



# BACK TO SCHOOL

## Speech-Impaired and Multiply-Disabled Students Receive Help and Guidance at Rock Brook School

"It is hard for these students to do things we take for granted."

This is what W. Glenn Famous, executive director of the Rock Brook School, witnesses every day.

This includes explaining what you think to another person, and understanding his or her response; tossing a ball or Frisbee; walking from one place to another without fear of falling; reading a book and understanding the contents; and noticing facial expressions and gestures of other people and understanding their meaning.

Indeed, most people practice these commonplace activities every day without a thought. But for the students at Rock Brook School, they present difficulties and challenges they must work hard to overcome.

### New Concepts

Founded in 1974, the school was established to provide intensive education services for children aged 2-1/2 to 6 coping with language and sensory motor difficulties. This was the first comprehensive education program for preschool

special education students in Somerset County. The low student-to-teacher ratio and the emphasis on remediating language and communication skills at an early age were new concepts at the time.

In addition, occupational therapy was provided to work on balance and coordination, which was also a new component of programming for children with developmental disabilities.

Now located at 109 Orchard Road in Skillman, the nonprofit private school is approved by the New Jersey State Department of Education and has received accreditation from the CES-MSA Middle States Commission on Elementary Schools (MSCES).

Over the years, the school has grown and adapted to meet the needs of the students and the community, reports Famous, who recently became executive director after a long and successful career as principal of several elementary and middle schools in South Brunswick.

"We now have more than 50 students, from 3 years old to 21, and coming from

25 different school districts in central New Jersey, including Princeton, Franklin Park, West Windsor, and Hillsboro, among others," he reports.

### Multi-Sensory Instruction

"The students are sent to us from public schools' special education programs. In most cases, the home school district pays tuition, if placement is approved through the Individual Education Plan (IEP) process. Every student has been evaluated by their previous school, including by a social worker and psychologist."

Once accepted at Rock Brook, the students engage in multi-sensory instruction, which meets the New Jersey Core Curriculum Standards, and is designed to help students reach their highest level of achievement in learning, and independence in their development of social and living skills. In time, some students are able to return to their previous school.

Students at Rock Brook are coping with a variety of conditions, including



**LEVELS OF LEARNING:** "Each of our students has his or her own unique story to tell. Most of them are multiply disabled and communication-impaired, who are trying hard, with the help of our staff, to progress and learn," says W. Glenn Famous, executive director of the Rock Brook School in Skillman. Shown are staff members enjoying a time out on the large play set in the spacious playground.

autism, hearing impairment, seizure disorders, developmental delay, and numerous problems such as cerebral palsy and other physical disabilities. They may experience fine and gross motor difficulties, short attention span, difficulty focusing, and behavioral problems, among many other conditions.

Students at Rock Brook receive academic instruction and an array of support services according to their IEP. All classes are taught with

a team, multi-focused approach, and a full academic program is provided, including technology instruction. Individual speech/language therapy is emphasized, and speech and language remediation is incorporated into all phases of the curriculum.

"We are the only school in the state with a full-time teacher and full-time speech therapist in every class," points out Famous. "They also all have occupational and physical therapy. Students are grouped together

in classes according to levels of ability, and our teacher-student ratio is very low, with no more than 10 students in a class and often fewer. The teachers are all trained in special education, and some have additional qualifications in specific disabilities."

Speech/language specialists, occupational and physical therapists, learning disability teacher consultants, board-certified behavior analysts, and technology

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Below are a sample of recent popular posts.

### Big IDEAS to PRACTICE NOW

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**MINDFULNESS**  
Try breathing techniques.  
Focus thoughts on the present.  
Limit news intake

**REFLECTIVE LISTENING**  
Listen to what someone is saying & repeat back to them.  
Validate & understand concerns

**SELF EXPLORATION**  
Make self-care a priority.  
Discover new interests.  
Reflect on mood.  
Assess needs

**ACCEPTANCE**  
Accept uncertainty. Accept the inability to have all the answers.  
Trust that medical professionals are working hard towards solutions

Source: "Coronavirus: Mental Health Coping Strategies," nami.org, Katherine Ponte, BA, JD, MBA, CPRP, March 20, 2020, Retrieved March 30, 2020

