The Department of Special Education
Family Support Center
John Carroll Administration Building
1400 Nalley Terrace
Landover, MD 20805

14th Annual Parent Empowerment Conference

Stronger Together: Empowering Families of Children with Disabilities



Virtual Conference Series

March 18, 2025 - May 01, 2025

Please see the schedule of events for the link to join your selected sessions.

Join us as we continue this journey together!

Schedule of Events

Date	Session Title	Presenter	Time	Audience	Virtual Live/Recorded	Zoom Link
Tuesday, March 18, 2025	Unlocking the power of databases: from homework struggles to success!	Catherine Francoeur	6:30 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.	Pre-K-21	Live	https://pgcps-org.zoom.us/meeting/register/M_ysfSj5TlSX007X8SdKOA
Wednesday, March 19, 2025	Attention, Working Memory, and Initiative	Miguel Reyes	6:30 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.	Pre- K- 21	Live	https://pgcps-org.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZcsceqrrzMrGdRDd-mZj7zqhR6OJokOt0CN
Thursday, March 20, 2025	Understanding Autism/Who is Pathfinders for Autism	Neal Lichter	6:30 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.	Pre- K- 21	Live	https://pgcps-org.zoom.us/meeting/register/a7qJOMdiRPeo0SitsLS-zw
Wednesday, March 26, 2025	Autism, ADHD, Sensory Processing, and Kids	Jacki Edry	12:00 p.m. - 1:30 p.m.	Pre- K- 21	Live	https://pgcps-org.zoom.us/meeting/register/7h8-ZxCmQdOxpb11ntty3g
Wednesday, March 26, 2025	Cuando Se Escapan o Caminan Sin Sentido	Gicel Martinez, Rosa Lily, Officer Laurie Reyes	12:00 p.m.	Pre- K- 21	Pre-Recorded	https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCt8Zw1SzUQrwC4z3qnCUU9Q/
Saturday, March 29, 2025	3rd Annual Autism Summit	Various Presenters	8:45 a.m. - 3:15 p.m.	Pre- K- 21	In-Person John Carroll Administration Building	Register - https://pathfindersforautism.org/strongertogether2025/

Date	Session Title	Presenter	Time	Audience	Virtual Live/Recorded	Zoom Link
Wednesday, April 02, 2025	Something is Definitely Off with My Child... Understanding ADHD, Neurodiversity, and Executive Functioning	Brandi Walker	6:30 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.	Pre- K- 21	Live	https://pgcps-org.zoom.us/meeting/register/ZxsNy_-FTKC3zyEqq_r2gQ
Wednesday, April 02, 2025	When they Wander or Run Away	Officer Laurie Reyes and Shelly McLaughlin	12:00 p.m.	Pre- K- 21	Pre-Recorded	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bykz8-tRHMM
Thursday, April 03, 2025	Part 1: Trauma Awareness & Building Stronger Communities Part 2: School Safety and Threat Assessment	Scott Showalter	6:30 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.	Pre- K- 21	Live	https://pgcps-org.zoom.us/meeting/register/1--vw6pQTAuib4IaUHjOPg
Tuesday, April 08, 2025	Becoming a Holistic Family Advocate, It all begins with Vision and Security- (An Introduction and Overview to Circle of Security)	Abila Tazanu	6:30 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.	Pre- K- 21	Live	https://pgcps-org.zoom.us/meeting/register/sqBN_qY8THim5fv3BzkCnw
Wednesday, April 23, 2025	Stronger Together: How Collaboration Between the Office of Equity, Diversity, and Belonging & the Department of Special Education Supports Student Success	Marson Richardson OEDB	6:30 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.	Pre- K- 21	Live	https://pgcps-org.zoom.us/meeting/register/Q4y_xDrzRtOgjg_u_Yt-PA

Date	Session Title	Presenter	Time	Audience	Virtual Live/Recorded	Zoom Link
Tuesday, April 29, 2025	Sensory Processing Differences (SPD): What Out-of-Sync Kids Want Their Parents to Know	Carol Stock Kranowitz, M.A.	6:30 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.	Pre-K-21	Live	https://pgcps-org.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZwsdemrqj4vEtFvLlq1Q9ZJB6DlTeuup10N
Thursday, May 01, 2025	You've Got a Friend in Me	na'im madyun	6:30 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.	Pre-K-21	Live	https://pgcps-org.zoom.us/meeting/register/GM16zkKYSvyI6b_xfsu12g



Session Descriptions

Keynote Presenter: Carol Stock Kranowitz, M.A.

