

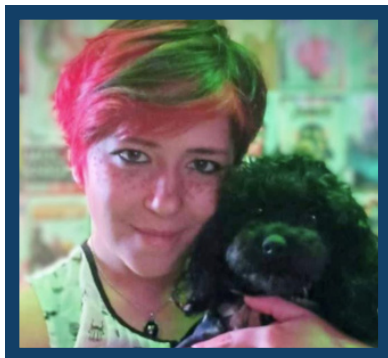
STUDENT SERVICES NEWSLETTER

SPECIAL EDUCATION AND PUPIL SERVICES



INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- Getting to know the Secretary to the Director of Student Services
- Pennsylvania Alternate System of Assessment (PASA)
- Spotlight on School Psychologist



**Beth McNerlin, Secretary
Department of Student Services**

...Welcome...

**Beth McNerlin
Secretary
Department of Student Services**

Beth McNerlin is the new secretary for the Department of Student Services at Mount Union Area School District.

Ms. McNerlin has an Associate's Degree in both liberal arts and sciences and cybersecurity from Penn Highlands Community College

Ms. McNerlin previously held the position of Admissions Operations Assistant at Juniata College. Ms. McNerlin states that she is incredibly excited to be working at the Mount Union Area School District in her new role, as well as having the opportunity to make a difference for children receiving resources from the Department of Student Services, however small.

Ms. McNerlin currently resides in Cassville with her long-term partner Morgan and their friend and roommate Hunter, as well as a chaotic puppy named Stormy, a lazy cat named CinCin, and a moody African gray parrot named Noel.

When Ms. McNerlin is not working, she enjoys spending time outside, enjoying films, attending concerts, and playing with Stormy.

Pennsylvania Alternate System of Assessment (PASA)

MUASD

**STUDENT SERVICES NEWSLETTER
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The Individuals with Disabilities Act of 2004 (IDEA) requires that States and Local Education Agencies (LEAs) ensure that all children with disabilities are included in all general state and district-wide assessment programs, including assessments used for purposes of satisfying the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). If necessary, a state may create an alternate assessment.

The Pennsylvania Alternate System of Assessment Dynamic Learning Maps (PASA DLM) was developed in accordance with this allowance to meet the needs of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who are not able to participate in the general assessment even with accommodations. The PASA DLM is aligned with Pennsylvania's academic content standards with a reduction in depth, breadth and complexity and measures the attainment of knowledge and skills of children with the most significant cognitive disabilities. Like the state-wide general standardized assessments (PSSA and Keystone Exams), the purpose of the PASA DLM is to provide information to school districts and other educational service providers that will aid them in improving instruction for children and meet Pennsylvania's accountability requirements for reporting student achievement.

PENNSYLVANIA ALTERNATE SYSTEM OF ASSESSMENT DYNAMIC LEARNING MAPS (PASA DLM)

The PA Alternate System of Assessment Dynamic Learning Maps (PASA DLM) are adaptive alternate assessments for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities for whom general state assessments are not appropriate, even with accommodations. Eligibility for participation in PASA DLM is determined by the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team. The IEP team reviews participation in statewide assessments annually using the PASA Eligibility Criteria: Decision Making Companion Tool and determines whether the student will participate in the general assessment or the PASA DLM. The IEP Team must answer "YES" to all six PASA eligibility criteria in order to participate in the alternate assessment.

PASA DLM assessments offer students with the most significant cognitive disabilities a way to show what they know and can do in English Language Arts, mathematics, and science. The assessments can also help parents and educators set high academic expectations for their students. Results from PASA DLM assessments can be used to inform instruction and meet Pennsylvania's accountability requirements for reporting student achievement.

PASA DLM assessments are designed to maximize accessibility for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. Students taking DLM assessments have access to unique accessibility tools and supports that meet their needs and preferences. Some tools and supports are built into the online assessment system while others are provided by the teacher. Educators and IEP teams decide which tools and supports students need.

PASA DLM is aligned to grade-level standards and Essential Elements. Essential Elements are reduced in depth, breadth, and complexity. Students eligible for the PASA DLM receive instruction aligned to Essential Elements, and the IEP must include standards-aligned goals and objectives. Explore Understanding Standards Aligned Instruction (PDF) for more information. Access more information about PASA DLM including essential elements, instructional, assessment and professional development resources at www.dynamiclearningmaps.org/pennsylvania. View essential elements, grade level standards, and mini-maps on the Standards Aligned System at www.pdesas.org.

PASA Eligibility Criteria:

Decision Making Companion Tool

The PASA Eligibility Criteria: Decision Making Companion Tool is a resource provided to individualized education program (IEP) teams in Pennsylvania to assist in determining eligibility for the Pennsylvania Alternate System of Assessment (PASA). The PASA is appropriate for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who meet all six requirements listed below. Additional considerations are provided that further define the criteria and assist the IEP team in decision making. Factors that the IEP team should not consider in eligibility determination are also identified.

The IEP team must answer “YES” to **all** six criteria in order for the student to participate in the PASA. If the answer is “NO” to any of the questions, the student must participate in the PSSA/Keystones with or without accommodations, as determined appropriate by the IEP team.

1

____ YES

Will the student be in grade 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, or 11 by September 1 of the school year during which the IEP will be operative?

