

# PACESETTER

A news magazine of PACER Center, Inc. | Champions for Children | (952) 838-9000 | PACER.org

## Paula Goldberg honored by St. Louis Park High School

PACER Center Executive Director and co-founder Paula Goldberg has been honored by St. Louis Park High School in Minnesota with its Distinguished Alumni Award.

The award, which recognizes past graduates and inspires community pride, is granted to graduates of St. Louis Park High School who have made significant contributions to their community and society through service or a distinguished career. Past recipients include renowned songwriter Dan Wilson, the Coen brothers, and three-time Pulitzer-winning journalist and author Thomas Friedman.

In a speech at St. Louis Park High School's graduation ceremony on June 5, Paula spoke about her lifelong work for families of children with disabilities. After leaving her teaching position, Paula co-founded PACER Center, choosing to remain in education to help children with disabilities whose needs were not always being met by their schools.

With four part-time employees and a \$71,000 grant from the federal government, Goldberg thought PACER's work would be done in three years. Now, almost 40 years later, PACER's projects span international borders and include the National Bullying Prevention Center.

"Every night I go home knowing that we have helped a child, because parents tell us how we have made a difference for their sons and daughters," Paula said.

Paula closed her speech with a message to the graduating seniors.

"If we can change one life, that's what matters in this world," she said. "You as graduates can help make the world a better place every day. Be kind, inclusive and respectful. You are important." ■

## Take action this October for National Bullying Prevention Month

As the weather turns colder, warm your community with kindness, acceptance and inclusion! October is National Bullying Prevention Month, and PACER is leading the way to unite communities across the U.S. and around the world in the mission to **Create a World Without Bullying**. Since the first National Bullying Prevention Month, originated by PACER 12 years ago, schools, organizations and individuals have worked hand-in-hand with PACER to raise awareness of the many solutions to bullying behavior. Although progress has been made, one in five children still report being bullied. "Preventing childhood bullying happens when we work together, whether it's in a school, a neighborhood, or a family," said Julie Hertzog, director of PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center. "When people connect with the same vision to change their lives at the local level, that leads to change in our world."

This month, share what you're doing to prevent bullying and spread the message that all people should act with kindness, inclusion and acceptance.

**Here are some ways to celebrate and take action:**

- Download free images from PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center website to share online and promote participation. Go to [PACER.org/bullying/NBPM](http://PACER.org/bullying/NBPM)
- Share a post on social media about National Bullying Prevention Month and tag [@PACER\\_NBPC](https://twitter.com/PACER_NBPC)
- Hold events and activities: Communities around the world mark National Bullying Prevention Month through creative events and initiatives. There are many resources, including classroom toolkits, free bookmarks, posters, and awareness-raising ideas, available at [PACER.org/Bullying](http://PACER.org/Bullying)

*continued on page 11*

# From parent to board member

## Matt Woods' 22 years with PACER

PACER Board of Directors President Matt Woods first connected with PACER 22 years ago as a parent. “When our son Andrew was diagnosed with autism, we didn’t know where to turn for help. Our pediatrician wasn’t informed about available resources or how we could access them,” Matt said.

It was 1996, and “the knowledge and understanding of autism was in its infancy,” Matt said. “Suzanne and I were lucky enough to find our way to Paula Goldberg and PACER through a counselor at Andrew’s school who had heard about this growing organization, PACER, and she told us about it.”

Matt remembers attending his first PACER workshop on the Individualized Education Program (IEP). That workshop and other PACER programs gave the Woodses valuable information about their educational rights. “PACER helped us learn about IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), the accommodations available, what the law required and what we were entitled to as parents.

“PACER gave us so much. Not just the great resources and ideas, but emotional support. As a parent, I felt so lost; PACER taught us to advocate, and we gained the ability to take control again. PACER restored a sense of balance and hope to us.”

Along the way, Suzanne Woods volunteered with PACER, and when Matt’s life became less hectic (he is a partner with the law firm Robins Kaplan LLC), he knew that he wanted to be more involved. “We stayed in touch with the organization and really felt good about PACER. I connected again with Paula in real time, and now I’ve been on the Board for four years,” Matt said. He’s found it to be deeply satisfying, calling it a “fantastic experience.” Colleagues of mine who sit on Boards sometimes sound as though their involvement is in name only. PACER’s Board is different: we not only get a chance to hear what’s going on, we also impact policy.

“Last summer’s Board retreat, where we focused on vision and strategy, was amazing. I think there are two kinds of



President of PACER's Board of Directors, Matthew Woods

leaders: those who are just transmitters, and true leaders, who both transmit and receive. That’s the kind of leader Paula is. She also understands how to build bridges, to find commonalities.”

Matt’s long history with PACER has given him a vantage point from which to look at the organization’s past with an eye toward the future. “Paula has an incredible group of people supporting her on a daily basis,” he said, “PACER’s reach has expanded beyond Minnesota. I’d like to see us replicate our local success in a systematic way across the country and internationally.

“PACER’s formula is a unique combination of pushing and pulling: forcing the issue when necessary, but also letting people come along at their own speed, allowing others to catch up. It’s not preachy, ‘my way or the highway.’”

Matt and Suzanne’s three sons are all young adults today. Both Andrew, who’s now 25, and Alex, 22, are on the autism spectrum. Andrew is working full time, taking a break from college to decide what he wants to do next. Alex, who just graduated from college with a degree in biology, is looking for his first professional job. Nicholas, who’s 18, is neurotypical and headed off to college this fall.

