

Potomac Association of Cooperative Teachers Inc.



October 2026

Fall Newsletter

www.PACTeachers.org

Letter from the President

Greetings PACT members,

The beginning of a school year is such an interesting time to me. As a teacher, many of the gains that were made the previous year are reset to zero as we welcome a new set of kiddos into our classrooms and discover who they are and where they are on their developmental journey. As a director, many of the parent board members with whom I have developed a strong working relationship have moved on and out of the school, and I find myself beginning anew with families who are just beginning their journey.

I find this a good time to focus on basics, like ensuring our practices are meeting the basic brain development needs of the students and that we are on the lookout for signs of kiddos in need of extra support with their communication. It is in this spirit that we offer you our fall professional development line up.

Thank you for once again making PACT a part of your own professional development journey and I wish for us all a school year filled with progress.

(James) Scott Mitchell
PACT President
Presidentpact4@gmail.com

Professional Developmental Days: Thursday, October 22 & Wednesday, October 28

PACT is pleased to offer two virtual workshops this Fall 2025: "*The Growing Brain: Cognitive and Executive Functioning*" by Petrea Hicks and "*Everyday Opportunities: Supporting Communication & Development in the Preschool Classroom*" by the Skill Builders Team (CWO-164865 for both).

We have scheduling options for your convenience; sessions will be held **Thursday, October 22 from 3-5 PM and 7-9 PM, and Wednesday, October 28 from 3-5 PM and 7-9 PM**. You may choose to attend both of the 3-5 PM sessions, both of the 7-9 PM sessions, or both sessions on a single date! See below for more details about the workshops content and presenters.

Workshops Content Descriptions:

“The Growing Brain: Cognitive and Executive Functioning” by Petrea Hicks

Thursday, October 22 **3pm to 5pm** OR Wednesday, October 28-**7pm to 9pm**

Description: An innovative course that provides the toolkit for how the brain develops step by step, neuron by neuron. This workshop explains brain processes and the effects of outside influences, along with ways you can encourage healthy brain development in children from birth to five years old. Participants will learn how children develop cognitive and executive functions as their brains develop. **2 hours child development (COK)**

“Everyday Opportunities: Supporting Communication & Development in the Preschool Classroom” by the Skill Builders Team

Thursday, October 22-**7pm to 9pm** OR Wednesday, October 28-**3pm to 5pm**

Description: This presentation is designed to help preschool teachers and staff better understand the roles of occupational and speech therapy in supporting preschool-age children. Participants will gain an overview of developmentally appropriate skills, learn to recognize red flags that may warrant further evaluation, and explore practical, classroom-friendly strategies to promote children's communication, motor, sensory, and social-emotional development. The presentation will also address how to approach sensitive conversations with families and emphasize the importance of collaboration and partnership in supporting each child's success. **2 hours special needs (COK)**

Presenter Biographies

Petrea Hicks

Petrea Hicks has over 30 years of experience in the early education field with a master's degree in Early Childhood Education-Curriculum and Instruction. She has witnessed various changes and believes that through it all, one thing remains constant...children.

In 2015, Petrea was recognized as a Master Leader in the Exchange Leader Initiative (ELI) and has contributed noteworthy articles to Child Care Exchange magazine (July/August 2017, May/June 2018 and May/June 2020.)

She has presented at local, state and national early education agencies, including the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) in 2017, 2018 and 2022.

As an approved trainer with Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) and the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE), Division of Early Learning in Washington, D.C. She conducts interactive training workshops that center on young children from birth to school age. Workshop topics include, but not limited to, social-emotional development, brain development, curriculum instruction and design, the classroom environment, positive behavior strategies and culturally responsive literature.

Skill Builders

Jamie Hampton, MS, OTR/L is a pediatric occupational therapist practicing in Northern Virginia. She has experience treating individuals from infancy through young adulthood. Jamie has experience treating autistic and neurodivergent individuals, as well as those with developmental delays, vision impairments, executive functioning deficits, and sensory processing challenges.

Gabriella “Gabby” Mazzeo, OTD, OTR/L is a pediatric occupational therapist practicing in Northern Virginia. She enjoys working with clients from toddlerhood through adulthood. Gabby has experience supporting clients with developmental delays, autism, ADHD, sensory processing challenges, and other forms of neurodivergence. She is passionate about trauma-informed care and providing practical solutions for families and schools.

Elizabeth Clark McKenzie, MS, CCC-SLP has been a pediatric speech-language pathologist serving families in Northern Virginia for nearly 20 years. She specializes in working with children from birth through age five, with expertise in early language development and pediatric feeding challenges. Elizabeth’s signature is her connection-based approach, emphasizing that children learn best through meaningful, natural interactions and everyday experiences. She is passionate about equipping parents with practical, responsive strategies that support their child’s development while strengthening the parent-child relationship. In addition to providing direct therapy, Elizabeth offers parent coaching, helping families navigate specific developmental challenges while fostering confidence in their own parenting instincts.

Members will receive 2 clock hours of continued education training credit for either course which qualify for Core of Knowledge (COK) in Maryland.

Registration

Registration and payment can be completed [HERE](#). Please sign up individually to ensure your email is recorded. Registration and Payment are due by **Friday, October 16**. By completing the Fall PDD registration, you are also receiving a membership to PACT for the 2026-2027 school year and will have access to our Spring Professional Developmental Days.

Access to the Zoom Link for Fall Professional Development Days

A Zoom link will be e-mailed to registered members 24 hours prior to each session. Please join your training session at least 15-20 minutes early to check audio/video, sign in, and hear announcements from PACT.