Additional consideration:

The grade level listed for the student in the Pennsylvania Information Management System (PIMS) and the PASA digital system must correlate to the assessment decision documented in the current IEP.

2

____ YES

Does the student have significant cognitive disabilities?
Pennsylvania defines significant cognitive disabilities as pervasive and global in nature, affecting student learning in all academic content areas, as well as adaptive behaviors and functional skills across life domains.

Additional consideration:

A significant cognitive disability is not directly defined by a Chapter 14 disability category. Typically students with a primary disability category of Specific Learning Disability or Speech Language Impairment DO NOT meet the definition of a significant cognitive disability. Generally, a student with a significant cognitive disability may be characterized as having intellectual functioning below average – cognitive measures of intelligence 2.5 to 3.0 standard deviations below the mean.

3

____ YES

Does the student require intensive, direct, and repeated instruction in order to learn and generalize academic, functional, and adaptive behavior skills across multiple settings?

Additional consideration:

The student's course of study includes functional skills. Instruction typically occurs in a one-to-one or small group setting with opportunity to generalize and transfer skills across multiple settings.

4

____ YES

Does the student require extensive adaptation and support in order to perform and/or participate meaningfully and productively in the everyday life activities of integrated school, home, community, and work environments?

Additional consideration:

A significant cognitive disability is pervasive, affecting student functioning across all academic, social, and community settings. The student is expected to require intensive and ongoing supports after graduation.

5

____ YES

Does the student require substantial modifications to the general education curriculum?

Additional consideration:

Substantial modifications change the content expectation by a significant reduction in depth, breadth, and complexity of grade-level standards as exemplified in the Alternate Eligible Content.

6

____ YES

Does the student's participation in the general curriculum differ substantially in form and/or substance from that of most other students? Students found eligible to take the PASA must have measurable annual goals and short-term objectives reflected in the IEP.

Additional consideration:

Students with the most significant cognitive disabilities likely require objectives, materials, prompting hierarchies, and teaching modalities different from the general education curriculum. The student's goals and objectives typically reflect the Alternate Eligible Content.

PASA eligibility determinations are NOT based on:

- IQ score or disability category alone (i.e., All students with an intellectual disability do not automatically qualify for the alternate assessment.)
- English Learner (EL) Status
- Poor attendance
- Expected poor performance on the general assessments
- Educational environment or instructional setting
- Low reading or achievement level
- Anticipated disruptive behavior or emotional duress
- Impact of scores on accountability system
- Administrative decision



MUASD SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST

HEIDI MYERS

SPOTLIGHT ON SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY AT MOUNT UNION AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT

At the Mount Union Area School District, we believe all children can learn and deserve to feel emotionally safe at school. Our school psychologist plays a vital role in helping students achieve academically, socially, emotionally, and behaviorally—while also supporting families, educators, and administrators in creating positive and supportive learning environments.

WHAT IS A SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST?

School psychologists are highly trained professionals in both psychology and education. They are certified by the state and complete advanced graduate training, including a year-long internship. Their expertise includes child development, mental health, learning processes, motivation, and effective teaching strategies.

WHAT WE DO AT MUASD...

While involved in all of the above functions, our school psychologist focuses most on two key responsibilities:

1. Consulting with parents and teachers through Child Study and Student Assistance Team meetings.
2. Conducting evaluations to determine if students qualify for special education, a 504 plan, or gifted support.

In addition, the school psychologist provides direct intervention during times of crisis and works closely with administrators to promote a healthy school climate.

AT A GLANCE.....

School psychologists provide a wide range of services to support students, families, and schools, including:

- Consultation: Collaborating with teachers, parents, and administrators to address learning or behavior concerns and strengthen connections between home, school, and community.
- Evaluation: Assessing academic skills, social-emotional development, and determining eligibility for special services such as special education, 504 plans, or gifted support.
- Intervention: Offering short-term counseling, crisis support, and skill-building in areas such as social skills and conflict resolution.
- Prevention: Designing programs to promote tolerance, diversity, and safe learning environments.
- Research & Planning: Using data and evidence-based strategies to improve academic and behavioral supports across the district.

Additional Information

School Psychologist

How Can Families Get Support?

If you have concerns about your child's educational progress, please begin by reaching out to your child's teacher or school counselor. From there, a Child Study Team meeting may be scheduled, bringing together educators, parents, and support staff to discuss strategies and determine whether a formal evaluation is needed.

Related Services

The district also provides psychological counseling as a related service for students with disabilities, as determined by the IEP team. These services are offered at no cost to families and are designed to help students benefit fully from their educational program.

At Mount Union, our school psychologist is here to ensure every child feels supported, understood, and ready to thrive—both in school and beyond.



Contact:

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MUASD

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Contact Information

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Homeless Liaison**

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**Appointments can be
scheduled**



**"WORKING TOGETHER TO
ACHIEVE STUDENT SUCCESS"**

PaTTAN TECHNOLOGY ADVENTURE



for Students with Hearing & Vision Needs

Connecting students, families, and educators with supporting community partners to explore assistive technology (AT) in your own region.



Monday, Oct 13

Western PA School for the Deaf



Tuesday, Nov 18

PaTTAN East



Thursday, Nov 20

PaTTAN Central

REGISTER NOW



www.pattan.net/events