Keynote Session Title: Sensory Processing Differences (SPD): What Out-of-Sync Kids Want Their Parents to Know

Description:
"Out-of-sync" children with sensory challenges may be bewildered by the world as well as bewildering to their grown-ups. This presentation will review the ways Sensory Processing Differences play out, describe how kids strive to get — or get away from — certain sensory stimuli, and offer fun and functional strategies to help children get in sync.

Presenter: Jacki Eldry

Session Title: Autism, ADHD, Sensory Processing, and Kids: A look at how the senses affect your child's sense of well-being, behaviors, and daily life.

Description:
All people, whether they be neurotypical or neurodistinct, rely on their brain's ability to perceive and process sensory information to understand their environment and interact with the people around them. Join in to learn more about the senses and how they affect people diagnosed with autism, ADHD, sensory and auditory processing disorder, and more. In addition, Jacki will offer suggestions for coping with diagnosis and navigating the educational system. There will be a Q/A session at the end of the presentation.

Presenters: Catherine Francoeur

Session Title: Unlocking the power of databases: from homework struggles to success!

Description:
This session introduces a variety of educational databases to help parents support their child's learning and homework. These resources offer access to reliable, up-to-date information across subjects like science, history, math, and more. With easy-to-navigate tools and engaging content, these databases are designed to empower both parents and students in finding the right information to enhance learning and academic success.

Session Descriptions

Presenters: Neal Lichter

Session Title: Understanding Autism/Who is Pathfinders for Autism

Description:
1 in 43 children in Maryland are diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Undoubtedly, you are interacting with someone with Autism whether in your home, your neighborhood, your school, or your workplace. Understanding ASD is one way to improve your interactions with someone on the spectrum.

Presenters: na'im madyun

Session Title: You've Got a Friend in Me

Description:
There are so many safety, emotional health, professional, and family implications related to the existence and quality of friendships. Identifying good friends is a huge challenge in our society in general. Having a disability makes discernment even more complicated. This session focuses on developing, maintaining, and evaluating friendships for individuals with disabilities.

Presenters: Officer Laurie Reyes and Shelly McLaughlin

Session Title: When They Wander or Run Away

Description:
This webinar addresses reasons why individuals might elope, safety preventive measures parents and caregivers can put into place, and what information is most beneficial for police if your loved one goes missing.

Presenters: Dr. Miguel Reyes

Session Title: Attention, Working Memory, and Initiative

Description:
Attention, working memory, and initiation are considered "cogwheels of learning." Participants will gain insights on how supporting each cogwheel can make a difference in learning.

Session Descriptions

Presenters: Marson Richardson, Jason Ray, and Stephanie Bailey

Session Title: Stronger Together: How Collaboration Between the Office of Equity, Diversity, and Belonging & the Department of Special Education Supports Student Success

Description:
Join us for an engaging session on how the Department of Special Education and the Office of Equity, Diversity, and Belonging are working together to foster more inclusive and supportive learning environments. Participants will gain valuable insights into how these efforts drive positive change at the school level and support student success.

Presenters: Scott Showalter

Session Title: Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) & Resiliency Building

Description:
Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are traumatic events that occur in a child's life, such as physical or sexual abuse, neglect, household dysfunction, or witnessing violence. Research has shown that these types of experiences have a direct impact on children's developing brains and immune systems, increasing the risk for negative health and well-being outcomes as an adult. Adverse childhood experiences are common and cut across demographics such as income level, race, and culture. This presentation will provide participants with an in-depth look at the impact of ACEs on health and well-being, as well as explore factors that increase resiliency. Participants will leave with a deeper understanding of ACES and what it means to help build and support resilient self-healing communities.

Presenter: Abila Tazanu, M.D.

Session Title: HAPE Hour: Becoming a Holistic Family Advocate, It all begins with Vision and Security

Description:
An Introduction and Overview to the Circle of Security- Spectrum of Hope

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Session Descriptions

Presenter: Dr. Brandi Walker

Session Title: Something Is Definitely Off with My Child...Understanding ADHD, Neurodiversity, and Executive Functioning

Description:
Are you repeating yourself multiple times when you ask your child to complete a chore? Is it common for your child to remember 1-2 things from a list of 5? Does your child have trouble starting a task, staying on task, or completing a task? Neurodiversity represents a handful of brain-related conditions that develop during early childhood. These conditions are often the result of differences in how the brain's major functional areas work together. Sounds confusing? A little, if you've never heard of executive functioning. The brain has 8 major types that directly impact thinking, emotions, mood, and yes, behavior. This presentation will help parents understand how their child's choices and actions can be undermined by an undiagnosed neurodiversity condition. Even if your child has been given a diagnosis such as ADHD, specific learning impairment, or autism spectrum disorder, do you understand what it means, how to manage, and what it will take to be successful? Join us for an informed conversation around neurodiversity and executive functioning and how to help your child overcome challenges of this nature and thrive.



