how you contribute to it as an essential IEP team member. If you do, please plan to attend, ***What Parents Need to Know About IEPs***. There will be two sessions offered via Teams meeting on May 9, 2024, at 11:00 A.M. - 12:00 P.M. and 7:00 P.M. - 8:00 P.M. The deadline to register is Thursday 5/2/24. Please reach out to Mindy Sturgess to register at [msturgess1@pghschools.org](mailto:msturgess1@pghschools.org).
- Do you have questions about the Special Education Evaluation and/or Reevaluation process? If you do, please plan to attend, “***What Parents Need to Know About the Special Education Evaluation and Reevaluation Process***.” There will be two sessions offered via Teams meeting on May 16, 2024, at 11:00 A.M. -12:00 P.M. and 7:00 P.M. - 8:00 P.M. Deadline to register is Thursday 5/9. Please reach out to Mindy Sturgess to register at [msturgess1@pghschools.org](mailto:msturgess1@pghschools.org).



If you are interested in more information prior to the session on May 2<sup>nd</sup>, please click on the image to the left for the CITY Connection brochure.

## Training Resources:

- PaTTAN Assistive Technology AAC Talks 2024 - Elevating Voices: Empowerment Through AAC Join us for the sixth annual AAC Talks Web Conference on Friday, May 10th! This event offers evidence-based practices, practical ideas, strategies, and resources to engage students with complex communication needs through augmentative-alternative communication (AAC) systems. Our theme, Elevating Voices: Empowerment Through AAC, encourages participants to explore innovative solutions and perspectives in AAC implementation, empowering students and amplifying their voices across diverse settings. National and local presenters will discuss a variety of topics including the importance of person-centered practices honoring the uniqueness of individuals, how a variety of communication partners can be empowered to support the use of a range of communication methods, evidence-based practices, and practical ideas on how to develop and implement lessons that include a variety of AAC strategies and devices. Please [Click Here](#) for a link to more information about this event.
- Be sure to check out the PEAL Center monthly calendar for events by [clicking here](#). The PEAL Center is an organization of parents of children with disabilities reaching out to assist other parents and professionals.

### Additional Events for Parents & Guardians:

April Events

May Events



## Did You Know that April is Autism Awareness Month?



As we continue to raise awareness about autism, it is crucial for parents and guardians to understand what autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is and how it may affect their children. Here are some key points to consider:

### What is Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?

Autism is a developmental disorder that affects social interaction, communication, and behavior. It is called a spectrum disorder because it can range from mild to severe, and each individual with autism is unique in their strengths and challenges.

### Early Signs and Diagnosis

Early signs of autism can often be observed in infancy or early childhood. These may include (but are not limited to) delayed speech or language skills, difficulties with social interaction (such as making eye contact or understanding social cues), repetitive behaviors, and intense interest in specific topics or objects. A diagnosis of autism is typically made by a team of professionals, including psychologists, pediatricians, and speech-language pathologists, based on observations and evaluations.

### Support and Interventions

Early intervention is key in supporting children with autism. This may include speech therapy to improve communication skills, occupational therapy to address sensory issues and motor skills, behavioral therapy to work on social skills and behaviors, and educational interventions tailored to the child's specific needs. Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and 504 plans in school settings can also provide necessary accommodations and support.

### Embracing Neurodiversity

Parents and society as a whole need to embrace neurodiversity, which recognizes and respects differences in neurological functioning. Each person, including those with autism, has unique strengths and perspectives to contribute to the world.

By promoting autism awareness through education, empathy, and advocacy, we can create a world where individuals with autism are accepted, supported, and empowered to reach their full potential. Together, we can make a difference in building a more inclusive and compassionate society for everyone.

