

## **Pathways Academy**

### **Program & Student Description, Program Capacity (Criterion 1.2)**

#### **Population Summary**

Pathways Academy is a day program with an operational capacity of 32 students, with 30 students currently enrolled (as of 8/6/19). Pathways Academy serves students between the ages of 6 through 22 years of age with diagnoses of neurodevelopmental disorders including, but not limited to Autism Spectrum Disorders, with or without co-occurring psychiatric disorders.

#### **Educational Characteristics of Population Served**

Students at Pathways Academy may present with significant anxiety around school in general and/or specific subjects. Many students struggle with school phobia and have had previous negative experiences in other school settings. Students at Pathways Academy tend to have average intelligence scores although significant gaps in knowledge and delay in skill development are common. Some students may have specific learning disabilities and challenges with processing speed. Most students at Pathways Academy have had negative experiences in programs with strict ABA philosophies and benefit from our system of social-pragmatic learning and natural consequences.

#### **Learning, Social-Emotional, and Behavioral Characteristics**

Many of the students at Pathways academy struggle with:

- Typical school and classroom-based demands
- Social Skills
- Sensory processing
- School-related anxiety
- Frustration with school subject matter
- Limited ability to produce written work
- Working on non-preferred topics
- Accepting instruction
- Making mistakes
- Frustration tolerance
- Rigid thinking
- Unrealistic expectations of themselves
- Limited tolerance for change/transition
- Mathematics and/or writing
- Schoolwork output in general
- Motor skills (fine and gross)
- Attention and/or impulse control
- Reduced processing speed
- Tendency to perseverate on thoughts or actions
- Tendency to become caught up in anxious thinking and worry
- Tendency to shut down when demands outweigh coping skills

- Tendency to act out when demands outweigh coping skills

### **Philosophy, Goals, and Objectives of the Program**

Pathways Academy strives to meet the physical, social, and academic needs of children and adolescents who are out of school or struggling in school and are having difficulty understanding social cues and tend to misunderstand and misinterpret social situations. The goal and objectives of the program are to provide students with a low-stress, therapeutic learning environment in which each student's plan can be customized based on his/her individual academic, social, and cognitive profile.

Pathways Academy provides services, based on the philosophy of developmental, child-centered education. All behaviors are seen as a form of communication. Pathways Academy students often have difficulty integrating their experiences and interactions and drawing expected inferences. Their reduced ability in these areas often leads to feelings of frustration, limited success, and low self-esteem. They also may have co-occurring psychiatric diagnoses, including depression, social and academic anxiety, and/or mood disorders.

Pathways Academy utilizes a consistent implementation of positive behavioral supports and natural consequences to manage student behavior. Every effort is made to encourage positive behavior by acknowledging and reinforcing cooperative interaction, developing consistent clear rules in conjunction with the student, and designing classrooms/play spaces with children's needs in mind. Students are encouraged to use their language and developing social skills to resolve conflicts instead of using harmful or physically aggressive behaviors. Students are taught to find appropriate avenues for meeting their needs and for defusing their anger.

At Pathways Academy the Educational Administrator ensures that all staff members have an understanding and knowledge of the general curriculum expectations and Learning Standards of the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks and the Common Core Standards and that this knowledge has been incorporated into the educational programs developed for each student as written in his/her Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

Pathways Academy's work environment provides for low-distraction work areas, preferential seating away from distractions and/or close to the teacher, preparation of students for transitions and changes in routines, support during transition times and earphones for all equipment with audio functions. Pathways Academy provides support for free time activities, low ratio supervision throughout the day, carpeting on floors, dimmer switches on lights, and availability of incandescent or fluorescent lighting. A consistent, predictable schedule is readily available to students within their classroom on a daily basis.

All assignments are clearly presented in writing and/or aloud. Teachers provide adaptation and/or modification of classroom material and/or of the amount of work assigned, reduction of paper and pencil tasks, provision of taped or highlighted texts,

outlines, a scribe, division of work into short, sequential steps with opportunities for reinforcement, and feedback at the end of each step. Supplementary materials are provided as needed. Students are encouraged to utilize sensory items and strategies within the classroom and to take sensory breaks when needed.

Pathways Academy supports students in listening and following directions with the use of eye contact, repeated directions, gentle reminders, multimodal instruction and cueing, and through the use of examples. Pathways Academy staff members break down instructions into steps, break down information into manageable chunks, keep verbal instructions simple, and use positive reinforcement on a consistent and continued basis. Expectations are individualized to the needs of each student and can be adjusted in an ongoing manner throughout the day if needed. Pathways Academy staff provides ongoing support and structure, teaches to student strengths, uses high impact visual aids, and provides frequent positive encouragement.

### **Social Pragmatics**

Social pragmatics is taught directly as a core subject and is integrated throughout the school day. Pathways Academy is committed to providing a supportive environment in which students can learn, develop, and practice social pragmatic skills, both with staff members and with one another. Field trips into the community provide students the opportunity to practice skills in other settings. Pragmatics instruction includes skills such as asking for help, listening, bringing materials to class, following instructions, friendship skills, beginning and ending a conversation, joining in a conversation, playing a game, asking a favor, giving and receiving a compliment, sharing, apologizing, dealing with feelings including knowing and expressing feelings, recognizing the feelings of others, expressing concern, dealing with anger, dealing with another person's anger, dealing with fear, and expressing affection. Students also learn coping strategies and social-emotional regulation strategies. Students are taught methods to improve their understanding and expression of non-verbal communication, how to successfully deal with anxiety, and skills for dealing with stress.