“It is so exciting to see the trajectory of them becoming great people. You’re always a parent, no matter how old they are, whether your child has disabilities or not.” ■

Each summer, a number of students participate in PACER's internship program. High school, college and graduate students who intern at PACER gain hands-on experience in a variety of areas, depending on their interests and backgrounds. PACER benefits from their skills, energy and perspectives. "PACER has had interns for many years," said internship coordinator Danna Mirviss. "We provide an opportunity for students with and without disabilities to acquire valuable work experience that enriches their academic studies and enhances their perspectives on the workplace in a non-profit organization."

Maddy Luehr and Dee Bardell both interned at PACER this summer. Maddy is an undergraduate at the University of Virginia, majoring in neuroscience. Dee graduated from the University of Minnesota in May, with a B.S. in mathematics, and is on track to earn her second bachelor's degree, in computer science, in 2019.

Both Maddy and Dee have long-term ties to PACER. "I've been involved with PACER since I was two," Dee said. "I started in the Simon Technology Center, and then when I was school age, PACER helped my family learn how to advocate for my educational rights as a kid with cerebral palsy. PACER helped me a lot as a kid, and I wanted to give back in return," Dee said. "The staff are very kind and understanding, and it has been wonderful to work alongside them. This is my first job experience." Dee focused her time working on PACER's website under the direction of Jordan Bohm, PACER's website administrator.

"I gave her a lot of responsibilities and she's knocked it all out of the park," Jordan said. "Her work is well executed, with great attention to detail. She finished in two weeks a project that was supposed to last all summer!"



Dee and Maddy

Maddy worked on a variety of projects over the summer, and singled out her work with Pat Lang, coordinator of PACER's Health Information Center, as her favorite. "I've worked on grant proposals and put together PowerPoints. I've learned a ton about the education system and disability rights."

"Maddy is an amazing young woman, ahead of her time. Her work is perfect! When I give her something and get it back, I love it. She also has the empathy gene," Pat said.

*continued on page 4*

## Write in PACER for your United Way pledge

Choose PACER this fall when making donations through your workplace giving (payroll deduction) campaigns. You can be a Champion for Children! Here's how to contribute.

### United Way Donor Choice Program

On the United Way pledge card, write in PACER Center, 8161 Normandale Blvd., Minneapolis MN 55437 under the "Donor Choice" designation.

PACER is not a United Way agency organization and therefore doesn't receive support from United Way's general funds. However, PACER can still benefit from the donor choice funds when you write in PACER Center.

Name of Agency PACER Center  
Address 8161 Normandale Blvd.  
City Minneapolis, MN 55437

# Young children and disabilities:

## Transitioning from early intervention to special education

When Emma, who's now nearly three years old, was first diagnosed with developmental delays, she and her family began to receive services in their home through their local school district's early intervention program. Early Intervention, a system of coordinated services with a goal of promoting the growth and development of infants and toddlers, and support for their families, includes home visits to assist parents in helping their child to develop and learn. The services Emma and her family receive are spelled out in an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP). "Early intervention focuses on helping a family meet their children's basic developmental needs, such as learning to sit, walk, talk, and learn," explained Judy Swett, PACER Center's early childhood coordinator.

Now that Emma is a few months away from turning three, the IFSP service coordinator has informed her parents that the "transition process" will begin soon because the early intervention program ends on the child's third birthday. When children are approaching their third birthday, the IFSP team meets to determine what steps are necessary to take prior to the child turning three.

### The transition meeting

Parents and the other members of the IFSP team will discuss a number of issues, including timelines, team members' responsibilities and parent concerns; and whether an evaluation is needed to determine if the child will qualify for early childhood special education preschool services.

### Moving from "family focus" to "child focus"

If the child qualifies for services, an Individualized Education

Program (IEP) will be written and services provided through the local school district. "While the IFSP focuses on helping the family help their child develop and learn, the IEP focuses on educational and functional skills. IEPs begin at age three and can continue through age 21," Judy explained.

Parents are part of the team that plans their child's IEP. Other team members include regular and special education teachers, a school district representative who can commit resources, a professional who can interpret results of evaluations, and others as needed. The IEP team sets measurable annual academic and functional goals and objectives and determines the services needed to meet those goals.

The initial IEP for a three-year-old contains goals and objectives to address their unique needs as she or he learns the skills needed to prepare for kindergarten. "The services under an IEP are provided in the least restrictive environment, such as preschool, child care, or Head Start," Judy said. "Children with IEPs should learn alongside their typically developing peers unless there is a compelling reason not to do so."

"While parents are sometimes apprehensive about transitioning their child from early intervention services, the transition process can bring great rewards for all involved," she added. "PACER is here to support parents during this time."

For more information about PACER's early childhood resources, go to [PACER.org/EC](http://PACER.org/EC) or call (952) 838-9000. ■

“ While parents are sometimes apprehensive about transitioning their child from early intervention services, the transition process can bring great rewards for all involved. PACER is here to support parents during this time. ”

– Judy Swett

continued from page 3

Maddy has family ties to PACER. "My younger brother has a disability, and we've been involved with PACER since he was born, and my dad's been on the Board of Directors for about ten years. My dad always comes home from [Board] meetings and is talking about all the things that they're doing. I knew this is what I want to do when I was older, so I got in contact with Paula Goldberg about an internship. I want to go into public health and public policy potentially, and I'm going to get my master's in public health."

"The interns gain valuable experience," Jordan said. "PACER benefits, too: interns who can do high quality work expand what PACER can offer to families."

"It's a win-win situation." ■



Don McNeil

## PACER advocates for parent voices at the Minnesota State Capitol

PACER's history of advocating for special education in Minnesota has helped students with disabilities learn and thrive. Each year, PACER is active in talking with legislators and giving voice to stakeholders in disability rights as they write new laws.

Legislators trust PACER's advocacy and experience when making decisions about funding and education laws. "Legislators need to talk to parents about special education law," said Don McNeil, a PACER board member. "We live that life, and as constituents, we should have a say in how these laws are made." PACER unites and leads a strong coalition of disability advocacy organizations to advocate for laws that will better the lives of students with disabilities and increase special education funding. PACER has a yearly Day at the Capitol.