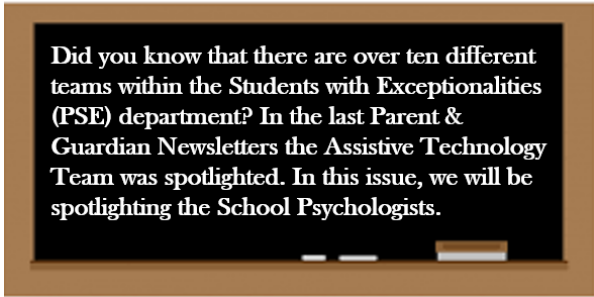
### Resources & Events for Parents & Guardians

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|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">KIDSBURGH - Your Go-To Guide to Autism Services in Pittsburgh</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">ASERT (Autism Services, Education, Resources and Training)</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Autism Pittsburgh</a></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Autism Pittsburgh</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">The ECHO Autism Communities Symposium 4/11/24</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">PROJECT LIFESAVER</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Visit Pittsburgh - A Sensory-Friendly Guide to Pittsburgh</a></li> </ul> |
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**Make sure to check out Dr. Bresnahan's recommended books on page 6.**

## You Spoke & We Listened: Spotighting PSE Teams



The School Psychology Department is committed to growth, consistency and flexibility. By coming alongside community partners such as Children's Hospital and Pitt we maintain best practices for assessment and consultation. The department has always had a very low turnover rate with many psychologists spending decades in specific schools. With



assessment services available to all city residents, don't be surprised to find a school psychologist working with students in homes, private schools and community locations.

### What are School Psychologists' responsibilities within the District?

- Improve academic achievement by conducting psychological and academic assessments that inform interventions to improve student outcomes.
- Assist school teams in monitoring student progress through the collection and interpretation of student and classroom data.
- Promote strategies that support positive student behavior and mental health practices in resolving individual, group, and system-level challenges in student behavior and mental health-related areas.
- Promote understanding of developmental expectations of children with diverse characteristics, cultures, linguistic, and economic backgrounds.
- Conduct educationally relevant identifications of student learning and behavioral disabilities within a time-sensitive period as a part of the multidisciplinary team process.
- Provide diagnostic information and recommendations to determine the classification/identification of students in need of special education services including those identified in Chapters 14, 15, and 16 of the Pennsylvania Code.
- Strengthen family-school partnerships by providing support to families understanding of their child's learning and mental health needs while considering their diverse characteristics, cultures, and linguistic backgrounds, as well as providing families with community service provider information.

### Who are the School Psychologists within the District?

- |                              |                               |                              |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| • Jobe Bennett, M.S.Ed.      | • Kara Issod, Ed. S           | • Kimberly Pippole, M.S.Ed.  |
| • Stacey Boal, M.S.Ed.       | • Erin Kotyk, M.S.Ed.         | • Heather Roesinger, M.S.Ed. |
| • Jennifer Colemand, M.S.Ed. | • Stephanie Long, Ph.D., NCSP | • Alison Ryan, Psy. D        |
| • Heather, Goldbach, M.S.Ed. | • Erika Martin, Psy.D.        | • Danielle Sychterz, M.S.Ed. |
| • Rachel Grasswick, M.S.Ed.  | • Matthew Mier, Ph. D         | • Brittany Weid, Ed. S       |
| • Deanna Hnakinson, M.S.Ed.  | • Kara Paolicelli, M.S.Ed.    | • Thomas Bonaroti, M.S.Ed.   |
| • Crystal Horzempa, M.S.Ed.  | • Andriana Perdue, Psy. D     |                              |



If you have additional questions about your child's school psychologist, please reach out to the counselor or social worker at your child's school to contact the school psychologist. If you need to reach out to Dr. Bresnahan, Program Officer of Psychological Services, he can be reached at 412-529-3193 or [bbresnahan1@pghschools.org](mailto:bbresnahan1@pghschools.org).

## Looking to the Future: May is Mental Health Awareness Month

Mental health is a crucial aspect of overall well-being, especially for children and adolescents. As parents and guardians, it's essential to be informed about mental health issues, recognize potential signs of distress in our children, and know where to find resources and support when needed. Here are some important insights and resources to help you navigate this important aspect of parenting:

### Understanding Mental Health:

1. **What is Mental Health?** Mental health refers to emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act and helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices.
2. **Common Mental Health Challenges:** Depression, anxiety, ADHD, and behavioral disorders are among the common mental health challenges faced by children and adolescents. It's important to note that mental health issues can manifest differently in each child.
3. **Recognizing Signs of Distress:** Keep an eye out for changes in behavior, mood swings, withdrawal from activities, changes in sleep or eating patterns, and difficulty coping with everyday stressors. These could be signs that your child may be struggling with their mental health.

