Summer 2005 • Vol. 28, Issue 2

# PACESETTER

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

## New NCLB policy affects assessment

*By Patricia Bill*

The details of a new No Child Left Behind (NCLB) policy that affects the testing of some students with disabilities were announced by U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings on May 10.

The new guidelines allow another 2 percent of students with academic disabilities to take alternate assessments.

Previously NCLB allowed for 1 percent of students, those with the most significant cognitive disabilities, to take alternate assessments. States and local districts could apply to increase the percentage under certain circumstances.

The new policy is designed to help states better assist students with disabilities, Spellings said. She pledged to continue working with states to ensure they have the flexibility needed to raise student achievement.

"Under this policy, to be made final under a new rule, students with academic disabilities will be allowed to take tests that are specifically geared toward their abilities, as long as the state is working to best serve those students by providing rigorous research-based training for teachers, improving assessments, and organizing collaboration between special education and classroom teachers," she said.

Some parents and advocates for children with disabilities said that while they support the intention of helping all children succeed academically, they are concerned that using alternate assessments will lead to lowering expectations for children with disabilities.

For information, visit *www.ed.gov/news/pressreleases/2005/05/05102005.html*

## Meetings to discuss IDEA regs planned across United States

*By Patricia Bill*

The U. S. Department of Education plans public meetings to receive comments on proposed regulations to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA 2004). The meetings are in June and July in seven major cities.

*Isaiah LaBelle of Plymouth is one of 6.8 million children with disabilities nationwide that will be affected by IDEA regulations.*

IDEA is the federal law that provides a free, appropriate public education for the nation's 6.8 million children with all disabilities. Congress reauthorized (updated) it in late 2004, and it takes effect July 1, 2005. Regulations interpret and clarify the law.

The public meeting site nearest Minnesota is in Chicago on Wednesday, June 29. Parents of children with disabilities may attend the meeting and comment on the proposed regulations. The Department considers the comments in finalizing the regulations.

The proposed regulations had not been released at Pacesetter press time. However, those for Part B of IDEA, affecting children with disabilities from ages 3 to 21, were believed imminent. A 75-day comment period on the draft regulations follows the publishing of the proposals in the *Federal Register.*

PACER will post or link to the proposed regulations through its Web site (*www.pacer.org* and click on "Legislative Info") as soon as they are available.

The Department's Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services conducts the public comment meetings.

For information, contact (202) 245-7468 or for TDD, call (800) 877-8339.

### Public comment

The public meetings will be in:

Nashville, Tenn. – June 17
Sacramento, Calif. – June 22
Las Vegas, Nev. – June 24
New York, N.Y. – June 27
Chicago, Ill. – June 29
San Antonio, Texas – July 7
Washington, D.C. – July 12

Written comments or suggestions can also be submitted electronically to *comments@ed.gov,* or mailed to:

Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services
U.S. Department of Education,
400 Maryland Avenue, S.W.
Potomac Center Plaza, Room 5126
Washington, DC, 20202-2641

PACER CENTER

# Technology Center plans Toy Expo July 30

PACER's Simon Technology Center (STC) plans the second annual Early Childhood and Toy Expo for Saturday, July 30, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

The free event will allow young children and infants with all disabilities and their families to play with and evaluate toys from the Toy Industry Foundation. The event also includes art activities and information on maximizing young children's growth and learning opportunities through play.

The expo will offer toy giveaways, refreshments, information, and catalogs.

The STC Lending Library, which includes adaptive toys as well as computer software, will be open during the expo, and PACER staff will be available to discuss assistive technology.

To register for attending the Expo, call PACER at (952) 838-9000.

*One young girl was fascinated by an adapted toy at PACER's 2004 Toy Expo.*

## PACER's bullying prevention effort under way

# Nationwide project calls for children's input

While any child can be the target of bullying, children with disabilities can be especially vulnerable. If your child is being bullied, you know how devastating it can be. What can you and your child do about it? Having information and an action plan can make a big difference. PACER Center can help.

Children can help prevent bullying—and have fun in the process by entering PACER's "tell us your story" contest. Stories, poems, and artwork about bullying will be judged by a celebrity panel, including local artists and authors. Winners will receive exciting prizes, and their submissions will be featured on PACER's new bullying prevention Web site when it launches this fall.

The site will feature animation, videos, games, information, contests, artwork, stories, and more. It will explain what bullying is, how to respond to it, and how to prevent it. It will be particularly helpful for children who are targets of bullying and those who witness it. Geared for all students in second through sixth grade, the site has a special emphasis on children with disabilities.

## Contest Rules

| | |
|---|---|
| **Who:** | The contest is open to children who are in second through sixth grade during the 2004-05 school year. |
| **What:** | PACER seeks stories, poetry, or artwork on the topic of bullying. There is special interest in entries that illustrate questions such as: What is bullying? How does bullying make me feel? What can I do to stop bullying? Each contestant may provide up to two entries. |
| **How:** | Download entry forms and the complete contest details at *www.pacer.org*, or call (952) 838-9000 and ask for a bullying prevention contest form. |
| **When:** | Entries must be postmarked by July 15, 2005.<br>*(All submissions become the property of PACER Center.)* |

# Unified system of parent centers provides data

Research from the Technical Assistance Alliance for Parent Centers (the Alliance) shows that more than 1.7 million parents of children with disabilities and professionals contacted parent centers across the United States last year (2003-04).