A father of three children, two of whom have disabilities, Don has experienced the benefits of Minnesota's special education funding. He participated in a 2009 taskforce that studied the state's special education law and prepared a report on how those laws affect stakeholders. In doing so, Don met with his district's special education director and learned about the laws and frameworks that affect teachers, administrators, and the students themselves. This experience highlighted for him the importance of having parents directly involved in decision making, so they can share their personal stories of how policies impact their every day lives.

Gretchen Godfrey, PACER's Assistant Director, described PACER's commitment to detail when it comes to legislation. "Even if a law doesn't directly deal with special education, there are often unintended consequences for students with disabilities," she explained. "Our work helps lawmakers understand the full impact of their work and ensures that students have an ally in the capitol every day."

### Want to make your voice heard?

Reach out to your legislators and share what special education funding has made possible for your family and community. To find out who represents you, go to <https://www.leg.state.mn.us/leg/districtfinder> ■

## PACER's resources help surrogate parents learn to advocate

Parental involvement in decision-making about special education programs for children with disabilities is so important that it is recognized under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). But when a child with a disability does not have a parent to serve as his or her educational advocate, **who fills that role?**

**Often, it's a surrogate:** a foster parent or a volunteer from the local community, who is appointed by the school district. A surrogate parent who represents a child who has or needs special education services has the same rights

and responsibilities as parents and guardians in the special education decision making process. PACER can help.

PACER's Surrogate Parent Project provides information and resources for surrogates, or those considering taking on a surrogate role. Help is available through workshops, publications, videos, and an online training guide.

"The educational and training materials PACER provides to surrogate parents helps them succeed in their important role as the advocate for a child with a disability," said PACER's Surrogate Parent Project coordinator Pat Anderson. "Surrogate parents have told us that they find the website and workshops to be tremendously helpful in helping them succeed in their role."

For more information, visit [PACER.org/surrogate](https://www.pacer.org/surrogate), email Pat at [panderson@PACER.org](mailto:panderson@PACER.org), or call (952) 838-9000.

# PACER Board member travels to Siberia for transition project collaboration

PACER board member Kathy Graves traveled to Russia in June as part of a group from the University of Minnesota's Institute on Community Integration (ICI). The Peer-to-Peer project is funded by the U.S. Embassy in Moscow. It brings together researchers from ICI, parents and other experts with experience guiding young people's transitions from high school to community living, employment and post-secondary education with like-minded colleagues and parents from the Krasnoyarsk Krai region of the Russian Federation. The project builds on established connections made by ICI and the Rotary Club of White Bear Lake.

The team spent a week in the Siberian city of Krasnoyarsk, collaborating with parents, advocates, business representatives, and other local experts, as well as visiting non-government day programs for youth with disabilities.

PACER participated at the request of ICI. "The Krasnoyarsk folks specifically wanted a parent perspective on transition, post-secondary education, and community-based living," Kathy explained. "We met with and made presentations to spur more integration for youth with disabilities into the community. There are many motivated people in Russia who want to move in that direction. We explored what Krasnoyarsk can learn from what we've done well and not done well in the U.S."

PACER's transition website, [PACER.org/transition](http://PACER.org/transition), was a key part of Kathy's presentation. "The resources on the website were very helpful," she said. "People loved the

concept of parents helping parents. They were also really interested in assistive technology." Kathy's presentation included her knowledge of PACER programs and personal experiences with her son Sam, a young college graduate whose talent for technology landed him a job in social media communications. Sam, who has cerebral palsy, is a former PACER intern and recipient of PACER's 2016 Otto Bremer Youth Leadership Award.

"I walked through a day in the life with Sam, how he gets to work, the accommodations he has there," Kathy said. "I shared how he got to where he is today and how we built support throughout his time in school. Showing images and videos made a big difference in being able to translate educational and legal concepts."

Many young people with disabilities in Krasnoyarsk live in institutions, Kathy noted, or if they live at home, are not integrated into the community or employed. "We shared ideas to give people hope and see possibilities for a different way of living. Many of the young people with disabilities we met are highly employable."

One of the most inspiring experiences Kathy had was meeting a 25-year-old woman named Vasilina and her mother. "Vasilina has cerebral palsy. Her mother fought for her to go to university, and she now has her degree," Kathy said. "She has a great job in social media with an oil and gas company. While she doesn't speak English, she did grab my phone and immediately connected us on Instagram," Kathy laughed.

Vasilina's mother does not speak English either, and Kathy speaks little Russian, yet they understood each other almost instinctively, Kathy said. "We are both mothers who are doing all we can to support our kids," she said. "In that way, we speak each other's language."

The ICI-Krasnoyarsk project is ongoing; a group will visit Minnesota, including PACER Center, in October. ■



Kathy Graves, second row, fourth from left, with Peer-to-Peer project members in Siberia

# His mom's high expectations helped TJ succeed

When TJ Anderson was a preschooler, a rehabilitation doctor told his parents that he would never make it past fourth grade. But Sharla and Jim Anderson weren't about to give up on their son, who experienced a stroke in-utero that caused developmental delays. They were determined that TJ have the best possible life. Sharla and Jim had some medical knowledge, as both were registered nurses; Sharla was a nursing home supervisory nurse and later, a home care nurse for high needs patients. Jim was a nurse anesthetist. But above all, they were dedicated parents who had high hopes and high expectations for both of their children.

Things became even more complex when TJ was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) in first grade. It was a difficult time for the family. "ADHD made it difficult for TJ to sit still in class," Sharla said. Medication helped, but she and Jim disagreed with the district's plan to treat TJ's disabilities as a disciplinary issue. "Rather than putting accommodations into TJ's Individualized Education Program (IEP), the district wanted a disciplinary plan, including having TJ work alone in a room outside the principal's office," Sharla explained.

