



Our students walk into a warm embrace,
and walk out with the ability to embrace the world



The Gateway School
Providing Excellence in Special Education since 1981

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Alpha School
Providing Excellence in Special Education Since 1980

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Welcome to Alpha School— *home of the Alpha Eagles!*

We want to thank you for demonstrating your interest and considering Alpha School as a potential placement for your child. Our mission has always been to provide a safe and nurturing educational environment for students with disabling conditions.

Since 1980, Alpha School has empowered students with skills for life, work, and recreation, with the goal of helping each student reach their fullest potential to live independently. We believe that every individual possesses the dignity and promise to contribute to a better world.

Alpha School provides a holistic approach to supporting all student needs: academic, social-emotional, and therapeutic. In addition to our full complement of academic instruction, where students are educated in each of the core content areas (mathematics, English/language arts and reading, science, social studies, physical education, and health), we provide related services in house. Should your child require counseling services or speech, occupational, or physical therapy, they will be provided by our experienced therapists.

In addition to our academic programming, Alpha School exposes students to social and career-oriented activities targeting interpersonal skills. Our transition and career readiness programs help develop vocational skills. Students learn to work with their peers in an employment-like setting and practice interacting with others. As students progress, they visit community-based organizations and work with our job coaches in public settings, such as local businesses and municipal organizations.

It is with great pleasure that we welcome you into our halls as you visit Alpha School. We hope the time you have spent with us has given you a glimpse of what we offer. We are grateful that you have considered Alpha School as a potential placement for your child. Should you have any additional questions along your way, please do not hesitate to call me at **732.370.1150**, or email **gonzalezj@alphaschool.com**.

With gratitude,
John Gonzalez, Principal



Our Academic Program

Alpha School of Jackson, New Jersey, operates as a private day school, approved by the New Jersey Department of Education, providing public school districts with an enhanced alternative program for students ages 5-21 with disabling conditions. Our program uses an individualized and holistic approach to meet the functional academic and behavioral needs of the most challenging students from sending districts.



Our academic program is aligned with the New Jersey Student Learning Standards (NJSLS) and incorporates social, emotional, behavioral, and functional learning, in addition to the core content areas of language arts, math, science, and social studies. Our students also take part in courses in health, physical education, art, and music to complement the core classes.

Differentiated instructional strategies are practiced, and instruction is delivered through multiple approaches, including auditory, visual, tactile, and kinesthetic methods. We recognize that all students learn in multiple and various ways.

Subject Areas of Our Academic Program

Our academic/instructional subjects include:

- ✓ Career education and job readiness skills
- ✓ Daily living skills
- ✓ Financial literacy
- ✓ Functional math
- ✓ Health
- ✓ Language arts literacy
- ✓ Mathematics
- ✓ Science
- ✓ Social-emotional learning
- ✓ Social studies
- ✓ Technology

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Certified teachers assisted by trained paraprofessionals provide individualized and small-group instruction in a small-class setting. A multisensory approach is used with individualized and modified techniques. A wide variety of materials are used to help the student reach his or her full academic potential.

Our Range of Standard Educational Programs and State-of-the-Art Programs

Our academic/instructional programs include:

- ✓ Access Literacy Learning (ALL)
- ✓ Discrete Trial Trainer
- ✓ Edmark Reading Program
- ✓ Handwriting Without Tears
- ✓ IXL
- ✓ Low Level High Interest materials
- ✓ Reading Milestones Program
- ✓ PCI Reading Program
- ✓ Reading A-Z
- ✓ Spectrum Math
- ✓ Touch Point Math
- ✓ Unique Learning System/News-2-You

Extended School Year

Our school recognizes that for many students, it is vital to continue their academic and social skill development year round. To address these needs, our school offers a 30-day, full-day extended school-year program, available upon district approval, in order to continue the educational and support needs of a particular student.