Families asked Parent Training and Information Centers (PTIs) and Community Parent Resource Centers (CPRCs) for:

- Help in obtaining appropriate education and other services for their child with disabilities under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).
- Training and information to help their child, according to best practices.
- Help in resolving specific concerns at school or with other agencies.
- Community resources for their child.

The nation's 100 parent centers, part of the Alliance's unified system, responded with one-on-one consultations, meetings, workshops, printed and electronic materials, and other resources. The parent centers also collected and shared data from their work that leads to improved practices in serving children and youth with disabilities.

Alliance research shows that parent centers are effective. Data from follow-up calls to parents contacting parent centers presents positive outcomes:

- 81 percent of parents said that their child received more appropriate services because the parents used the information they learned from the parent center by phone.
- 92 percent of parents said that parent centers provided them, by telephone, with the information they needed to make decisions
- 83 percent of parents reported that the information and support they received from the parent center by telephone helped them to resolve a disagreement with the school.

The Alliance National Technical Assistance Center is at PACER Center. Regional centers are in California, Colorado, Florida, New Jersey, North Carolina, and Ohio. The Alliance provides parent centers with research-based information and useful tools and technology to respond effectively and efficiently to the families they serve.

Each state has at least one parent center, and states with large populations may have more. There are 100 parent center in the United States.

Two recent publications provide data about how parent centers and the Alliance help children with disabilities and their families. *Parent Centers Helping Families: Data Outcomes 2003-2004* and *Why Parent Centers?* are available by contacting the Alliance project at PACER Center (952) 838-9000 or (888) 248-0822 (toll free).

For information about parent centers visit *www.taalliance.org*.

**PACESETTER**
Published by PACER Center, Inc.
Three times a year
*Circulation: 101,000*
©2005 by PACER Center
8161 Normandale Blvd.
Minneapolis, MN 55437-1044

Voice: (952) 838-9000
TTY: (952) 838-0190
Toll-free: (800) 53-PACER (MN)
Toll-free: (888) 248-0822 (National)
FAX: (952) 838-0199
E-mail: pacer@pacer.org

PACER Executive Director:
Paula F. Goldberg
Communications Coordinator:
Patricia Bill
Writer-editor:
Marcia Kelly

PACER Web site: *www.pacer.org*
Alliance Web site: *www.taalliance.org*
FAPE Web site: *www.fape.org*

PACER Center expands opportunities and enhances the quality of life for children and young adults with disabilities and their families. The mission is based on the concepts of parents helping parents and working in coalition with others. An Equal Opportunity Employer, PACER is funded by grants from the U.S. Departments of Education, Labor, and other sources, and from foundations, corporations, and individuals. Views expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the Departments or other donors. Contributions to PACER are tax-deductible. For information, call Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

# NPSO to collect, analyze post-school data

PACER Center was named a partner of the National Post-School Outcomes Center (NPSO).

NPSO is a federal project to help states develop systems that collect and analyze data about how youth with disabilities fare after they leave school. The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) funds the project, based at the University of Oregon's College of Education.

"From a research standpoint, the goal is to zero in on the connection between what happens in school and what happens immediately afterwards," said Michael Bullis, director of NPSO.

PACER Center will bring the perspectives of youth and families to the project and will develop brief documents targeted to youth and their parents. Deborah Leuchovius of PACER will work with the project.

**Save the date!**
**24th Annual PACER Benefit**
**May 6, 2006**

# PACER's multicultural staff meet the

*By Patricia Bill*

*PACER staff serving underrepresented families include (front row, from left) Jesús Villaseñor, Dao Xiong, and Bonnie Jean Smith. Standing are Lucy Favorite and Abdi Omer Abdilahi.*

As different as cultures may be from one another, most parents have one thing in common, said Dao Xiong, parent advocate who works in PACER's multicultural project.

"Our children are the most valued thing we have. We want them to succeed," he said.

Through its five-member multicultural project staff, PACER Center helps children with disabilities from a spectrum of ethnic groups find success. The parent advocates assist children with disabilities and their families from Minnesota's Southeast Asian, African American, Somali or Ethiopian, Native American, and Hispanic-Latino communities. The advocates offer one-on-one assistance, bilingual workshops, translated written information, and other support. They also work with school and other professionals to help bridge cultural gaps.

One of the advocates' most important undertakings is to build trust with the families. The advocates' own experiences help them address issues challenging underrepresented and immigrant families of children with disabilities. They make themselves visible and accessible in the community, meet with parents, share some of their experiences, and explain the education and disability systems.

"Some parents need to see that I'm real—that I'm human—before they can trust me," said Bonnie Jean Smith, who works with African American families. She laughs that she has done presentations on PACER Center in the grocery store and explained the special education system in parking lots—wherever parents stop her to ask for help.

Although PACER publishes and translates materials, often it is word of mouth that provides entrée to families, said the advocates.

"Many parents in the community know me just as 'PACER,'" said Xiong. "I'm proud of that."