### How to talk to kids about anxiety & mental health by age

@trinitycounselingservice

#### Ages 4-6

- ★ Help identify feelings
- ★ Ask what helps (i.e. "Will crying or hugging help?")
- ★ Praise when healthy coping strategies are used

#### Ages 7-10

- ★ Ask about feelings
- ★ List "highs and lows" of your day every night as a family; this encourages kids to open up & talk about tough things in a less intimidating storytelling format

#### Ages 11-14

- ★ Ask what they know about mental health & what they identify with
- ★ Accept they might push back but reiterate they are loved and important to you

#### Ages 14-18

- ★ Have frequent conversations about mental health
- ★ Ask if they are worried about anything
- ★ Understand them not opening up to you is not personal; ask who they would feel comfortable talking with
- ★ Brainstorm with them how to approach these conversations and help

Source: "How to talk to children about anxiety and mental health: An age-by-age guide," TODAY.com, Meghan Holohan, September 26, 2019, Retrieved May 18, 2020

If you do not already, please follow us to receive these resources as well as more information about our services.

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consultants are all available. In addition, a nurse is on site at all times.

### Positive Interaction

Instruction is offered in four programs: preschool, ages 3 to 5; elementary, K through sixth grade; middle, seventh, and eighth; and high school, grades nine and 10 and post-grad, ages 14 to 21.

Each program provides appropriate curriculum for students' age and level of ability. Persisting with tasks, ability to follow directions, working with a group, positive interaction with adults and other children are all emphasized along with the academic focus on English/language arts, mathematics, writing, science and social studies.

In addition, the high school/post graduate program offers opportunities for students to work in jobs outside the school. Its mission is to help students attain the skills and knowledge necessary to become independent and successful in society through community-based experiences.

Students have worked in a number of different situations, including for such employers as Princeton Center Health & Yoga, SAVE — A Friend to Homeless Animals, Mary Jacobs Library, and others. "These opportunities can help students gain self-esteem," notes Famous. "Building self-confidence is embedded in all our programs and classes."

### Outdoor Setting

In addition to the academic-

focused classes, counseling and play therapy groups, weekly art and music activities, physical education, and individualized behavior management plans are part of the overall student program.

Exercise in a spacious outdoor setting is available, with a large play set, swings, and a basketball court, also suitable for bike riding. Interaction with parents is frequent, with visits, updates, and discussions.

COVID-19 has been a crucial factor in how Rock Brook has functioned in recent months. Virtual programs have been in place since March, and now the hope is to open on site in late September. "The virus has been an absolute struggle, a tremendous challenge," says Famous. "What we hope to do now is to have a virtual program for two or three weeks, and then welcome students back to school safely with a shorter day, and of course, following all the safety precautions. Actually, all of the virus issues present a teaching opportunity, with the masks, hand washing, temperature taking, etc."

"We did have a shortened summer camp this past July, as part of our Extended Year Program, and this provided our students with many chances to socialize, exercise, learn new skills, and have a sense of normalcy. The program also provided their parents much-needed relief from their service as at-home teachers, caretakers, therapists, and aides on top of their already full-time role as parents, and remote workers. We considered this

a Parent Relief Program for a half-day, two days a week — a gift to the parents."

### Important Insights

"Beyond offering a great service to our students and parents, our camp experience provided us with important insights into how we can re-open this September," continues Famous. "And the best news is that we were able to make it through without a single instance of anyone becoming infected with the virus."

"Students really look forward to coming to school. There is comfort in routine and structure, and the focus is to get back to where we were before the virus, and regain what we have lost."

Famous looks forward to Rock Brook being able to continue its important work in making a positive difference in the students' lives. "I love the challenge and problem-solving of this work, and being with people who are unique and different."

"I love the kids, families, and the staff and their dedication. I really want to tip my hat to our staff because they continually go above and beyond. Our teachers use patience and compassion as they work with kids who are struggling to communicate. People who choose to work with these students have the patience, positivity, and motivation to help the kids go forward. This is very hard work, and it can be exhausting."

But the rewards can outweigh the difficult moments, and they are so important, he emphasizes.

"It's wonderful when we

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see a student who is struggling with understanding be able to say a new word

and actually understand it. This is such an affirmation of what we are doing. It is very rewarding to realize we are here doing something really special."

For more information regarding the school's reopening and hours, call (908) 431-9500. Website: [www.rock-brook.org](http://www.rock-brook.org).

—Jean Stratton

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**Limited Openings for fall 2020**

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Stay creative and connected this fall! Let the Arts Council of Princeton take care of art this fall.

Both virtual and small group in-person classes and workshops are enrolling NOW and are taught by our incredible professional teaching artists. Running from September 19 all the way through December 12, your young artists can try their hand at ceramics, painting, mixed media, fiber arts, and more.

**In-person Classes & Workshops:** Keep the creativity coming! All in-person classes are taught using social distancing measures and masks are required for both students and instructors. The Arts Council follows all current standards, including temperature checks upon entry to the building. Tools, supplies and ceramic wheel stations are not shared, and class sizes are limited.

**Virtual Sessions:** Enjoy unique art-making sessions, led by our professional teaching artists, from the comfort of home! All you'll need is Wi-Fi and a computer or other device with a built in camera. Students will receive an email with Zoom instructions and info regarding supplies prior to the first class.

**Private Pods:** If you've formed your own "pod" or "extended bubble" with friends and neighbors to help keep your elementary and middle schoolers busy, take advantage of our Private Pod Classes. Private Pods are held at the Arts Council of Princeton and run for 1-2 hours. Sessions can be tailored to your groups' interests, and make for fun, safe birthday

parties too!

Enroll today at [artscouncilofprinceton.org](http://artscouncilofprinceton.org) or email [education@artscouncilofprinceton.org](mailto:education@artscouncilofprinceton.org) for more information.

**Cambridge School**

Cambridge School is an extraordinary place where children who learn differently thrive. We're an independent day school that specializes in learning disabilities — including dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, ADHD, and auditory processing disorder, among others. Our program is built on evidence-based research and a student-centered approach to education that provides an individualized and specialized, yet comprehensive school experience. All of our teachers are language specialists, who use direct, explicit instruction with multi-sensory teaching methods to increase learning.

To learn more about Cambridge School please visit [thecambridgeschool.org](http://thecambridgeschool.org). 100 Straube Center Boulevard, Pennington; (609) 730-9553.

**Color Me Mine**

Color Me Mine is a paint-it-yourself pottery studio located at the Princeton Shopping Center; you pick a piece of pottery and paint it, we will glaze/fire it for you! We also host birthday parties, summer camp, special events, and workshops using clay, canvas, and pottery.

This fall we are holding an Art Enrichment Program to supplement virtual schooling. A little socialization and a whole lot of art! Every Wednesday one of our artists will demonstrate a project using clay, canvas, pottery, paint pour, or mosaics. Kids can follow along or work on their own project. Head to our

website for more details about this program, Kids Night Out, and Adults Night Out. See you at the studio!

Princeton Shopping Center, 301 N. Harrison Street, back parking lot near NY Sports Club. [www.princeton.colormemine.com](http://www.princeton.colormemine.com).

**The Dance Corner**

The Dance Corner (TDC), conveniently located in the Southfield Shopping Center, is thrilled to begin a new season! 2020 marks the studio's 20th year bringing quality dance instruction to the local and neighboring communities. The Dance Corner is proud to offer a diverse variety of classes in multiple styles for all ages, preschool through adult. TDC offers recreational dance classes, adult classes, and summer camps taught by experienced teachers who pride themselves on the relationships they build with their students. Additionally, The Dance Corner is home to the West Windsor Plainsboro Dance Company, and an audition-only Elite Competition Team.

As we enter an unusual school year, new considerations come to mind when choosing after-school activities. Are you looking for ways to increase your child's physical activity, particularly as we head into the cooler months? Are you seeking ways to increase your child's social interaction at a time when school days face a new normal? The Dance Corner will be offering all classes listed on the studio schedule with an option for in-person or virtual instruction. All virtual classes will have a dedicated assistant teacher to help incorporate

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