

PACESETTER

A news magazine of PACER Center, Inc. by and for parents of children and young adults with disabilities

Annual federal report looks at special education

By Patricia Bill

Approximately 6.9 million American children with disabilities, from birth through age 21, received special education services through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 2002.

The figure comes from data collected for the 26th *Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004*. The two-volume several-hundred-paged report on IDEA, released in April 2006, was prepared for the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS), U.S. Department of Education.

It covers IDEA-related information from the health of infants and toddlers served by IDEA to preparing young

adults for the transition to life beyond high school.

The report includes information by age groups: infants and toddlers (Part C of IDEA); children ages 3–5 (Part B), and students ages 6–21 (Part B). Among the data:

- The 268,331 children ages birth–2 years receiving services under IDEA’s Part C represents about 2.2 percent of the birth–2 population in the United States. The number of children served under Part C increased by 62.3 percent between 1994 and 2002.
- In 2002, Part B served 647,420 children ages 3–5.
- In the 6–21 aged students receiving Part B services, the greatest number were diagnosed with a

specific learning disability (48.3 percent). Other disability categories were speech or language impairments (18.7 percent), mental retardation (9.9 percent), serious emotional disturbance (8.1 percent), other health impairments (6.6 percent), and other disabilities (8.4 percent).

To order a copy of the report, go to www.edpubs.org/webstore/Content/search.asp and type in the report title or the ID number (ED000675P).

Regs expected soon

Final regulations for Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), as amended in 2004, are expected in August. IDEA is the federal law that provides a free, appropriate public education for children with disabilities.



PACER, the Benefit, children:

What it's all about!

Glamour, great entertainment, lively auctions—PACER’s annual Benefit is THE event for many generous Minnesotans. The purpose: to support PACER programs for children with all disabilities and their families. (See pages 11–14.)

An exchange between 11-year-old Jarek Belle-Isle and pop star Michael Bolton at the end of the evening was the essence of the Benefit and PACER’s work. Jarek won PACER’s Creative Kids art competition. He showed off his ability by presenting PACER notecards featuring his original design to a receptive Bolton.

Jarek’s experience symbolizes PACER’s mission: To expand opportunities and enhance the quality of life of children and young adults with disabilities and their families.

Jarek Belle-Isle presents Benefit performer Michael Bolton with PACER notecards featuring Jarek’s design. Artist Anthony Whelihan looks on. See more on page 15.



Ted & Roberta Mann Foundation Symposium:

Event examines learning, mental health disabilities

More than half the calls PACER Center receives from parents involve invisible disabilities—learning and mental health issues such as attention disorders, learning disabilities, and emotional-behavioral disorders.

The first annual Ted & Roberta Mann Foundation Symposium for Children's Mental Health and Learning Disabilities will address those concerns on Aug. 8.

"Based on the overwhelming number of reservations received and the size of the waiting list to attend the symposium, we are planning a similar event next year," said Paula F. Goldberg, PACER executive director. "This year's registration filled quickly. It shows the critical need for information."

Sponsored by the Mann foundation, the free symposium is designed for general education teachers (CEUs are offered) and parents of children with disabilities. PACER is a co-sponsor.

Keynote speakers are

- Jonathan Mooney, writer-activist who has dyslexia, did not learn to read until he was 12 years old. A graduate of Brown University, with an honors degree in English literature, Jonathan co-founded Project Eye-to-Eye, a



Gabrielle Carlson



John Schumacher



Jonathan Mooney

famous mentoring program for students with disabilities. He received a prestigious Truman Scholarship for graduate studies and was a Rhodes Scholarship national finalist.

- Gabrielle Carlson, M.D., specializes in childhood and adolescent depression and bipolar disorder. She is a professor of psychiatry and pediatrics and directs the Division of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at the State University of New York at Stony Brook. Carlson obtained her medical degree from Cornell University and trained at Washington University (St. Louis) and the National Institutes of Mental Health. She completed a fellowship and taught at UCLA.
- John Schumacher, world-famous chef, had difficulty reading and learning as a child. Later he was diagnosed with dyslexia. Although frustrated in the classroom, he

succeeded as a cook and baker. He earned a diploma from Dunwoody Institute and graduated with high honors from the Culinary Institute of America. Schumacher owned and operated the world-class New Prague Hotel and has published three cookbooks.

The conference includes interactive breakout sessions led by education and mental health experts.

For information about results of the conference or to learn about registration for next year's symposium, visit www.pacer.org or call PACER at (952) 838-9000 (metro area) or (800) 537-2237 (Greater Minnesota)

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8161 Normandale Blvd.

Minneapolis, MN 55437-1044

Voice: (952) 838-9000

TTY: (952) 838-0190

Toll-free: (800) 537-2237(MN)

Toll-free: (888) 248-0822 (National)

FAX: (952) 838-0199

E-mail: pacer@pacer.org

PACER Executive Director:

Paula F. Goldberg

Communications Director, Editor: *Pat Bill*

Writer-Editor: *Marcia Kelly*

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PACER Web site: www.pacer.org

Alliance site: www.taalliance.org

FAPE site: www.fape.org

C³ site: www.c3online.org

Bullying: www.pacerkidsagainstabullying.org
(Alternate format is available upon request.)

The Ted and Roberta Mann Foundation

The ongoing mission of the Ted and Roberta Mann Foundation is to keep alive the legacy established by the late Ted Mann, theater owner, movie producer, businessperson, and philanthropist. Administered by Mann's eldest daughter, Roberta Mann Benson, and her two children, John and Blythe Brenden, the foundation continues to make a difference in the lives of many.

The content of the symposium is of particular interest to Roberta Mann Benson from a professional standpoint. She received her master's degree in psychotherapy at the Adler Graduate School and is currently working on her doctorate at St. Mary's University in the field of education. Mann Benson is also certified as a life coach.

Alexa Posny appointed to head OSEP

Alexa Posny, Ph.D., former deputy commissioner at the Kansas State Department of Education, special education director, and teacher of students with emotional and learning disabilities, was named Director of the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). OSEP is part of the U.S. Department of Education under the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS). John H. Hager, Assistant Secretary of Education, OSERS, announced Posny's appointment in April.

Posny oversees a number of federal programs affecting students with disabilities and their families. Her work

has been recognized nationally for some time. Kansas is viewed as a leader in the inclusion of students with disabilities in its statewide accountability system, and

Posny was invited numerous times to share Kansas' experience with alternate assessments with federal officials.

In addition to her Kansas post,



Alexa Posny

Posny was director of special education in Kansas, Wisconsin, and Illinois school districts. She has taught elementary school students with learning disabilities and students with behavior disorders in middle and high schools.

"We look forward to Alexa Posny's leadership," said Paula F Goldberg, PACER Center's executive director. "Her priorities of parent involvement, early childhood issues, transition for young adults, and No Child Left Behind and IDEA [the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act] will benefit children with disabilities and their families."

Barbara Troolin directs Minnesota's special education

Barbara Troolin, Ph.D., was made Director of Special Education Policy, the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), in January.

She had been Director of Special Services at South Washington County Schools. There she oversaw special education



Barbara Troolin

and several other programs.

Before her South Washington County responsibilities, Troolin was manager of the Monitoring and Compliance Division at MDE. Other experiences include administrative work in Sherburne-Northern Wright Special Education Cooperative and special education teacher. In addition, she has been on the adjunct faculty at St. Cloud State, St. Mary's University, and at the University of Minnesota.

Troolin said she will bring the local district perspective to MDE's leader-

ship team and looks forward to building relationships inside and outside the department. Her priorities include implementing the State Performance Plan that mostly focuses on measuring results for students with disabilities.

"Barbara Troolin has said she is committed to building positive partnerships with parents and other stakeholders in the special education community. We know that parents and professionals will appreciate her efforts on behalf of children," said Virginia Richardson, PACER parent training manager.

A simple bequest can change lives

*It's easy to make a bequest—a gift that lives after you.
Simply remember PACER with a statement in your will or trust.*

Your bequest in your will provides a legacy of your concern for children with disabilities and their families. It will support important PACER programs that truly make a difference in the lives of children.

Bequests can be in cash, real estate, securities, or other assets, and they may be deducted from your

estate taxes. PACER Center, Inc. is registered as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation in Minnesota.

For information on how you can make a bequest to PACER, contact Mary Schrock, PACER Center's director of development, or an attorney who represents your interests.

