

## Opening Message from Assistant Superintendent Patti Camper

Dear Parents and Guardians,

Happy New Year! As we step into 2025, the Program for Students with Exceptionalities (PSE) is excited to continue supporting our students and families in new and meaningful ways. This year, we are focusing on expanding our services and enhancing communication to ensure that every child receives the resources they need to succeed. In the coming months, we will be sharing updates on upcoming programs and services, including summer learning opportunities and Covid Compensatory Services (CCS). We are also working to streamline access to important information by updating our websites and communication channels regularly.

Our goal is to create a seamless experience for families by providing clear, accessible resources. We are continually seeking feedback to improve our services, and we encourage you to reach out with any thoughts or questions. Together, we will make 2025 a year of growth, collaboration, and success for all of our students.

Thank you for your ongoing support!

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 to give us feedback.**



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## Parent & Guardian Training Opportunities

Quarterly Update on Training Opportunities

### Exploring Universal Designs for Learning (UDLs) with the Assistive Technology Department

- Does your child have an IEP or a 504 and struggle with different aspects of reading writing, or organization? If yes, please join us for a session to discover how the AT department can help, who we are, and what the AT process entails here in PPS. Part of this session will also be devoted to reviewing different Universal Designs for Learning (UDLs), including Read & Write, OrbitNote, Microsoft OneNote, and Apple Accessibility. Join us to discover how features in these programs, accessible to all learners in PPS, can help a struggling student to succeed.

**Date & Time:** 2/5/25 at 4:00 PM - 5:00 PM

\*If you are interested in registering, please click on the Register Now link

\*Registration will close on 1/29/25



### What You Need to Know About ESY

- Extended School Year (ESY) is a service that provides eligible students with disabilities special education and related services beyond the 180-day school year. Would you like to learn more about PSE's ESY program for the summer of 2025? If so, please plan to attend our virtual session.

**Date & Time:** 2/5/25 at 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM

\*If you are interested in registering, please click on the Register Now link

\*Registration will close on 1/29/25



### Secondary Transition - 101

- Do you have questions about your child's transition into adulthood? Is so, please attend 'Secondary Transition - 101'. This parent training will provide essential guidance for supporting your child's shift from school to adult life, including information on services and programs offered within PPS. You will gain practical strategies to help navigate educational and career planning and learn how to advocate effectively for your child's needs as they approach this critical stage.

**Date & Time:** 2/20/25 at 6:00 P.M. - 7:00 P.M.

\*If you are interested in registering, please click on the Register Now link

\*Registration will close on 2/13/25



### Early Intervention Parents: Transition to Kindergarten

- Transitioning to Kindergarten is one of the most important steps in a young child's life. Children, parents, and caregivers experience a level of excitement and a sense of wonder. Children must learn to navigate academic, behavioral, and social expectations in school that might be different from the expectations at home or in the early childhood setting. Parents and caregivers of students who are currently in Early Intervention might feel discomfort about sending their children into this new experience. Well-planned, collaborative transition models build trust and relationships among children, families, teachers, and the school community. If your child is going to kindergarten next school year and you are interested in learning about the Special Education Services offered in kindergarten, please plan to join us.

**Date & Time:** 2/11/25 at 6:00 PM - 7:00 PM

\*If you are interested in attending, please use the following link on the day and time - [Join the Meeting](#)

**If you have any questions regarding the sessions on this page, please reach out to Alecia Granata at [agranata1@pghschools.org](mailto:agranata1@pghschools.org)**



## Did You Know that January is Recognized as National Braille Literacy Month?

National Braille Literacy Month is celebrated every January to honor the impact of braille on the lives of individuals who are blind or visually impaired. The month was chosen in recognition of Louis Braille’s birthday on January 4, 1809. He is the inventor of the braille system. His work revolutionized access to written language for people with visual impairments, opening doors to education, employment, and independence.



### Who Was Louis Braille?

Louis Braille was born in Coupvray, France, and became blind at the age of 3 due to an accident in his father’s workshop. Despite his blindness, he excelled in academics and attended the Royal Institute for Blind Youth in Paris. Frustrated by the lack of accessible reading material, Braille developed his tactile writing system at the age of 15, adapting a military communication code called "night writing." His six-dot system became widely accepted after his death in 1852 and is now used worldwide.

### Why is Braille Literacy Month Important?

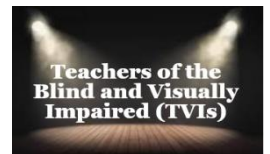
The celebration aims to raise awareness about the importance of braille as a literacy tool, particularly for children and adults who are blind or visually impaired. The event also advocates for equal access to education, employment, and information, which are vital for an inclusive society.

National Braille Literacy Month reminds us of the transformative power of braille and the ongoing need to ensure it remains accessible to future generations. If you are interested in exploring National Braille Literacy Month further, please check out these additional sites:

<a href="#">Paths to Literacy</a>	<a href="#">National Braille Press</a>	<a href="#">American Council of the Blind</a>
<a href="#">Braille Bug</a>	<a href="#">The Name Game</a>	<a href="#">Braillewriter</a>

## You Spoke, We Listened: Spotighting PSE Teams

Teachers of the Blind and Visually Impaired (TVIs) play a critical role in the education and empowerment of students with visual impairments. Their expertise ensures that students can access the curriculum, develop essential skills, and achieve independence.



