May Center School for autism and developmental disabilities

WEST SPRINGFIELD,
MASSACHUSETTS

MAY CENTER SCHOOL:

Belonging

Learning

Pride

Opportunity

MAY CENTER SCHOOL: *Belonging*

Welcome to the May Center School!

The May Center School for Autism and Developmental Disabilities in West Springfield, Mass., offers an ideal environment for children and adolescents with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and other special needs to learn and grow. It is a school where students establish a strong foundation to build a meaningful life.

We provide full-day, year-round educational and vocational services for children and adolescents from preschool to age 22, using proven methods of treatment and teaching based on the latest clinical and applied research. The May Center School is a Massachusetts Chapter-766 approved school.

May Center School Snapshot

Age range:	3–22 years
Clinical Method:	Applied behavior analysis (ABA)
Educational Method:	Evidence-based academic curricula provided in small groups and 1:1 instruction
Staff-Student Ratio:	1:1
Length of program:	Full-day, 12-month

The journey through childhood and adolescence is a unique experience, filled with joy, challenges, accomplishments, and countless opportunities for learning.

For children with ASD and other developmental disabilities, and their families, the journey includes unexpected turns and unfamiliar territory. It requires structure, patience, love, guidance, and knowledge to meet the challenges that will inevitably arise.

For nearly 70 years, May Institute has been guided by its mission of providing compassionate care and helping families navigate the challenges—and celebrate the successes—of their children's journeys through the complex world of autism and related disabilities.

At the May Center School, we focus on building communication, social, behavioral, vocational, and academic skills. Working together with families to prepare for the transition to adulthood, and utilizing the considerable resources available to us, our caring professionals help each child to reach his or her highest potential.

BRIDGET ANDERSON, M.ED., BCBA

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

ABA: Effective and Individualized

Applied behavior analysis (ABA) is the application of principles of learning to achieve mean-ingful outcomes. It is a well-developed discipline that is used by many professionals.

ABA emphasizes direct observation, objective measurement, and evaluation of the effects of assessments and interventions to be sure they are having the desired outcome.

At May Institute, we use the principles of ABA to support individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and their families to:

- Learn to communicate and interact with others
- Develop self-control and self- management skills
- Learn skills of daily living such as dressing and using the bathroom
- Learn to play independently and with others
- Increase academic skills such as reading and math
- Decrease challenging behavior such as self-injury or aggression
- Build independence

Decades of Expertise in Autism

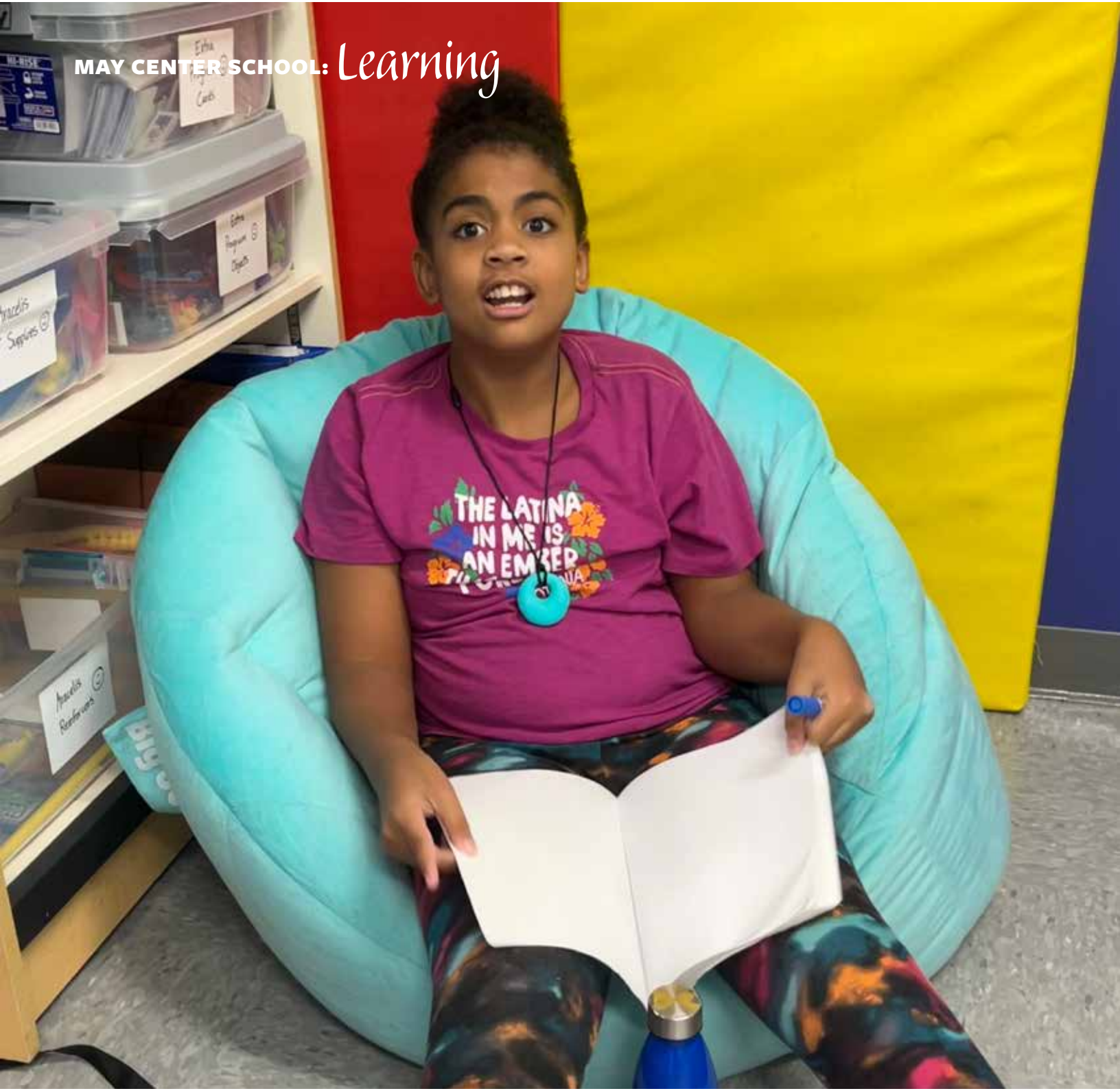
Providing the highest quality, research-based services for children and adolescents with autism has been a major focus of May Institute since the founding of the first May school in the 1950s.