PACER Center, Inc. • 952.838.9000

Parents want to know: ‘Does advocating for

By Marcia Kelly

At some point, you may meet with your child’s Individualized Education Program (IEP) team and you may encounter an issue on which you and the other team members disagree. Maybe it will concern the services your child is receiving, or perhaps it will be about the IEP goals. Whatever the issue, it presents an opportunity for you to

play a role that only you can: your child’s advocate.

While it might be tempting to avoid the conflict, “advocating for your child with a disability is the most important job you’ll ever have,” says Carolyn Anderson, a parent advocate at PACER. “What you do is very important and can have lifelong implications,” she adds. Here are some specific reasons you may want to speak up for your child.

Parents learn how their leadership can help children

“Four stars” is how one parent rated PACER Center’s sixth Parent Leadership Conference, “Champions for Children with Disabilities.” Other superlatives filled the evaluations, too. The conference was April 28-29 at PACER.

Keynote speaker was Alice Seagren, Minnesota Commissioner of Education. She is the parent of an adult child with a disability and a parent leader at local, district, and state levels.

The event prepares Minnesota parents of children with disabilities to serve effectively in an advisory capacity on Special Education Advisory Councils (SEACs) and other interagency committees, councils, and boards in their communities. It offered parents information about federal and state education laws, special education finance, and ways to

have input into policymaking.

Many of the parents attending said they gained ideas for new, innovative ways to approach parent-professional collaboration. The event also offered them an opportunity to develop friendships with one another as part of PACER’s statewide Parent-Leader Network.

Andrea Watrus, a participant, wrote PACER, “I just want to say that you accomplished, in that stellar conference, what many only hope they can do. I feel the time I spent at the Parent Leadership Conference was the most valuable use of time that I spent in a very long time. The information presented and distributed is invaluable as well as meeting all the dynamic participants and PACER staff. Thank you again. You rock!”

Special education directors and interagency committee chairs seeking to fill advisory positions can contact Barb Ziemke, at PACER (952) 838-9000 or (800) 537-2237 (toll-free in Greater Minnesota). Parents and professionals can also call Ziemke to request assistance in increasing the effectiveness of parent involvement.

For publications and other resources on leadership, go to www.pacer.org/parent/leadership.htm

Below left, Minnesota parents attending the leadership conference learned how their involvement in community committees and councils can help children with disabilities. Below right, Alice Seagren, Minnesota Commissioner of Education, addressed the conference.



my child with a disability make a difference?'

You're the One

For starters, no one understands your child like you do. You know his or her strengths, challenges, spirit, and dreams better than anyone. You have a vision for your child's future and a sense of what it will take to achieve it. Your IEP team members need you to provide this information. Doing so will help the team align the IEP's goals and objectives with the vision you have for your child. "Remember, too," Anderson says, "you are the permanent member of the IEP team. Therefore, you have more to offer and more to lose or gain."

Not only do you have a unique understanding of your child, you also have a lifelong connection. "Once your child grows up, the people from school will be gone," Anderson notes. "You will be left with the results, so it's important to make sure they are the ones you and your child want." Advocating for your child over the years can help ensure that outcome.

You Shape the Future

When you advocate for your child, you act in the present to make a difference in the future, said Anderson. You might not realize it, but every time you stand up for your child's rights and speak out for his or her needs, you are modeling an essential skill: self advocacy. By watching you at IEP meetings and seeing how to effectively express needs and opinions, your child will have the opportunity to learn a vital skill that will be important for a lifetime.

Advocating for your child can feel challenging, even intimidating. You might be shy or speak a different language or feel that you aren't equal to the professionals on the team. The fact is, however, parents are true partners in their child's education.

"You are an equal, but just on a different basis of qualification," Anderson says. The professionals are qualified by virtue of their education; you are qualified by virtue of your role as a parent. "That shouldn't be underestimated as a qualification to be at the IEP table," she says.

"It is always appropriate to advocate for your child as best you can, even if you make mistakes," Anderson adds. "Just learn and do better next time. There are many ways to increase your skills." PACER, for example, offers free workshops about special education law, leadership, and advocacy. It also provides written materials, parent advocates, national speakers, and more.

Parents can advocate more effectively and appropriately if they learn about the system and the process of special education. "If you do that, you are more likely to be successful in obtaining what your child needs," Anderson says.

For example, she says, it's helpful to realize that your viewpoint is bound to be different from that of educators.

Communication skills go hand in hand with advocacy

Interested in being a more effective advocate with your IEP team? These communication tips could help.



Carolyn Anderson

- **Be self-aware.** Do you have preconceived ideas? Are you aware of your own and others' perspectives and perceptions? Do you judge others?
- **Recognize your communication attitude.** Are you passive? Aggressive? Angry? Receptive? Friendly? Assertive? People will respond to your attitude as much as to what you say.
- **Listen more than you speak.** Communication is a two-way process. Other people may have valuable information and insights that you need to hear.
- **Ask questions.** Direct your questions to the person most likely to have the information or expertise you need.
- **Be clear and honest.** Don't blame. Focus on solutions instead. Limit criticism. Give positive feedback and praise as often as possible. Focus on specifics, not generalities.

"Parents are free to focus on their child," Anderson says. "Schools are government agencies and they have different constraints than parents do. Even the best staff people are not free to be as focused on the child as the parent is."

It's also useful to know that schools are not required to offer the "best," only what's appropriate for the child. "When parents understand this, they are more likely to be successful advocates," Anderson says. "If you ask for 'what's best for my child,' you set yourself up for a dynamic of opposition. If you instead ask for what's appropriate for your child, you're working within the process, using their language, and avoiding the adversarial dimension."

In the end, advocacy is all about making sure your child receives the services and education to which he or she is entitled. Your unique and valuable perspective can help the IEP team makes decisions that will benefit your child now and in the future.

Dropping out:

Can parents help prevent it?

By Patricia Bill

When a child enters preschool or kindergarten, most parents view the milestone as the beginning of a journey that leads to high school graduation, employment, and a secure future. Few expect that their son or daughter will *not* complete their education.

Yet, many students—particularly those with a disability—drop out of school with sad consequences. Research shows that unemployment, poverty, teen pregnancy, chemical abuse, criminal activity, and many other problems often affect people who do not finish high school.

Students who drop out of school are often discouraged, in a cycle of failure, not in control, and may engage in

negative behavior, said Renelle Nelson, PACER parent advocate and coordinator of PACER's Project for Children and Youth with Emotional or Behavioral Disorders.

"It may not be the student's intention to drop out," said Deborah Leuchovius, coordinator of the Technical Assistance on Transition and the Rehabilitation Act (TATRA) project at PACER Center. "Many students who quit school say that they simply stopped going one day. Some disliked school, had a problem with a teacher or administrator, or had low grades. A number thought a teacher or administrator wanted them to leave—and no one objected. Others have reasons unrelated to school, such as pregnancy, caring for family members, or the need to work."

What puts students at risk for dropping out?

Factors or markers that may lead to quitting school may be present early in a child's life. However, many children begin to respond to them, often with negative behaviors, in the middle school years—13 to 14 years old, said Renelle Nelson. That is often when parents contact PACER.

Risk factors are not precise indicators, cautioned Deborah Leuchovius and Nelson. Some students may quit school for no apparent reason, while others with a number of risk factors graduate. Following are some things that may contribute to a student leaving school:

Environment

Family, peers, and community—all influence how children and young adults view school.

- An abundance of research shows that family involvement has a major effect on a student staying in school. Without emotional and academic support from home, students are at high risk for dropping out.
- Some schools or communities may

not expect children who are racially and culturally diverse, children with disabilities or who are from low incomes families to do well in school. Low expectations may keep a child from trying.

- Youth often adopt the attitudes of friends or others they admire. Associates who do not like school or are uninterested in education can persuade a susceptible student that school is not worthwhile.

Disabilities

Students with mental health disabilities, such as learning disabilities, attention deficit, fetal alcohol syndrome, or other neurological disorders, are at risk for dropping out.

- Students having difficulty with an academic subject may feel frustrated or discouraged, said Nelson. A student who does not qualify for special education services or a Section 504 (of the Rehabilitation Act) Plan may not receive sufficient help. A student receiving special education, but doing poorly, may need changes in his or her Individualized Education Program (IEP), she said.
- Research shows that students with

disabilities are at greater risk for dropping out if they have previously been held back a year, if they are older than other students in their grade, or if they have limited English, said Leuchovius.