In Pittsburgh Public Schools, we currently have 9 TVIs and one vacancy. In addition, 5 of the 9 TVIs are also Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialists (COMS).

Specific ways in which PSE TVIs support our students include:

- Braille Instruction
- Orientation and Mobility Support
- Skill Development
- Assistive Technology Training
- Curriculum Adaptation
- Collaboration with general education teachers, families, and support staff to create inclusive learning environments.

Teachers of the Blind and Visually Impaired are essential advocates and educators who make a lasting difference in the lives of students, empowering them to achieve their full potential.



## Keeping You Up to Date:

### In Case You Missed It!



Have you seen the Winter flyer for upcoming and continuing CCS programs? If not, please click on the latest CCS update image for the most recent flyer.

### Special Message from Dr. Maria Paul:



Our Summer 2025 CCS flyer will be shared with families in early February. We will continue to have a variety of options for students of all ages, including recent graduates, this summer. Enrollment will run through the end of March via a registration link shared with the Summer flyer. Any enrollments after March will be handled directly by me.

In addition, ESY determination meetings should be happening over the next couple of months. If your child is part of the Armstrong Group (autism, severe ID, serious emotional disturbance, degenerative impairments, MDS), those determinations must be made by 2/28/25. All other students need to have determinations made prior to the end of the school year but as early as possible.

Your input and participation in the ESY determination meeting are necessary and valuable. ESY is scheduled to run from July 7th through July 25th this summer. The hours are 8a - 1p. The district will not be running their Summer Boost program. PSE is working on an alternate program for students who have typically attended Boost in the past.

## Additional Resources:

### Pennsylvania Department of Education Conference, Feb 5-7, 2025



Click on the image for access to the flyer

Join Pennsylvania's educators for the Bureau of Special Education's signature event.

This annual statewide

conference offers an opportunity to learn and engage with nationally recognized presenters, as well as colleagues from across the state, highlighting effective instructional strategies and interventions designed to make an educational difference for all students.



## Additional Resources (Continued):

The Arc of PA's Include Me program is excited to present "Disability Acceptance through Literature," a virtual book study for students. Books selected by our facilitators provide opportunities to learn about the many aspects of disability through the perspective of school age protagonists. Discussions center on understanding, acceptance, presuming competence, and friendship. Values like compassion, honesty, authenticity and diversity steer the ship, and we love when conversations are led by students' interests. These book studies are an innovative way to provide students interested in reading with a structured opportunity to connect with other students across Pennsylvania. We strive to make the book studies accessible, with:



- audio recordings of each chapter,
- vocabulary resources,
- engaging visual content for discussions, and,
- by providing copies of the book to families as the book studies gear up.

These four- or eight-week book studies make room for silliness and curiosity, and we're proud of the stigma-blasting power of the program (and that of the students themselves!).

Include Me connects each book study and accompanying lessons to the Pennsylvania Academic Standards.

For more information regarding the information on pages 5 and 6 please contact: [cmorrison@includemepa.org](mailto:cmorrison@includemepa.org) or [jmacsisak@includemepa.org](mailto:jmacsisak@includemepa.org)

### The Arc of PA's Include Me WINTER 2024-25 BOOK STUDIES:

Children Ages 5 - 8; Wednesdays at 5:00 pm, beginning January 15, 2025



**Theme:** "A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words", A Disability Acceptance Story Series

**Group:** Kids 5 - 8 years old

**Day/Time:** Wednesdays, 5:00 pm - 5:45 pm

**Dates:** January 15 - 29, 2025 (3 weeks)

Join us Wednesdays at 5:00PM starting January 15, 2025, for a winter "Story Tour," our Disability Acceptance through Literature program for 5- to 8-year-olds! The group will meet weekly for 45 minutes via Zoom. We'll read a different children's book aloud each week and talk a bit about the story together. All learners are welcome!

Registering will save you a seat. Register with your mailing address and we will send a copy of each book for your household. Before our first meeting, you will receive an email with the Zoom link we'll use to join in every week.

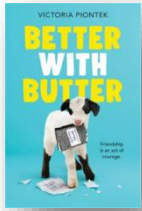
**Lineup for our Winter 2024-2025 Story Tour includes:**

- *A Day with No Words*, by Tiffany Hammond, illustrated by Kate Cosgrove
- *My Wandering Dreaming Mind*, by Merriam Sarcia Saunders, illustrated by Tammie Lyon
- *Aaron Slater, Illustrator*, by Andrea Beaty, illustrated by David Roberts

[Click here to register](#)

Questions? Contact Celia at [cmorrison@includemepa.org](mailto:cmorrison@includemepa.org) and Jennifer at [jmacsisak@includemepa.org](mailto:jmacsisak@includemepa.org).

