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## Pace School to open K-5 special education learning center

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By Rachael Conway, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

A new special education learning center designed for children in kindergarten through fifth grade will open next fall in Valencia.

The Pace Learning Center, the first offshoot of the 40-year-old Pace School in Churchill, is scheduled to open two classrooms Sept. 9 in the Mars Area School District's former Middlesex Elementary School building, said Tricia Norris, Pace's intake coordinator.

"This will be a private academic school for special education students and for those who haven't been identified yet," said Ms. Norris.

In other words, in addition to accepting students who have been professionally identified as having special needs, the learning center will also accept children who are clearly having difficulties in school but haven't been diagnosed with a specific problem.

"These might be kids who have problems with school readiness or school anxiety," Ms. Norris said. "They might be kids who are falling through the cracks."

The learning center is different from the Pace School in Churchill in several ways, she said.

Students who attend the kindergarten through ninth grade Churchill school have identifiable and often profound mental, social and behavioral disabilities.

At the learning center, the K-5 students' problems will be less severe and as a result, they will need a less intensive staff support structure, Ms. Norris said.

At the Churchill school, students are referred by school districts that aren't equipped to meet their physical and emotional needs.

At the learning center, parents who are worried about their children can seek enrollment, Ms. Norris said.

Because it's a tuition-based school, parents making private referrals would have to pay for their child to attend the learning center, said Karen Lamoureux, chief executive officer of Pace School.

The idea of opening a new school in or near Butler County has come up several times over the past few years, Ms. Lamoureux said.

The Butler Area School District, which has several children enrolled at the Churchill school, has been a particularly active proponent, she said.

Officials from that district even helped Pace find space at the former Mars elementary building.

Moving into a location that already has classrooms, a cafeteria and other school facilities in place helped keep down startup costs, Ms. Lamoureux said.

PACE has an annual, renewable lease with Mars and will spend about \$250,000 to open the school, she added.

The school can accommodate 24 children and will have five staffers at the Valencia building, Ms. Norris said.

And there is room for expansion.

Pace intends to serve students from eight school districts within a 25-mile radius of the Valencia site, she added.

"For Pace School this is an exciting venture. It's the first step outside of our doors," she said. "Our hope is we can take services closer to the children that need them."

To learn more about the Pace School, visit: [www.paceschool.org](http://www.paceschool.org).

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