Presenter Bios

Carol Stock Kranowitz, M.A.

When she was a preschool teacher, Carol observed many "out-of-sync" children with Sensory Processing Differences (SPD). To help these children participate in ordinary experiences at home and school, Carol learned to identify their sensory challenges and steer them into early intervention. The seminal book in her "Sync" series is “The Out-of-Sync Child: Recognizing and Coping with Sensory Processing Differences.” Her mission is to empower parents and teachers to incorporate joyful sensory-motor experiences into the daily life of every child.

Stephanie Bailey

Stephanie Bailey (she/her) is a dedicated Equity Coach in the Prince George's County Public Schools Office of Equity, Diversity, and Belonging, where she works to build equitable spaces where students and staff feel welcome and affirmed. Her journey in education began 16 years ago as a Head Start Teacher in PGCPS, igniting her passion for creating equitable learning environments.

With extensive experience as an Instructional Specialist in the Early Childhood Office, Stephanie brings valuable insights to her role. She holds a Master's in Early Childhood Curriculum and Instruction.

Outside of work, Stephanie can be found at home playing a mean game of Uno with her two children and spouse. She takes pride in her role as a wife, mother, and dog parent, and she can't remember the last time all the laundry was finished.

Jacki Edry

Jacki Edry published her first book, Moving Forward: Reflections on Autism, Neurodiversity, Brain Surgery, and Faith, in 2021. Shortly after that, she launched her blog. She enjoys consulting and teaching about neurodiversity and sensory processing to a wide range of audiences.

Jacki is a Hampshire College graduate with many years of experience in education, writing, lecturing, and marketing. She has been exploring the world of autism and neurodiversity for close to forty years.

Jacki is also neurodivergent and a survivor of complex brain surgery, which greatly affected her sensory and perceptual abilities. Her children have been diagnosed with varying forms of neurodivergence, including autism, ADHD, Auditory and Sensory

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Processing Disorder, Irlen syndrome, dyslexia, and more. Sharing her insights and understanding of neurodiversity has been the driving force behind her work.

Jacki has also spent many years advocating for inclusion and educational reform.
Her work as a neurodiversity advocate has been recognized worldwide, and in 2023, she was chosen as one of the top 50 Neurodiversity Evangelists by ND by design, powered by Dynamis.

Jacki was born and raised in NY. Upon completing her studies, she made Aliyah to Israel, where she resides with her husband, children, and dogs.

To learn more about Jacki's work and ideas, please visit:
Blog and website: www.jackisbooks.com.
LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/in/jacki-edry-7583346/
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/jackisbooks

Direct link to book on Amazon.com:
https://www.amazon.com/Moving-Forward-Reflections-Neurodiversity-Surgery/dp/9655995232/

"Moving Forward" is also available on Ingram Spark

Catherine Francoeur

With over 23 years of experience at PGCPS, Catherine has spent the last 21 years in the Professional Library, where she plays a key role in managing our library automation system and providing essential support to our talented school librarians. Passionate about empowering educators and students, she actively visits schools to introduce and guide staff in the effective use of our diverse range of databases. Whether it's optimizing systems or enhancing research capabilities, she's dedicated to fostering an environment where information is accessible, organized, and impactful.

Neal Litcher

Neal Lichter joined Pathfinders for Autism in October of 2013. As a trainer, Neal has provided an Understanding of ASD training since 2014. Audiences include students from kindergarten to college, educators, police, first responders, medical personnel, and many others across the state of Maryland. Neal is also responsible for helping to plan many of the workshops that Pathfinders for Autism collaborates on around Maryland. Neal is married, with two sons, one of whom has Autism.

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na'im madyun

na'im madyun is a school psychologist in Prince George's County Public Schools. Prior to working in Prince George's County Public Schools, Mr. Madyun was a family engagement instructional coach for Intermediate District 287 in Plymouth, MN. Serving at both the K-12 and postsecondary levels, Mr. Madyun has over 20 years of experience as an educator.