Families in the Somali community remember hearing about the death of Abdi Omer Abdilahi's 7-year-old daughter, who had cerebral palsy and other challenges, two years ago. They identify with him as a parent, he said. He tells families how he wanted someone to help him when his daughter was born—and that PACER can help *them*. It makes a difference in establishing a relationship, he said.

Smith understands the nuances of Minnesota's African American community, and parents usually listen to her suggestions. She may mention that her own son has disabilities, and that she, too, had difficulty obtaining services for him. She 1) helps the parent pinpoint and focus on his or her concern, 2) explains the special education process, 3) suggests actions the parent can take to help the child, and 4) recommends how to approach the school staff.

"I don't judge parents when they call in crisis," Smith said. "I just try to keep them in the process. It's a dance of life, and I'm only teaching people the steps."

For parents in some cultures, telephone consultations are impractical or uncomfortable, and coming to a large workshop may be intimidating. As a result, PACER's multicultural advocates often conduct smaller presentations in their community or meet parents face-to-face in their homes or other community settings.

Transportation may be difficult for Native American families at times, said Lucy Favorite of PACER's American Indian project. Parents frequently ask her, "How am I supposed to get to you?" She resolves the problem by meeting them in their home or at a local fast food restaurant

# needs of diverse populations

or other location near their home.

Home visits are usually the best way for him to connect with families, said Jesús Villaseñor, advocate for parents in the Hispanic-Latino community. He urges other professionals to become involved with the families in that way. Many from the Hispanic-Latino community are shy, and their quietness is sometimes mistaken as apathy or an indication that they are hiding something, he said. Arranging for a friendly home visit generally honors the family while giving the professional a better understanding of the family and student as individuals and member of a cultural group.

The advocates said that parents from many cultures do not seek help from schools or agencies because they view the staff as authority figures rather than partners. They may not understand that schools, government, and family need to work together.

Growing up, Favorite was taught to respect her elders and not to question a person of authority, she said. It wasn't until her son with a learning disability had difficulty at school that she learned that she needed to collaborate with the school.

In Southeast Asia, the families of whole villages knew one another and acted as parents for a child, said Xiong. There is a different environment in the United States. Many families view schools as institutions and are reluctant to seek help outside their community.

"I advise families that seeking outside services is a *good* thing," said Xiong.

"In their life experience, [Somali people] didn't have government involvement," explained Abdilahi. "The notion of asking for help in the system is new, and having a child in special education is new. The biggest challenge is telling parents their child's rights under the law."

Some parents may be wary of schools and agencies because of their immigration status, added Villaseñor.

PACER's multicultural efforts are unique among organizations.

"PACER was the first place to say to me, "Yes, I can help you," remembered Favorite.

Those words are a lifeline when a family is dealing with an unfamiliar culture or environments and the issues of rearing a child with disabilities. Benefits of the parent-PACER relationship, however, flow both ways, said the advocates.

As Villaseñor put it, "In my job, I inform a lot; I help a lot—and I also learn a lot."

## *PACER Center's staff exemplifies diversity*

A glance around a staff meeting confirms that diversity is important to PACER Center. The men and women gathered there present a spectrum of backgrounds. The one thing they have in common: commitment to helping families of children with all disabilities.

"From the time PACER Center opened its doors in 1978, one of its values has been to serve families of children with disabilities regardless of race, cultural, or economic background," said Paula F. Goldberg, executive director. "One of the ways to do that is to hire staff that share, understand, and respect families' cultural experiences," she said.

Virginia Richardson, parent training manager, is an example. She has been part of the organization since its earliest days, first volunteering by presenting workshops. Shortly after PACER was established, she was named to the Board of Directors. After four years, she became president of the board—a position she resigned to join the staff. She celebrates her 25th anniversary as a PACER staff member this year.

That Richardson is African American is beside the point. She is the parent of a child with disabilities, she understands special education law and the rights of parents, and she is sensitive to families. So are Dixie Jordan (Native American), 20 years at PACER; Sharman Davis Barrett (African American), 17 years at PACER; Dao Xiong (Hmong), 11 years at PACER; Jesús Villaseñor (Hispanic-Latino), 9 years at PACER; and most of PACER's other staff members.


*Virginia Richardson*

"I've always felt that PACER is intentional about serving all families in a way that is respectful. From the beginning, PACER tried to bring in parents whose voices were not at the table of other disability groups," Richardson said.

The effort remains. Two-and-a-half decades later, "we continue to work on serving *all* parents of children with disabilities," said Richardson.

# Twenty-five years of PACER puppets teach

*By Patricia Bill*

PACER Center's Count Me In project, which teaches inclusion and disability awareness to children through puppet shows, celebrates its 25th birthday this year.

Pigtails and overalls may be passé for most 25-year-olds, but not for Sally, Mitch, Carmen, and PACER Center's other Count Me In puppets. They are forever children. The 3-foot-tall puppets portray youngsters from diverse ethnic backgrounds with a variety of disabilities. Since 1979, they have taught elementary school students that children with disabilities are "just kids" like them.

The message works. One youngster, reporting on her school day, stumbled over the word "disabilities." She told her mother she had seen a puppet show about children with "possibilities."

Over the years, approximately 323,000 people have seen the Count Me In puppet show and learned about *possibilities* for all children, said project coordinators Gloria Williams and Lynn Dennis. Puppeteers are now performing for a second generation. Parents of current students recall seeing the show when *they* were children.

Children in elementary schools are the primary audience. However, the puppets also perform at Girl or Boy Scout meetings, colleges and universities for future teachers, Head Start and agency diversity staff trainings, community celebrations, and in many other venues.

Trained volunteer puppeteers present the shows, as do Williams and Dennis. The puppeteers learn scripts about children who have deafness, blindness, learning and cognitive disabilities, epilepsy, autism, ADHD, cerebral palsy, juvenile diabetes, spina bifida, or other disabilities. The shows are entertaining, informative, and upbeat. They invite audience participation, and the honest questions come from children:

"Do you dream in color?" *(to the puppet who is blind)*

"What do you like to play?"

"How do you take a bath?"

## Puppets help pave a professional path

One wouldn't think a puppet show could influence someone for life, but that's what happened to Nicole Williams, M.D.

Newly graduated from the University of Minnesota Medical School, she begins a residency in pediatric neurology at Stanford University this summer. She recently returned from a month in Bangladesh where she worked with children in a hospital as part of her medical studies. Throughout her professional journey, PACER's Count Me In puppets played a role.

Nicole met the puppets in 1985 when she was a third grader in Shoreview. She brought home a notice of a Count Me In show at her school, and it sparked the interest of her mother, Gloria Williams, who has a cousin and niece with disabilities. As Nicole grew up, Gloria learned more about PACER's Count Me In project, became a puppeteer, volunteered at PACER many years, and now co-coordinates the puppet projects as a PACER staff member.

For 20 years, the puppets and their message of inclusion have been part of the Williams family. During that time, the puppets often came home with Gloria between shows. Nicole and her younger sister Angie became well acquainted with the puppet characters, the disabilities they portrayed, and ideas from the scripts their mother practiced.

Nicole's interest in helping people with disabilities continued. She became more aware of her cousin's needs. She did a speech in high school on the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). She volunteered at a residential facility for people with disabilities. She met with Carolyn Allshouse of PACER's Health Information and Advocacy project to discuss their mutual interests.

All the influences came together when she wrote her residency application, and she realized PACER's impact on her life, Nicole said.

"PACER is amazing. I'm so impressed with PACER's quality involvement with children with disabilities and their families in all ways," she said.

Nicole has some time before she needs to decide whether she'll work in academia or private practice, but she does know that her job will involve helping children with disabilities—thanks, in part, to PACER's Count Me In project.

*Above, Nicole with the Carmen puppet in 1986. Nicole and Gloria with Carmen today.*

# children about the importance of inclusion

*Count Me In coordinators Gloria Williams (left) and Lynn Dennis (right) work with puppets, including Mitch, Sally, and Gina.*

“There is a lot built into the presentation to promote give-and-take conversation,” said Williams. She has been with the program since 1985, first as a volunteer, then as a PACER staff member. “It’s a comfortable environment. Sometimes a child will mention the disability of a family member. Also, children with disabilities can—and do—talk about their own disability.”

For many Minnesota schools, the puppet shows are an annual event. Sometimes, teachers or administrators from individual school buildings or classes book a show. In other instances, there may be a districtwide contract with PACER. Families of a child with disabilities have also provided the show for their child’s classroom. For example, the Rickertsen family of Hutchinson asked for a puppet show to be presented at their child’s school to help explain his disabilities to classmates.

“It was a wonderful, fun, interactive experience,” said Sandra Rickertsen. “It just heightened awareness. It didn’t make my son stand out, but just brought out that inclusion piece. I think the children really internalized the message.”

In addition to scheduling and presenting metropolitan area shows and training puppeteers, PACER markets puppets, scripts, and training to schools and organizations. Minnesota schools and organizations from International Falls to Albert Lea support Count Me In projects. Count Me In is also in 23 other states across the nation.

Based on a quarter century of positive evaluations on the presentations, the PACER puppets remain as popular in 2005 as they were in 1979. Moreover, no matter the geographic area in which children see the puppet show, they understand the meaning of Count Me In’s theme song:

**“Maybe we don’t all walk the same,**
**Maybe we don’t all talk the same,**
**But, all people want to say:**
**Count Me In!”**

*Information on scheduling a show, becoming a volunteer, or purchasing the puppets and training is available by calling PACER Center at (952) 838-9000 or (888) 248-0822 (toll-free).*

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
- HOT Party
- Benefit on May 6, 2006

*For information, call Rianne Leaf at PACER (952) 838-9000 or (800) 537-2237 (toll-free in Minnesota).*

# Ten tips that may help ease your chi

*By Marcia Kelly*

*Planning for your child's transition from adolescence to adulthood is one of the most important things you can do to pave the way to a successful future. In Minnesota, special education transition planning and services begin when your child with a disability is 14. From then on, you and your child will start learning new skills side-by-side. Your child will begin to take on more responsibility, and you will find new ways to provide support.*

*It can be a challenge. Depending on your child's disability, you may need to consider everything from post-secondary education to employment, from housing to finances. As you and your son or daughter plan for the future, consider these tips to help build a successful transition.*

### 1. Help build your son's or daughter's self-determination and self-advocacy skills.

All young people should have a strong sense of their strengths, abilities, and interests. If students have a disability, they should also be aware of how it might affect them at work, in the community, and in their educational pursuits. Transition is a wonderful time to explore how youth will talk about their disability in different settings and ask for any support or accommodation they will need.

### 2. Help develop your child's social outlets.

Social relationships and recreation are more than fun; they are important tools that help tie people into the community and provide a wider network of support. Although social isolation can be an issue for many young adults with disabilities, transition planning that addresses opportunities for social relationships and recreation can build a bridge to success.

### 3. Expand your network and explore community supports.

As children with disabilities become adults with disabilities, they may need support from a variety of sources. Start now to develop helpful networks for your child. Who do you know in your family, social group, professional circle, religious community, or other sphere who could help provide social, recreational, work, or volunteer experiences for your young adult? Look, too, at adults in the community who have the same disability as your child to learn what kinds of supports they use.

### 4. Make sure your son registers with Selective Service at age 18.

All males—including those with disabilities—must register with Selective Service within 30 days of their 18th birthday. (Exceptions are made for young men in institutional care.) Failure to do so can affect a person's ability to receive federal and state benefits, including student loans, job training, and government jobs. Learn more at *www.sss.gov* or link through PACER's site at *www.pacer.org*.

### 5. Explore post-secondary accommodations.

Students who receive academic programming and support in high school through Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and 504 plans will not automatically have the same support after they graduate. Although post-secondary institutions are required to provide reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities, they are not required to modify course work, if it would substantially change program requirements. When you and your student visit a prospective school, visit the campus's Disability Services Office to:

- explore how to document your student's disability;
- ask if you can talk with other students and families about their experiences in this particular program;
- inquire about what accommodations are available. In addition to note takers, extended time, and alternative testing environments, are other, less common services offered?

### 6. Investigate SSI programs.

Financial planning is an important part of transition. Many people with disabilities are beneficiaries of Supplemental Security Income (SSI), a federal program that provides a monthly benefit check that can help pay for living expenses. A lesser-known program of SSI, called Plan for Achieving Self-Support (PASS), may be helpful to some SSI recipients. It allows a person with disabilities to set aside income and resources in order to reach a work goal. These goals could include such things as enrolling in an educational or training program; obtaining supported employment; starting a business; or purchasing a vehicle to commute to work. PACER Center published parent briefs on SSI in conjunction with the National Center for Secondary Education and Transition (NCSET). The briefs are at *www.pacer.org/publications/transition.htm.*

# ld’s transition to adulthood

Social Security information on SSI is at *www.ssa.gov/work/ResourcesToolkit/pass.html.*

### 7. Encourage your child to build a résumé` by volunteering.

Many young people struggle to find work experiences that help them compete in the job market. Volunteering is a great solution. Young adults can gain skills and build a résumé that shows a prospective employer their abilities, initiative, and dedication to work.

Volunteering can also help develop additional social skills, especially if it is done along with a parent, friend, or group of peers.

### 8. Help your child learn “soft” employment skills.

In addition to the work skills people need for their jobs, they also need “soft skills.” These include such things as being able to accept direction, ask for help, deal with conflict, and engage in interpersonal communication. They also include being prompt, having appropriate hygiene, and dressing properly for the workplace. An employer is more likely to be patient with an employee learning the technical aspects of a job if soft skills are in place. You can help your young adult develop these skills by practicing them at home.

### 9. Plan for health care management.

Like most people, young adults with disabilities need to manage their health care and insurance. You should develop a clear plan on how to address health care needs once your child reaches adulthood.

### 10. Call PACER Center for information and resources.

The transition staff at PACER Center can help you prepare your son or daughter for the adult world. Trained advocates can help you understand your rights and find resources to help with all aspects of transition. To speak with a transition expert, call (952) 838-9000. You may also visit *www.pacer.org/publications/transition.htm* for online transition resources.

# Parents attend leadership training event at PACER

*Minnesota parents attending PACER’s fifth Parent Leadership Conference .*

“It was a great conference. I am so, so happy that I came. I have learned so much and made many new connections.”

For many of those attending, the parent’s comment summed up PACER Center’s fifth Parent Leadership Conference. “Champions for Children with Disabilities” was April 15-16.

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.

“The parents heard dynamic speakers share important information about federal and state education laws, special education finance, and ways to influence policymaking,” said Barb Ziemke of PACER.

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.

“I will put things I learned to good use!” concluded one parent.

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 a presentation on parent leadership in a school district
- obtain names of parent leaders in their community who have successfully completed the training, or
- learn about parent involvement issues.

There is also information at *www.pacer.org/parent/leadership.htm*

*Parent's Guide to Special Education Advisory Councils*

# Booklet describes parent involvement

*PACER Center staff often remind families that "parents are their child's best advocate." With the demands of everyday life and caring for their youngster's special physical or emotional needs, however, families of a child with disabilities may not realize the importance of being involved in their child's education beyond the classroom.*

*A new PACER booklet,* A Parent's Guide to Special Education Advisory Councils, *by parent advocate Carolyn Anderson, explains one way that parents can participate in their child's special education. Excerpts follow:*

## What is a SEAC?

A Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC, pronounced "seek") is a group that provides input on special education issues to its local school district. Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), each state has a special education advisory group. The purpose is to advise and advocate, not to decide policy. Minnesota law requires each school district or cooperative in the state to have a SEAC, although it does not specify how to organize the groups or what duties they should perform. As a result, each SEAC may have a unique mission and structure.