### **Transition Planning**

Pathways Academy's Transition Planning program is individualized for each student. Pathways Academy staff members work with students to develop a transition plan and work on pre-vocational and career skills, which may include, but are not limited to: community service work, gaining experience, attending community college, and obtaining a part time job. Transition planning activities are also addressed in pragmatics class.

### **English as a Second Language**

Pathways Academy is dedicated to ensuring the meaningful participation of students with limited English proficiency and welcomes eligible students with limited English proficiency to apply for admission. All students at Pathways Academy are offered equal opportunity to access and participate in the program's services and activities regardless of English proficiency level. Pathways Academy works closely with school districts to implement necessary program modifications and support services to identify and

effectively serve students with limited English proficiency. Students with limited English proficiency will receive sheltered content instruction and additional instruction in English as a Second Language (ESL) from a certified ESL teacher unless the student's IEP specifies otherwise.

### **Physical Education**

Students participate in physical education class once a week, covering the fundamentals of non-competitive team sports as well as team building and group activities. Activities are adapted to meet student interests, abilities, and specific needs. In addition, students are given the opportunity to use the McLean Hospital Fitness Center on a weekly basis.

### **Recreation Services**

If a student's IEP requires that he or she receive recreation services, Pathways Academy will work with the sending school district to ensure that the student receives the appropriate services and/or equipment. The student will work with Pathways staff to determine what his or her specific needs are and to develop and implement a plan to work toward recreation goals and objectives during the school day. Pathways Academy has dedicated outdoor space for recreation, an indoor dayroom, an indoor gym, and a fitness center. In addition, the McLean campus includes wilderness trails and walking paths. Pathways Academy provides students with a variety of sports equipment, board and computer games, student-based activities, craft materials, and opportunities for interaction.

### **Transportation**

Sending school districts provide transportation to and from Pathways Academy. Pathways Academy provides the school district, transportation companies, and parents with daily schedules for arrival, departure and vacation days. It is the responsibility of parents to call the transportation company to report absences or changes in dismissal arrangements. Pathways Academy staff members meet and escort students to and from their vans. Pathways Academy staff transport students in McLean Hospital vans for scheduled community outings.

### **Speech and Language**

Pathways Academy's Speech and Language Therapists (SLPs) address expressive/receptive language needs, pragmatic communication issues, and executive function impairments in individual sessions as per student's IEPs.

### **Sensory Integration**

Sensory integration plans are developed for each student by the Occupational Therapists (OTs). Pathways Academy's OTs provide individualized sensory integration training and support to students in the occupational therapy gym, classroom and/or milieu. All Pathways Academy staff members are trained to assist students with sensory integration activities. A music room is available to students during sensory integration breaks.

### **Occupational Therapy and Life Skills**

Pathways Academy's OT provides services including, but not limited to, individualized therapy for gross motor skill development, fine motor skill development, motor planning, sensory modulation, handwriting, and keyboarding. In addition, self-help and daily living skills, such as simple meal preparation, self-care, personal hygiene, folding laundry, and household chores can be addressed within a student's individual therapy sessions or within the classroom.

### **School Health Services**

The Pathways Academy school nurse and consulting physician provide school health services as necessary. McLean Hospital has a Medical Doctor on Call (MDOC), a walk-in clinic for emergency medical services and a Clinical Evaluation Center for emergency psychiatric services.

### **Assistive Technology**

Pathways Academy's adaptive/assistive technology is available to all students and includes, but is not limited to, iPads, desktop computers, laptop computers, tablets, LCD televisions, projectors, and audio players. In the event that an enrolled student has a visual, hearing, or other impairment, Pathways Academy will coordinate efforts with his/her school district to obtain adaptive equipment as per the student's IEP, which may include Braille materials.

### **Communication Needs**

Pathways Academy ensures that all students, including deaf and hard of hearing students, receive appropriate services to meet their communication needs. These services include, but are not limited to, Speech and Language therapy, assistive technology, social pragmatic classes and staff guidance and intervention during social interactions.

### **Parent Training and Counseling**

Pathways Academy has a Parent Advisory Group (PAG) that offers opportunities for parent training at twice yearly PAG meetings on topics such as social pragmatics and sensory integration. Pathways Academy encourages parents to contact local agencies to pursue counseling or additional training resources.

### **Not Offered by Pathways Academy**

- Pathways Academy does not offer Mobility Orientation Training or Physical Therapy. In the event that a student's IEP requires mobility training and/or physical therapy, the sending school district provides these services.
- Pathways Academy does not provide individual psychological counseling or rehabilitation counseling services to parents and/or students. Parents and students are encouraged to seek outside counseling if they are interested.
- Pathways Academy does not encourage or facilitate the interaction between enrolled Pathways Academy students and patients at McLean Hospital. This includes, but is not limited to, the use of other unit's facilities. In addition, Pathways Academy does not promote or participate in gatherings with school

groups or agencies other than Pathways Academy. Pathways Academy does not have extracurricular activities beyond the traditional school day.

- Pathways Academy does not offer individual tutoring of students; however, staff members assist students with individual learning needs within the classroom as needed.
- Pathways Academy does not offer neuropsychological testing or testing beyond the mandatory three-year psycho-educational assessment (cognitive and academic) or any other service not indicated in our pricing contract. In the event that additional services are required as per a student's IEP, it is the responsibility of the sending school district to arrange and fund said services.
- Pathways Academy does not provide specific social work services outside of assisting with the transition planning process.