We encourage you to visit our school's website often to stay informed about any updates or changes to our academic and other support services.



Our Career Education and Transition Program

Transition services at Alpha School are defined as a set of activities that are designed in an outcome-oriented process that promotes movement from school to post-school activities. This includes community participation, independent living, integrated employment, and in-school activities. The transition plan is a vision of the student's future after graduation that is defined by the student with input from the parent, the school team, and community participants. We emphasize functional vocational education training with development of academic proficiencies.



Community-based Instruction (CBI)

CBI activities include:

- ✓ Food shopping
- ✓ Travel training
- ✓ Volunteering
- ✓ Recreation
- ✓ Job sampling/Structured Learning Experiences (SLEs)

Students are given the opportunity through Structured Learning Experiences (SLEs) to work at a local participating business that has agreed to partner with us. Our staff works closely with the personnel of each business prior to and during the job placement. Employment specialists (SLE instructor and/or job coach) from our staff accompanies each student to the job site to assist them in performing their required tasks. They also ensure appropriate interaction with coworkers, customers, and supervisors.

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Students gain community-based work experience at the following types of work sites:

- ✓ Chain stores
- ✓ Libraries
- ✓ Offices
- ✓ Plant nurseries
- ✓ Restaurants
- ✓ Retail stores



In-School Activities

In-school activities include:

- ✓ Activities of Daily Living (ADL) training
- ✓ Accessing vocational resources, such as Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD), Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and centers for independent living
- ✓ Classroom businesses held either daily or weekly
- ✓ Entrepreneurial businesses
- ✓ Employability skill development (resume writing, interviewing skills, job applications)
- ✓ In-school job and work safety training
- ✓ In-school Structured Learning Experiences (SLEs)
- ✓ Interest Inventories
- ✓ Prevocational instruction

We also seek out individual job opportunities based on student interest. The school staff is committed to assisting students in acquiring the skills that will enable them to live independently, be actively involved in their communities, and be able to find employment and the appropriate supports.



Our Creative Expression Programs

The creative expression programs at Alpha School are an essential element of education, just like reading, writing, and arithmetic. Our integrated programs of drama, music, and art are all keys that can unlock the fullest potential of each student. A strong emphasis is placed on self-expression through participation in a variety of highly motivating activities that enhance social skills development.



Drama

Creative drama provides an introduction to theatre while helping children work on social skills and academic subjects. Using theater games, improvisation, story-telling, sensory awareness activities, juggling, puppetry, and basic theatre terminology, students are encouraged to engage in imaginative play. It provides a safe environment for students to explore behavior, ideas, and creativity while having fun.

Music Program

Our music program is led by a board-certified music therapist. Group sessions are focused on increasing self-expression, socialization, and communication through activities such as rhythmic drumming, instrumental improvisation, music listening, movement songs, and songwriting.

Our music program includes:

- ✓ Adaptive music lessons
- ✓ Chorus
- ✓ Elementary and high school guitar
- ✓ Hand bells and tone bells
- ✓ Individual music therapy
- ✓ Voice class

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Art Program

Inspiration is the key for every artistic work produced in art class. Each student is given the opportunity to create their own style and use art as a means of expression.



Our art program includes:

- ✓ Annual art exhibits
- ✓ Exposure to different art styles, principles, and techniques
- ✓ Visiting a local museum

The art program was featured in "I Am an Artist," a film documentary that explores the world of children with disabilities. In this documentary, young adults gain confidence under the gentle guidance of their teacher.

Winter and Spring Shows

Each year, the expressive drama, music, and art skills our students have developed are featured in our winter and spring shows, in addition to other special events.



Our Behavioral Support Programs and Services



Alpha School strives to integrate a variety of behavioral support programs, treatments, and approaches that can provide a safe and nurturing educational environment. Our vision is that individuals with disabling conditions are entitled to a full and meaningful life. Our behavioral support programs seek to empower each student with skills for life, work, and recreation. We believe that every individual possesses the dignity and potential to contribute to a better world.