## Why are SEACs important?

Local SEACs advise school districts on the development of programs and services to meet the special educational needs of children and families. By sharing their unique perspective of what it is like to use these services, parents can help the district to be more effective. As a result, outcomes for children with disabilities should improve.

## Why might I want to participate on a SEAC?

Parents give many reasons for joining a SEAC, including these:

- I may be able to help other families and children with disabilities in my school district.
- I can share what I've learned since my child began his education.
- I can support the school professionals in my district.
- I will be a good role model for my child.
- I feel good when I make a contribution to this community.
- I will learn information and skills that may help me work more effectively with my school district.
- I will meet other parents and school professionals with similar goals.
- I may build positive relationships with others in my district.
- I will become more knowledgeable about special education.
- By sharing my unique perspective and insights as a parent, I may help the school district work more effectively with families and improve outcomes for children.

## How do I find my local SEAC?

Call your school district's special education director and ask when and where the group meets next. If you are not sure how to reach your district, call PACER Center.

## How do I join my local SEAC?

Each school district determines SEAC membership differently. Some SEACs ask for applicants and appoint members; others use volunteer members. Your district's special education director can explain how your SEAC works. Before you join a SEAC, you may want to attend a meeting to learn more about the group and how it operates. Meetings are public.

## In conclusion

Minnesota legislators realized the value of parent involvement in school district decision- and policy-making by requiring SEACs. The SEACs can be an effective way for parents and school professionals to work together for the benefit of children with disabilities.

For more information about SEACs and the new booklet, call PACER at (952) 838-9000 or (800) 537-2237 from Greater Minnesota or visit the Web site at *www.pacer.org*. The site also has several article on parent involvement under the Parents Helping Parents category.

## What the Law Says

*Minnesota law requires each school district in the state to have a special education advisory council (SEAC). Here is what the statute says:*

**125A.24 Parent advisory councils.**
In order to increase the involvement of parents of children with disabilities in district policy making and decision making, school districts must have a special education advisory council that is incorporated into the district's special education system plan.

(1) This advisory council may be established either for individual districts or in cooperation with other districts who are members of the same special education cooperative.
(2) A district may set up this council as a subgroup of an existing board, council, or committee.
(3) At least half of the designated council members must be parents of students with a disability. The number of members, frequency of meetings, and operational procedures are to be locally determined.

**A supplement to PACESETTER Summer 2005**

# PACER Benefit is huge success

Attendees are still talking about how much fun they had at PACER Center's 23rd annual Benefit on May 7.

"So many people have told us it was truly the best PACER Benefit ever," said Paula F. Goldberg, PACER's executive director. "The success 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. The program was great! Lionel Richie was just terrific. The audience loved him."

"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."

Benefit co-chairs Mary Frey, Judy Jaffee, and Colleen McGough-Wood headed approximately 400 volunteers. Silent Auction co-chairs were Patrice Alkire, Trish Lies, and Danna Mirviss. Patron Party co-chairs were Susan and Jon Campbell and Alexandra and Irwin Jacobs. Dinner co-chairs were Melanie Barry, Susan Gray, and Martha Kvanbeck. Frank Vascellaro, KARE 11-TV anchor, was master of ceremonies.

The following pages offer a glimpse of PACER's 2005 Benefit—termed the "hottest ticket in town."

The next PACER Benefit is May 6, 2006.

*Carl Pohlad, left, and Paula F. Goldberg, PACER's executive director, met entertainer Lionel Richie following the performance. Pohlad was recognized at the Benefit for his longtime support to PACER Center. A PACER conference room will be named for him and his late wife, Eloise.*

*Mary (PACER development director) and Dr. Jerry Schrock chatted with Mary Sue and Steve Simon of the Advisory Board.*

*At left, artist Tony Whelihan, left, and Tim Henning, held Whelihan's portrait of Lionel Richie as Richie signed it. The portrait was purchased by Kailen Rosenberg, right. Whelihan is on the Advisory Board.*

*Above, Benefit co-chairs were Colleen McGough-Wood, Mary Frey, and Judy Jaffee.*

Benefit photos by Marcia Kelly, Allison Munsell and Patricia Bill

# The Benefit helps many children

*From left are Paul Ackerman, National Business Advisory Board; Paula Goldberg, PACER executive director; Bill and Tani Austin, and Debbie and Bill Mack.*

*From left, Mike and Pat Broyles, R.J. and Jessica Broyles, and Allen Lenzmeier shopped the silent auction. Jessica Broyles is a member of the PACER Center Board of Directors.*

*Above, John Guthmann, president of the PACER Center Board of Directors; Dan Parker, Advisory Board; and Charlie Weaver, Advisory Board, paused for a photo. Below, Don Davidson, Advisory Board and Benefit Committee, arrived with wife Joann, daughter Stacy, Brian Reeves, and Jean and Dave Egeland.*

*From left, Eloise Kaplan, PACER Advisory Board, attended with husband Elliot and Judy and Steve Schumeister. Both couples have supported PACER's programs over the years.*

*At left are Eric and Karen Paulson.*

*The group at right, includes employees of Best Buy, corporate sponsor. John (PACER Board of Directors) and Joan Valente, at right, rows 1 and 2, were on Benefit committees.*

*The Jacobs family has long supported PACER . In front are Madeline Grodnick and Sheila Jacobs. In row two, Melinda Jacobs Grodnick, Trisha Jacobs Blake, Robert Blake, and Alexandra and Irwin Jacobs, Patron Party co-chairs.*

*Mara, left, and Muffy Bennett met Lionel Richie after his performance. Muffy is on PACER's Advisory Board..*

*Waiting for the program to begin were Carol and Michael Berde and Emmett Carson. The program included a unique live auction followed by Richie's performance.*

*College friends celebrated Mothers Day with their moms at the Benefit. From left are Bonnie and Greg Davis of Colorado and Rosalie and Frank Vascellaro. Frank, KARE 11 anchor, was Benefit emcee. Kathy Davis Graves, Greg's sister, is former PACER board president and Benefit co-chair.*

**Save the date: May 6, 2006**

*At right are Dana Rocheford and Richard Perkins, Benefit Corporate Sponsor Committee co-chair and Advisory Board member.*

*Lower right, Jim (Benefit Corporate Sponsor Committee) and Donna Oricchio have supported PACER's work for many years.*

# More Benefit...

Jon and Susan Campbell of Well Fargo met performer Lionel Richie following the Benefit. Wells Fargo sponsored the Patron Party.

Benefit Dinner co-chairs were Susan Gray, Melanie Barry and Martha Kvanbeck. Above, seated, are Norton and Susan Gray, and standing are Chuck and Melanie Barry.

At right are Martha Kvanbeck and Jeff Betchwars. Jeff is former president of the PACER Center Board of Directors.

Enjoying the gourmet dinner before the Benefit were, seated from left, Dick and Judy Corson and Ron Mitsch, Standing are Kathy and Charlie Cunningham and Marilyn Mitsch.

Above, attending from corporate sponsor IBM were Marnie and Jim Galvin, Heidi (PACER's National Business Advisory Board) and Randy Kraemer, Kristi Wieser (PACER Advisory Board), and Kathi Tunheim.

At right, Sheryel Hanuman, left, and Pat Anderson caught up on a mutual commitment to children with disabilities.

# Reading skills for all children begin early

*By Patricia Bill*

Early reading skills may affect a lifetime.

When Allison was in elementary school, she would slouch behind her desk, hoping the teacher wouldn't notice her when it was time to read aloud. Later, she yearned to drive, but put off applying for a permit because she could not read the application form. As an adult, Allison wanted to cook but didn't not want to ask others to read the directions or recipes for her.

Reading is a necessary throughout one's life, beginning with early childhood. Like Allison, when someone cannot read, it is difficult to function in today's world.

*It's never too early to teach literacy skills.*

Most children can learn to read, said Virginia Richardson, PACER Center's parent training manager and the parent of an adult daughter with disabilities.

"I think it's our responsibility to teach children to read. I believe we need to assume a child can read until we find out that he or she cannot," Richardson said.

Parents can do a lot to encourage their child to read, say most literacy experts. "Start early," they advise. A jump start to literacy is even more important for youngsters with some disabilities who may need additional help or accommodations, they add. For children who cannot see or hold traditional ink-on-paper materials, techniques such as Braille, assistive technology, or books on tape may provide an avenue to reading and literacy.

Reading Is Fundamental, a national nonprofit literacy organization, suggests how parents can encourage young children to read.

Following are tips.*

### Babies and Toddlers

- Read aloud to your baby for only a few minutes at a time. Read a little longer as your older baby is willing to listen.
- Point to things in picture books and name them. As your children learn to talk, ask them to "point and say."
- Set aside at least one regularly scheduled time each day for reading. Make it a part of your toddler's routine. Also take toddlers to the library or bookstore for story hour.
- Recite nursery rhymes and sing songs. Rhymes help develop a young child's ear for language.

*Try introducing your child to:*

- Cloth, vinyl, and board books that are durable for babies
- Books with familiar objects to name
- Simple stories about a toddler's everyday experiences
- A collection of Mother Goose or other nursery rhymes

### Preschoolers

- Encourage your children to join in while you read. Pause to let them fill in a rhyming word or repeating line: "I'll huff and I'll puff . . ."
- Ask open-ended questions, such as "What do you think will happen next?" or "Why do you think he did that?"
- Move your finger under the words as you read aloud. It helps connect printed words to spoken words.
- Begin teaching the letters of the alphabet, starting with those in your child's name. Make letter-learning fun with markers, magnets, glue, and glitter.

*Try introducing the following types of books to your child:*

- Concept books, such as counting and A-B-C books
- "Pattern books" with rhymes and repetition
- Simple stories with predictable plots

**Used with permission from Reading Is Fundamental, Washington D.C. (877) RIF-READ or* www.rif.org. *Some of the advice above is from* Reading Checkup Guide: Helping Your Children Become Better Readers *— developed for "Read Me a Story," a RIF/VISA brochure.*

## 'Let's Talk' cards encourage reading

PACER Center's "Let's Talk" activity cards are fun for children ages 2 to 6 and an easy way for parents to introduce the first steps to reading. Simple instructions and the colorful, easy-to-handle cards help children learn vocabulary and speaking skills—the foundation of reading. $4 per set (a set is free to Minnesota parents of children with disabilities), with discounts for volume orders. To order the cards (# PHPa27), call PACER at (952) 838-9000 or (800) 537-2237 (toll-free from Greater Minnesota).

