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**JFS Rochester and Rochester Rehabilitation Center Announce
Strategic Transition of Pencils & Paper to Sustain Countywide Impact
Program Provides Free School Supplies Serving More than 36,000 Students**

ROCHESTER, NY - March 11, 2026—JFS Rochester today announced that, effective July 1, the Pencils & Paper program will transition to new leadership at Rochester Rehabilitation Center, an Ability Partners agency, ensuring the long-term growth and sustainability of one of Monroe County’s most vital educational equity initiatives. At its core, Pencils & Paper is built on a simple but powerful belief: when students have the basic tools they need to learn, barriers to achievement are removed and education becomes a true pathway out of poverty. This transition reflects a shared commitment by both organizations to strengthen the program’s future and expand its reach.

Founded by community champions Howard Berman and the late Howard Grossman and brought to life at JFS in 2016 to support 28 Rochester City School District schools, Pencils & Paper has grown into a countywide resource serving 119 schools across nine districts, along with independent, parochial, and alternative schools. Last year, Pencils & Paper distributed more than \$1.5 million in free school supplies to 1,527 teachers and 36,888 students, ensuring teachers have the resources to meet students’ needs and creating pathways to long-term opportunity. Pencils & Paper has been powered by an extraordinary community of volunteers, many from the Jewish community, whose time, care, and commitment built the program into what it is today. Those volunteers will continue to help steward the program’s next chapter at Rochester Rehabilitation.

“Pencils & Paper represents the very best of what community collaboration can accomplish,” said Deb Rosen, JFS President & CEO. “We are extraordinarily proud to have nurtured this program from a small city-based initiative into a countywide resource for students and teachers. Rochester Rehabilitation Center brings the infrastructure, mission alignment, and operational capacity to take it even further. It is an evolution, and we will be working side by side to ensure Pencils & Paper becomes an even greater force for educational equity in Monroe County.”

Rochester Rehabilitation Center operates a multifunctional site at 1357 University Avenue focused on training, and employment opportunities for individuals of all abilities. The organization’s physical infrastructure and mission-driven workforce model create strong operational and fundraising synergies for Pencils & Paper’s next phase.

“Pencils & Paper is a powerful, proven program that changes what is possible for students and teachers every single day,” said Darrell Whitbeck, Rochester Rehabilitation Center President & CEO. “We are honored that JFS has entrusted us with its future. The program aligns seamlessly with our model of hands-on training, meaningful work, and community impact. We are committed to preserving what makes Pencils & Paper so special while building the capacity to serve even more schools and classrooms across Monroe County.”

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The transition comes at a time of unprecedented need. Over the past decade, demand for basic classroom supplies has more than quadrupled as rising costs and inflation have placed increasing pressure on families and educators throughout the region. New York State families now spend an average of \$1,348 per child on school supplies, the highest in the nation, with costs rising more than 7% in the past year and nearly 24% since 2020. What was once primarily an urban challenge now affects suburban districts as well, making Pencils & Paper an essential countywide resource.

JFS and Rochester Rehabilitation Center will work closely through the transition and beyond to ensure continuity for educators, volunteers, donors, and community partners. “JFS remains deeply committed to the success of the students and teachers served by Pencils & Paper,” added Rosen. “Seeing it positioned to reach more classrooms, remove more barriers to learning, and create even greater opportunity for students is a source of enormous pride.”

Additional details about volunteer engagement, community partnerships, and program operations for school districts and teachers under Rochester Rehabilitation Center will be shared in the coming months.

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