The range of behavioral health challenges and therapy support services can be unique for each student. Therefore, your child's specific needs and challenges will need to be discussed in detail. This approach is to ensure that we can better ascertain what programs would work best for a particular student.

Behavioral Therapy Services

Application of Behavioral-based Interventions and Techniques

We use techniques to reduce and/or eliminate maladaptive behaviors, including:

- ✓ Aggressive behaviors
- ✓ Attention-seeking behaviors
- ✓ Destructive behaviors
- ✓ Non-compliant behaviors
- ✓ Self-injurious behaviors
- ✓ Stereotypical behaviors

Functional Behavioral Assessments

To ascertain the function or reason for problem behaviors, we use a variety of assessment tools, including:

- ✓ Direct observation
- ✓ Parent and staff interviews
- ✓ Review of records



- ✓ Screening tools
 - Functional Assessment Screening Tool (FAST)
 - Autism Treatment Evaluation Checklist (ATEC)
 - Functional Assessment Interview (FAI)

Collaboration With Instructional Staff & Related Service Professionals

We work with a variety of professionals, including:

- ✓ Classroom and specials teachers
- ✓ Counselors
- ✓ Occupational therapists
- ✓ Physical therapists
- ✓ Speech therapists

Behavioral Intervention Plan Development

Based on the results of the Functional Behavioral Assessment, we develop a behavioral intervention plan. This plan describes the problem behavior, hypothesizes as to why the behavior occurs, and outlines positive intervention strategies.

Curriculum Development Based on the Needs of the Individual

We develop a curriculum that is tailored to the needs of each student. This curriculum is designed to help the student acquire skills, including:

- ✓ Academic skills
- ✓ Activities of daily living
- ✓ Community skills
- ✓ Functional communication
- ✓ Leisure and play skills
- ✓ Safety skills
- ✓ Social skills
- ✓ Vocational skills

Direct Staff Training

We train staff on a variety of behavioral topics, including:

- ✓ Data analysis to monitor and determine the effectiveness of interventions
- ✓ Design and implementation of data collection

Parent Assistance and Training

Parents are taught specific behavioral techniques to assist in the generalization of skills learned in school to the home and community environments.

Crisis Prevention Intervention (CPI) and Team Safety and Care

We utilize the crisis intervention program, which is a safe, non-harmful behavior management system designed to help staff provide for the best possible care, welfare, safety and security of disruptive, assaultive, and out-of-control individuals – even during their most violent moments. Crisis intervention is a small segment of time in which staff members must intervene with another person to address behavior that may escalate into disruptive or even violent incidents.

Our School-Based Program

In collaboration with Rutgers University Behavioral Health Care (UBHC), we offer a school-based program. The goal of this program is to create a healthy environment for learning that promotes academic and life success for all of our students. UBHC and Alpha School partner to develop prevention and intervention strategies to meet this goal. This service, offered at no charge to the parents, allows us to better address the mental health and psychiatric needs of some of our more challenging developmentally disabled students.

The school-based program provides a range of free and confidential mental health services, including:

- ✓ Case management/referral services
- ✓ Crisis intervention
- ✓ Family counseling
- ✓ Individual counseling
- ✓ Medication management with child psychiatrist
- ✓ Staff consultation
- ✓ And more

A child psychiatrist visits once a week to meet with specifically identified families/ students for medication management. Our mental health clinician works collaboratively with the psychiatrist, staff, families, and students. Through this process, students are observed, and teachers are advised. From there we develop a behavior plan, which monitors the student's progress.



In addition, this program provides individual and family counseling and facilitates crisis intervention as needed to support the positive mental health of our students.

Harassment, intimidation, and bullying are continuously monitored. We are specialists in investigating, reporting, and resolving any incidents of maltreatment.

