

## Opening Message from Assistant Superintendent Patti Camper

Greetings and Happy New Year! As we begin 2024, the Program for Students with Exceptionalities (PSE) is busy planning summer programming for Extended School Year (ESY) and Covid Compensatory Services (CCS). Information on these programs will be forthcoming in February, as we finalize building permits for specific locations and dates. This information will also be available on the PSE website and the Covid-19 Resources page under CCS. Both sites are being updated weekly with information and resources for families. While this information will also be delivered via email, Talking Points, and through school communication, our goal is to maintain a central webpage where parents can access the information. Additionally, now that 51 schools have established after-school and/or weekend programming for students with CCS service agreements, you will find a newly created CCS folder on all school webpages that will include information on school-based programs.

Please know we're committed to improving communication and appreciate your input on this Newsletter and our webpages. In closing, we're looking forward to a productive 2024 and working together with each of you.

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



### You Spoke & We Listened:

Have you heard the phrase, "Your Voice Matters!" Well, it does, and the PSE Department, with assistance and feedback from the members of the LTF, have provided additional topics to be included in this edition of the Parent & Guardian Newsletter that can be found on pages 4 and 5 of this issue. We will continue to seek and respond to your feedback. If you are interested in providing feedback on this issue or would like to see additional features in the next issues, please scan the QR code.



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## Parent Training Opportunities

### Quarterly Update on Parent Training Opportunities

- 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 February 29, 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 1/22. Please reach out to Mindy Sturgess to register at [msturgess1@pghschools.org](mailto:msturgess1@pghschools.org).
- 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 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 more about special education services in kindergarten, please plan to attend a virtual meeting on February 8, 2024, from 6:00 - 7:00 P.M. The session is a joint training opportunity offered by Early Intervention and School Age. Participants in this session will learn about the special education transition to kindergarten process, the services offered in kindergarten, and where to turn if you have questions. If you would like to attend, please [Click Here](#) for the flyer and reach out to Tracy Brezicki at [tbrezicki1@pghschools.org](mailto:tbrezicki1@pghschools.org) to RSVP for the session.
- 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 2024? If so, please plan to attend, ***What You Need to Know About ESY*** on February 27, 2024, from 11:00 A.M. - 12:00 P.M. The deadline to register is Tuesday 2/20. Please reach out to Joyce Dzadovsky to register at [jdzadovsky1@pghschools.org](mailto:jdzadovsky1@pghschools.org) and [Click Here](#) for the informational flyer about the program.

## Training Resources:

- 2024 Pennsylvania Department of Education Conference, Making a Difference: Educational Practices That Work! 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. The conference is February 28<sup>th</sup> - March 1<sup>st</sup>. Please [Click Here](#) for more information. #MakingADifferenceInPA
- Be sure to check out the PEAL Center's wealth of valuable resources by [Clicking Here](#). The PEAL Center is an organization of parents of children with disabilities reaching out to assist other parents and professionals. The PEAL Center provides workshops, training, and information about early intervention, special education, and inclusive education to the western and central regions of Pennsylvania. Parent advisors assist families with information about the special education process and problem-solving strategies. In addition to the calendar of events to register for, you may also want to view the selection of available recorded webinars. Please [Click Here](#) for a link to this page.

**Resources for You to Share with Your Students:****The Arc of PA's Include Me Connection Club (IMCC)!**

The Include Me Connection Club (IMCC) aims to create meaningful and authentic connections among diverse student populations across the state of Pennsylvania.

**Designed for 3rd - 5th graders of diverse abilities and interests.**

- These virtual club meetings will offer creative opportunities for students to connect through games, activities, and student-driven discussions. Each club meeting will be facilitated by our engaging and energetic staff.

**Your student is welcome here!**

- Club meetings occur the last two Tuesdays of each month from 5:30-6:30 pm. Themes and topics change monthly and are curated to meet kids where they are. Registration for the club is always open.

If interested in joining the club, <https://thearcpa.org/includeme/include-me-connection-club/>

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

**The Arc of PA's Include Me program is excited to present "Disability Acceptance through Literature"**

"Disability Acceptance through Literature" is 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.