Behavior

A student's negative behavior is often a factor in the failure to graduate.

- Behaviors may be part of a disability. Behaviors that cause problems at school may be associated with some neurological disorders.
- Students doing poorly in an academic subject may skip class or act out in the classroom to divert attention from their weakness, said Nelson. Skipping school, failing classes, significant discipline problems, and breaking the law often precede dropping out.

What can parents do?

Parents influence how a child views the importance of school. Following are some ways to encourage your child to do well at school.

From home:

- Show your child that you value education, said Leuchovius. Encour-

Just the facts...

About 14 percent of all youth 18 years and older do not complete high school.—*National Center for Education Statistics, 1999.*

The dropout rate for students with disabilities is approximately twice that of students of the general population.—*J. Blackorby & M. Wagner, "Longitudinal Postschool Outcomes of Youth with Disabilities: Findings from the National Longitudinal Transition Study. (1996) Exceptional Children 62(5)*

The percentage of students ages 14 and older with disabilities who dropped out of school was 37.6 percent in 2001-02. It is a decline from 45.1 percent in 1993-94.—*Twenty-Sixth Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (April 2006)*

There is no single reason why students quit high school. It may be due to of lack of connection to the school environment, a perception that school is boring, feeling unmotivated, academic challenges, and the weight of real world events. Nearly half (47 percent) of surveyed students said their reason for dropping out was that classes were not interesting. About 69 percent said they were not motivated or inspired to work hard.—*"The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts," for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (March 2006)*

age your child to learn, know what your child is studying in school, tell your child what you expect, and talk about the future, she said.

- Show your child how much you value education when he or she is young. Read to your child, play "school," point out the school building on drives or walks, post your child's artwork, and do readiness activities such as learning the alphabet and counting.
- Point out the importance of homework. It teaches your child responsibility, as well as subject matter. Be involved by promoting a regular time and place to do homework.
- Participate in your child's schooling:
 - Talk to your child and ask questions about the school day
 - Read and respond to communications from school
 - Become acquainted with teachers and other staff
 - Regularly visit the school's Web site
 - Volunteer for the school
 - Attend school events
 - Meet and talk with other parents.
- Know your child's friends and their families. Connections among parents build community and support for your child.
- Despite declarations of independence, most teenagers want their parents' support. Keep the lines of communication open.

Through school

- Research shows that when students are involved in school activities they are less likely to drop out. Encourage your child to participate in sports, music, or other activities. Attend related events and other school functions.
- Encourage your child to form relationships with adults at school. Friendly conversations with a teacher after class or one-on-one moments with an extracurricular

adviser may initiate a connection.

Many students who drop out say they believe that no one cares.

- Monitor your student's attendance and school performance. Check with your child's teachers occasionally to see how things are going. Compliment your child if they are going well; offer help if they are not.
- Know and understand your child's school behavior policy and make sure your child does, too. If your child has not brought a copy of the policy home for you to read, ask the principal or district office for one, or check the school's or district's Web site. If something in the policy could present problems for your child, work with your child and the school to keep your child in good standing. (Many schools are instituting schoolwide behavior supports that create a positive environment for all students. See www.pacer.org/articles/pacesetter/winter03/posbehavior.htm.)
- Tell the teachers and others at school to contact you if your child is having
(Continued on page 8)

'WHY do you act that way?'

"Why" is a question that parents and schools sometimes forget to ask a child or young adult when behavior could lead to dropping out of school.

"If child cannot respond, look for a pattern to the behavior," Nelson suggested. She recalled a couple situations in which figuring out "why" kept teens in school.

"Joe"

Although he did well otherwise, "Joe" regularly misbehaved in his math class.

When a PACER advocate asked the school and his parents *why* he might act that way, pieces of the puzzle began to emerge. 1) Math was difficult for him. 2) The class met during the weakest cycle of his medication. 3) The class was right before lunch, and he was hungry.

The resolution: Joe should attend class for the instruction, but he could go to the resource room during the work period for more individualized support. He could also have a snack break mid-morning.

"Jane"

"Jane" was in her senior year when she became truant. Instead of going to class, she was hiding in the restroom, hall, or media center. Eventually she faced suspension. When her father called PACER, the advocate suggested he ask his daughter *why* she was skipping class.

Jane said she was "embarrassed." Her parents had recently divorced and the girl stayed with her father to finish high school. In addition to missing her mother, she faced questions and remarks about her mother from other students.

The resolution: the father spoke with the school's social worker, and they figured out ways to help Jane.

Global concern for children with disabilities

By Patricia Bill

Vacation trips often result in travelers becoming more interested in the area visited. Usually as time goes on, however, the attention wanes.

Not so for a couple of PACER staff. What began as personal trips for Paula F. Goldberg and Sue Folger to destinations across the world have resulted in collaboration to help children with disabilities and their families.

“Children with disabilities and their needs draw my attention wherever I am,” said Goldberg, executive director and a founder of PACER Center.

“When I vacationed in India in 2005 with two friends, I noticed the critical needs of children with disabilities and their families there. We also saw cutting-edge resources that could make a difference for them. Based on my experience in the United States and at PACER Center, I thought there must



Paula Goldberg (left) met in India with Sudha Murty, chairperson and trustee of the Infosys Foundation, and Sudha Gopalakrishnan, trustee of the foundation.

be a way to match the two.”

A few appointments paved the way. Before she and her friends left India, they had visited with Indian government officials, toured many programs, and laid the groundwork for future collaboration. Now, plans are under way for a December assistive technol-

ogy conference in Bangalore, India, and creating a center like PACER’s Simon Technology, also in Bangalore, with help from Indian and American companies. (See PACESETTER Fall 2005.)

There are many reasons to be interested in India, said Goldberg. India has millions of children and adults who will benefit from assistive technology. India is a leader in technology and partners with major American IT companies. India’s education system is open to research and demonstration. India is the largest democracy in the world and an ally of the United States. Finally, propos-

als for assistive technology collaboration are receiving encouragement and support.

Sue Folger, co-director of the Technical Assistance ALLIANCE for Parent Centers (the national center is at PACER) also experienced international involvement with children with disabilities. She visited Malaysia with friends in April. Their host had asked if she would talk to a few

Dropping out of school: Can parents help prevent it?

(Continued from page 7)

difficulties. Work together to resolve problems before they escalate into situations that will make your child want to leave school.

If problems arise

■ “Children and youth often meet their needs through behavior,” said Nelson. “Many times professionals look at the behaviors and forget to figure out the needs that cause the behaviors.”

If your child has failing grades, excessive absences, truancy, or disciplinary issues that could prompt dropping out, talk with your child, said Nelson. “Ask, ‘What do you need?’ Kids are pretty good at knowing what they need. If the problems continue,

ask yourself ‘What am I missing?’ and continue communicating with your child,” Nelson said.

Another route is to ask the school for a functional behavioral assessment, said Nelson. It identifies why a child behaves in a certain way and recommends positive ways to intervene and instructions to address the behavior.

■ If you suspect your child is using drugs or alcohol, seek help for him or her immediately.

■ Ask to meet with your child’s teacher, school counselor, or social worker, said Nelson. If your child does not receive special education services, does he or she need a Section 504 Plan? If your child has an IEP, call an IEP team meeting to think about

changing goals and developing new strategies. By law, you are a member of your child’s IEP team.

■ “If you, your child, and the IEP team conclude that your child won’t succeed in the current school environment, look at a different setting,” said Leuchovius. Options include magnet schools, alternative schools, charter schools, work-based learning programs, and general education development (GED) programs.

“Dropout prevention often begins with helping a child learn to believe in himself again,” concluded Nelson. “Parents and schools have a major role in making that happen.”

Check www.pacer.org for a new handout, “Dropout Prevention: Parents Play a Key Role.”

prompts international collaboration

parents of children with disabilities while she was in Malaysia. Folger consented, believing it would be a simple encounter with a handful of people.

“Imagine my surprise when I was led to a room with about 80 people waiting to hear about the work of parent centers in the United States,” said Folger.

The scenario was repeated several times during her trip. Folger also visited homes, local centers, and an institution for children with disabilities.

At the institution, resources were unused because of the lack of trained staff.

