



GREATER THAN THE SUM OF OUR PARTS



AIU SPECIAL EDUCATION & PUPIL SERVICES



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Learn more about the AIU's special education related services.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

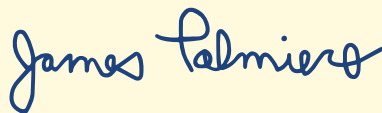
In 1971, the Allegheny Intermediate Unit (AIU) first opened its doors to serve children with special needs in Allegheny County. Over the last five decades, the AIU has adapted to the ever-changing educational landscape, and has pioneered a variety of innovative programs that help all students achieve their full potential.

As we look to the future, the AIU has recently adopted a new five-year strategic plan, which includes mission and vision statements and five-year goals that will guide the organization in its path forward. As our new mission states, at the AIU, we are an educational community that advocates and advances equitable opportunities for every learner. We are resolute in our belief that through equitable access, all learners can achieve their full potential, and we have dedicated our professional energies to honoring this commitment to all students.

Our high-quality services are designed to meet each child's unique needs, and individual offerings can be combined to serve the whole child, their family and school system. We offer specifically tailored programs to serve children with a single incident or those who experience multiple and more complex needs. When combined, the AIU's special education services deliver a seamless and dynamic educational experience that helps a child build upon their current abilities and grow so that they may achieve their full potential. Our compassionate and highly-qualified staff bring forth the best in all students, and some of their stories have been highlighted in this prospectus. Simply put, we are more than the sum of our parts.

On behalf of everyone in the AIU's Special Education and Pupil Services Division, I would like to sincerely thank you for your support over the last five decades, and we look forward to our continued partnership as we embrace the challenges of the future. I invite you to turn the pages of this prospectus to learn more about how our related services help all learners achieve their full potential.

Sincerely,



Dr. James Palmiero
Assistant Executive Director for
Special Education & Pupil Services



PASSION for Success

AVA HAS A PASSION FOR MUSIC and the drive to succeed, no matter the obstacles.

This Bethel Park student has not let her visual impairment stop her from achieving success. With the help of her teachers and the AIU, Ava has not only kept on pace with her classes, she has excelled.

Since preschool, Ava has been using Braille to learn about everything from science to history to musical notes.

Throughout her school career, Ava has been encouraged by many, including her teacher for the visually impaired, Joyce Kemp. A veteran educator, Kemp has helped Ava learn strategies to navigate a variety of challenges, from the lunch line to homework assignments.

"Students are very different. Each student brings a different perspective and different abilities," Kemp said. "It's been a real pleasure to be with Ava."

Ava also has regular check-ins with her occupational and physical therapists from the AIU, who coordinate with Kemp to ensure a seamless learning experience. Ava, an independent thinker and self-starter, is always looking for new ways to stay active in her adaptive physical education class, said Stephanie Cormier, Ava's physical therapist.

"She's a great self-advocate for what she needs," Cormier said.

True to her inspiring nature, Ava is already thinking about life after high school. With a passion for music, Ava plans to study music production and pursue a career in music, where her passion for success will no doubt carry her far.

"Ava has the skills and know-how she needs to program things on her Braille writer. It's been a real pleasure to work with her."

Joyce Kemp, BVISP teacher

Meeting the Challenge of the New Normal

Interpreters go with the flow.



As the COVID-19 pandemic changed classrooms throughout the country, the 2020-21 school year was definitely not “normal.”

FOR THE HEEMSTRA HOUSEHOLD in West Jefferson Hills, this ‘new normal’ meant sisters Lucy and CeCe would learn remotely from home through countless Zoom sessions, just like many of their peers. But with hearing impairments, the new normal posed a challenge for the sisters as well as their interpreters from the AIU.

In spite of the challenges, AIU staff learned new techniques that allowed them to interpret live virtual classes during the school day as well as on-demand courses offered by the district.

“It took a lot of research and a lot of practice but we got it off the ground and it’s turned out really well,” said AIU interpreter Dianne Chontos.