Our school welcomes students whose needs require a highly specialized program delivered by caring and trained professionals. The primary diagnosis of our students is autism, and we provide individualized educational instruction and behavioral intervention to meet the varying abilities and needs of all the children we serve.

Our staff members are uniquely qualified to provide the level of specialized care that enables each child to make significant and ongoing improvements in behavior, functional skills, communication, and social skills. These improvements result from tireless work combined with our uncompromising commitment to the highest standards.

May Center School staff include:

- Bachelor's- and Master's-level instructors
- All staff thoroughly trained in ABA
- Master's-level behavior specialists
- Licensed special education teachers
- Allied health professionals (occupational therapy, physical therapy, and speech and language pathology)
- On-site school nursing


MAY CENTER SCHOOL: Learning

The Learning Experience—From Preschool to Adulthood

From the first day a child enters one of our classrooms, we begin to carefully create a personal learning experience, assessing needs and developing specific goals and objectives. We regularly measure progress, re-evaluating and adjusting each individual program, as necessary, in order to constantly challenge, motivate, and encourage.

Our teachers work with students in small groups and one-on-one, employing an evidence-based applied behavior analytic approach. Each student has a comprehensive plan that includes details on implementing his or her Individualized Education Program (IEP). Teachers and behavior specialists record data daily, noting the child's challenges and progress with developmental, behavioral, and educational goals.

Improving communication skills is an integral component of most students' IEPs. All students have access to individualized functional communication systems, including speech generating devices (e.g., tablets), sound imitation, sign language, and picture exchange communication system (PECS).

Promoting Language, Play, and Social Skills

At the May Center School, we strive to provide the most meaningful environment for children to acquire and expand their language, play, and social skills. Rather than using artificial settings, staff use the natural context of play, social interactions, and daily routines to develop these skills.

Classrooms have 1:1 student-staff ratios. Our highly trained staff utilize the most effective methods of working with children with autism. Classroom activities emphasize all areas of a child's development, including communication, language, social, school-readiness, self-care, and play skills.

Academics

The May Center School offers an individualized, developmentally appropriate curriculum for all its students. Staff work closely with families and school districts to prepare children for more independent living and, ideally, for a successful transition to a less restrictive setting.

Teachers develop goals and objectives that specify observable, measurable skills for the child. They combine the best practices of child development, special education, speech pathology, and physical and occupational therapy. Our staff continually evaluate and adjust each child's program to ensure the greatest progress possible, and guide parents on the principles of ABA to ensure continuity across settings.