“Things are very different for people with disabilities in Malaysia than they are in America, but the families there want change. Parents and the people working with children with disabilities were amazed to hear about what many of our children and



Sue Folger, third from left in rear, met with families of children with disabilities and professionals on a recent trip with friends to Malaysia.

young adults with disabilities have accomplished with the appropriate support and accommodations,” said Folger. “The people there are hungry for materials and were thrilled to learn

about PACER’s Web site,” she said.

The examples of Goldberg and Folger illustrate the possibilities of international collaboration to improve the lives of children with disabilities and their families. However, PACER has had informal global connections for many years. For example, its Count Me In program is in England, Japan, and Australia (see page 10); PACESETTER goes to a number of countries upon request; and the Web site (www.pacer.org) has many visits from across the world. In addition, professionals from other parts of the world contact PACER for tours when they visit the United States.

As nearly anyone would agree, the world is becoming smaller. PACER’s experiences merely echo the fact.

ALLIANCE provides technical assistance nationwide

PACER Center is the national technical assistance center for the Technical Assistance ALLIANCE for Parent Centers. It serves the more than 100 Parent Training and Information Centers (PTIs) and Community Parent Resource Centers (CPRCs) across the United States.

In turn, the parent centers provide training and assistance to the nation’s families of 6.9 million children with disabilities.

Part of the ALLIANCE’s work is to document parent centers’ effectiveness in helping families.

Following are results of a random 2004-05 telephone survey of 5,000 parents using parent centers.

- 81 percent said that parent center assistance received via telephone helped their child receive more appropriate services.
- 89 percent said that because of information received at a workshop, they were able to work with the school to address a critical need related to their child’s education.
- 84 percent said that parent center information and support helped them resolve a disagreement with their child’s school.
- 93 percent said assistance from a parent center gave them the information to make a decision about their child’s education.
- 98 percent reported that information received at parent center workshops made them more knowledgeable about how to work with schools.

The following is based on reports of parent centers nationwide.

- Parent centers had more than 1.6 million contacts with parents and professionals through training, presentations, calls, letters, home visits, and e-mails.
- More than 524,000 parents and professionals attended parent center training and presentations.
- Approximately 37 percent of parent center contacts were with families and professionals of culturally and racially diverse backgrounds.
- More than 14,000 families were helped when parent center staff attended Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings and mediations with them.
- Parent center Web sites recorded more than 7.7 million visitors.

ALLIANCE co-directors are Paula F. Goldberg, Sue Folger, and Sharman Davis Barrett. Regional centers are in New Jersey, North Carolina, Ohio, Colorado, and California. In addition to a highly regarded annual national conference, the ALLIANCE facilitates three institutes for parent center staff from across the United States each year.

For more information about the ALLIANCE, parent centers, and their work, visit www.taalliance.org.

PACER puppets immigrate to England

PACER's COUNT ME IN puppets usually talk "Minnesotan" when they teach elementary school students about including children with disabilities. For a new troupe of the puppets, however, British accents are the rule.

Relationships often develop for PACER via visits

to its Web site at www.pacer.org. That was the case with PACER and Special Abilities, an organization located in Wakefield, England, and home to the newest COUNT ME IN puppets.

Similar to what PACER does in America, Special Abilities provides information and support for parents of children with disabilities across the United Kingdom. Gillian Archbold is the director and the parent of an adult daughter, Sabrina, who has cerebral palsy. Gillian founded Special Abilities in 1999 and spearheaded the PACER connection.

Like PACER, Special Abilities has a goal of removing barriers for people with disabilities. It wants to promote inclusion in a way that makes an impact, Archbold said. Using puppets had been mentioned, but the board and staff didn't know where to start. Then Archbold spotted information about COUNT ME IN on the Web. She sent an e-mail to



Special Abilities staff and board met the PACER's Count Me In troupe. From left, Sabrina Archbold bonded with the puppet Sally; PACER's Gloria Williams helped a new puppeteer make adjustments; Gillian Archbold worked with Gina.

PACER, and Gloria Williams of COUNT ME IN quickly responded.

"The e-mail was so welcoming, I was encouraged to learn more," said Archbold.

The exchanges continued. Soon Special Abilities purchased a set of puppets and scripts. It also sent a delegation to PACER for

training—a major undertaking for the English organization. Archbold realized the risk in making a large purchase sight unseen and committing seven staff and board members to an intercontinental journey, she said.

"I had no doubts, though, when I met the people at PACER and saw the puppets," she said. "I knew instantly it would be good."

PACER puppet coordinator Lynn Dennis felt good, too, she said.

"They were such an enthusiastic and dedicated group, and it was such fun to see the puppets come alive in their hands!" she said.

The Brits evaluated the training with an overall "Excellent" score. In addition, one new puppeteer responded that what was most helpful was "knowing simply that such an exemplary organization [PACER] exists in the world."

How to purchase PACER puppets

Selling COUNT ME IN and Let's Prevent Abuse packages to organizations across the United States or abroad is not new for PACER. Puppets have been sent as far away as Australia and Japan.

PACER puppets are unique, handcrafted works of art. The multicultural hand-and-rod puppets are three feet tall. Basic packages include puppets, a custom-built bright red wheelchair, other props, scripts, and resource books.

All puppets and scripts are copyrighted and available only through PACER Center.

Training may be arranged for groups purchasing puppet packages. Disability awareness and/or abuse issues, and puppetry techniques will be taught.

For information or to order a puppet package, visit www.pacer.org/puppets or call PACER Center at (952) 838-9000.



BENEFIT '06

PACER Center's 24th Annual Benefit, May 6, 2006 – A supplement to PACESETTER

Benefit brings success, support

“Better than ever!” That is how supporters of children with disabilities and PACER Center described PACER's 24th annual Benefit. It was May 6 at the Minneapolis Convention Center.

In addition to pop star Michael Bolton's performance, the Benefit featured a 1,000-item silent auction and a spectacular live auction, with items that included a BMW sports car and a Twins package with Kirby Puckett's jersey, worn and autographed (complete with juice stain) and tickets for four to all seven of the World Series games.

“The success of the Benefit is the result of the hard work of a fantastic Benefit committee, the wonderful support of PACER's many dedicated friends, and the commitment of the community to help children with disabilities,” said Paula F. Goldberg, PACER's executive director.

“Generous corporate sponsors and outstanding donations to the live and silent auction items mean that Minnesota children with disabilities and their families benefit,” said Mary Schrock, PACER's director of development. “The Benefit affects many PACER programs.”

Below, Jerry Ruzicka and Honorary Benefit Chair Tani Austin, both of Starkey Hearing Foundation, looked forward to the Benefit program. Above right, Carl Pohlad and Irwin Jacobs are long-time active PACER supporters. Below right, Joanne and Don Davidson met pop star Michael Bolton. Don Davidson co-chaired the Benefit Corporate Sponsor Committee. Austin and Don Davidson serve on PACER's Advisory Board.

Honorary Benefit chairs were Bill and Tani Austin, Starkey Hearing Foundation. Benefit co-chairs Mary Frey, Colleen McGough-Wood, and Danna Mirviss headed approximately 400 volunteers. Silent Auction co-chairs were Patrice Alkire, Lisa Miller, and Joan Valente. Patron Party sponsors were the Austins, with Alexandra and Irwin Jacobs as co-chairs. Dinner sponsors were Steve and Mary Sue Simon and Family. Reception sponsor was Target Corporation, Friend of PACER sponsor was Phyllis Heilicher, and Valet sponsor was Best Buy Company. Emcees were Frank Vascellaro and Amelia Santaniello, husband-and-wife WCCO-TV news anchors.

The next PACER Benefit is May 5, 2007.



Thanks to the Benefit, PACER's help is free to Minnesota families



At left, long-time PACER supporters began the evening of the Benefit with a gourmet dinner. Seated are Marnie Stimpson and Jerry and Sarah Caruso. Standing are Dan Seman, Frank Bennett, Mara Bennett, Stacy Seman, and Muffy Bennett. Frank is co-chair of the PACER Advisory Board, of which Muffy is also a member. Sarah is former PACER Board of Directors president.