At first, the adjusted program was created for CeCe, but soon sister Lucy requested a similar arrangement. With seamless instruction and the interpreter’s constant availability, the sisters didn’t miss a beat. Math, science, gym, even virtual recess — no problem. And an interpreter was always there.

“It didn’t make you feel like you were left out of the class or anything,” Lucy said. “You still felt like you were included. After a little while, it just felt normal.”

And that just might be the biggest success of all.

“To me, a huge piece is the partnership. With the AIU, you don’t get just the services, there is also the collaboration with experienced professionals who truly have the child’s best interests at heart.”

Jade Fiore, Supervisor
Special Education/Pupil Personnel
West Jefferson Hills School District



ABOUT THE DEAF/HARD OF HEARING SUPPORT PROGRAM

The Deaf/Hard of Hearing Support Program provides specially designed instruction to students who exhibit a mild to profound hearing loss that interferes with the development of language and communication. Certified teachers of the deaf/hard of hearing provide instruction and support for students in developing auditory, language, speech reading, literacy and self advocacy skills as well as academic support in an inclusive educational program.

“It took a lot of research and a lot of practice but we got it off the ground and its turned out really well.”

Dianne Chontos, AIU Interpreter

BY THE NUMBERS

Deaf/Hard of Hearing

18 Teachers

3 Educational audiologists

13 Interpreters

54 LEAs served

42 School districts served

17.6 Average years of teaching experience

21.2 Average years of interpreting experience

100% Compliance for IEP minutes

YOGA

and Therapy

Occupational Therapy is key to Emily's full participation in yoga.



It was supposed to be just a regular IEP meeting — nothing new, just a check-in. But when 20-year-old Hampton Township student Emily Ortman, and her mother, Dori, logged in to the virtual meeting, they immediately noticed something different.

Joining the familiar faces of Emily's teachers and occupational therapists were the hatha masters and others who were part of Emily's unexpected journey into the world of yoga.

The range of stakeholders and yoga masters moved Dori to tears.

"There were so many people on the Zoom call," Dori said. "More than I had ever seen before."

The path to yoga was a journey neither she nor Emily, who has Down Syndrome, expected.

Throughout high school, Emily was an active and vibrant student, and was even a member of the cheerleading squad. As her friends graduated and moved on, Emily began looking for new activities, and her focus shifted to post-secondary endeavors.

Then one day, Emily started taking yoga as part of a physical education class. Like many, she struggled at first.

With the help of her AIU occupational therapist, Jessica Sattler, and the district's special education staff, Emily developed consistently good form on the mat. Soon, she was staying after school perfecting her yoga poses.

The support from Ms. Sattler, whom Emily just calls 'Jess,' is appreciated by everyone at the district and helps streamline the education process. Dori also appreciates Sattler's contribution to her daughter's development.

"At the IEP meetings, Ms. Sattler is very active and had a lot of ideas. She's very well thought-out and is always prepared," Dori said.

Last year, Emily began taking pop-up classes at Open Up Pittsburgh, an organization that provides mindfulness, yoga and social skills training to marginalized groups, including those with disabilities. When asked if the workouts made her feel strong, a shy Emily shook her head yes.

Emily is now in pursuit of an international yoga teacher certification. Professionals in the field already see Emily's passion for yoga and see a bright future for her in practice, including Open Up Pittsburgh co-founder and executive director Marissa Vogel.

"I think she'll be a great yoga teacher and a great example of what yoga can and should look like," Vogel said. She added that she looks forward to helping Emily with a future career, and perhaps a job placement.

When asked if she would like to work at Open Up Pittsburgh, shy Emily once again shook her head yes. This time, enthusiastically so.



BY THE NUMBERS OT/PT

70 Therapists on staff

897 Combined years of school-based experience

13.2 Average years of school-based experience

497.5 Combined years of service with AIU

7.3 Average length of years in current assignment

100% Compliance for IEP minutes

ABOUT OT/PT

The AIU's Occupational and Physical Therapy programs work with a district's educational team to meet student's needs.