Meet Some of Our Behavioral Support Staff

Rebecca Shpigler, Social Worker

Rebecca Shpigler is the social worker for Alpha School and is a licensed social worker in the state of New Jersey. Ms. Shpigler obtained her undergraduate degree in social work with a minor in communication studies in 2016, and then completed her graduate degree in social work in 2017. She obtained both degrees from the University of Georgia in Athens, Georgia. Before working at Alpha School, Ms. Shpigler provided in-home and in-community therapy services for children and families around New Jersey.

Ms. Shpigler primarily uses cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT). CBT is a solution-focused therapy form that empowers clients to challenge unhealthy thought processes and use more effective behavior patterns. This treatment modality is based on research indicating how cognitive processes impact actions taken. Through talk therapy, therapeutic games and activities, and "homework" in which clients practice healthy coping skills outside of sessions, Ms. Shpigler utilizes CBT to help students work toward their various social-emotional goals.

Ms. Shpigler also works with students using a holistic approach that integrates the mind, body, and spirit. To help students work through anxiety, depression, conflict resolution, and a myriad of other situations, Ms. Shpigler often incorporates deep-breathing techniques, guided imagery, yoga, meditation, and breath work in sessions. Holistic therapeutic approaches can help students move toward their goals using natural, innate skills.

Allison Rawlins, BCBA

Allison is the Board Certified Behavior Analyst at Alpha School. She earned her Bachelor's degree from the College of New Jersey in Elementary Education and History in 2009 and a Master's degree from Rider University in Applied Psychology: Applied Behavior Analysis in 2014. Her role is to work with the students and staff at Alpha School to help students reduce interfering behaviors while increasing appropriate behaviors through the use of applied behavior analysis.



Our Life Skills (Activities of Daily Living)

At Alpha School, life skills development is an integral part of the transition program we begin implementing when a student turns 14. Below are the main goals we strive to achieve with each student to the best of their abilities. Developing practical and functional living skills in order to prepare students to be future adults – whether in the home, community, or work environment – is key to their development.



Independent Living and Activities of Daily Living Objectives

Our life skills instruction has a variety of objectives, including:

- ✓ Communication and social skills
- ✓ Cooking, cleaning, and laundry skills
- ✓ Functional academics and reading
- ✓ Hygiene, health awareness, and nutrition
- ✓ Impulse control and coping strategies
- ✓ Managing home tasks, such as making a bed
- ✓ Organizational skills
- ✓ Overall daily living skills
- ✓ Problem solving and conflict resolution
- ✓ Self-advocacy
- ✓ Time and money management

Community-Related Life Skills Development

Our life skills instruction develops a variety of skills, including:

- ✓ Banking, debit card use, and check writing
- ✓ Familiarity with public transportation, travel training, and exposure
- ✓ Functional academics and reading, such as signs, prices, maps, and money use
- ✓ Shopping and purchasing
- ✓ Use of the public library



Our Parent and Family Support

At Alpha School, we value the collaboration between the school and the home. Therefore, we offer parent and family support.



Our School's Website

It is vital that each family stays in touch with the information we supply on our website, from our "Parent Resources" section to our ongoing monthly articles. In addition, as a child ages and begins a transition process, it is even more crucial that the families stay informed about the regulations, laws, and services that can be in place to better serve each child through the years.

Workshops

Throughout a given school year, we host a variety of workshops and seminars to better inform families of the complexities and challenges of raising a child with special needs.

Some of these workshops or seminars are presented by professionals in the field of special education. Others consist of families sharing their story to help one another.

Additional Support Components

We provide other types of parent and family support, including:

- ✓ Parent-teacher conferences
- ✓ Progress reports
- ✓ PTA-sponsored field trips
- ✓ Serving as a liaison with the Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD), Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS), and other transition/adult agencies (such as PrimeTime Center)

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We Are There for You

Questions, concerns, feelings of being overwhelmed with options and choices ... these are all real-world challenges, and we work to provide the information you need to help your child over the years. At Alpha School, our teachers, therapists, and staff at all levels strive to complete your family support system to the best of our abilities.