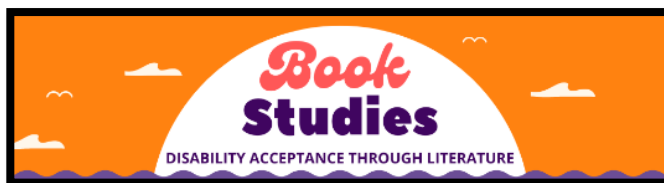
Discussions center on understanding, acceptance, presuming competence, and friendship. Values like compassion, honesty, authenticity, and diversity steer the ship, and we love it when conversations are led by students' interests. These book studies are an innovative way to provide students interested 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, contact: [cmorrison@includemepa.org](mailto:cmorrison@includemepa.org) or [jmacsisak@includemepa.org](mailto:jmacsisak@includemepa.org)**

**Registration for our Winter Sessions are open on our website: <https://thearcpa.org/includeme/bookstudy/>**



## You Spoke & We Listened: Spotlighting PSE Teams

Did you know that there are over ten different teams within the Students with Exceptionalities (PSE) department? We have been asked to spotlight a team within the quarterly Parent & Guardian Newsletters and the first team nominated was the Assistive Technology Team.

We will be spotlighting the Assistive Technology Team through an FAQ format.



### What is Assistive Technology (AT)?

- Assistive Technology is products, equipment, and systems that enhance learning, working, playing, and daily activities. AT can be temporary or permanent.

### Who are the members of the Assistive Technology Department?

- Dr. Stephanie Hui, OTD, OTR/L, ATP – An Assistive Technology Consultant who has been in the District for 4 years. Before that, Stephanie worked as an AT Consultant in New York and California, and also has a background as an Occupational Therapist, working with children with complex bodies.
- Alicia Connolly, M.S., CCC-SLP– An Assistive Technology Consultant who has been in the District for 24 years. Before being part of the Assistive Technology team, Alicia worked in PPS as a Speech – Speech-Language Pathologist.
- Gary Rush, AT Facilitator – Gary is starting his 30<sup>th</sup> year in PPS in March 2024. A crucial member of the department, he helps to troubleshoot and solve problems with equipment ranging from low to high tech. He ensures it is working properly and delivered in a timely manner to our many schools.

### What does the Assistive Technology Department (AT) do in PPS?

- We provide support, services, and if needed, equipment to students to help with communication, vision, hearing, positioning, and learning for students with IEPs or 504 plans. (A student must have a 504 plan or IEP to receive assistive technology services). We also provide AT services to students in Early Intervention, City Connections, as well as the Charter and Approved Private Schools within the City of Pittsburgh. In addition, Stephanie and Alicia provide AT training to IEP teams as needed. Stephanie Hui and Alicia Connolly split their caseloads by region.

### What is an Assistive Technology Consultation?

- An AT Consultation occurs after Stephanie Hui or Alicia Connolly receive an approved AT Consultation Request from the Program Officer at your child's school that was completed by their case manager, or sometimes, their itinerant service provider. Stephanie or Alicia then work with the case manager and/or itinerant service provider to schedule an observation of the child. Next, we determine if there is evidence of a need, and discuss the next steps as well as any possible solutions, which are individualized for each student.

\* **Special Things to Note:** Assistive Technology is not a stand-alone service. We work in conjunction with the IEP or 504 team to help students reach their IEP or 504 goals through technology. Students will not have a specific AT goal, but rather, AT is used to help support the student in reaching their goal(s). If you would like more information, your first step is to talk to your child's IEP case manager and share your concerns. The case manager will then follow the Pittsburgh Public School procedure for an AT Consultation, (which does not require a PTE or PTR).

# You Spoke & We Listened: Secondary Transition in the Pittsburgh Public Schools

## What is Secondary Transition?

Secondary Transition is the process of preparing students for adult life after they leave high school. Preparation includes a variety of services and supports to prepare students for employment, continued education/training, and independent living/community participation after graduation.

### [PaTTAN - What is Secondary Transition?](#)

In Pennsylvania, transition planning must be addressed in the IEP during the academic year in which the student turns 14 years of age, or earlier, if requested by the parent/guardian and determined appropriate by the IEP team. Transition services should be ongoing and individualized based on the student's needs. More specifically, the student's transition plan should identify the services and activities needed to reach their goals after graduation. Services and activities should build upon the student's strengths, interests/preferences and needs and involve a partnership between the student, family, school-age services and community agency providers.