Therapists help students develop a variety of motor and sensory processing skills through direct intervention and collaboration with school personnel. Certified therapists also recommend strategies and modifications that can be practiced within the school environment.

A CHANGE OF PACE



SCHOOL WAS ALWAYS A STRUGGLE for Lucy and Henry Reinheimer, their mother, Jen, said. Unable to adapt to typical learning environments in elementary and middle school, the students began to disengage and became self-isolated, distancing themselves from their teachers and peers.

Both 12-year-old Lucy and her 9-year-old brother Henry have Angelman Syndrome, a genetic disorder that often causes developmental disabilities, including speech limitations. With the help of her district’s special education team, Jen enrolled Lucy and Henry in Sunrise School, located in Monroeville and operated by the AIU.

With the help of specialized instruction and highly trained professionals, Lucy and Henry are now engaged with other students and can learn at their own level and pace. At times there are three or more teachers and paraprofessionals in a classroom simultaneously helping students, and the siblings received focused, individualized attention. Speech therapy became a critical component of their daily instruction and speech therapists immediately began helping the students improve not only the sound of their speech, but their fluency and articulation as well

“It’s unbelievable — the difference in such a short amount of time.” Jen Reinheimer, mother of Lucy and Henry

Jen noticed improvements almost immediately. The focus on real-life living skills improved Henry’s sociability. Lucy, a mild-mannered girl with an infectious smile, ‘still has her say,’ but interacts more than ever and is coming out of her shell.

“The therapists have so much that keep her busy and interested. It’s unbelievable — the difference in such a short amount of time,” she said. “It’s nothing short of amazing.”

BY THE NUMBERS SPEECH/LANGUAGE SUPPORT PROGRAM

49 Therapists on staff

10 Average years of experience

1,413 Students who took part in screenings and evaluations

100% Compliance for IEP minutes

What is an IEP?

IEP is an acronym that stands for Individualized Education Program. For a child to receive special education services, they need an IEP. An IEP is a kind of map that lays out the program of special education instruction, supports, and services that child needs to make progress and thrive in school.

IEPs are provided for by law via the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). They’re created for eligible children who attend public school, including charter schools.

The vetting process begins with an evaluation that shows a student’s strengths and challenges. The results are used to create a program of services and supports tailored to meet the student’s personal needs.

To be considered, a child’s school performance must be “adversely affected” by a disability in one of 13 categories (below).

1. Specific learning disability (SLD)

This covers learning challenges that affect a child’s ability to read, write, listen, speak, reason or do math. Dyslexia and auditory processing disorder are two examples of disabilities that fit this category.

2. Other health impairments

This umbrella term covers conditions that limit a child’s strength, energy or alertness. One example is ADHD, which impacts attention, working memory, flexible thinking and inhibitory control.

3. Autism spectrum disorder (ASD)

ASD is a developmental disability. It covers a wide range of symptoms, but it mainly affects a child’s social and communication skills. It can also impact behavior.

4. Emotional disturbance

Mental health issues fall under this class, including anxiety disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder and depression.

5. Speech or language impairment

This category covers difficulties with speech or language. A common example is stuttering. Other examples are trouble pronouncing words or making sounds with the voice. It also covers language problems that make it hard for kids to understand words or express themselves.

6. Visual impairment, blindness

A child who has eyesight problems is considered to have a visual impairment. This category includes both partial sight and blindness. If eyewear can correct a vision problem, then it’s not considered an impairment.

7. Deafness

These are kids who can’t hear most or all sounds, even with a hearing aid.

8. Hearing impairment

The term “hearing impairment” refers to a hearing loss not covered by the definition



of deafness. This type of loss can change over time. Being hard of hearing is not the same thing as having trouble with auditory or language processing.