"My mother supported me 300% in teacher conferences," TJ said. That support included reaching out for help with TJ's education.

"I picked up the phone and called PACER for advice," Sharla said. She received more than advice; a PACER parent advocate traveled to the Andersons' Northern Minnesota community for Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings. "She looked at his doctor's recommendations of what TJ needed in the classroom, which included putting him near the front of the classroom and other things. The PACER advocate kept the district focused on TJ's needs and the supports he required to be successful."

**The main reason I have done so well and been successful is because of my mother. She has been the backbone of my life.**

**– TJ Anderson**



Left to right: JJ, TJ, Jen and Robert Anderson

The advocate helped the Andersons persuade the IEP team to include TJ's pediatrician's suggestions. "It made a world of difference for TJ," Sharla said. "We helped him with his homework every night until he was in 10th grade," she added.

She and Jim never doubted that TJ could have a good life – and TJ lived up to his parents' expectations, not just academically but in other ways, too. "My mom was a role model in teaching me life skills like how to iron my clothes," TJ said. "We volunteered at church and visited patients at the nursing home my Mom worked at. She taught me how to cook, she taught me how to take care of myself and others, how to drive a car, and how to help care for Grandma Liz as she was failing."

Today, the boy who couldn't hold up his head when he was six months old or walk until he was three is happy and successful. After graduating from high school, he earned a two-year degree in radio broadcasting. He has a good job in the maintenance department of an aircraft manufacturer and has served in the Army reserves for nine years. He and his wife, Jen, have been married for 13 years, and have a daughter and a son.

After TJ and Jen's son Robert, who's now 12, was diagnosed with autism, Sharla took early retirement to help care for him. "Robert is significantly impaired," she said. Once again, the Andersons called on PACER for help. Jen talked with a PACER parent advocate several times for help with Robert's IEP.

"PACER gave us the support that helped TJ be successful," Sharla said. "It's wonderful that PACER is here to help his son, too." ■

# PACER collaborates with Instagram to shape new parent guide

PACER recently visited Instagram in New York City to learn about and advise the social media company on their new parents' guide to prevent bullying on the platform. On July 19th, Julie Hertzog, Director of the National Bullying Prevention Center (NBPC), and Bailey Lindgren, NBPC coordinator, joined 20 colleagues from youth advocacy groups across the nation to weigh in on the bullying prevention section of the guide and to discuss parent involvement with their child's social media usage.

A statement by Instagram co-founder Kevin Systrom described how the platform's growth has inspired joy and beauty but requires more effort to create a welcoming atmosphere. "We want to work diligently to maintain what has kept Instagram positive and safe," Systrom wrote.

Bailey Lindgren and Julie Hertzog pose at a photo wall at Instagram Headquarters

Instagram and its parent company, Facebook, are leading the way in bringing tools to parents to make social media more welcoming. "They're always analyzing their audience and making changes to be an important platform for teens," Julie said.

PACER's deep partnership with parents and families across the nation came in handy as Julie and Bailey shared strategies that parents can employ to help their children use social media in a positive, healthy manner. They discussed conversation starters for parents to use when inappropriate or bullying behavior occurs on social media, and how to set boundaries around device usage with young children.

Julie and Bailey were also joined by colleagues from organizations including the National Parent Teacher Association, Girl Scouts, Boys and Girls Club, GLSEN, and the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence. "The diversity of organizations spoke to Instagram's willingness to embrace a comprehensive view of parents and how children's experiences with social media may vary," Bailey said.

"This event showcases their commitment and how to tangibly use the tools they're putting out there," she said. "They recognize while they're a technology company, their platform is about relationships, so they seek advice from the community to help people connect in healthy ways." ■

Join PACER's 9<sup>th</sup> Annual

## Run Walk Roll AGAINST BULLYING

presented by Friends of PACER and  
sponsored by Car Donation Foundation



### Step into National Bullying Prevention Month with PACER's Run, Walk, Roll on Oct. 6

PACER's ninth annual Run, Walk, Roll Against Bullying raises awareness and funds for PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center. Open to all ages and abilities, it takes place at Mount Normandale Lake Park in Bloomington, Minn.

Stick around for performances, guest speakers, prizes, and more! Snacks, coffee, and water are provided. Registration is \$20 for ages 16 and older, \$10 for ages seven to 15, and free for children six and younger. Register before October 5 to be guaranteed a free event t-shirt! For information and to register, go to [PACER.org/RWR](http://PACER.org/RWR), or call (952) 838-9000.

**9 AM – Check-in, day-of registration, activities**

**10 AM – 4 mile run, 2 mile fun walk & roll**

**10:45 AM – Activities, guest speakers, performances, prizes & more**

# Kindness Coordinator gives bullying prevention a boost at Coon Rapids High School

Coon Rapids High School in Minnesota will celebrate National Bullying Prevention Month with a “Respect Retreat” for ninth graders and Random Acts of Kindness challenges. The October activities have their roots in the Kindness Matters campaign launched a year ago, which earned the school one of PACER’s National Bullying Prevention Center Faces of Change Awards.

At Coon Rapids High School, students and staff have teamed up to make high school a friendlier place with the Kindness Matters Campaign. Special Education teacher Jamie Weisz is the school’s Kindness Coordinator. He launched a campaign that culminated in a video of celebrities, athletes, and public figures speaking directly to Coon Rapids students to tell them why kindness matters. The yearlong campaign consisted of contests, challenges, charity drives, posters, and pep assemblies featuring staff dressed as superheroes.

