



# PACER'S

## EARLY CHILDHOOD CONNECTION

Information and Resources for Parents of Young Children with Disabilities

Summer 2011

### OFF TO SCHOOL: PREPARING YOU AND YOUR CHILD FOR THE TRANSITION TO KINDERGARTEN

When 6-year-old Chloe Alpaugh started kindergarten this past year, she didn't even bat an eye when it was time for Mom and Dad to leave her side for the first time.

For Mom and Dad, though, the shift from preschool to kindergarten for Chloe, who has Down syndrome and speech apraxia, was a little more complicated. The transition can be hard for any parent, but for parents of children with disabilities, it can be especially stressful. Bill and Susan Alpaugh began planning for their daughter's transition a year prior to the start of kindergarten, while Chloe was still in preschool.

"Chloe's transition was complicated by the fact that our district was re-districting their special education program at the time," Susan says. "I was told by the school that Chloe may have to be bussed outside our neighborhood to another school with a special education program. That added a fair amount of stress to the process. I didn't know what my rights were as a parent."

Susan called PACER Center for information on her options to enroll Chloe in her neighborhood school, which also had a special education program. PACER's early childhood advocate explained that the school would have to prove why Chloe could not be served there before it could require her to be bussed to another school. In the end, the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team, which included the parents, decided that Chloe would attend the neighborhood school. Chloe's parents already



Chloe Alpaugh (middle) with her two older sisters, Faith (left) and Sarah

knew the school and the kindergarten special education teacher well.

With that concern lifted, Susan and the team began writing Chloe's IEP, which was due the April before kindergarten. The team spent time working through the IEP process to determine Chloe's schedule and appropriate goals for her development. "Our PACER advocate helped us with that, too, and went through everything step by step," Susan says.

*Off to School continued on next page*

#### IN THIS ISSUE

FAQs .....	3	ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY .....	6
PARENT LEADERSHIP .....	4	NEW PUBLICATIONS .....	7

## Off to School continued from previous page

“She even attended the IEP meeting with me, which was wonderful.”

With Chloe’s IEP in place and the matter of where she would go to school decided, the rest of the transition process went according to plan. The kindergarten special education teacher observed Chloe at her preschool. Susan attended the school’s “kindergarten round-up” event. She and Chloe went to the summer open house and visited the kindergarten classroom so Chloe would feel comfortable on the first day of school. Looking back, the question of whether Chloe herself would be ready for kindergarten was never an issue, Susan says.

“We had more opportunities for Chloe to meet people and socialize before the start of kindergarten, but I didn’t feel she needed that,” she says. “She just couldn’t wait to go to school.”

## The First Year

With Chloe’s kindergarten year behind her, Susan says the overall experience has been positive. It was a learning process, though, and some adjustments needed to be made to ensure Chloe could grow and learn as much as possible. For example, Susan and the IEP team changed Chloe’s schedule midway through the year so that she could start her day in the inclusive classroom and socialize more with her classmates.

“She loves going to school,” Susan says. “I’ve received consistent reports that she’s becoming more cooperative and understanding routines better. I want to keep her moving forward. I always want to set the bar high to see what she can do.”

As Susan reflects on her daughter’s first year of school, she’s grateful for the help she received from PACER, especially

*Off to School continued on page 8*

### Tips for Parents on the Transition to Kindergarten

Planning for your young child’s transition to kindergarten should begin early, usually a year ahead of time, to ensure your child makes the move as smoothly as possible.

You can start the process by asking the IEP team to discuss what skills your child will need to succeed in kindergarten and what IEP goals would move your child in that direction. For example, your child could be practicing how to follow directions, take turns and recognize his or her written name before kindergarten begins. The IEP team can also suggest home-based activities you can use to help your child develop kindergarten skills.

Once you have determined which kindergarten program your child will attend, you can request a transition meeting with the current IEP team and staff from the new school to discuss your child’s needs. At this meeting, you can consider any needed changes to the IEP. If your child has medical needs, ask that the school nurse be included in the meeting so a current health plan can be on file.

To help prepare your child for kindergarten, you can:

- Have your child visit the classroom and meet the teacher before the school year begins.
- Work on self-help skills at home, such as toileting, hand-washing and dressing.
- Take pictures of the school and classroom and use the pictures to talk with your child about starting kindergarten.



- Arrange summer play times with other students who will be in your child’s classroom.
- Include your child in a shopping trip to purchase school supplies. Most school districts will publish a list of supplies before school starts.
- Begin new routines a week or so before school starts. This is especially important if bedtime and wake-up times will need to change.
- Read books with your child about kindergarten, such as:
  - › “David Goes to School” by David Shannon
  - › “Off to School, Baby Duck!” by Amy Hest

Going to kindergarten is a major milestone in you and your child’s life. When parents, teachers and administrators work together, the transition to kindergarten can be a smooth one for both you and your child.