9. Deaf-blindness

Kids with a diagnosis of deaf-blindness have both severe hearing and vision loss. Their communication and other needs are so unique that programs for just the deaf or blind can’t meet them.

10. Orthopedic impairment

Kids with an orthopedic impairment lack function or ability in their bodies. An example is cerebral palsy.

11. Intellectual disability

Kids with this type of disability have below-average intellectual ability. They may also have poor communication, self-care, and social skills. Down syndrome is one example of an intellectual disability.

12. Traumatic brain injury

A brain dysfunction is caused by an outside force, usually a blow to the head, often the result of a car accident or severe sports injury.

13. Multiple disabilities

A child with multiple disabilities has more than one condition covered by IDEA. Having multiple issues creates educational needs that can’t be met in a program designed for any one disability.

ABOUT THE SPEECH/LANGUAGE SUPPORT PROGRAM

The Speech/Language Impaired Support program provides specially designed instruction to students whose impairment of language, voice, fluency or articulation is present to such a degree that academic achievement is affected. Certified specialists provide assessments as well as individual and small group therapy.

A Test of Will

Great teachers show students what can be.

BY THE NUMBERS

BVISP

47 School districts served

23 Teachers serving the program

13.4 Average years teaching

267 Combined years of teaching experience

55 Total LEAs served

100% Compliance for IEP minutes



MANDY SMITH WAS — AS SHE DESCRIBED HERSELF — A STUBBORN STUDENT.

“Over the years, I’ve had teachers I butted heads with,” she said. She would do everything in her power to avoid learning different methods of reading such as Braille. “I was angry that I was visually impaired and angry that I had to do this,” Mandy added.

“The best thing about Ms. D is that she’s stubborn too — in a good way. She has me learn things that I may not like at the beginning.” Mandy Smith, AIU student

In 7th grade, Mandy began losing the rest of her vision. “I thought to myself, ‘I could never, ever lose all my vision. That would never happen to me,’” she said. “But it did.”

That’s when Patricia D’Ascenzo, a teacher of the visually impaired with the AIU, came into the picture. Mandy says she met her match in “Ms. D.”

“The best thing about Ms. D is that she’s stubborn too,” Mandy said — in a good way. “She has me learn things that I may not like at the beginning,” Mandy said, but she feels immense pride when she resolves tasks assigned to her by D’Ascenzo. Over the past two and a half years together, Mandy has dramatically improved her academic standing and is now taking honors classes in history and English. She also plans to attend college, something she didn’t see for herself two years ago.



“She won’t take the wheel either, she’ll take the passenger’s side.”

“She’s just doing phenomenal,” D’Ascenzo said.

Mandy is now proficient in numerous forms of reading, including JAWS (Job Access With Speech), a program that allows an array of increased accessibility online from reading emails and accessing documents to online shopping.

“If it wasn’t for (D’Ascenzo) I wouldn’t be using JAWS right now,” Mandy said. “I wouldn’t be able to go on the internet and find these sources for my history papers.”

“Though she’s stubborn like me, she won’t take a backseat,” Mandy says of D’Ascenzo. “She won’t take the wheel either. She’ll take the passenger’s side.”



ABOUT BVISP

The Blind/Visually Impaired Support Program (BVISP) provides specially designed instruction to students whose visual impairment adversely affects their educational performance. Teachers of the visually impaired provide instruction in the Expanded Core Curriculum, including orientation and mobility, social interaction skills, independent living skills, recreation and leisure skills, career education, use of assistive technology, sensory efficiency skills and self-determination.



It's the Journey

PATHFINDER'S PRIDE PROGRAM FOCUSES ON LIFE SKILLS

ABOUT Pupil Services

In addition to travel training, navigation and other life skills, the AIU's Pupil Services department offers an array of services to support students who may be experiencing a significant life crisis, trauma or other areas that impact learning. Licensed social workers and certified school psychologists work with educational teams to assist students and their families as they navigate a variety of challenges.