An Inside Look: Facility Highlights

- Bright, new facility with large classrooms
- Cafeteria, gross motor skills room, sensory room, adaptive gymnasium, computer lab, library, media center, and game/music room
- Vocational and employment program, including a life-skills apartment suite
- 17,500-square-foot space
- 2,000-square-foot outdoor play area

Use of Technology

Technology plays a critical role in enhancing our students' educational experience. Each classroom has computers and iPads augment the school's educational program. The school houses a computer lab, and multiple smartboards. Color-coded cases indicate devices utilized for communication, academic programs, vocational use, community applications, and fun!

Students have access to the latest applications (over 120 applications separated into categories such as English Language Arts (ELA), sound identification, writing, matching, math, puzzles, music, and games). Communication iPads or devices are programmed with the most recent speech-generating applications and individualized for each student. iPads and electronic schedules are used for vocational work and community access with applications such as video modeling, video and auditory prompting, and visual timers.

Employment Training: Classroom to Community Initiative

As students turn 14, transitional planning begins and the team explores potential vocational interests and skills. Students have the opportunity to practice a variety of job readiness skills within the school setting. This job-matching process allows us to match student interests with job opportunities. We transition the skills learned in the school environment into the community through volunteer and paid positions.

Programs are created to develop transferable employment skills to enhance the acquisition of long-term positions. Tasks are broken down to allow students to understand and complete job skills with independence and self-reliance in the workforce.

The ultimate goal is a seamless transition from school-based services to adult life.

MAY CENTER SCHOOL: *Pride*

"It's a very rewarding experience to work alongside such dedicated teachers, behavior analysts, and instructors each day. Knowing we are helping children and their families make gains, both big and small, makes every school day so important and meaningful."

BRIDGET ANDERSON, M.ED., BCBA
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Building Family Partnerships

Our team works closely with parents, individualizing plans and programs to meet each family's needs. Together with parents, we support and advocate for students both inside and outside the school. We help in resolving day-to-day issues, are committed to protecting students' rights and privacy, and are available to provide emotional and practical support when parents must make important decisions.

The team offers a comprehensive set of services, including: coordination of family/school communication; home consultation as needed to ensure consistency between home and school; workshops on practical issues such as self-care skills, behavior management, and improved communication; and connections to community support and resources. Our Parent Advisory Group serves as a liaison between families and the school's administration.

Student Snapshot

When Mikey, who was born with Fragile X syndrome, entered public preschool, everyone quickly realized it was not the right fit. He was non-verbal, aggressive, and engaging in high rates of self-injury. His parents recognized they needed help. After an exhaustive search, they found May Center School and Mikey, then four years old, became a student.

"The staff didn't avoid Mikey's challenging behaviors. They addressed them directly. The teachers taught him how to get his needs and wants met using appropriate behavior," says his mom Kelley. "Without this school and the progress Mikey has made there, I just don't know what his life would be like, what our life would be like. His challenging behaviors were eliminated at school with lots of hard work and lots of love, and they stay near zero because of a consistent commitment from the greatest behavior analysts, teachers, and instructors that I can imagine."

The Journey Into Adulthood

As students move from the classroom into the community, we focus on making their transitions as smooth as possible. Individual and group career counseling, supported school and community employment, and life skills training all contribute to our students' increasing independence and future success.

We work closely with families and community agencies to help students successfully navigate into adult life. We provide information, guidance, and support to parents as they evaluate options for their young adult.

Some families who require ongoing support choose to continue their relationship with May Institute beyond graduation. These young adults transition directly into our state-of-the-art day programs, and/or our nearly 100 group homes across Massachusetts, ensuring a seamless continuum of care.

The journey continues for these young people, as do the challenges. But our students learn firsthand that challenges can be met. Progress *is* possible.

With the skills they have learned and the self-confidence they have developed, their futures are full of hope.

"We've worked really hard to try to figure out the best ways to support my daughter's learning and to teach her. It wasn't until she started at the May School that we've really felt comfortable with what she is being provided: a concentrated, intensive therapeutic environment over many hours each day. She has really responded to that."