Our Related Services

Alpha School's related services are an integral component of the educational team. We provide : occupational therapy, physical therapy/adaptive physical education, speech therapy, and nursing services based on a child's IEP. We employ a collaborative model that utilizes current evidence-based treatment interventions. We strongly encourage home and school communication so that we can partner with families to design each child's individualized program.



Our related services include:

- ✓ Collaborative team meetings with classroom staff
- ✓ Collaborative use of physical, sensory, communication, and health strategies
- ✓ Coordination of services with sending districts
- ✓ Individual/small-group sessions
- ✓ Ongoing staff education to promote the well-being of our students
- ✓ Staff and parent training in specific techniques
- ✓ Utilization of a dynamic treatment model

Occupational Therapy

Our occupational therapy services include:

- ✓ Academic readiness skills
- ✓ Classroom seating and positioning for educational success
- ✓ Development of modifications for independence in handwriting/self-care
- ✓ Life skills
- ✓ Pre-vocational skills
- ✓ Self-regulation and coping skills
- ✓ Sensory motor, perceptual motor, and fine motor skills

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Physical Therapy/Adaptive Physical Education

Our physical therapy/adaptive physical education services include:

- ✓ Balance and strength training
- ✓ Functional mobility skills
- ✓ Home exercise programs as well as parent training
- ✓ Integration of activities such as swimming, cheering, and dance
- ✓ Integration of intramural sports
- ✓ Orthopedic concerns
- ✓ Participation in Special Olympics
- ✓ Training in gross motor coordination skills

Speech Therapy

We utilize a total communication approach to facilitate effective interactions with others.

Our speech therapy services include:

- ✓ Augmentative/Alternative Communication (AAC)
- ✓ Oral motor and feeding interventions
- ✓ Picture Exchange Communication Systems (PECS)
- ✓ Speech generating
- ✓ Verbalization, gestures, and sign language
- ✓ Voice Output Communication Aides (VOCA)

Nursing

Our nursing services include:

- ✓ Administering first aid, emergency care, and daily prescribed medications
- ✓ Completing annual health screenings
- ✓ Maintaining health and immunization records
- ✓ Providing parent support and guidance regarding student well-being
- ✓ Providing physical assessments (completed by a certified registered school nurse)
- ✓ Providing skilled nursing care
- ✓ Providing staff training in medical procedures and precautions



Our After School Social Skills Program



At Alpha School, we infuse social skills learning throughout the day. In addition, we offer an after school, extended day program that provides additional social skills practice, along with access to our social worker and the Rutgers University Behavioral Health Care (UBHC) team. This program provides students who require additional social skills programming with a fun and engaging learning environment.

Parents and guardians can feel comfortable knowing their children are not only receiving professional academic support, but also interacting with peers in a physically and emotionally safe environment. Students participate with their friends in structured and invigorating recreational and cooperative team-building games that encourage social skills.

Which Students Are Eligible for Our After School Social Skills Program?

Eligibility for our after school Social Skills Program is based on current assessments (including progress reports, classroom anecdotal notes, and observations of the student's individual needs). The assessments measure a student's behavior, social skills, communication, academics, and self-help skills.

The IEP team should consider this program based on the student's individual needs regarding the development of behavior, social skills, communication, academics, and self-help skills. An analysis of the student's IEP goals and objectives may reveal that continued focus is needed, with an emphasis on generalization of skills. The IEP team should consider the educational and emotional performance that requires instruction and intervention beyond the typical school day. The students' participation in the after school program will allow for meaningful progress towards their IEP goals and generalization of skills.