## PACER ANSWERS FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Need more information on pre-kindergarten screenings? Have questions about family goals on the Individualized Family Service Plan? PACER's early childhood advocate, Judy Swett, has the answers.

**Q:** My child is on an Individualized Education Program (IEP) and will start kindergarten next year. Does she have to go through the Early Childhood Screening required for all children in Minnesota prior to attending kindergarten?

**A:** As long as the evaluation that determined your daughter was eligible for early childhood special education services included a vision and hearing screening and a height and weight assessment, she will not have to complete the preschool screening. If you are unsure if this occurred, you may want to check with your IEP case manager to determine if these assessments were included in that evaluation.

**Q:** My child is turning 7 in a few months and is currently receiving special education services under the category of developmental delay. He was re-evaluated at age 5, but the team is now telling me that he needs to be evaluated again before his 7th birthday. I thought re-evaluations only took place once every three years. Why are they doing a re-evaluation so soon?

**A:** The category of developmental delay can only be used up to the age of 7 in Minnesota. After age 7, a child must meet the criteria for one of the other special education categories. Based on your child's current strengths and needs, he may continue to qualify for services under another disability category. If you have questions regarding the criteria for the other categories, please contact PACER and ask to speak to an advocate.



**Q:** My 1-year-old child has been evaluated and qualifies for early childhood special education services. The service coordinator contacted me to set up a meeting to write the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) and suggested that I think about family goals to include in the IFSP. I thought the IFSP was for my daughter. Why is the service coordinator talking about goals for the family?

**A:** The IFSP is a process that includes the parents as an important part of the team. It is also a written plan that includes the resources, strengths and needs of families to meet the developmental needs of their child. Because of this, it can contain goals for both the child and the family. Perhaps you would like to access child care, explore financial resources or learn more about your child's disability. Any of these goals can be written into the IFSP, in addition to goals for your daughter.

*If you have more questions, please call PACER Center at (952) 838-9000 and ask to speak with an early childhood advocate.*

### Early Childhood Terms to Know

**Primary service provider model:** A model of delivering early intervention services that has been adopted by many school districts in Minnesota. Under this model, one service provider comes to the home and works with the family or other caregivers based on the needs of the child and the priorities set by the family.

**Least Restrictive Environment (LRE):** This term refers to the expectation that, to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities are educated alongside children without disabilities. In addition, special classes, separate schooling, or removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only if children cannot receive their education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aides and services.



## PARENT INSPIRES CHANGE THROUGH LEADERSHIP ROLE

A true leader, Lynnisha Lott has perfected her ability to multitask. In addition to working a full-time job and raising a 4 and 5 year old, she also serves as co-chair of the Minneapolis Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC), where she makes a difference not only for her children, but for all children with disabilities in the Minneapolis school district.

Her children are the primary reason Lynnisha became involved with SEAC, a group of parents that advises the school district on matters relating to special education. Her son, 4-year-old Makhi, was diagnosed with mosaic and translocation Down syndrome at 21 months old. Both types are rare, and the diagnosis left Lynnisha searching for information that wasn't always available.

"I'm a resourceful person, but it was really hard for me to find information and understand what this diagnosis meant for him," she says. "That was one of the things that motivated me to want to help other parents. Knowing from experience how stressful that process is, I would not want another family to go through it."

In January 2010, Lynnisha learned about SEAC and decided to attend a meeting. At her first meeting, she realized that she could offer the group a different perspective and help bridge some gaps between the school and community.

"When I first started going, I noticed there wasn't very much diversity at the meetings," Lynnisha says. "There weren't too many parents in their late 20s or early 30s, or from varying ethnic backgrounds. I wanted to represent my demographic and get the group to consider circumstances that may be barriers for parents, so others like me would feel welcome."



Lynnisha Lott with her son Makhi and daughter Mianna

For some extra help with making those changes, she turned to PACER and attended its Early Childhood Family Leadership Summit. At the summit, she learned effective leadership skills and networked with other parents who also wanted to take on leadership roles in their schools.

"The summit was great, because on one hand you find out a lot about what you need to participate at any level, state or local," Lynnisha says. "On the other hand, as much as it shows you what you need, it also helps you realize that there are skills you already possess that are very valuable in a leadership role. I left feeling equipped to make a difference."