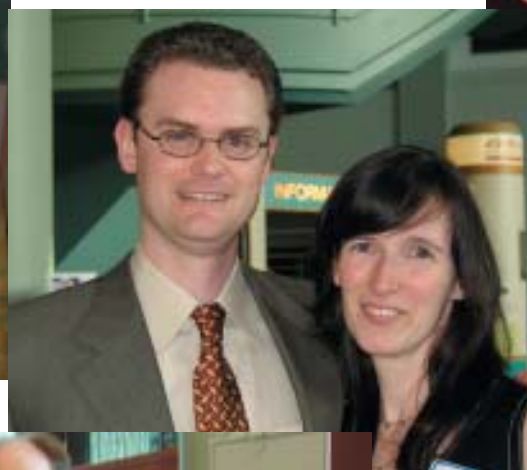
Benefit co-chairs were Colleen Mirviss. All three have volunteered on committees over the years. Colleen was on the Corporate Sponsor Committee and previously headed the Silent Auction.



At left, PACER Development Director Mary Schrock planned much of the Benefit. She and husband Dr. Christian Schrock ended the evening with a smile.



Above, Julie and Advisory Board member Charlie Weaver were among the 2,500 attending the Benefit. At left, Hayes Batson and Alicia Kunin-Batson are active PACER volunteers. Hayes was on the Benefit Corporate Sponsor Committee, and Alicia is a member of PACER's Board of Directors.



At left, Kathy and Hazen Graves, left, met up with Tom Bird, Catherine Shreves, John Bessler, and Amy Klobuchar. Kathy is a member and past president of PACER's Board of Directors and has chaired the Benefit. Amy is a member of PACER's Advisory Board.



At right, Jim Oricchio was co-chair of the Benefit Corporate Sponsor Committee. Part of the group attending with him were Jennifer Oricchio Carey, Chad Carey, Kelly Benz, and Jay Oricchio.



At right, Benefit program emcees Amelia Santaniello and Frank Vascellaro, husband and wife WCCO-TV news anchors, right, socialized with long-time friend Greg Davis of Colorado, left.



en McGough-Wood, Mary Frey, and Danna steered in several capacities on the Benefit Colleen has worked extensively on the ee and both Mary and Danna have Auction Committee.



At right, Beth and Clark Becker participated in the festivities. Clark is a member of PACER's Advisory Board.

Below, Kristin Stinar of KSTP-TV and Brad Geer were among the local celebs attending the PACER Benefit.



Jessica and Rowan Broyles enjoyed the evening. Jessica is a member of PACER's Board of Directors, in addition to serving as co-chair of the Benefit Invitation Committee.



Below are John Valente, Heidi Kraemer, PACER Executive Director Paula Goldberg, Paul Ackerman, and Kristi Wieser. John is on PACER's Board of Directors; Heidi is on the National Business Advisory Board; and Kristi is on PACER's Advisory Board. Paul, from Washington, D.C., is a member of PACER's National Business Advisory Board.



More Benefit...

At right, Richard Perkins, left, smiled for the camera with Ken and Charlie Rosenblum. "Perk" is a long-time member of the PACER Advisory Board, as well as the Corporate Sponsor Committee. Ken was a member of the Corporate Sponsor Committee.



Below, from left, Trenese Bellamy, Sandra Richardson, and Virginia Richardson ended the evening at the Patron Party. Virginia is manager of parent training at PACER.



**Save
the date:
May 5,
2007**

Phyllis Heilicher, left, Friend of PACER Sponsor, is pictured with Zehorit Heilicher and Danna Mirviss. Danna was Benefit co-chair.



Above, Cynthia and Larry Holtz have supported many PACER functions.

At right, attending with the McGough group were, from left, Kim Beecham, Janet McGough, Mary Jean Sargent, Megan McGough, Aimee Fierke, Colleen McGough-Wood, Brad Wood, Nicky Nagle, Tim Nagle, and Jean McGough. Colleen was Benefit co-chair. She is also on the PACER Advisory Board. Janet, Nicki and Mary Jean were Benefit Raffle co-chairs.



Children cut up (draw, paint, and paste) at PACER

By Patricia Bill

Vibrant colors, imaginative elements, distinctive style, fun! An Anthony Whelihan portrait?

Well, yes, but in *this* case the words describe PACER's new art workshops for children of all abilities—Whelihan-inspired.

Creative Kids workshops are the brainchild of Whelihan, internationally known artist and long-time supporter of PACER Center and children with disabilities. He developed the idea and conducted free art sessions at PACER in February and March. Local artists were on hand to assist and advise. Creative Kidstuff, Twin Cities-based retailer, donated art supplies. Through the project,

- Children with disabilities painted, drew, worked clay, clipped, pasted, and exercised their imaginations and talents. Each child produced at least one masterpiece, with a boost in self-esteem.
- Children could submit artwork created at the workshops or home for a PACER art contest. Ten finalists donated their winning pieces to the PACER Benefit Silent Auction. The watercolor-colored pencil creation of grand prize winner Jarek Bell-Isle became the design for PACER's 2006 greeting card.

"This new program is beyond anything I anticipated and is only going to get better as we move ahead to next year," said Whelihan. "Wherever we went everyone was so willing to donate and wanted to be a part of Creative Kids. Watching the kids with all the art materials was an experience..."

Participating in PACER's Creative Kids workshop under the watchful eye of artist Anthony Whelihan, right, are Alex Stanley, Sarah Gallaher, and Courtney Stanley.



PACER's Creative Kids cards support children with disabilities

Notecards designed by Jarek Belle-Isle (page 1) can be purchased at Twin Cities' Creative Kidstuff stores and PACER, through the PACER Web site at www.pacer.org, or by calling PACER at (952) 838-9000.

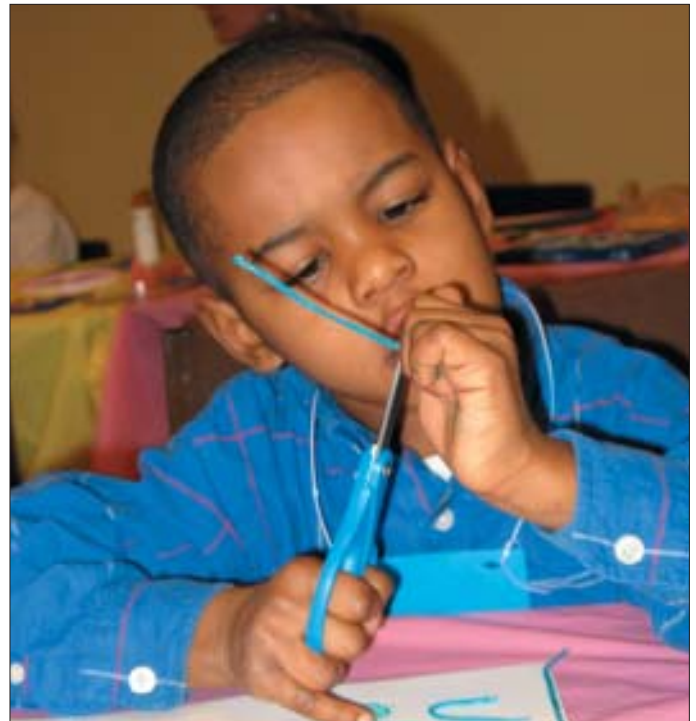
They are \$10 for a box of eight 4½ x 6¼ notecards and are printed on high-quality paper with accompanying envelopes. Jarek's story and a description of PACER services are on the back.

Production of the cards and envelopes is contributed by Ambassador Press, B&B Adcrafters, Gallery Services, Shapco printing, and DGIinventif.

As each kid completed his work, you could see that they were all proud of what they had done. Some of the signatures were bigger than the art itself... The one common denominator that everyone seemed to possess was an infectious smile. Art is an integral part of our lives as it allows for expression and creativity and can bring a smile to anyone, at least for a moment."

Families wanting information about Creative Kids can call (952) 838-9000 (metro) or (800) 537-2237 (toll free from greater Minnesota).

Izear Joiner concentrates on making just the right cut for his Creative Kids art project.



Considering a guardianship: Is it something

By Marcia Kelly

Eighteen may seem like a young age, but in the eyes of the law,* it means a person is an independent adult. Being deemed an adult means a person can do such things as vote, sign contracts, or consent to surgery without anyone else's permission. That's true even for teens with disabilities who might not be able to take care of themselves or manage key areas of life, such as employment, housing, nutrition, safety, or medical care.

If your teen is not able to make or communicate reasonable personal decisions or is unable to manage essential personal needs, you may want to consider the need for a guardianship. This legal tool grants you or another designated person the legal authority to make decisions for your adult child. Although a guardianship can be implemented at any time, developing one by your child's 18th birthday can help ensure a smooth

transition from childhood to adulthood. Considering whether a guardianship is appropriate for your family is an important part of your overall planning for your child's future.