## Additional Resources (Continued):



**Children Ages 8 - 12 ; Thursdays at 6:00 pm, beginning January 16, 2025**

**Title:** *Better with Butter*, by Victoria Piontek

**Group:** Kids 8-12 years old

**Day/Time:** Thursdays, 6:00 pm - 7:00 pm

**Dates:** January 16, 2025 - March 6, 2025 (8 weeks)

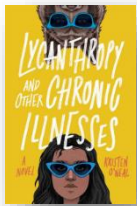
Join us Wednesdays at 6:00 PM beginning January 16 for our new middle grade pick for Disability Acceptance through Literature! The group (8- to 12-year-olds and our Include Me facilitators) will meet weekly via Zoom. All learners are welcome!

Registering will save your child a seat. Include your mailing address so we can send you the graphic novel! Before our first meeting, you will receive an email detailing how to connect, including the Zoom link we'll use every week. Audiobook recordings, adapted chapter summaries and PODD pages will be available.

*A girl with anxiety disorder finds an unlikely friend – and emotional support animal – in the form of an adorable fainting goat.*

[Register Here](#)

Questions? Contact Celia at [cmorrison@includemepa.org](mailto:cmorrison@includemepa.org) and Jennifer at [jmacsisak@includemepa.org](mailto:jmacsisak@includemepa.org).



**Young adults ages 17 & up; Mondays at 6:30 pm, beginning January 13, 2025**

**Title:** *Lycanthropy and Other Chronic Illnesses*, by Kristen O'Neal

**Group:** Young adults age 17 and up

**Day/Time:** Mondays 6:30 pm - 7:30 pm

**Dates:** January 13, 2025 - February, 10 2025 (5 weeks)

Join us Mondays at 6:30 pm for our new young adult+ pick for Disability Acceptance through Literature! The YA group and our facilitators meet weekly via Zoom. Participants aged 17 and up are welcome to join; our conversations will be inclusive and honest. Registering will save you a seat! Include your mailing address so we can mail you the book. Before our first meeting, you will receive an email detailing how to connect, including the Zoom link we'll use every week. Audio recordings will be available

*“Teen Wolf meets Emergency Contact in this sharply observed, hilarious, and heartwarming debut young adult novel about friendship, chronic illness, and . . . werewolves. [Read more about the book here.](#)”*

[Register Here](#)

Questions? Contact Celia at [cmorrison@includemepa.org](mailto:cmorrison@includemepa.org) and Jennifer at [jmacsisak@includemepa.org](mailto:jmacsisak@includemepa.org).

\* For more information regarding the Winter Book Studies on pages 5 and 6 please contact:

[cmorrison@includemepa.org](mailto:cmorrison@includemepa.org) or [jmacsisak@includemepa.org](mailto:jmacsisak@includemepa.org)

## Additional Resources (Continued):

### IMCC presents: Around the World for 3rd-6th Grades (Sept 2024-May 2025)

Include Me Connection Club (IMCC) returns for our ALL NEW 'Around the World' series. Each month we'll explore different cultures and continents from the comforts of our own homes while connecting and socializing with other students! | NO COST to attend. | Your student is welcome here! Programs occur virtually the last two Tuesdays of each month (5:30-6:30pm).



If interested in joining the club, [SIGN UP HERE](#)

For more information: contact: Nick Webster at [nwebster@includemepa.org](mailto:nwebster@includemepa.org).

Want to stay up to date on the Include Me Program? Click [here](#) to subscribe to our IM News and Tools newsletter!



### Tips from Dr. Bresnahan & the School Psychologists:

Teenagers often look online for information to help them with their identity formation, and like many of us to seek validation and understanding. However, adolescents may lack the knowledge, and perhaps learned skepticism, that adults have developed in approaching online content. This may leave them susceptible to influencers and bloggers who share their own mental health struggles, but also have agendas for promoting content and followers. Additionally, social media platforms often use algorithms to direct new content to users, thus surrounding teens online with continued information related to their mental health concerns.

Many professionals offer advice for parents on this trend, including Dr. Jennifer Katzenstein at John Hopkins (see links below) who discusses responding with empathy and encouragement, but also gaining additional scientific information about diagnoses. Dr. Cindy Gellner of the University of Utah outlines sharing with teens the differences between scientific websites versus other sources which may have alternative motives. Diving for the root of this new trend, Dr. Joseph Davis suggests addressing any social ideals of perfectionism and resulting feelings of inadequacy that adolescents have developed, often from the presentation of 'perfection' online.

### Helpful Links:

Dr. Katzenstein	Dr. Gellner	Dr. Davis
<a href="#">Social Media and Self-Diagnosis</a>	<a href="#">Teens, Social Media, and the Trouble with Self-Diagnosis</a>	<a href="#">Teen Influencers as Social Media Psychiatrists</a>



Join the PPS Psychology Department in their first **Parents as Mental Health Coaches** meeting on 2/13/25 at 5:30 PM - 6:30 PM. The first topic is **Anxiety Online: Empowering Anxious Kids to be Savvy and Balanced Online Users**.

If you are interested in attending the session, please use the following link to join:

If you have any questions, please contact Dr. Bresnahan at [bbresnahan1@pghschools.org](mailto:bbresnahan1@pghschools.org).