WITH MORE THAN 90 NEIGHBORHOODS and a seemingly greater number of bridges, the roads in Pittsburgh and the surrounding communities can be confusing. Even Savannah Stophel, 18, who has lived in the Eastern Pittsburgh region all her life, didn't have much experience finding her way around the city.

But thanks to the AIU, Savannah and five of her classmates were able to venture around the county with the help of Port Authority, that has a trolley route right by The Pathfinder School in Bethel Park. Their destination: the Andy Warhol Museum on the North Shore.

Savannah can take this trip as part of The Pathfinder School's PRIDE program, which provides essential hard and soft skills training for high-functioning students with disabilities. Each weekday, students focus on different life skills, including developing and maintaining healthy relationships, healthy living, travel instruction, career communications and more.

"I think one of the big things (about AIU) is it gets them out of their comfort zone," said PRIDE teacher Shanie Lininger. "They're faced with having discussions about what they should be doing in a variety of situations and talking through their issues... (PRIDE is) putting that into practice."

AIU travel trainer Michael Beigay makes weekly trips with students to a variety of places across the region, from local landmarks to grocery stores and other typical destinations.

With map-in-hand, Savannah led the way among the group on the light rail's Blue Line. Once they reached their final rail stop, she once again gestured and marched along with her peers to the connecting bus stop. Soon enough, they were right in front of the museum.

"I like that it's a new place every week," Savannah said, wondering where next week will take them.

PRIDE stands for:

- Personal maintenance.
- Recreation and leisure opportunities.
- Independence in the community.
- Domestic living skills.
- Employment and training opportunities.



"I think one of the big things about PRIDE is it gets them out of their comfort zone."