Jason Ray

Jason Ray (he/him) is an Equity Coach in the Office of Equity, Diversity, and Belonging for Prince George's County Public Schools. In this position, he works with central offices and school teams on programs and professional development to support the PGCPS Equity Plan. This work primarily involves helping stakeholders to identify, analyze, and attack disparities for specific groups of students and staff, with a focus on centering historically marginalized groups. This role also provides direct support in creating more inclusive and culturally responsive schools and offices. Prior to this role, Jason was an Assistant Principal, Academic Resource Teacher, and classroom teacher, all at the high school level. He holds a Bachelor of Arts in English Language and Literature from the University of Maryland College Park, and a Juris Doctor from The Catholic University of America Columbus School of Law.

Dr. Miguel Reyes

Dr. Miguel Reyes has an M.S. in Educational Psychology from the University of Albany, Albany, NY, and an M.S. in Marriage Family Therapy and a Ph.D. Family Psychology from the Graduate School of Psychology, Pasadena CA. He was an Adjunct Professor at the University of La Verne, La Verne, CA. He completed postdoctoral training in School Psychology (California State University) and in Applied Behavior Analysis (Florida Institute of Technology). Dr. Reyes was the Lead School Psychologist for Adult Correctional Education, Maryland Department of Labor. He is a father of a child with Autism.

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Marson Richardson

Marson Richardson is an Equity Coach with the Office of Equity, Diversity, and Belonging, dedicated to fostering inclusive and equitable learning environments. With over 20 years of experience as an educator, Marson has led efforts to advance culturally responsive practices and systemic change in schools. Passionate about empowering educators and students, Marson works to dismantle barriers and promote educational equity for all.

Scott Showalter

Scott Showalter, Ed.S., is a national award-winning school psychologist who received his undergraduate degree from the University of Michigan and his graduate degree from the University of Kansas. He has over 18 years of experience working in Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS), where he now serves as the Coordinator of Psychological Services. Specializing in behavioral consultation, crisis preparedness, response and recovery, non-suicidal self-injury, and suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention, Mr. Showalter often serves as one of the primary points of contact in the school system for behavioral health services and initiatives. He has delivered hundreds of presentations on topics related to ADHD, behavior management, crisis response, non-suicidal self-injury, suicide prevention, and trauma.

Abila Tazanu, M.D.

Dr. Abila Tazanu is a pediatrician with more than 20 years of health and community service provision. She is a mother of five inspiring adult children, three of whom have autism and related co-existing emotional and health concerns. She serves as Spectrum of Hope's Lead Medical Guide/Consultant, where she pursues her passion for enhancing the lives of those living with ASD and related different abilities while enriching the communities in which we live! Abila received her B.S. in Microbiology and Doctor of Medicine from Howard University in Washington, D.C. through an accelerated B.S.- M.D. Program. She then completed her pediatric residency at Inova Fairfax Hospital/University of Virginia. A native of Washington, D.C., raised by parents who immigrated from West Africa and the Caribbean, she now resides in Maryland. Her cultural background and personal struggles to identify and support her own children created the vision for the One World Center for Autism, Inc. (a non-profit) where she served as director for 14 years. Her drive to give hope and genuine support continues to fuel her passion for helping individuals living with autism and related special needs in a more focused and

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holistic manner. Her vision is to create a standard of comprehensive medical care and linkages to therapeutic interventions for all individuals on the neurodiverse spectrum, which incorporates family support, individual support, and community awareness. To fulfill this vision, she obtained certification as a Charting the Life Course Ambassador and actively seeks community collaborations and partnerships that foster greater hope, health, and happiness for all.

Brandi Walker

Brandi Walker is the founder of Villages Overcoming Intersections: the Collaborative Empowerment (V.O.I.C.E.) for Neurodiversity, focused on research and developing culturally conscious/culturally sensitive training for professionals who provide support to neurodiverse individuals. She also has a private practice dedicated to providing educational, clinical, and psychological guidance and expertise to organizations seeking to improve their social climate and enhance their diversity/equity awareness. She is an alumna of Howard University and the University of Maryland and a former Army clinical psychologist and faculty member at Womack Army Medical Center at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. She recently retired from active duty but still conducts research with Service Members. Dr. Walker spent the last eight years working with various hospitals, clinics, and schools, conducting research on children with ADHD, their families, and various sleep variables and environmental factors. She collaboratively initiated the Prince George's County Maryland CHADD chapter and the Southern Regional Support Center.

In Partnership with:

This event was sponsored by the Department of Special Education and The Family Support Center.

PATHFINDERS FOR AUTISM

the parents' place of Maryland

SECAC-PG
Special Education Citizens Advisory Committee for Prince George's County Public Schools

SPECTRUM OF HOPE