In June, after only being a member of SEAC for five months, the Council nominated Lynnisha to be co-chair for the 2010-11 academic year. In this new leadership position, she's worked hard to encourage other parents to join SEAC. She suggested the group begin offering food at

### Want More Information on SEACs?

For tips on developing parent leadership skills and an online guide to Minnesota's local SEACs, check out [mnseacinfo.org](http://mnseacinfo.org), a PACER website. Supported through funding from the Minnesota Department of Education, this project encourages SEACs as they look to increase the effective involvement of parents of children with disabilities in district policymaking and decision making. For more information, call PACER at (952) 838-9000 or visit [mnseacinfo.org](http://mnseacinfo.org).

the meetings as an incentive to attend and had the Council publish its brochure in multiple languages.

As co-chair, Lynnisha also goes out of her way to meet with school officials about how to improve special education services. Her hard work has paid off: This year, she and her co-chair were invited to attend the district's strategic planning meeting for the next school year.

"We are making a lot of headway as far as staying on administrators' minds, so when they're making decisions, they're considering every child, including children with special needs," she says. "The fact that we were invited to the strategic planning is important."

Lynnisha clearly has a passion for working to improve services and outcomes for all children with disabilities, which makes her a great leader for SEAC. While her leadership role keeps her busy, it also allows her to stay focused on her biggest passion: her own children.

"It's difficult to manage everything sometimes, but I always keep in mind what my motivations are," she says. "I don't feel like I could ever be too tired to make things better for my kids."



Lynnisha Lott with her daughter Mianna and son Makhi

*For more information on how to become involved in a leadership role in your community, contact PACER at (952) 838-9000 and ask to speak with an advocate.*

## Friends of PACER's Second Annual

# Run Walk Against Bullying Roll

**PACER CENTER**  
CHAMPIONS FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES®

**Sat. Oct. 1 | 9:00 a.m. | Mt. Normandale Lake**

Mark your calendars for PACER's second annual Run/Walk/Roll Against Bullying on Saturday, Oct. 1, 2011, part of PACER's National Bullying Prevention Month of October. The four-mile run or 1.5-mile walk or roll will take place at Mt. Normandale Lake in Bloomington, Minn. The entry fee is \$20 per person, and each participant will receive a complimentary T-shirt. Proceeds from the event will go toward PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center, which educates communities nationwide to prevent bullying through creative and interactive resources. Register online at [PACER.org/Bullying/RunWalkRoll](http://PACER.org/Bullying/RunWalkRoll).

### Events:

**9:00 am – Registration/ Race packet pick up**

**10:00 am - 4-mile Run | 1.5-mile Fun Walk/Roll**

**Entry Fee: \$20 per person** (\*payable to Friends of PACER)

*The End of Bullying Begins With Me | [www.PACER.org/bullying](http://www.PACER.org/bullying)*

## ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY CAN HELP CHILDREN WITH EVERYDAY ACTIVITIES

Looking for simple adaptations to make you and your child's life easier? Whether it helps young children gain new independence or learn important communication skills, assistive technology can make a world of difference for infants and toddlers with disabilities.

Assistive technology (AT) is any device that helps a child perform a skill or participate in an activity. It's important to recognize the benefits of assistive technology when planning for young children in the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP). When considering what AT to include in the IFSP, the team should discuss skills that the child will need to learn and then outline the daily activities where the child would use those skills.

“The IFSP team should consider any assistive technology that would help the child participate in everyday activities, such as morning routines, bath time, play time, meal time or bedtime,” says Judy Swett, PACER's early childhood advocate.

Assistive technology can help children gain independence in these activities. For example:

- An adapted high chair may help a child sit up straight during meal times
- A special spoon and fork may enable a child to feed himself or herself
- Adapted equipment, such as a switch for a toy, may allow the child to join in a play activity



### Help Me Grow Services Meet Needs of Young Children with Disabilities

Minnesota's Help Me Grow Early Intervention Services for eligible infants and toddlers are designed to meet the unique developmental needs of each child and their family. Help Me Grow Early Childhood Special Education Services for eligible children ages 3-5 provide supports and services individually tailored to meet the learning needs of each child. These services are delivered at no cost to families. For more information, visit [parentsknow.state.mn.us/parentsknow/Newborn/HelpMeGrow\\_SpecialNeeds/WhatIsHelpMeGrow/index.html](http://parentsknow.state.mn.us/parentsknow/Newborn/HelpMeGrow_SpecialNeeds/WhatIsHelpMeGrow/index.html).



