

Academics at Pathways Academy

Pathways Academy is a DESE-approved, year-round school developed to meet the psychological, social and academic needs of children and adolescents ages six through 22, with Autism Spectrum disorders. Pathways Academy's students have difficulty understanding social cues and tend to misunderstand and misinterpret social situations. They have difficulty integrating their experiences and interactions and drawing expected inferences. Students' 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, social and academic anxiety, and other social-emotional challenges. Educational and clinical services are based on a comprehensive assessment of each student's neuropsychological profile.

Pathways Academy's developmentally-based program serves the academic and clinical needs of each student, providing comprehensive integrated educational and therapeutic services within naturalistic group settings. Furthermore, Pathways Academy interprets students' behaviors as a form of communication. We employ social pragmatics and social skills training in all our programming; everything is an opportunity for learning and growth. At Pathways Academy, children with similar cognitive, learning, and developmental profiles are clustered together to facilitate group learning with a staff to student ratio of 1:2. Students are assigned to a classroom according to their chemistry with other students within the classroom, as well as their age and academic achievement/support needs. Students are grouped within 48 months of age, according to DESE regulations. Maximum classroom size is four students.

All required subject areas are accessible to Pathways Academy students, consistent with public education standards. Subject areas are addressed through modified instruction in a manner specific to the needs and abilities of the individual student, based on his/her IEP as well as learning profile. Subject areas include but are not limited to:

- Social Pragmatics
- English Language Arts
- Mathematics
- Science
- History
- Physical Education
- Arts Education (music and visual arts)
- Life/Transition Skills
- Current Events
- Vocabulary
- Test Preparation
- Culinary Arts
- Community Service and Job Skills

The Pathways Academy educational program emphasizes multi-sensory instructional strategies that are experiential, thematic, and cross-curricular. Students are encouraged and supported to achieve to the best of their abilities. Although each student's education is grounded in core academics, all students at Pathways Academy have IEP goals and objectives that address skill deficits, challenges, and other barriers that adversely impact their educational functioning. For instance, social skill development is a common theme within all classes, regardless of academic content. The school program provides students with opportunities to learn and practice social and coping skills across environments. By incorporating social pragmatic and social-emotional learning strategies throughout the instructional curriculum, students learn to self-manage behavior and strengthen interpersonal relationship skills, increasing the probability of successful school, family, and community reintegration. Each of the six periods of the school day is

comprised of a 45-minute academic class and a 15-minute sensory break. During these sensory breaks, students work on their sensory integration goals as well as social pragmatic goals.

The curriculum within individual classes varies based upon classroom composition and individual student needs. Within core classes, students work to meet IEP goals and objectives in conjunction with Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks standards and entry points.

- In Social Pragmatics classes, students learn about social communication skills and nonverbal language - proxemics, body language, gestures, tone of voice, and active listening. Students learn about identity, personal values, and skills needed to build and maintain friendships. Students learn about bullying prevention and intervention; they focus on teasing, bullying and peer conflicts. Students learn to identify bullying in all its forms and learn how to make the distinction between bullying, accidental issues between peers, teasing, and conflicts. Students learn about figurative language, humor, emotions, self-care, and social-emotional skills to cope with frustration and stress. Students learn about the different expected behaviors that apply to a myriad of situations both at school and in the wider community.
- In English classes, students study a variety of fiction and nonfiction works across diverse genres while assessing and developing personal interests and style. Students learn about grammar, parts of speech, and how to compose sentences of varying complexity. Students engage in the essay-writing process and learn how to edit and improve upon their work. Students develop reading comprehension skills, learn the elements of story, and learn to distinguish between fact and opinion in discussion and text.
- In Mathematics classes, students develop skills in number theory, patterns, computation, ratios, proportion, percent, fractions, factors, multiples, exponents, and graphing; mastering grade-level concepts to the best of their ability. Topics also include: decision-making and problem solving, communicating with the language of mathematics, learning important mathematical ideas, and applying learned skills to real world problems. Students study and build upon their knowledge as they work through functional mathematics, simple and advanced algebraic concepts, geometry, probability, and statistics.
- In Science classes, students explore Earth and space science, physical science, and life science. As students enter high school and prepare for high school MCAS tests, many find that building on previous life science coursework to be highly rewarding; a focus on biology in grades 9 and 10 (and often beyond) provide students with in-depth knowledge of biological systems. Students investigate the diversity, complexity, and interconnectedness of life on earth to gain a solid understanding of the processes of life, down to the cell.
- In History classes, students learn about culture and community. They study both United States and world geography and geographical features, ancient civilizations, world history, and United States history. Students visit a variety of local historical landmarks and learn about the significance of our local area within our nation's history. Students also study current events and learn about civic history, participation in government, and political science.

Instructional materials and resources are matched to the appropriate grade and skill level of the student, following the guidelines of their IEP and the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. Educators utilize the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks to design class lessons, using both learning standards and entry points to the standards. In each of their classes, students work on both grade-level content and on developing individual skills and abilities at their own pace. Special Education teachers at Pathways Academy craft lessons and activities that meet individual student needs. Pathways Academy uses many of the same textbook series used in public schools in the area, but Pathways educators also create a large number of individualized lessons and activities to meet individual student needs.

Pathways Academy provides a safe and comfortable learning environment for students who have struggled both socially and academically. Pathways Academy focuses on the social pragmatic and academic advancement of each student so that they may successfully face challenges in all aspects of their life. Led by Roya Ostovar, Ph.D., Director, and Laura Mead, MS.Ed., Educational Administrator, the team works closely to integrate academic and clinical services for each student. The Pathways staff is comprised of a multidisciplinary team of special education teachers, clinicians, speech/language pathologists and occupational therapists trained in working with children whom struggle with social and academic success.