### Resources and Support:

- **School Counselors and Psychologists:** Most schools have trained professionals who can provide counseling, assessments, and support for students dealing with mental health issues. Reach out to them if you have concerns about your child's well-being.
- **Community Mental Health Centers:** Many communities have mental health centers that offer counseling, therapy, and psychiatric services for children and families. They often provide sliding-scale fees or accept insurance.
- **Online Resources:** Websites like the [National Alliance on Mental Illness \(NAMI\)](#), [Child Mind Institute](#), and the [American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry](#) offer valuable information, resources, and tools for parents and families.
- **Hotlines and Crisis Intervention:** In times of crisis or urgent need, hotlines such as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1-800-273-TALK), resolve Crisis Services (1-800-7-YOU-CAN), or Crisis Text Line (text HOME to 741741) can provide immediate support and guidance.

### Tips on Promoting Positive Mental Health:

- **Open Communication:** Create a supportive environment where your child feels comfortable discussing their feelings and concerns without judgment. Encourage open communication and active listening.
- **Healthy Lifestyle:** Emphasize the importance of regular physical activity, healthy eating habits, sufficient sleep, and limiting screen time. A balanced lifestyle contributes to overall well-being.
- **Teach Coping Skills:** Help your child develop healthy coping mechanisms such as deep breathing exercises, mindfulness practices, journaling, and engaging in hobbies they enjoy.
- **Seek Professional Help:** If you notice persistent or severe symptoms of mental health issues in your child, don't hesitate to seek professional help from a mental health professional or therapist.

Additional Information is also provided on the Pittsburgh Public Schools website. Please click on the Image for additional Mental Health Resources.



Prioritizing mental health is an ongoing process that requires patience, empathy, and proactive support. By working together as a community of parents, guardians, educators, and mental health professionals, can create a nurturing environment where our children can thrive emotionally and academically.

## Keeping You Up to Date:

### Did Know the PSE Family Has Expanded?

**Welcome, Dr. Maria Paul!**

Dr. Maria Paul joins the PSE Leadership Team as a Program Officer. Her primary focus as she transitions into her role is to develop partnerships with community organizations for CCS programming for Summer 2024 and beyond. She will also support the development of ESY Programs for PPS.

Dr. Paul started with the District in October of 2000. She spent several years working in Early Intervention before moving to a K-2 Autistic Support classroom at Liberty Elementary and was there for seven years. She spent the last 12 years working at Pioneer Education Center. In 2022, she earned her doctorate in Leadership and Administration from Point Park University.

In addition to working at PPS, she is contracted to complete multidisciplinary evaluations on children birth - 3 in Allegheny County and teaches part-time at RMU. She has one daughter, Draea (30), and three sons, Josias (21), Jace (16), and Maddix (7). She has a 14-year-old granddaughter, Kaelyn, who is a big part of her life. In October 2025 she will also gain a son-in-law, Wayne.

She enters this position not only as a professional special educator but also as the parent and grandparent of children requiring special education services. In her own words, *"I look forward to making a positive impact in my new role and supporting PPS families in any way I can."*

**We are excited to welcome her to the team!**



### COVID Compensatory Services (CCS) 2.0 from Dr. Paul

PSE is in the final stages of securing CCS partners for the upcoming summer. Expect to see a flyer with information on these summer opportunities in early April. The flyers will be located on the district website's CCS page and sent to families via Peach Jar. Program officers will also distribute hard copies of the flyers to special education teachers to be sent home with students. Families will be asked to complete the survey link found on the flyer to express interest in summer programs. The PSE team will then work to coordinate registration for these programs based on survey responses.

PSE will continue sharing the most up-to-date information on CCS as it becomes available. We are working to provide a wide range of services, experiences, and opportunities for students to engage in this summer to meet CCS hours owed.