How a guardianship can help

"A guardianship focuses on a person's well-being—and their vulnerabilities," explains Minneapolis attorney Bob Gunderson.

18 year olds are adults in Minnesota

"Having one in place by the time your child is 18 helps you manage that transition when many

changes are occurring. Your child may be leaving school and going to a vocational or residential setting.

They'll be leaving the pediatric clinic where everyone knows them and facing a different set of players in the

adult medicine clinic. If you don't have a guardianship in place and your child is not able to make appropriate decisions, there's no one to give direction. As a result, you may be shut out and your young adult

could be more vulnerable," he says.

"I always tell moms and dads, 'this guardianship does not change your relationship with your child. What it changes is your relationship with the outside world,'" he adds.

With court approval, a guardian may have power in up to seven areas: housing, day programs (such as school or work), medical care, contracts, public assistance, general supervisory power, and control of personal effects, Gunderson says. If the court is satisfied that your child is unable to manage all of those areas independently, unlimited guardianship is granted. If your child can manage some areas but not others,

Guardianship does not change the relationship with your child

limited guardianship will be granted.

Establishing a guardianship has significant implications

for your adult child. On one hand, it puts protections in place so your son or daughter can live life more safely, with as much self-determination as possible; on the other hand, it limits civil rights.

Legislature adjourns with little impact on education

By Bob Brick, Public Policy, PACER

The Minnesota State Legislature adjourned on May 21 after passing major bills dealing with a supplemental budget, bonding, taxes, and stadiums. For education, the results were less dramatic.

Legislation affecting early childhood education through grade 12 did not yield major changes, but it prevented the passage of proposals that parents and others believe would have an adverse effect on children with disabilities. One such proposal was to repeal all state laws and rules that exceed federal minimum standards. Another shifted responsibility for the burden of proof in due process

hearings from schools to parents.

The supplemental budget bill authorized changes to and increased funding for the state's early intervention system for children with disabilities (often referred to as Part C of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act). Observers expect the eligibility criteria for the program will change so that infants and toddlers who have been abused or exposed to other risk factors may be eligible for early intervention services. The bill included funding for early childhood family education and child care assistance targeted to families who are on a waiting list for the basic sliding fee program.

The bill also authorized \$10 million in

new funding for mental health, primarily by adding funds for crisis services and increasing rates for psychiatrists and other critical mental health professionals.

The bill required broad stakeholder involvement before significant changes could occur in the existing publicly funded health care programs that would affect benefits or require persons with disabilities to enroll in managed care programs.

The bill also required the Department of Human Services to notify stakeholders before proposing changes to the federal government under the Federal Deficit Reduction Act, which would affect the state's medical assistance program (including waived services).

your son or daughter will need at 18?

Balancing values of independence and protection can be a challenge.

Depending on your adult child's needs and wishes, you may consider less restrictive options before

There is no formula for choosing a guardian

choosing guardianship. A health care directive, for example, is a written document that describes a person's wishes about their health care. If a person is able to understand and sign the document, it can be used to name an agent, such as a parent, to make decisions if the person is unable to make or communicate their health care choices.

Choosing a guardian

If you do opt for a guardianship, you will want to think about whom should assume that duty. In many families, parents take on the role for as long as they are able. When parents die or can no longer do the job, someone else must be named. That person might be a sibling, relative, or trusted friend. You may even want to select co-guardians, such as a parent and a sibling, to share the responsibility.

There is no exact formula to guide you as you choose an appropriate guardian. You may, however, find it helpful to consider the following factors:

- **Age.** If the prospective guardian is close in age to your adult child, he or she may be able to serve for a lifetime. If you choose someone who is significantly older, such as a grandparent, your adult child may need a contingent guardian.
- **Relationship with your child.** A guardian makes important personal decisions that will have a significant impact on your adult child. You will want to choose someone who has a loving, respectful relationship with your child and will make decisions that support his or her values, desires, and independence.
- **Willingness to serve.** Acting as a guardian is a big commitment. Whoever assumes the role should do so willingly and not feel pressured into it.
- **Proximity.** Living nearby will help the guardian to pay proper attention to important issues and maintain a close relationship with your adult child.
- **Skills.** A guardian should be ethical, able to communicate effectively, have good organizational skills, and

feel comfortable dealing with the court and other such agencies.

Choosing to have a guardianship of your child is a big decision, but it still has some flexibility. "It does not have to be forever," Gunderson says, noting that if your child becomes able to manage his or her affairs, the court can end the guardianship. Keep in mind, too, that the court reviews the arrangement each year. The scope of the guardianship can be renegotiated or a different guardian can be chosen.

If you are considering guardianship for your adult child, you no doubt will have many questions. Many factors will weigh into your decision. Every situation is unique, so it is advisable, although not required, to begin by consulting an attorney at least six to eight weeks before your child's 18th birthday. You may also want to seek information from disability-specific organizations, the Minnesota Department of Human Services, your county's district court probate division, your county social worker (if you have one), or PACER Center. Learn more about this important topic at www.pacer.org or by calling PACER at 952-838-9000.

** In Minnesota, the age of majority (adulthood) is 18. Other states' laws vary.*

It does not have to be forever

Keeping your child solvent is the concern

A guardianship helps secure the personal well-being of your adult child. If you also need to address your child's financial needs, you may want to investigate these options.

- A **conservatorship** is a court order that gives one person the legal right to manage another person's estate, such as his or her finances and property. If your adult child has significant assets, this may be an appropriate choice. However, if your adult child with a disability is eligible for and participates in public assistance programs, having such assets may disqualify them from benefits. You may want to think about other ways to provide financial oversight.
- A **power of attorney** allows a parent or other selected adult to pay bills and make other financial decisions for another person without removing any basic civil rights, as a guardianship does. The person must have the ability to understand

and sign the document presented to him or her.

- A **special needs trust** is funded by the person's own funds. Money in this type of trust does not disqualify a person from public assistance programs.
- A **supplemental needs trust** is funded by someone other than the person with the disability. Like a special needs trust, these assets do not disqualify a person from public assistance programs.
- A **Supplemental Security Income (SSI) representative payee**, designated by the Social Security Administration (SSA), is authorized to receive and disburse SSI financial benefits for your adult child. He or she makes a report each year to the SSA, accounting for how the funds have been spent.

STC's lending library accommodates needs

By Patricia Bill

Common sense and the desire to help families went hand-in-hand when PACER Center created the Simon Technology Center (STC)

Library nearly 20 years ago.

The rationale for the technology center's lending library is:

- Assistive technology, including computer hardware and software,

can help people with disabilities learn, communicate, and be more independent.

- Some assistive technology is expensive—a major purchase for the budgets of many families. A

Safety: It takes planning and educating, too

By Marcia Kelly

They are the kinds of things that happen every day. Maybe a stranger knocks at the door, or perhaps the bus doesn't come on time. Maybe a telephone solicitor requests personal information.

Would your young adult with a disability know how to handle such situations? It's more than an academic question. Knowing how to respond when things go wrong, feel scary, or may be dangerous is important to being safe.

As children with disabilities become youth and adults in the community, it is vital that they have the skills and resources to stay safe. You can help your child prepare for this aspect of independence in many ways.

"Think about your young adult being in the community," says Sue Fager, a PACER transition specialist. "Now imagine something upsetting happening. What skills or resources would you wish were in place for your child before it happens?"

Those are the kinds of questions that you might want to start discussing with your child. "The answers will be unique to each family," Fager says. Your child's disability, skills, and living situation will all be factors to consider as you have this conversation. If your child is receiving transition planning services through an Individualized Education Program (IEP), you may want talk with the IEP team about including safety goals.

Fager recommends looking at six areas when thinking about safety for your transition-age young adult.

Self-advocacy skills

Help your child develop healthy boundaries and effective communication skills. You may want to encourage your child to practice communicating messages such as "No." "Leave me alone." "I need..." "I want..."