Shanie Lininger, AIU teacher



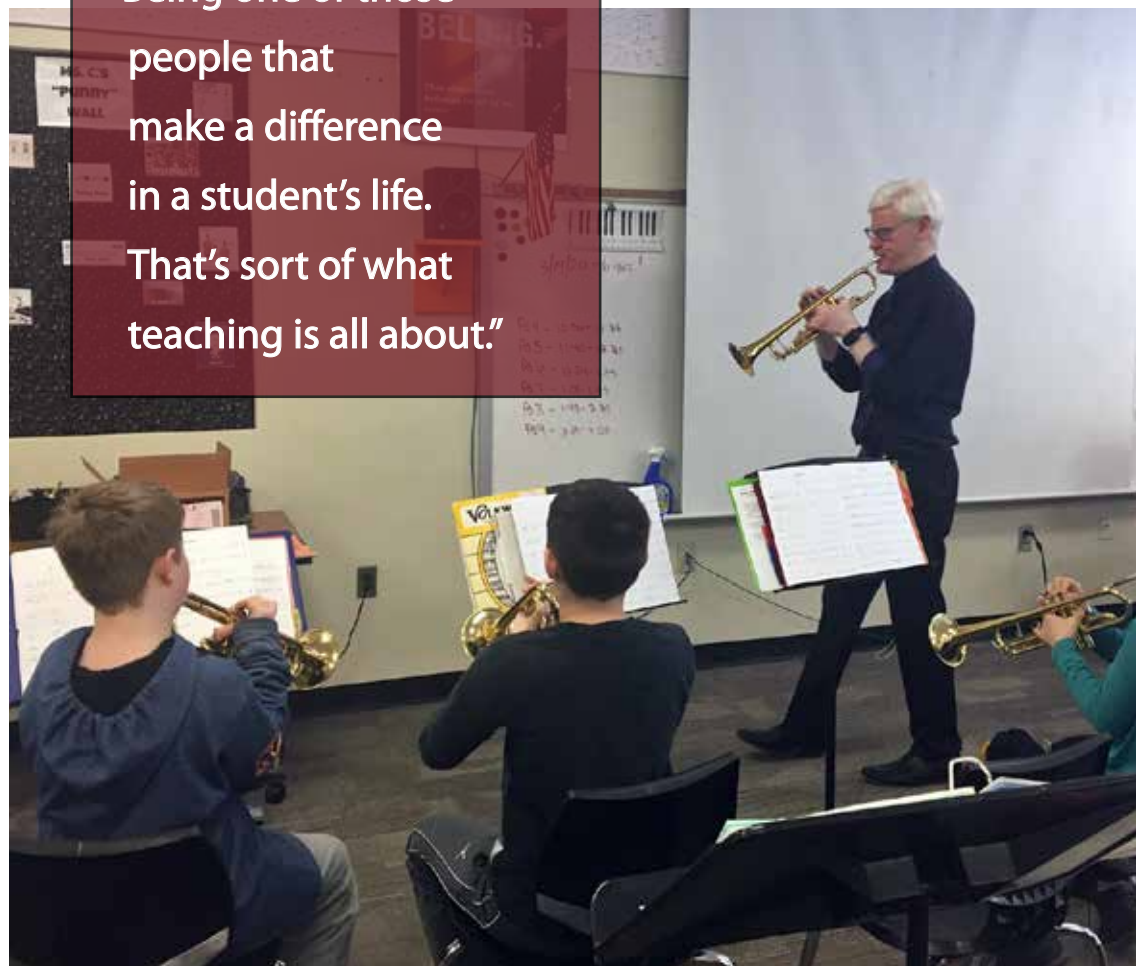
BY THE NUMBERS
Pupil Services

- 15 Clinical staff
- 246 Combined years of school-based experience
- 16.4 Average years of experience
- 190 Combined years of service with AIU
- 11.9 Average length of years in current assignment
- 100% Compliance for IEP timelines



VISION + SOUND

“Being one of those people that make a difference in a student’s life. That’s sort of what teaching is all about.”



DEEP DOWN, Gareth Allegrucci always knew he wanted to have a career involving music, despite his assumption of going into architecture or engineering.

Not only did he play with sounds as long as he can remember (he plays three instruments) but when the time came to choose electives as a sophomore at Baldwin High School, he looked at nothing but music classes.

“This is a sign that I should be considering something else,” he recalls thinking at the time.

It was a turning point, and years later he’s made it a passion he shares with countless other students.

GARETH IS NOW A MIDDLE SCHOOL INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC TEACHER at Baltimore County Public Schools in Maryland. He graduated with a degree in music education with a focus on piano from Duquesne University 2019.

Gareth, who has lived with a visual impairment all his life, received services from the AIU’s Blind and Visually Impaired Support Program throughout his primary and secondary education.

Looking back, Gareth says the vision services he received from the AIU, including orientation and mobility instruction, prepared him to venture out of Pittsburgh and into another big city.

As an elementary school student, Gareth remembers learning basic navigation skills around small spaces with his visual support teachers. As he got older, he began practicing using public transit throughout Pittsburgh. Now, it’s an essential skill Gareth is utilizing to get around the Baltimore metropolitan area.

“I was really lucky in the services I had,” Gareth said. “I would stick with a lot of the same people for multiple years at a time. Building those relationships with those same people was super beneficial,” he said. “

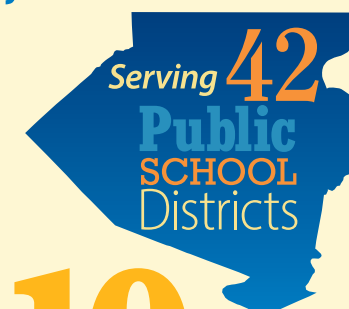
Having that support from AIU staff, Gareth said, became integral to his early learning years. “They became people you can go to. You can tell that they cared,” he said.

Gareth now suspects that approach has rubbed off on him and his career. “It’s probably a subconscious thing for me that the AIU staff I interacted with when I was younger — and their care and compassion — probably carried over into my teaching,” he said.



“They became people you can go to. You can tell that they cared.”

AIU BY THE NUMBERS





ALLEGHENY INTERMEDIATE UNIT

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