Jamie has long used prizes from musicians, athletes, and actors to motivate his students. “I’ve made great connections with organizations, sports teams, foundations and corporations,” Jamie said. “Whether it be Beats by Dre or a signed Tom Brady photo, I try to get people in different fields, like chef Andrew Zimmern and local sports stars.”

The school’s kindness theme revolves around empathy. “Kindness is a choice, it’s an action, it’s free,” Jamie said. “You just kind of put yourself into their shoes and realize one little small difference can make a big difference for somebody, whether that’s opening a door, helping clean a desk, or reaching out to a classmate.”

One action in the Kindness campaign was a Random Acts of Kindness challenge. “We handed out Random Acts of Kindness cards to the students, and they had to try to incorporate that sometime in the day or the week,” Jamie said. “It could be ‘say thank you to somebody,’ ‘say hello to someone.’ It takes practice but once you do those things unconsciously it makes people feel good, that’s the way I see it.”

“The students are really excited about the Kindness activities, and they try and encourage their friends. When you talk about kindness, through quotes or activities, I think students will ultimately develop the skills and take the necessary actions to show kindness.” The school’s emphasis on kindness continues to flourish. The administrative office reports that behavioral referrals have dipped, attendance is up, and the energy in the hallways has changed. “We want to be sure it’s something we touch on every day,” said Principal Annette Zeigler of Coon Rapids High School. “We need to do a lot of things to challenge kids to make kindness a priority.”

Check out PACER’s National Bullying Prevention Center website for ideas on how you can help prevent bullying in your community! Visit [PACER.org/Bullying](http://PACER.org/Bullying) to learn more. ■



Jamie Weisz and kindness messages at Coon Rapids High School

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[PACERKidsAgainstBullying.org](http://PACERKidsAgainstBullying.org)

[PACERTeensAgainstBullying.org](http://PACERTeensAgainstBullying.org)

PACER Center enhances the quality of life and expands opportunities for children, youth, and young adults with all disabilities and their families so each

person can reach his or her highest potential. PACER operates on the principles of parents helping parents, supporting families, promoting a safe environment for all children, and working in collaboration with others. PACER is also the National Bullying Prevention Center, offering innovative resources for students, parents, educators, and others.

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# Mediation can be a positive solution for all

When a parent and their child's school district are unable to resolve differences, mediation is one of the voluntary dispute resolution options that are available to parents. In mediation, the State of Minnesota assigns a neutral third party to help parents and the district resolve disputes over issues with an Individualized Education Program (IEP), including identification, evaluation, educational placement, or the provision of a free appropriate public education (FAPE).

## How it works

The necessary members of the IEP team, including at least one parent and a district staff person with authority to resolve the dispute (often the special education director), attend the mediation conference. But parents don't have to go it alone, said Pat Anderson, PACER Senior Advocate and Trainer, who works with mediation. "It's important for parents to know that they can receive help from a PACER staff advocate every step of the way. An advocate can assist parents with deciding to mediate, help them prepare for the mediation, tell them about the process, and even attend the mediation."

The mediator takes on the role of facilitator, helping keep the focus on the child's needs and assist the team in creating a solution that both sides can agree on. Mediation almost always results in an agreement, Pat said. "In 2017, the Minnesota

Department of Education reported that 93 percent of cases mediated reached an agreement."



Another benefit to mediation is that it is a constructive, rather than an adversarial, process. "The mediator helps the participants work as a team. They agree on an outcome, rather than having one side 'win,'" Pat explained. "The process helps build cooperation and trust and a feeling of working together on the child's behalf."

For more information on dispute resolution, visit [PACER.org/disputeresolution](http://PACER.org/disputeresolution) or call (952) 838-9000 and ask to speak to an advocate. PACER's dispute resolution page includes a link to a checklist to aid parents in preparing for a mediation. ■

## Minnesota Department of Education launches dyslexia initiative

In 2017, the Minnesota Legislature recognized the importance of increased support for schools in addressing the needs of students with dyslexia, and created the position of dyslexia specialist within the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE). Amy Schulting, PhD, a clinical psychologist with more than five years' experience evaluating and diagnosing reading difficulties, was hired in January to fill the position. "This role is very exciting for me," Schulting said. "It allows me to integrate all aspects of my training and expertise."

Schulting also has personal experience with dyslexia. "Dyslexia runs in my family," she said. "The experiences of family members have given me great understanding about and empathy for those who have dyslexia."

Schulting is part of a team that includes specialists in literacy and learning disabilities. Her priority right now is hearing from members of the community. "I've been holding listening sessions with stakeholders," she said. So far she's met with superintendents, special education and curriculum directors, school psychologists, speech language pathologists, and some parents. A parent listening session at PACER is scheduled for October.

"One of my initial goals is to help school districts screen and identify students who have the characteristics of dyslexia," Schulting said. "Our initial plan is to increase awareness of dyslexia, focusing on early identification and intervention to support positive outcomes for students," she said. "I am thrilled about the level of energy and attention being paid to this important issue."

# Capacity crowd for PACER's 13th Annual Symposium

More than 900 parents, teachers, administrators and others packed the Minneapolis Convention Center on August 8th for PACER's 13th Annual National Symposium on Children and Young Adults with Mental Health and Learning Disabilities.

The three keynote speakers were all enthusiastically received. Steven Schlozman, M.D., of the Harvard Medical School, kicked off the conference with his inspiring presentation, "Full of sound and fury: adolescent brains and psychological distress." The second keynoter, Rosemarie Allen, Ed.D., of the Institute for Racial Equity and Excellence, spoke on social emotional competence and bringing out the best in every child. The closing keynote, addressing adolescent anxiety, was given by clinical psychologist David Stember, Ph.D., of the Harvard Medical School.