Disability-appropriate supports

People with a communication or behavior disability may find it helpful to carry a card that could be used to communicate with others, including the police. The card might contain information such as

- your child's name
- a sentence stating the disability and how it might affect your child's ability to handle situations
- a phone number of someone who could be contacted

Safety network

Help your child identify safe people and places in the community. This list might include:

- Neighbors
- Community helpers such as fire fighters, police officers, security guards, doctors, or nurses
- Public places such as a fire station, police station, place of worship, hospital, or clinic

Resources

You never know when or where a problem might arise. Make sure your child always has a way to reach someone who can help. Provide a cell phone—and emergency phone numbers—for your child to carry at all times

Transportation

Help your child learn to "expect the unexpected" and know what to do. For example,

- Explain that if someone makes your child feel uncomfortable on the bus, he or she could move closer to the driver.
- Discuss what your child should do if the bus goes on a detour or breaks down. This response might include calling you or another trusted adult on the cell phone.

Common sense

Common sense safety tips are good for everyone—with or without disabilities. Here's a good list for the whole family to review.

At home:

- Keep doors locked at all times.
- When you leave, lock your windows.
- Don't open your door to strangers or let them into your building, apartment, or house.
- Have a working fire extinguisher and know how to use it.

Out and about:

- Don't leave a purse in grocery basket when you turn away.
- Don't give personal information to strangers.
- Stay alert to what is going on around you.

It's a big world out there. With some discussion and planning, it can be a safer one, too.

of families of children with disabilities

lending library offers individuals an opportunity to try the technology before making a purchase.

- Insurance companies, medical assistance, and other funders often require documentation that an item will benefit the user before they will support a purchase. Individuals can borrow an item from the STC library to demonstrate its effectiveness.

The lending library is part of PACER's multifaceted STC project, which also includes individualized consultations, workshops, demonstrations and fairs, and publications.

The library has approximately 1,700 items, said Katrina Weibel, the assistive technology specialist who oversees it. It includes up-to-date software programs;

hardware, such as adaptive mice and keyboards; adapted toys; books; videos; and communication devices. The software emphasizes education skills in reading, writing, math, and other academic subjects; independent living skills; problem solving; and many other areas.

A recent service of the library is the A.T. Finder, an online catalog of library items. It allows families to search by category, specialization, age, keyword, and other ways, and it provides a description of each program and feedback from families who have used it.

Last year 856 persons visited the library and borrowed 2,147 items. The majority of users (72 percent)

were parents and families. Others were schools, professionals, organizations, and adults with disabilities.

The library is open from noon to 6 p.m. on Tuesdays and 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturdays. It closes on holidays. There is an annual membership fee for an individual or family of a child with a disability. Scholarships are available. Members who are unable to come to the STC in person may receive items by mail, and they are responsible for return postage.

Said one parent, "We have a much better understanding of what is possible with a computer. I look forward to further exploration of my son's abilities and strengths through the computer."

STC library's materials prompt family's regular visits

Sociability, science, math—they are only a few of the subjects covered on software that Laurie Case has borrowed from the Simon Technology Center (STC) Library for her 8-year-old son, Harlow.

Over the last couple of years, Harlow, who has autism, and his family have regularly visited the library.

"The staff is wonderful about helping me find things," said Laurie.

She and Harlow found a software program on social behavior to be of particular help.

"Harlow has learned some things about how to interact on the playground," said Laurie. "The program is set up in a way so that it is interesting and entertaining."

In fact, she thought the software was so good, she took it to Harlow's school and to Harlow's therapy with a recommendation that they buy it, she said. The professionals agreed, she added.

The Case family found an extra bonus in borrowing software from the

STC library. Harlow's twin brother, Richard, and his younger brother, Ezra, who has an attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, also enjoy the pro-

grams. In addition to using them for Harlow's needs, the programs are something the family can do together, said Laurie.



Harlow Case uses the STC lending library for vital instruction and enjoyment.

Know your school district: It's a step to

By Judy Swett, Parent Advocate

Research shows that family involvement helps children succeed at school. Parent support is especially important for a child with disabilities.

Knowing how your school district functions can help you participate effectively in your child's education. Following are some things to know:

Curriculum

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004) makes it clear that students receiving special education services have a right to be involved and make progress in the general education curriculum (set of courses).

It is important to know your district's curriculum and understand how it relates to your child's education. Be aware of specialized education programs that might benefit your child and requirements for the programs.

Policies and procedures

Students who receive special education services are considered part of the general education population and are subject to the policies and procedures that govern all the district's students. A copy of the district's policy

is probably available from your child's school office, district offices, or the district's Web site.

Be aware of how specific policies may affect your child. Knowing the policy will help you advocate for your child when considering accommodations, modifications, or supports and writing an education plan, such as the Individualized Education Program (IEP).

Policies may address:

- Transportation
- Bullying and harassment
- Behavior and school climate
- School choice
- Attendance policies
- Absentee and tardiness policies
- School year calendar
- Attendance area boundaries
- Deadlines for enrollment
- Graduation requirements

Making policy

Parents can guide district policy decisions by identifying issues, influencing decisions, and improving school programs. You do not have to be an expert in education, curriculum, assessments, or education finance to ask good

questions. Credit your experience and trust your common sense.

Advisory councils and districtwide committees seek parent involvement and provide opportunities to help many students, including your own child.

Districtwide committees may include:

- Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC). Each school district must have one, and at least 50 percent of its members must be parents of children receiving special education services.
- Interagency Early Intervention Committee (IEIC). The group affects services for children and families from birth to age 5.
- Community Transition Interagency Committee (CTIC). The group addresses services for students 14–21 years old.
- District advisory committees usually focus on areas such as curriculum, space and facilities, and budget. Some generally advise the superintendent or other administrators.

Advocating

Some education situations, such as budget cuts, changing programs, moving a program to a different location, or staffing changes need a parent viewpoint. If such issues arise, you can advocate for all children involved, including your child. One way is to reach the school board, which governs the district. Contact school board members or attend a board meeting.

To approach individual board members: Names and contact information for individual members is usually posted on the district's Web site or other communications. Some community telephone books list them.

If you live in a small town or suburb, you are likely to know a school board member as a neighbor, member of your faith community, or parent of your child's friend. Offer your opinion in friendly conversation.

Volunteer!

Join PACER in helping families

PACER serves the community by helping families of children with disabilities. Take a look at the opportunities below and think of how you can help make a difference in the lives of children with disabilities.

Volunteer Opportunities

Be a puppeteer for

- *COUNT ME IN*
- *LET'S PREVENT ABUSE*

Do clerical tasks at PACER

Help with PACER Center events

- *Annual Phonathon*
- *Benefit Silent Auction*
- *Benefit Corporate Sponsor Committee*

For information, call PACER at (952) 838-9000 or visit www.pacer.org

involvement in your child's education

To address the school board:

School board meetings are public. The board may discuss some matters, such as personnel issues, in closed sessions. Parents can obtain information about upcoming school board meetings by calling the school district or visiting its Web site. Many local newspapers also publish information on school board meeting dates, times, and locations.

If you wish to speak at a school board meeting, you will need to know

- Dates and times of school board meetings
- Location of the school board meetings
- How to be scheduled on the agenda (a requirement in most districts)
- What matters are excluded from public discussion

Reporting requirements

The federal No Child Left Behind law created new reporting requirements

for school districts. Each school and school district receives a "School Report Card" every year. To obtain the report cards, visit the Minnesota Department of Education Web site at <http://education.state.mn.us>; click on "Academic Excellence" at the top of the page; then scroll down to "School Report Cards." Scores are listed by school or district. The site provides information on:

- Student population and demographics
- Attendance rate
- Graduation rate
- Report on Adequate Yearly Progress
- The district ranking for the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments and the Basic Skills Test

As a parent, know the types of districtwide assessments, when the tests are given, and how students in special education fare on these tests

compared to children in regular education. It is important that students on IEPs take part in the tests or alternative assessments so that the district is accountable for educating all students.

Learning about the local school district may take some effort on your part, but many parents find that the results in helping their child—and others—are worth the investment.

"Parents and Local Special Education Advisory Councils" Thursday, Aug. 17

It's a workshop for parents who are on a SEAC—or would like to be. Also featured: tips on understanding YOUR school district.

Call PACER at (952) 838-9000 or visit www.pacer.org

PACER's Kids Against Bullying Web site earns praise

Thousands of people each month visit www.pacerkidsagainstabullying.org, PACER's successful bullying prevention site for elementary school children.

"Response from the children, as well as from parents and professionals, has been positive and enthusiastic," said Julie Hertzog, bullying prevention project coordinator. "It is gratifying to know that PACER is addressing another important need of children."