Goals and Objectives of Our After School Social Skills Program

Goals and objectives of this program include:

Peer Relationships and Friendships

- ✓ Dealing with peer pressure
- ✓ Dealing with teasing/bullying
- ✓ Friendship management
- ✓ Getting attention in positive ways
- ✓ Introducing yourself appropriately
- ✓ Properly using the phone
- ✓ Sharing friendships

Conversational Skills

- ✓ Allowing others to join conversation
- ✓ Entering/exiting a conversation
- ✓ Flexibility of topic; continuing flow when the topic changes
- ✓ Greetings
- ✓ Staying on topic
- ✓ Taking turns in conversation; not interrupting others
- ✓ Tone of voice

Eye Contact

- ✓ Using eye contact to acknowledge the listener
- ✓ Using eye contact when talking to others

Body Language

- ✓ Body language cues
- ✓ Indicating that you're listening to others

Cooperative Play Skills

- ✓ Choosing an activity
- ✓ Compromising
- ✓ Ending a game
- ✓ Joining others in play
- ✓ Winning and losing

Assertive Skills and Conflict Resolution

- ✓ Criticism and compliments
- ✓ Peer pressure
- ✓ Self-advocacy

Empathy

- ✓ How to convey that you understand others' feelings
- ✓ How to read nonverbal cues

Emotions

- ✓ Appropriately expressing your own emotions
- ✓ Identifying your own emotions
- ✓ Keeping calm
- ✓ Problem solving
- ✓ Reading others' facial expressions

Expectations From Home

- ✓ Encouraging students to get together with peers
- ✓ Encouraging time management skills
- ✓ Internet safety
- ✓ Parent feedback/input





Other Benefits of Our After School Social Skills Program

This program creates a physically and emotionally safe environment that is conducive to learning, while improving social and communication skills. Our program adds a strong youth development focus, including life skills, positive communication, conflict resolution, goal setting, and decision making. For children who face behavioral or social skill obstacles for success during school hours, the after school hours can be a time to attempt to eliminate these barriers and improve education of the "whole child."

The school staff recognizes the need to address social deficits experienced by students that make it difficult for them to successfully participate in typical activities at home and their sending school districts. Students who participate in our after school program will acquire the specific skills necessary to participate, not only in school, but also in society.



Our Technology

Technology is continuously evolving. At Alpha School, we always look toward the future to ensure our students have access to the tools and proven instruction that helps to further their skills and abilities as they get older. Through desktop applications and hardware, STEM, handheld devices, and robotics, we are always building a technology-based foundation to help our students move from academics to real-world life skills. Our staff is kept up to date on the use and application of our technology solutions to better serve our students.



Meet Our Robot

We utilize a humanoid robot known as NAO, which we call Rosie. We integrate this robotic friend to support teachers with in-class talks and help children with a variety of disabilities reach new levels of greatness. Rosie is personalized to students' needs through a fully programmable interface that can walk, talk, listen, and even recognize faces.



With a variety of sensors, Rosie is designed to help improve special education teaching by stimulating social interaction through play and allowing greater autonomy. We have discovered that Rosie is naturally accepted by students of all ages by responding to voice commands and tracking each child's performance.

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In-Classroom Devices

We infuse technological support and academics across all areas of our program, from web-based instruction in all content areas, to student support through communication devices such as FM systems and iPads.



Our technology solutions include:

- ✓ Augmentative and Alternative Communications (AAC) systems to assist students with difficulties communicating, expressing themselves, and sharing their needs
- ✓ Interactive white board learning, such as MimioTeach
- ✓ Software-based educational solutions, such as Unique Learning System, News-2-You, IXL, Reading A-Z, and Scholastic News
- ✓ Technology solutions to allow students to work on projects at home under the supervision of a parent/caregiver
- ✓ Utilization of iPads, Chromebooks, tablets, and other computers to assist students in building both academic and life skills

In summary, the technology we use acts as the perfect bridge for students with a variety of challenges and disabilities and furthers our continued mission to enable each student to reach their fullest potential.



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