MAY CENTER MOM

MAY CENTER SCHOOL: *Opportunity*

To learn more or to arrange a tour, please contact us at:
413.785.5462 or **mayinstitute.org/westspringfieldschool**

MAY CENTER SCHOOL FOR AUTISM AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

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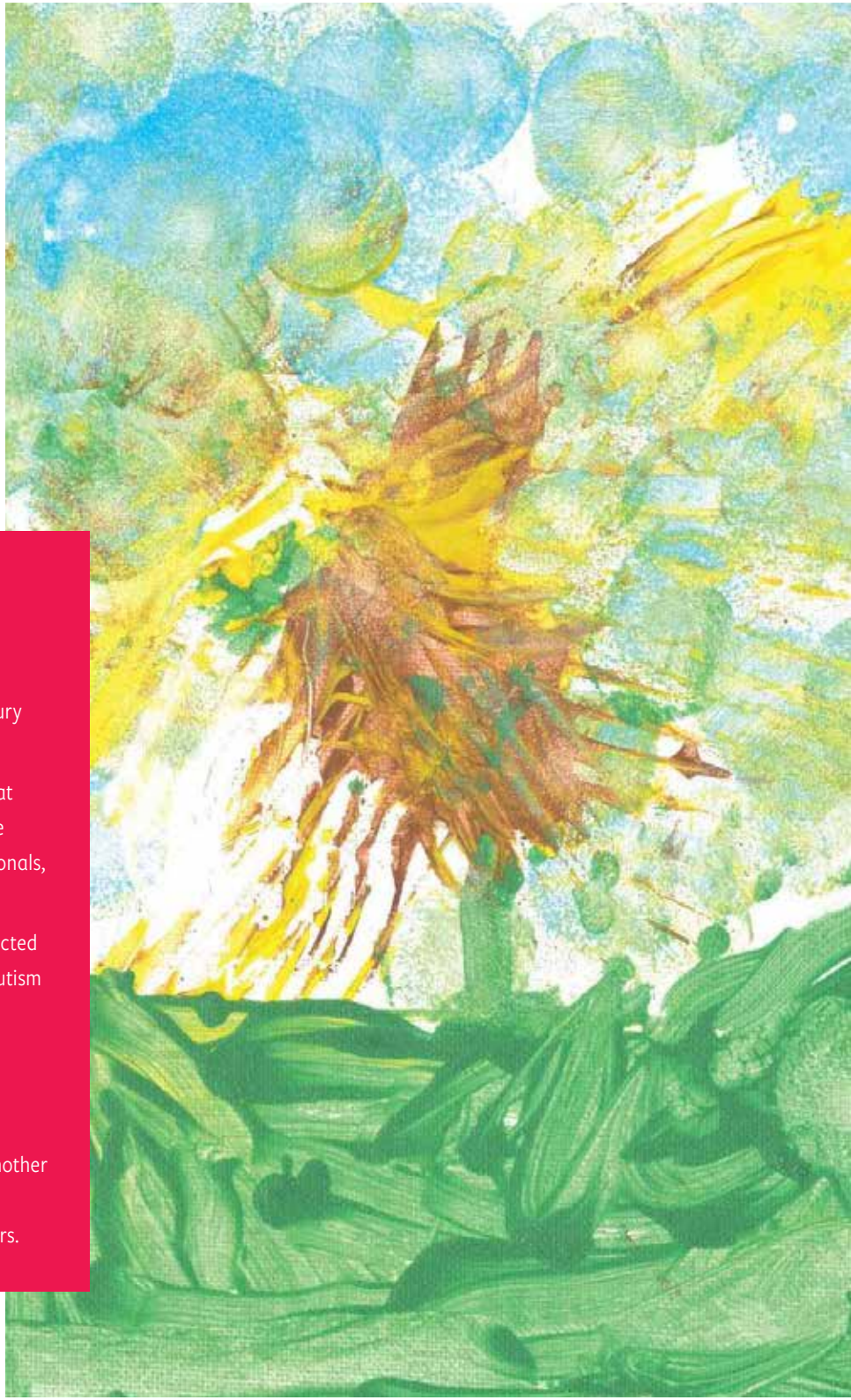

About May Institute

May Institute is a national leader in the field of applied behavior analysis, proudly serving autistic individuals and individuals with other developmental disabilities, brain injury and neurobehavioral disorders, and other special needs.

Founded 70 years ago, we are a nonprofit organization that provides educational and rehabilitative services across the lifespan. We also provide consultation services to professionals, organizations, and public school systems.

The organization is one of the largest and most well-respected providers of special education schools for students with autism and other special needs.

In addition to our West Springfield school, May Institute operates four other May Center Schools for Autism and Developmental Disabilities. They are located in Chicopee, Randolph, and Wilmington, Mass., and Santa Cruz, Calif. Another May Center School in Norwood, Mass., serves children and adolescents with brain injury and neurobehavioral disorders.

MayInstitute
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