### [PaTTAN - Planning for the Future Checklist](#)

## How does PPS prepare students for life after graduation?

Transitioning from high school to the adult world can be a challenging time for students, especially those with disabilities, as they enter a world of unfamiliar routines, new environments, and novel experiences. To ensure a seamless transition, most students require a team of individuals including teachers, counselors, other school personnel, families, and community agencies, to help support the process of selecting appropriate goals and developing the requisite skills to achieve these goals. The Pittsburgh Public Schools offers a

variety of services and programs to help prepare students for this transition. For example, the district employs transition counselors who serve as the initial point of contact for students ages 14+ with IEP's. Transition Counselors utilize various assessments to help students identify and develop post-secondary goals. Where appropriate, they initiate referrals to transition programs, CTE programs, school-based services, and adult agencies. PPS also offers a variety of transition services and programs (\*linked at the end of the document) to help prepare students for life after graduation. For a list of PPS Transition Counselors and assigned schools, please click here: [Transition Counselor Assignments 2023-2024.docx](#). If your child's school does not have a transition counselor assigned, please contact Crystal Evans, Transition Coordinator, at (412) 529-3143.

Students of transition age must be invited to their IEP meetings and should be encouraged to participate. Since transition planning includes areas other than academics (*i.e., planning for healthcare needs, living arrangements, etc.*), parents often serve as the bridge between school and community involvement for their child. As such, educators should also ensure family engagement throughout this process.

### [PaTTAN - Engaging Families in Transition Planning.](#)

Additionally, the IEP team should determine the appropriate

community agencies and other organizations that could help support the student's transition from school-age services to adult life. These may include employers, vocational rehabilitation centers, colleges, or universities, supports coordination organizations, mental health agencies, and other disability-related organizations. For example, the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) may provide vocational guidance and assistance in preparing for, obtaining, or maintaining competitive employment. Students are typically referred two years prior to graduation, although referrals can be made earlier when appropriate. Referrals can be made by anyone, including the student, a family member, or school/agency representative. Students under the age of 18 must have parent/guardian permission to become involved with OVR services. For more information or to apply for services, please contact your child's transition counselor or visit: [Vocational Rehabilitation Home \(pa.gov\)](#)

For more information re: secondary transition services in the Pittsburgh Public Schools, please contact Crystal Evans, Transition Coordinator, at [cevans1@pghschools.org](mailto:cevans1@pghschools.org) or (412) 529-3143.

### \* [Secondary Transition in the Pittsburgh Public Schools Resource Links](#)



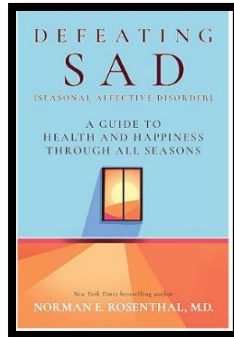


## Tips from Dr. Bresnahan:

Lead Psychologist & Program Officer for Psychology

January and February are the height of the winter blues. Need some tips to help you and the kids through it?

- The founder of light therapy, Dr. Norman Rosenthal, released a new guide this year: [Defeating SAD \(Seasonal Affective Disorder\): A Guide to Health and Happiness Through All Seasons](#). In this book he offers an up-to-date guide to overcoming the miseries and that millions experience with the changing seasons.



- Try to get outside, but if the weather doesn't allow it there are tons of winter activity books for kids to keep their minds active, and not just on electronics, in the [Winter Activity Book for Kids](#), as an example, or something similar.



Winter blues causing tummy aches and school avoidance? Try a Google of 'Sunday Scaries' or 'Monday Jitters'. Tips on some easy mindfulness and distraction techniques for tough mornings are available on multiple pediatrician sites and Psychology Today.

## In Case You Missed it:

### From PaTTAN: Animated Videos about ALL the IEP Team Members!

Have you ever wondered who should be at an IEP team meeting or why an individual was there? Check out this new series of short clips introducing each member of an Individualized Education Program (IEP) team. Follow PaTTAN on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or LinkedIn to see new releases, or visit the [YouTube playlist](#).



### Notes on Covid Compensatory Services (CCS):

All meetings with families to determine eligibility for CCS have occurred. If your child qualified for services, and you still have questions, please reach out to your child's IEP Case Manager. They can also discuss the types of CCS your school is currently offering.



### Additional Events for Parents & Guardians:

