

Philanthropy at the intersection of healthcare and education

Presbyterian Pace Academy at Presbyterian Hospital



Created in 2019, the Pace Academy is a partnership between Presbyterian Children's Care and PHF, and is funded by the Kathie Winograd Educational Excellence fund.

Kathie Winograd, PhD, was the first female chair of the Presbyterian Healthcare Services Board of Directors (2011-2019) and former president of Central New Mexico Community College (CNM). Many donors to the Pace Academy have been motivated both to honor an exceptional community leader and help kids facing enormous life challenges.

For pediatric patients receiving treatment for cancer and other chronic illnesses, keeping up with schoolwork can be difficult and stressful. The Presbyterian Pace Academy at Presbyterian Hospital provides academic support by focusing on each patient's individual needs. Fully funded by Presbyterian Healthcare Foundation's (PHF) **Kathie Winograd Educational Excellence Fund**, the program has helped more than 90 students return to school at the appropriate grade level.

Led by Learning Specialist Casey Williams, the Pace Academy currently serves 31 students of all ages. An experienced early childhood educator, Casey visits patients at their bedsides, tutors them, and goes to their schools to support their journey back into the classroom. She understands the vulnerability of children who have chronic illnesses and are in critical care, which can create a gap between school and healthcare.

In addition to support from PHF, partnerships with Presbyterian Volunteer Services, CNM, Explora Science Center and Children's Museum, and others make it possible for the Pace Academy to keep students engaged and on track by meeting their educational needs in a variety of ways. A new classroom, scheduled to open in 2025, will provide a centralized learning space.



"The best teacher is joy. If I can kick off a session with a kiddo with joy, that's what I do. It's the most amazing feeling to watch them re-enter the classroom with their friends. That's my favorite part of the job."

– Casey Williams, learning specialist at Presbyterian Pace Academy



Naturelle with Presbyterian Volunteer Carrie Heidmous

Student Success

When she was diagnosed with cancer two years ago, high school student Naturelle Benavidez spent most of her time at Presbyterian Hospital and felt like she was falling behind in her schoolwork. Naturelle credits Casey and program volunteers for keeping her on track, communicating with her teachers, recording video assignments for her theater class, and tracking down assigned books.

Naturelle hopes to attend University of New Mexico to study biology and journalism, go to nursing school, and eventually become a pediatric oncologist. Although Naturelle has returned to the classroom, Casey continues to help her with college applications and assignments.

Since its inception in 2019, the Pace Academy has a 100% success rate. Every student who has been active in the program has returned to their school at the appropriate grade level.



"I'm so thankful for the Pace Academy. If it wasn't for their dedication and help, I don't think I would be where I am today," Naturelle says.

How You Can Help

Funded entirely by philanthropy, the Pace Academy provides free educational support to pediatric patients with chronic health conditions. Additional gifts to the Kathie Winograd Educational Excellence Fund will sustain the program well into the future and meet the needs of even more students, ensuring that chronically ill children have access to education despite their health challenges.