### Center for Inclusive Child Care Offers Support

Parents of young children with developmental delays or disabilities often have difficulty finding an appropriate child care setting for their child. The Center for Inclusive Child Care (CICC) can help. The CICC is a statewide program that provides a resource network supporting inclusive care for children in community child care settings. For families of young children with special needs, the CICC can provide resources, support and training for child care staff in working with your child. Parents are encouraged to call if these additional resources are needed in your child's current child care. For more information, contact CICC Director Cindy Croft at [ciccrocft@inclusivechildcare.org](mailto:ciccrocft@inclusivechildcare.org) or (651) 603-6265.





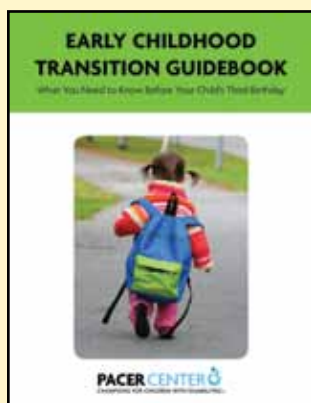
“It’s especially important to consider the use of assistive technology for infants and toddlers who have limited communication skills,” Swett says. These types of devices allow children to communicate with the world around them. They can be simple, such as pointing to a photo on a picture board, or they can be more complicated, such as pressing message buttons on a device that activates pre-recorded messages such as, “I’m hungry.”

In order to determine what types of AT may be appropriate, have the IFSP team observe your child in his or her natural environment, such as at home or child care, and then consider the use of AT in daily activities. Assistive technology can be written into an outcome on the IFSP, and it should be clear which service provider will be helping the child and family learn to use the AT device.

“Whatever your child’s disability, it’s important to consider the use of assistive technology when developing the IFSP,” Swett says.

“Children with disabilities can benefit greatly from assistive technology, whether it helps them communicate their needs or simply enjoy play time more fully.”

*For more information on including assistive technology in the IFSP, visit the Tots ‘n Tech website at [tnt.asu.edu](http://tnt.asu.edu). If you have questions regarding the IFSP process, contact PACER at (952) 838-9000 and ask to speak with an early childhood advocate. PACER’s Simon Technology Center also offers individual consultations and a Lending Library for families to preview software and equipment. For more information, visit [PACER.org/stc](http://PACER.org/stc).*



### **New! PACER’s Early Childhood Transition Guidebook**

Learn everything you need to know about your child’s transition from infant and toddler intervention services to preschool in PACER Center’s new publication, “Early Childhood Transition Guidebook: Everything You Need to Know Before Your Child’s Third Birthday.” The guidebook explains what transition is, how and when to plan for it, how to implement a transition plan and what to do if your child is not eligible for special education services. Download the book online at [PACER.org/publications/earlychildhood.asp](http://PACER.org/publications/earlychildhood.asp), or request a copy by calling PACER at (952) 838-9000. Free to Minnesota parents of children with disabilities.

### **Request PACER’s Updated “Families Are Important” Booklet**

“Families Are Important: An Early Childhood Guidebook for Families of Young Children” contains information on Minnesota’s early intervention system and offers guidance on how to access services for your child with a disability. The new version also includes updated terms and more resources for families. To request your copy, call PACER at (952) 838-9000 or visit [PACER.org/publications/earlychildhood.asp](http://PACER.org/publications/earlychildhood.asp). Free to Minnesota parents of children with disabilities.



8161 Normandale Blvd.  
Minneapolis, MN 55437  
952-838-9000 (Voice)  
800-53-PACER (Greater MN)  
952-838-0199 (Fax)  
PACER@PACER.org

**PACER.org**

**PACER Executive Director:**

Paula F. Goldberg

**Senior Writer/Editor:**

Julie Holmquist

**Writer/Editor:**

Ashley White

**Early Childhood Coordinator:**

Judy Swett

**Design:**

Jenna Hanson

©2011, PACER Center, Inc.

PACER is a coalition of organizations founded on the concept of parents helping parents. PACER strives to improve and expand opportunities that enhance the quality of life for children and young adults with disabilities and their families. This Early Childhood Project is partially funded with funds provided by the Minnesota Department of Education.

(Alternate format is available upon request.)

*Off to School continued from page 2*



Chloe Alpaugh's kindergarten picture

during the transition planning process.

“The PACER advocate was wonderful in keeping me grounded and focused on what my rights are and what the laws are,” Susan says. “She totally understands the process and gave me the support and documents that I needed. She was always there to answer any questions and was a huge help to me.

“All in all, this process is a journey,” she adds. “Many parents don’t have prior experience with this journey, but there are resources out there, and PACER is a great one.”

*For more information on the transition from preschool to kindergarten for children with disabilities, call PACER Center at (952) 838-9000 and ask to speak with a parent advocate.*