Along with the keynote speeches, attendees participated in eight different workshops on topics including the Individualized Education Program (IEP), Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Assistive Technology, social behavior and mental health, trauma, bullying prevention, implicit bias, and managing your child's relationship with the internet. A highlight of the day was the lunch time presentation by PACER's Youth Advisory Board on Mental Health.

PACER received many positive evaluations and comments from both first-time and veteran participants.

"Great first experience at the Symposium. Very kind people eager to teach and learn and better support future generations," said a first-time attendee.

"I always enjoy this Symposium," said a frequent participant. "It is the best way to learn so much for a parent and educator."

One comment was brief but heartfelt: "Thank you for another terrific conference. See you again next year." ■



Foreground: Virginia Richardson, PACER's Parent Training Manager, and Sharman Davis Barrett, PACER's Project Launch Program Manager

*continued from page 1*

- Share your event with us by emailing photos or videos to [Bullying411@PACER.org](mailto:Bullying411@PACER.org) to be featured in the 2018 annual Facebook album. Check out last year's photos on the National Bullying Prevention Center's Facebook page
- Call your lawmakers and encourage them to explore changes in laws to protect students from bullying

To learn more, PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center has three online resources for bullying prevention. They are:

- [PACERKidsAgainstBullying.org](http://PACERKidsAgainstBullying.org) for elementary school students
- [PACERTeensAgainstBullying.org](http://PACERTeensAgainstBullying.org) for middle and high school students
- [PACER.org/Bullying](http://PACER.org/Bullying) for parents and professionals

Together we can **create a world without bullying!**

For more information on how you can support National Bullying Prevention Month and prevent bullying, visit [PACER.org/Bullying](http://PACER.org/Bullying). ■

# Workshops

PACER Center workshops are FREE to Minnesota parents. For information and to register, call (952) 838-9000 (metro area) or toll free at (800) 537-2237 (Greater Minnesota), or visit [PACER.org/workshops](http://PACER.org/workshops).

## CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH, EMOTIONAL/BEHAVIORAL

### School Avoidance and Challenging Behaviors: Special Education and Section 504

Parents and others will learn the role of Section 504 and Special Education when supporting a child who struggles with challenging behaviors, including school avoidance.

- Oct. 22, 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. (Elk River)
- Oct. 29, 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. (Duluth)
- Nov. 5, 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. (Wadena)

### Planning For an IEP Team Meeting When Your Child Has Mental Health Challenges

Parents and others will learn how to prepare for a positive IEP team approach to supporting a child's mental health needs in school.

- Nov. 15, 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. (New Ulm)

### School Engagement and Avoidance: What to do When Your Child is Struggling

This training will discuss children's engagement at school, causes of school avoidance, and strategies for working with schools when attendance becomes a concern.

- Dec 4, 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. (PACER Center)  
Streaming option also available

### Parent Leadership Training on Children's Mental Health

Parents will gain information to help influence positive outcomes for children and youth with behavioral health needs.

- Jan. 17, 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. (PACER)  
Streaming option also available

### Practical Tips: Working Effectively with Culturally Diverse Families of Children and Youth with Behavioral Health Challenges

This webinar is designed for educators and other professionals working with families and their children and youth with mental health needs. This presentation, given by a unique panel of multicultural parent advocates, will suggest strategies they have found to be effective for building collaboration with families.

- Jan. 31, Noon to 1 p.m. (Online Webinar)

## EARLY CHILDHOOD

### Being an Active Participant in your Child's Transition Before Age Three

Families will learn to understand and take an active role in the transition process from Part C Early Intervention services to Part B preschool services or other services in the community.

- Sept. 25, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (PACER)  
Streaming option also available

### Becoming an Active Partner in Your Child's IEP

This workshop for parents of children ages 3 to 5 will provide an overview of the early childhood special education process and how to take an active lead in the IEP process.

- Oct. 18, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (PACER)  
Streaming option also available

### Being an Active Participant in Your Child's Transition from Early Childhood Special Education to Kindergarten

Kindergarten is a big step in any child's life. This workshop will help parents of young children with disabilities plan for this transition and learn strategies to help their child be successful.

- Nov. 17, 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. (PACER)  
Streaming option also available

### Becoming an Active Partner in Your IFSP

This workshop describes early intervention services, the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP), how families can be involved in writing child and family outcomes and become active participants in the IFSP process.

- Nov. 26, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (PACER)  
Streaming option also available

## HEALTH

### Tips and Strategies for a Productive Doctor's Visit

Parents will learn to organize their child's medical information, create questions and follow-up expectations, develop an emergency preparedness plan and learn communication skills to facilitate a partnership and shared decision making for better health outcomes.

- Sept. 27, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (PACER)

## PARENT TRAINING

### Planning for Educational Inclusion: A Viewing of "Including Samuel"

Filmmaker Dan Habib documented his family's efforts to include their son Samuel, who has cerebral palsy, in all facets of their lives. Includes Q & A with a PACER advocate.

- Sept. 13, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (Mankato)
- Sept. 20, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (St. Cloud)

### The ABC's of the IEP: Making the Individualized Education Program (IEP) Work for Your Child

Parents will learn how to use the IEP to benefit their child, including how each required part of the IEP can be developed to meet the child's needs.

- Oct. 11, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (PACER)
- Oct. 23, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (Chanhausen)
- Oct. 29, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (Owatonna)
- Oct. 30, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (Hutchinson)

### 10 Topics to Help Your Child Succeed in School

Parents will learn about 10 important areas in special education and acquire skills, knowledge, and useful tools to help their child with disabilities be successful.

- Oct. 16, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (Worthington)
- Nov. 13, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (Cottage Grove)

### How Parents Can Effectively Communicate with the Individualized Education Program (IEP) Team

Parents will learn to advocate for their child in the special education process and receive tips and tools to become more effective communicators on their child's IEP team.

