



We Believe Kids Can!



2023-24 Annual Report

Our mission is to provide individualized education with mental health, behavioral, and autistic support services that empower students from K through age 21 to thrive.



The “PACE” Way

Since I began my role as the CEO of Pace School in May 2024, I have been focused on defining the PACE Way. What we do; How we do it; Why we do it; Who we do it for. The Strategic Plan presented by the Board of Directors provided clear guidance on the school’s Mission, Vision and Values. We use the PACE Way to achieve our mission and vision and this year are focusing on Growing the PACE Way!

Program Quality: We provide high-quality, trauma informed and strengths-based services and programs.

Adaptability: We are adapting our instruction and interventions to meet students where they are.

Commitment: We are committed to providing individualized supports through myriad resources.

Equity: We are committed to ensuring that every student and staff member has what they need to thrive.

Our 2023-2024 Annual Report shares the unique stories of Mr. Cornelious Nesbit, one of our long-serving staff members, as well as Cayden & Miley, two students from the same family, who have benefited from the support and services available at Pace School. Beyond the impact on individual students and staff, your support has strengthened our entire community. As an organization committed to providing services to empower students and helping them reach their full potential, these stories reflect the lifelong impact of Pace School on the lives of students, families, staff and the communities we serve. Your ongoing support of Pace School allows these stories (and many others) to be possible.

As we look toward the future, Pace is uniquely positioned to continue supporting students with complex needs. I am excited to lead our community as we continue growing the PACE Way!

With deepest gratitude,

Dr. Amira McLemore Wolfson

See inside for our PACE Way Poster!

Growing up I always understood the value of role models and giving back to future generations of young people. So, when a fellow Pace employee introduced me to the school 17 years ago, I couldn't pass up the opportunity.

Leaving the hotel industry, I saw a chance to help kids with special needs. My understanding of giving back started as a young boy. Some of my family members and friends have children with special needs and watching their caring ways was remarkable. I was impressed with their patience and the many roles they had in their children's care. I wanted to gain knowledge and to develop relationships with their children without fear of the unknown. So, I began to ask questions wanting to know through the perspective of their parents, the fears and challenges that special needs children face.

As a young man, I understood what it meant to have adults helping me and realized that I wanted to give back to future generations in the same way. There were older men in my neighborhood that I looked up to because of what they had and what they accomplished. These men made sure that I was meeting responsibilities, staying active, and would let me know when I was on the wrong path. Today, they tell me how proud they are of me for my accomplishments and for not becoming a statistic. Inspired by their actions, ***I promised myself that giving back to the future generations would be my mission.*** If my experience and message reached one young person then I would honor what those men did for me to improve and save my life.

These are my experiences that motivate me in my work with the Pace students and their families.



Giving Back

by
Cornelius Nesbit

My path over my 17 years at the school has grown from personal care assistant to a Mobile Support position to Training and Development Coordinator. This growth has given me an opportunity to put my leadership skills to work. Pace School has shown me how to have more grace and patience with students and has encouraged me to continue to be curious and learn new things. It is a pleasure serving as a trainer for therapeutic intervention and serving on the Equity, Inclusion, and Diversity Committee and the Safety Committee.

How would I describe Pace School? It is a community providing opportuni-

ties, developing relationships, offering unique services, and the staff are passionate.

As a Pace Staff member and as a person, it is my passion to help students find out what makes them special every day and then tap into that self-esteem. I want to help them remove the labeling that they may receive from others in their communities and let them know that whatever the day brings good or bad, Mr. Nesbit will always be there. *It is my hope that when a student leaves Pace School, he or she will look back and say, "You changed my life forever because you believed in me."*

The Why

In a study, *Excelsior: Leadership in Teaching and Learning* conducted by Syracuse University: Teachers noted that seeing students show academic growth influenced their motivation to stay. During one of the focus groups, a participant commented, *"I just love to see my children grow academically and seeing their personal growth...this is why I stay."*

A Family's Story x 2

It can be overwhelming to have one child with special needs, but it can be even more difficult when you multiply this by two. The parents of two students at Pace School, Cayden and his sister Miley, know this well. It began with Cayden at the age of three when he was diagnosed as non-verbal autistic. His parents realized that their school district did not have the resources to accommodate and provide services for a child with their son's challenges. Cayden benefited from early intervention services; however, he was non-verbal and continued to be frustrated leading to unsafe behaviors. Mom and Dad advocated for their son to be placed at Pace School and were happy that they did.

With the help and support of Pace staff, Cayden made tremendous progress. His behaviors associated with frustration began to decrease because he learned other ways to calm himself and to communicate. Cayden began to use an Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) device to talk and is now able to express his needs to staff and to his family. The Pace staff were consistent with reinforcement for Cayden and they communicated regularly with the family and his wrap around services. This was important to Cayden's parents as they knew their son would require services that treated the "whole child" and they could see this happening at Pace.