Users logging on can

- Meet the Club Crew—12 animated characters
- Watch celebrity and children's videos
- Play interactive games
- Vote in polls
- Enter contests and win prizes

The Web site is a project of PACER's National Center for Bullying Prevention. It is funded in part by the Robins, Kaplan, Miller and Ciresi LLP Foundation for Education, Public Health and Social Justice, a supporting organization of The Minneapolis Foundation; Wells Fargo Foundation Minnesota; the Bigelow Foundation; and the Beverly Foundation.

The site has generated fan mail. Excerpts follow:

"This is an awesome Web site! I particularly liked the real kids talking about what bullying is, how it feels, and what to do about it. I also liked the interactive Webisodes. The resources were great!"
Gina, school social worker

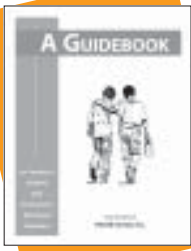
"I love it! I am like Molly. I have cerebral palsy and every day I use my walker at school...I LOVE THIS SITE!!!!"
Twelve-year-old girl

"I am a psychologist and work primarily with children, adolescents, and families. I want to thank you for putting together a Web site on bullying. I have found that children like the site and have benefited from it. Good job!"
A professional

"Your site couldn't have come at a better time. My daughter experienced a bullying moment a week ago. The site helped her process what happened and gave her valuable information on what to do."
A parent

Resources

NEW EDITION



A Guidebook for Parents of Children with Emotional or Behavioral Disorders

The popular book presents basic information about emotional and behavioral disorders, the type of professionals who provide mental health services to children and adolescents and how to select them, school-based services, recommended reading, and more. The 144 pages of this fourth edition are packed with pertinent suggestions for parents.

■ \$12 10 + copies, \$7.50 each PHP-a8

NEW

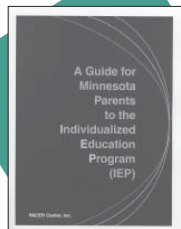


Toys: Universal Tools for Learning, Communication and Inclusion for Children with Disabilities

Most experts agree that play affects any child's development. The booklet outlines age- and ability-appropriate toys, in addition to information on buying toys and tips for adapting toys for specific needs.

■ \$3 10+ copies, \$2.50 each STC-14

A Guide for Minnesota Parents to the Individualized Education Program (IEP)



The 2005 edition of this booklet continues to be a staple for Minnesota parents of children in special education. It explains why parent involvement at IEP meetings is so important, and it guides families through the IEP process, clarifies the Minnesota forms, and explains the information parents need for them to make informed decisions about their child's education.

■ \$3 10+ copies, \$2 each PHP-a12

Disability Awareness Manual



This book is a MUST for every parent and professional working with children with disabilities. The readable, but comprehensive, content covers a multitude of issues affecting children and young adults with disabilities. From questions about inclusion to a chapter on the law, it features helpful, usable resources.

\$10 10+ copies, \$7 each CMI-1

NEW

Facilitated IEP Meetings: An Emerging Practice

The eight-page guide introduces IEP facilitation to help special education planning teams reach agreements. It is published by PACER's Technical Assistance ALLIANCE for Parent Centers project and the Consortium for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education (CADRE).

■ \$3 10+ copies, \$2 each ALL-26



NEW EDITION

The Road to Work: An Introduction to Vocational Rehabilitation

The third edition of this book for youth and adults with disabilities and their families reflects the current version of law. It discusses issues related to the Rehabilitation Act, including eligibility criteria for vocational rehabilitation services, transition planning for high school students, and other legislation and self-advocacy skills.

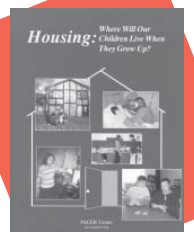
■ \$8 10+ Copies, \$6.50 each VO1



Housing: Where Will Our Children Live When They Grow Up?

This long-awaited resource offers concise, easy-to-read-and-understand information about housing options for people with disabilities. Whether their child is near adulthood or a newly diagnosed preschooler, parents of children with disabilities will find that the book answers many of their questions about housing and future choices to make with their child.

■ \$8 10+ copies, \$6 each PHP-a26



Is Your Child a Target of Bullying?

The new, one-of-a-kind, 30-page curriculum is for parent audiences. The appealing design and easy-to-understand suggestions are sure to inform and encourage families as they address this troubling problem. Transparencies are available on CD-ROM or in three-ring binder.

\$15 CD-ROM ALL-19 (English) or ALL-19sp (Spanish)
\$165 color transparencies and script in a notebook binder
ALL-20 (English) or ALL-20sp (Spanish)



Resources

NEW



No Child Left Behind and Students with Disabilities: A Curriculum for Parent Trainers

The new curriculum includes topics that families need to know about to ensure a quality education for their children with disabilities.

School choice, supplemental services, and adequate yearly progress are only a few. The curriculum is in an electronic PowerPoint™ or printed overheads format.

\$15 CD-ROM ALL-27

\$295 Overheads in 3-ring binder ALL-28

NEW DVD

Technology: Making a Different World

The three-minute overview of PACER Center's Simon Technology Center shows how assistive technology can help children and adults with disabilities develop and use skills that lead to inclusion at school and in employment. \$5 STC-13

For these materials and many more!

PACER Center's Catalog of Publications

The free catalog describes more than 200 PACER resources for families of children with disabilities and professionals working with them. Most listed items are free to Minnesota families of children with disabilities.

To order the listed materials...

1. Specify how many you want of each item and the cost
2. Total your order, adding appropriate sales tax
3. Enclose payment with your order
4. Mail to: PACER Center
8161 Normandale Blvd.
Minneapolis, MN 55437-1044

Prices include postage and handling. A discount may be available if 10 or more of the same item number are ordered.

■ indicates one item is free to Minnesota parents or guardians of children with disabilities and to Minnesota young adults (age 14 and older) with disabilities.

For foreign orders, please telephone or e-mail PACER (see page 2). Payment must be in U.S. dollars drawn on a U.S. bank.

The items listed on these pages are also available through PACER's *Catalog of Publications*.

Order number	Name of publication/video ordered	Quantity	Per item cost	Total item cost
Total cost of all items ordered →				

Amount of order: Sales tax: _____ Total amount enclosed: _____
(Minnesota residents, 6.5%; Minneapolis residents, 7%)

Please complete the following:

Parent Professional Other _____

Name: _____

Organization (if applicable): _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Telephone: (h) _____ (w) _____ E-mail: _____

If a parent:

Birth date of child with disability: _____ Disability: _____

PACER helps families of children with disabilities

Being a parent is challenging, but having a child with a disability may bring extra challenges. That's why there's PACER Center.

A national nonprofit parent center, PACER has served families of children with disabilities and special health needs for nearly 30 years. PACER provides expertise and resources to help families make decisions about education, vocational training, employment, and other services for children and youth with *all* disabilities.

How can PACER help me?

If you have a question or need help for your child with a disability, contact PACER. Most PACER staff are parents or family members of children with disabilities. They share your experience. They understand.

PACER has 30 projects. Some are national or international in scope; many are specific to Minnesota. All focus on ways to help children with disabilities succeed at home, at school, and in the community.

If you live in Minnesota, you can call PACER's parent advocates who will help you understand the laws that affect children with disabilities.

How do I contact PACER?

By telephone, Web sites, e-mail, or fax.

If you call during PACER office hours, a staff member will answer the telephone and take information about your situation and link you to the appropriate PACER project. If you are not

directly connected, a staff member from that project will call you back, usually within 48 hours.

PACER telephone numbers are
(952) 838-9000 (main number)
(800) 537-2237 (Minn. toll-free)
(888) 248-0822 (national toll-free)
(952) 838-0199 (fax)

Send e-mail to pacer@pacer.org.

PACER Center's postal address is 8161 Normandale Blvd., Minneapolis, MN 55437.

What are PACER hours?

PACER's switchboard is open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday–Friday. There is voice mail at other times. PACER observes federal holidays.

Where can I learn more about PACER?

PACER's Web sites are:

- www.pacer.org (principal site)
- www.taalliance.org (technical assistance for the nation's 100 parent centers)
- www.fape.org (information on the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act - IDEA)
- www.c3online.org (Connecting Youth to Communities and Careers)
- www.pacerkidsagainstabullying.org (bullying prevention)



PACER Center, Inc.
8161 Normandale Blvd.
Minneapolis, MN 55437-1044

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