- Oct. 15, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (Austin)
- Nov. 8, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (Elk River)

### Hot Tips on the Individualized Education Program: Is Your Child's IEP Individualized and Appropriate?

Parents will learn to use their child's special education evaluation report to determine how well the Individualized Education Program (IEP) addresses their child's needs. Parents need to bring the child's most current school evaluation and IEP.

- Oct. 29, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (PACER)

## Special Education: What Do I Need to Know

Parents will gain an understanding of special education, how to resolve disagreements, and discover the role they can play in the process.

- **Nov. 3, 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. (Minneapolis)**

## Tips and Tools for Talking with School Staff

Parents of special education students will learn practical tips and interactive problem-solving strategies to build the skills necessary to communicate effectively with school staff and resolve differences.

- **Nov. 17, 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. (Minneapolis)**

## Special Education & the Important Role You Play for Your Child

Parents will learn to use their rights and abilities to advocate for their child and work effectively with the school. This workshop will also provide valuable information for surrogate parents, foster parents, and the professionals who work with them on behalf of children.

- **Nov. 15, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (PACER)**

## SIMON TECHNOLOGY CENTER

### STC Annual Family Fun Day and Tech Expo

Come explore the possibilities of assistive technology (AT) and enjoy interacting with a variety of devices for children, teens, and adults. This event is free but advance registration is requested.

- **Sept. 15, 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. (PACER)**

### Switch it Up!

Switches can help individuals with disabilities control a variety of devices such as computers, tablets or communication devices. This workshop will cover different types of switches, switch interfaces and positioning options.

- **Sept. 19, 11:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. (PACER)**  
Streaming option also available

### APPy Hour: Apps for Time Management – Alarms, Timers, and Reminders

This 'APPy Hour' will showcase apps to support time management. Apps demonstrated will include clocks, alarms, timers, and reminders for both iOS and Android devices.

- **Oct. 10, 1:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. (PACER)**  
Streaming option also available

## The ABC's of AAC: Augmentative Communication Basics for Parents

Parents will learn about augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) technologies and how to acquire a communication device. Learn what questions to ask and how to advocate for what your child needs.

- **Oct. 22, 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. (PACER)**  
Streaming option also available

### AT Conference/Unconference

An introduction to assistive technology (AT) for beginners. Attend sessions that focus on new AT, funding AT, med management, and more. Free event, lunch provided. Limited to 120. Thursday, October 25, 2018, 8:00 – 4:00

- **Oct. 25, 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. (PACER)**

### Using Smartphones, Watches, and Wearables to Support Executive Function for All Ages

Attendees will explore ways that smartphones, watches, and wearables can support executive function skills for all ages. Topics will include time awareness, organization, focus, task completion, and motivation.

- **Dec. 3, 4:00 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. (PACER)**  
Streaming option also available

### A Recipe for Success: A Healthy Start With Augmentative Communication at Home

Successful communication starts with consistency and opportunity. Join us to learn how to create communication opportunities at home.

- **Dec. 6, 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. (PACER)**  
Streaming option also available

### APPy Hour: Take Control of Your New Year's Resolutions – Apps to Track Habits, Get Reminders, and Stay Healthy

This 'APPy Hour' will focus on apps that support new habits and staying healthy. Apps will include habit trackers, reminders, wellness support, and fitness logs.

- **Jan. 8, 2:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. (PACER)**  
Streaming option also available

### Assistive Technology for Reading and Writing: An Overview of Innovative Tools for School, Work, and Home

Participants will be introduced to new tools that support reading and writing. Demonstrations include devices from the STC lending library, mobile apps, Chrome extensions, and Microsoft learning tools.

- **Jan. 31, 3:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. (PACER)**  
Streaming option also available

## TECH FOR GIRLS CLUB

Roll up your sleeves and get messy while having fun with science, technology, engineering, and math! Girls with disabilities, ages 11-18, at all skill levels are welcome. These workshops will be led by TPT, Twin Cities Public Television. No programming, coding, or photography experience is necessary.

### Painting with Robots

Art and robotics collide in this fun workshop! Girls will code a robot and use it to create their own painting and photography masterpiece.

- **Oct. 13, 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. (PACER)**

### Artbots Part I

Wires, circuits and art, oh my! Girls will make a doodle bot (a drawing robot) and create a circuit to make it draw.

- **Nov. 10, 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. (PACER)**

### Artbots – Part II

Girls will continue to learn how to code. They will build a creature, and make it come alive! Attending the November workshop is encouraged but not required.

- **Dec. 8, 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. (PACER)**

## TECH FOR TEENS CLUB

Teens are invited to join an exciting club to learn about technology! This club is open to teens ages 11 to 19 with disabilities. All skill levels are welcome!

### Intro to Coding and Video Games

Teens are introduced to the fundamentals of coding. They will create interactive games and stories while developing basic programming skills.

- **Oct. 20, 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. (PACER)**

### Programming Robots

Teens will learn some of the fundamentals of robotics and use Snap!, an online tool, to program a robot.

- **Nov. 3, 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. (PACER)**

### Building Websites

Teens will learn the basics of coding, will create their own unique website, and publish it on the Internet.

- **Dec. 15, 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. (PACER)**

### A Star Wars 3D Printer Universe

A guest speaker will present the basics of 3D printing. Teens are invited to watch a 3D print and

## Workshops continued

experiment with 3D design software. Students of all abilities are encouraged to attend.

- **Jan. 12, 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. (PACER)**

### Building a Robot

Teens will assemble a robot and program it to respond to the environment. Students of all abilities are encouraged to attend.

- **Feb. 9, 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. (PACER)**

## TRANSITION

### Supplemental Security Income (SSI): First Steps

Learn how your youth can apply for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) to help meet his or her postsecondary education, training, employment, and independent living goals.