If you have any further questions about CCS and summer programs, please reach out to Dr. Maria Paul via email at [mpaull1@pghschools.org](mailto:mpaull1@pghschools.org).



[PPS COVID Compensatory Services 2.0](#)



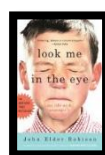
### Tips from Dr. Bresnahan:

**Lead Psychologist & Program Officer for Psychology**

April is Autism Awareness Month, and recent statistics suggest that 1 in 36 individuals will now receive an autism spectrum diagnosis in their lifetime. Autistic individuals, and those preferring the neurodivergence label, have successfully become recognized advocates for their community, and a wealth of first-person, autobiographical stories and recommendations have emerged. Consider reading one of their sometimes absurdist, and sometimes hilarious, but always serious accounts such as the following:



*Why Are The Lights So Loud?: Stories About Being An Adult Female With Asperger's*, by Heather Ann Chase



*Look Me in the Eye: My Life with Asperger's*, by John Elder Robison



*The Reason I Jump*, by Naoki Higashida

## In Case You Missed It:

### Last Call for CITY Connections Open House:

There are two more CITY Connection Open House events this school year and you are cordially invited to join us!

Dates	Location	Host Teacher(s)
Thursday, Apr. 18, 2024 9:30 - 10:30 AM	CITY Connections East 6322 Forward Ave Pgh, PA 15217	Nicole Freyer
Thursday, May 9, 2024 9:30 - 10:30 AM	CITY Connections North 3450 California Ave. Pgh, PA 15212	Jodi Newhouse

Parents, students, teachers, and administrators are welcome to attend any visitation date, with RSVP.

**Please RSVP to:**

Lindsay Del Conte (412) 728-3301 or [ldelconte1@pghschools.org](mailto:ldelconte1@pghschools.org), to let us know when you will be visiting.

### Transition Resources:

Transition Coordinating Council of Allegheny County  
(TCCAC)

*Tuesday, April 30<sup>th</sup> 8:30-2:30*

*Location: The Allegheny Intermediate Unit 3 - 475  
East Waterfront Dr., Homestead*

[Click Here to Register](#)

The TCCAC meetings are designed to educate transition coordinators, educational professionals, parents, and agency providers to support transition-age youth with disabilities successfully navigating their pathway toward graduation. Please consider attending to expand your professional network, enhance your knowledge and expertise, and gather meaningful tools and resources to assist you in your profession or community network.

Transition Resources from  
previous TCCAC Meetings:

[January 2024 TCCAC Meeting Padlet](#)

[November 2023 TCCAC Meeting Padlet](#)

[September 2023 TCCAC Meeting Padlet](#)

**SAVE THE DATE:**

Parent Event - **Saturday, June 1<sup>st</sup>**  
UPMC Health Plan Neighborhood Center  
Details are forthcoming.

### Upcoming Events:

The Pittsburgh Promise Future Readiness Fair

*Tuesday, April 2<sup>nd</sup> 9:00-1:00*

*Location: Pittsburgh Classical Academy/Greenway -  
1400 Crucible St., Pittsburgh*

[Click Here for More Information](#)

This college and career exploration event is all-inclusive and open to 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>-grade students and families (students must register with their school counselor). Attendees will learn about post-secondary education options, job training, placement, and supportive services. PARENTS are also welcome to attend! There will be various organizations and agencies (OVR, PEAL Center, Goodwill, Achieva, Bender Leadership Academy, and more!) that support individuals with disabilities there to answer questions and provide information.

Dan Miller's Disability and Mental Health Summit

*Thursday, April 18<sup>th</sup> and Friday, April 19<sup>th</sup>*

*Location: Beth El Congregation - 1900 Cochran Rd.,  
Mt. Lebanon*

[Click Here for More Information and to Register](#)

PA Representative Dan Miller's FREE Disability & Mental Health Summit is a one-of-a-kind event in Western PA that brings hundreds of people and participating organizations together to share information on a wide range of topics in the disability and mental health arena.