Assessments and Evaluations

Members will be asked to complete a content assessment and presenter evaluation of the virtual course via a Google form. The link will be e-mailed to participants following the PDD and should be completed within 24 hours. ***Requirements by MSDE also stipulate members from MD must pass the assessment with a score of 70% or higher.*

Certificates

In accordance with MSDE regulations, **participants MUST attend the full two-hour virtual presentation** and complete a content assessment along with a presenter evaluation before receiving their certificate. Further details about completing the assessment will be covered at the pre-PDD business meeting. Personalized certificates will be emailed within 2 weeks of each Professional Development Day.

Membership (New or Renewing)

Join PACT (or renew your membership!) by completing the online form [HERE](#). Current members are eligible to attend one or both virtual Professional Development Days in the Fall 2026 and the in-person Professional Development Day in the Spring 2027. The membership fee for the 2026-2027 school year is \$60 (\$61.50 with a PayPal fee).

Award for Devoted Service in Early Childhood Education

Time to recognize the best of us! We are pleased to call for nominations for our annual *PACT Award for Devoted Service in Early Childhood Education*! Who is the staff member at your school who stands out for their dedication to your preschool, its families, and the cooperative model? Fill out the [2026-27 PACT Award Nomination](#) form to nominate your staff member for recognition. As noted on the nomination form, two (2) reference letters are required and should be emailed to pactawards@gmail.com. Nominations are due by *Thursday, March 4, 2027*. Questions? Please email pactawards@gmail.com. We look forward to reading about all those great staff members!

Hall of Fame

The PACT Board established a PACT Hall of Fame in 2016 to recognize members who have given exemplary service in the field of Early Childhood Education. The following are the members who have been inducted to date:

Janise Allyn-Smith - *Teacher/Director, Silver Spring N.S., PACT Board member* (2017)

Helene Segal-Turner - *Director, Kensington N.S., PACT Board member* (2018)

Cindy Walsh - *Director (retired) CCPC Weekday N.S., PACT Board member* (2018)

Fran Warthen - *Director, Suburban N.S.* (2018)

Jennifer DeBernardis - *Teacher, Silver Spring N.S., PACT Board member* (2018)

Annette Fitzpatrick - *Director (retired), CCUMC Preschool, PACT Board member* (2018)

Edie Mossberg - *Director, Glenbrook N.S., Board member, ECE Consultant* (2019)

Bernadine Occhiuzzo - *Director/Teacher, Cedar Lane N.S.* (2019)

Angie Zeidenberg - *Teacher, Bannockburn N.S.* (2019)

Nancy Renner - *Director, Fort Hunt Preschool* (2020)

James Scott Mitchell- *Teacher, Silver Spring Nursery School* (2022)

Jane Millward- *Teacher/Director, Providence Nursery School* (2023)

Tara Block- *F. B. Meekins Cooperative Preschool* (2024)

Rebecca Brunson- *Teacher, Silver Spring Nursery School* (2025)

Kathleen McNickle- *Kensington Nursery School* (2025)

Marie Sloan- *Annandale Cooperative Preschool* (2026)

Join the PACT Board!

The PACT Board is run by dedicated volunteer early childhood educators. We are looking for an Assessments and Evaluations chair, so we need someone with basic google form skills to step forward! We are also looking for a legislative contact for Va and DC. Please contact Scott Mitchell if you are interested in joining our team. Information about Board positions can be found in PACT's By-Laws on the website

www.PACTteachers.org.

The Proposed 2026-2027 Board Members

President

[James Scott Mitchell](#) Silver Spring Nursery School, MD

V.P. Programming

[Bernadine Occhiuzzo](#) Cedar Lane Nursery School, MD

[Doreen Buntin](#) Cedar Lane Nursery School, MD

V.P. Membership

[Ellen Griffin](#) Cedar Lane Nursery School, MD

Secretary

[Rebecca Brunson](#) Silver Spring Nursery School, MD

Treasurers

[Kristin Wasserzug](#) Spring Knolls Cooperative Preschool, MD

Logistics & Hospitality

VA - [Joan Morales](#) Spring Knolls, MD

MD - [Meghan Ufko](#) Rockville Community Nursery School, MD

Professional Development Day Administration

[Jessie Auten](#) Providence Nursery School, VA

Joanna Lazzaro *Silver Spring Nursery School MD*

Exhibits/Resource Table -

Celeste Raker-Dillen *Silver Spring Nursery School MD*

Assessments and Evaluations

Open

Legislative Contact

MD - [Ylla Bishop](#) Silver Spring Day School, MD

DC - **OPEN**

VA - **OPEN**

Google Groups

[Magdalena Barry](#) Sleepy Hollow Preschool, VA

Web Master & Newsletter Editor

[Meredith Savage-Myers](#) Ashton Christian Preschool, MD

Past Co-Presidents

[Bernadine Occhiuzzo](#) Cedar Lane N.S., MD

[Ellen Griffin](#) Cedar Lane N.S., MD

Job Postings

Looking for a new teaching position in the Washington, DC area? PACT posts job openings on the website. Check the postings out [HERE](#). Directors wishing to post job openings should e-mail details to [Meredith Savage-Myers](#).

Google Groups

PACT members' Google group: To stay up-to date on PACT information, the google group is open to current PACT members. To join this Google group, send an e-mail to vpmembershippact@gmail.com.

Directors' Google group: Share resources, ideas, and training opportunities by joining the PACT Directors listserv. PACT membership is not required. To join the Directors' Google group, send an e-mail to [James Scott Mitchell](#).

We hope you are having a great start to your school year!