- **Sept. 10, 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. (Mankato)**

### Transition: Pathway to the Future

Parents of students in the 8th grade and above who have Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) will learn how to develop transition services to support planning for life after high school.

- **Oct. 2, 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. (Little Falls)**
- **Nov. 8, 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. (PACER)**

### Paths to Employment: How Families can Help

Parents will learn how to help their youth gain the skills they need for future success.

- **Oct. 9, 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. (PACER)**  
Streaming option also available

### Transitioning to Employment

Families of youth will receive information on career exploration and planning, including preparing their youth for employment, and information about agencies that provide independent living, financial, and employment services and supports.

- **Oct. 18, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (Grand Rapids)**

- **Nov. 1, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (Alexandria)**
- **Nov. 14, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (St. Cloud)**

### The Next Step: Planning for Success in Employment and Postsecondary Education

Attendees will gain information on the link between postsecondary education and employment success, and offer strategies to help youth prepare for work and education after high school.

- **Dec. 5, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (Mankato)**

### ABC's of the IEP for Transition Age Students and Their Parents

Parents and their students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) in 8th grade and above will learn how to use the IEP to assist with the transition to adulthood.

- **Dec. 11, 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. (Minnetrista)**

## Family Fun Day and Tech Expo is September 15



Children enjoying assistive technology at PACER's Family Fun Day and Tech Expo

Children and youth with disabilities, their families, and professionals will enjoy exploring high-tech tools and technology that supports everything from play to learning to employment. Participants will discover the possibilities of assistive technology and enjoy interacting with a variety of devices for children, teens, and adults. Attend mini sessions to see iPad app demonstrations, get creative with accessible art and do-it-yourself technology, and learn about PACER's resources. This event is free but advance registration is encouraged. The event is from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at PACER Center. **To register, call (952) 838-9000 or visit PACER's website at [PACER.org/workshops](http://PACER.org/workshops).**

# PACER serves a record number of families in 2017

The data is in, the numbers have been tallied; here's a look at how PACER exceeded its goals in serving families last year.



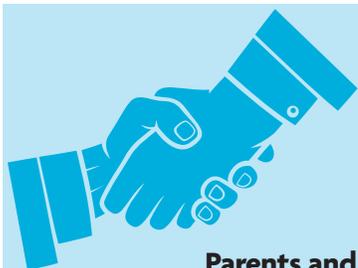
## 45,340

Requests responded to by PACER staff for individual assistance, information and support from parents and professionals via phone calls, mail, email and in person



## 2.2 Million

The number of visits to PACER's innovative, interactive websites



## 39,340

Parents and professionals working with families attended PACER's free workshops and presentations. Workshops are available at PACER Center, throughout Minnesota and via Livestream



## 228,000

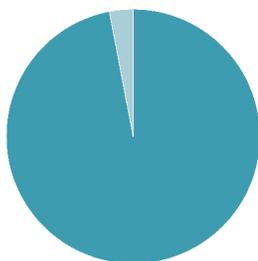
Individuals reached by PACER through print and electronic publications

## 1.9 billion

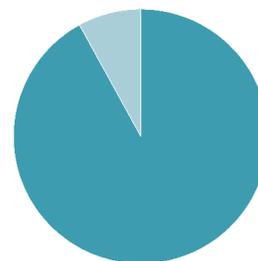


People read about PACER in online articles and social media

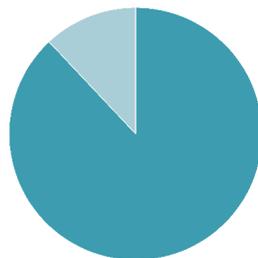
**97%** of parents reported learning new and helpful information from PACER's informative workshops and trainings.



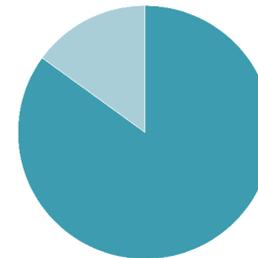
**92%** of parents and teachers reported that they would use the information learned at PACER workshops to help improve their child's or student's educational outcomes. PACER's workshops help students succeed in school.



**88%** of parents said their child received more appropriate services because of information they received from a PACER advocate. PACER helps students get the services they need.



**85%** of PACER's funds go directly to programs. As stated by auditors, PACER's management and fundraising expenses are only 15%, well below the industry standards. PACER is a good steward of its funds.



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## INSIDE

National Bullying Prevention Month	1
From Parent to Board Member	2
PACER Interns	3
Young Children and Disabilities	4
PACER Advocates for Parent Voices	5
Peer-to-peer Project in Siberia	6
Success Story	7
Run, Walk, Roll	8
Kindness at Coon Rapids High School	9
PACER's Symposium	11

## Change Service Requested

# Leaving a legacy:

## Why Tammy Pust contributes to PACER's endowment

"I believe that you need to live your values, and part of that is investing in the longevity of the work that will live after you're gone," said PACER Board member Tammy Pust. That's why Tammy supports PACER's endowment. "I know that with a strong endowment, PACER will have the ability to serve the future needs of kids and their families, no matter what."

Leaving a legacy is important to Tammy. "A nonprofit can put good people in charge, have a sound structure and accountability, but you also have to make sure it's sustainable in the future. You have to water the seeds, and make sure there's good soil for the roots. I know that at some point, I won't be here -- but I want to know that PACER will be," she added.

Tammy stressed the importance of contributing to the endowment at any level. "Some people can write out a check for thousands. For others, it's wonderful if they can give \$50, and that's a generous gift. What worked for me was to figure out how much I wanted to give and then have my bank account debited monthly over a three-year period.

"There are many ways to contribute. PACER makes it easy to do what's most comfortable for you."

To learn more, contact Paula Goldberg at (952) 838-9000.



Tammy Pust