That is only half of this family's story. . .

A young girl stepped through the doors of Pace School, 5 years ago. In October, that same girl walked out of those doors towards her future. A

future that is bright and leaves many things to explore. That girl is Cayden's sister, Miley.

When Miley joined us she was shy and quiet, unsure of herself. Her Mom shares that Miley was anxious about many things including school and had no control of it or her emotions prior to coming to Pace. With the emotional and behavioral support services that she received at

our school, Miley grew and learned. She wanted to come to school. Miley started to enjoy math, one of her best subjects, and advanced in all of her academics. Miley admits, "There is not a subject that I dislike." However, her favorite is art!

Staff work to make all students feel comfortable when they come to Pace, but for Miley, she knew she wasn't alone. In the morning, she rode the bus with her brother, Cayden. While she did not see him a lot during the day, she was able to share with Cayden what she learned about managing her emotions. Miley felt proud that she was able to help calm her brother during challenging times.

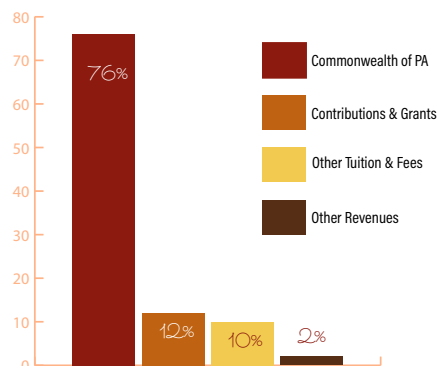
Both Miley and her parents admit that transition to a new school will not be easy. However, Pace has helped her to learn to take a deep breath before approaching a difficult situation. Miley can now self-advocate, self-monitor her emotions and has gained self-esteem. Mom says, "Miley can now express herself in a way that helps her and her family. She looks at a situation and identifies her needs."

Miley and Cayden have both made much progress at Pace. Miley, no longer shy and quiet, has made many friends at Pace, friends she will stay in touch with and friends that she has asked to keep a watch over her brother. And their parents? *As her mom shared, "It is overwhelming to have one child with special needs. It's even harder with two, but, Pace School has made it so much easier."*

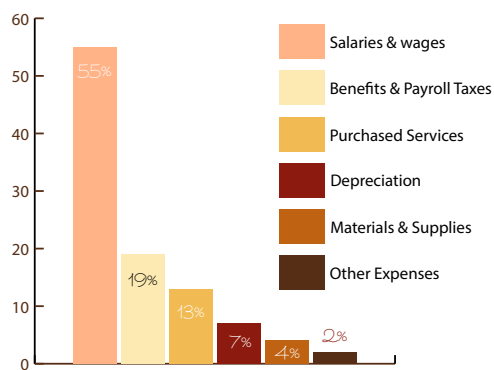
Siblings of autistic children have a 20% chance of being autistic themselves — about seven times higher than the rate in infants with no autistic siblings.

- UC Davis Mind Institute, Sally Ozonoff

Facts and Figures Fiscal Year 2023-24



Revenues and Support



Expenses

School Districts Served (3 counties & 38 school districts)

Counties

Allegheny
Washington
Westmoreland

Districts

Allegheny Valley
Avonworth
Clairton City
Duquesne City
East Allegheny
Elizabeth Forward
Environmental Charter
Franklin Regional

Gateway
Highlands
Jeannette City
Kiski Area
Manchester Academic Charter
McKeesport Area
Montour
Mt. Lebanon
New Kensington-Arnold
North Allegheny
Norwin Penn Hills
Penn Hills Charter
Penn-Trafford
Pittsburgh

Plum Borough
Propel CS - Braddock Hills
Propel CS- Hazelwood
Propel CS- Homestead
Propel CS-McKeesport
Ringgold
Shaler Area
South Allegheny
South Fayette Township
Steel Valley
Sto-Rox
West Mifflin Area
Wilkinsburgh Borough
Woodland Hills

Thank You Donors!

Pace is deeply grateful to all of the donors and in-kind contributors who helped transform the lives of our students and families through their annual giving and in-kind gifts in the 2023-24 fiscal year.

Every effort has been made to accurately reflect gifts and services received between 7/1/23 to 6/30/24. Please give Pace the opportunity to address inadvertent omissions or errors by contacting Janice Kerrigan, Executive Assistant, at 412-342-4304 or jkerrigan@paceschool.org

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Susan Campbell

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Stephanie and Lee Nichols

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Chip Burke and Carole King
Marilan Caito

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In honor of Cheryl Levin
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