# Divorce: It can complicate children's

*By Carolyn Anderson and Beth-Ann Bloom*

Each year, the parents of a million American children divorce. Despite a divorce, parents are still parents—and the best advocates for their children.

Divorce affects everyone involved, but it is often the most difficult for children. If the children have disabilities and need special education services, the situation can be even more complex. In that case, families need to see that

- the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA 2004) rights of children with disabilities and their parents are protected, and
- the students make educational progress.

The IDEA is a federal law that applies to all states, but individual states also make special education laws.* Education and divorce laws vary from state to state. Attorneys familiar with their state's laws on divorce, child custody, and education can help families. Talking to an informed lawyer is important if the divorcing parents have a child with a disability.

Divorce does not affect most education rights. However, the divorce decree, the legal document that describes parents' responsibilities after divorce, should clearly describe relationships among the parents, child, and education system. The following addresses the divorce–special education mix. Because there are differences in both personal situations and state laws, this information is not a substitute for legal advice.

## Who can make special education decisions?

IDEA and state laws stress that parents are the decision makers for their children. Parents retain these rights unless a court order, state statute, or legally binding instrument revokes them. In other words, each parent remains a decision maker in special education after divorce unless the divorce decree or other court action specifically removes that right.

## How do legal and physical custody impact decision making and school?

In a divorce decree, the court decides both legal and physical custody of children. In most states, courts have the option to grant parents joint legal custody. In some states, including Minnesota, the trend is to give parents who are divorcing joint legal custody unless there is a very strong reason why one parent should not have it.

***Joint legal custody*** means that both parents keep the right to make important decisions about their children's education, health care, and religious training. Under joint legal custody, unless the decree is written differently, both parents have the right to:

- Be members of their child's Individual Education Program (IEP) team
- Be given notice of team meetings
- Exercise their due process rights
- Receive progress reports
- Have the chance to agree or disagree with plans for initial evaluation and placement in special education.

The school must provide written notice of special education meetings to each parent who has legal custody of the child and has provided the school with an address.

***Physical custody*** is different from legal custody in a divorce decree. Physical custody means the routine daily care, control, and residence of the child. The court can give sole physical custody to just one parent or joint physical custody, in which both parents share in providing the child's home and making daily decisions about the child. If parents have joint physical and joint legal custody, an agreement is drawn up that can include how the child's time is divided between the two parents, what school would be attended, etc. If the parents have joint legal custody but only one parent has physical custody, both parents would keep the rights to receive information, see records, and make decisions regarding special education.

## What happens when a parent has sole legal custody?

Only a parent with legal custody has the right to participate in special education decisions. If the court grants sole legal custody, the school should be informed, preferably in writing. Schools may request to see the divorce decree. The parent without legal custody will no longer be part of the special education process.

### What happens when divorced parents have joint physical custody and live in different school districts?

States' laws differ on this question. Some jurisdictions allow the custody agreement reached by the parents and approved by the court to determine which district the child will attend. Others assign the district based on how the child's time in residence is divided through the year. It is important for parents to be aware of the law in their state and not rely just on the opinion of the school district's registration clerk or on hiding the child's true living situation. Failure to abide by the state law could cause the school district to force a child to change school mid-year. The disruption can be difficult for any child, but it can provide extra challenges for a child in special education.

### Who can give consent when a child receives special education?

If parents share joint legal custody and parental consent is needed for special education, the school district can proceed with the signature of only one parent. Because the schools need the signature of only one parent, there can be conflict between ex-spouses. For example, if one parent has sole physical custody but shares joint legal custody, the school could proceed with the signature of *either* parent and begin the proposed action. The parent who has physical custody has no greater legal rights than the other parent in special education decision making.

### What happens when parents with joint legal custody cannot agree about special education?

It is most helpful if parents work in a cooperative manner despite their divorce.

1. Some parents choose to come to an agreement or at least agree on a course of action before meeting with the other members of the IEP team.
2. If the parents cannot find agreement, most school personnel use informal means such as school meetings to try to resolve the conflict.
3. If the parents still cannot agree, either parent or the school may be able to use the alternative dispute resolution processes available in that particular state.
4. If they cannot agree yet, either parent can request a due process hearing. When the issue of the hearing involves a change in educational placement, the child will in most cases "stay put" in the current school program until the matter is decided.
5. If parents are in so much conflict that they are unable to work on behalf of the child in the special education process, either parent has the option of consulting an attorney about asking the court to alter the divorce decree.

** Information about your state special education laws and regulations is available through the Parent Training and Information Center (PTI) in your state* www.taalliance.org/Centers/index.htm *or through your state's special education department. PACER has also produced a handout on divorce specifically for Minnesota parents.*

## Questions from parents—and responses from parent advocates

**My former spouse and I have joint physical and legal custody of my son. When my child is with his other parent, he doesn't do his homework. What can the school and I do?**

This is a very difficult situation for all parties involved. It is most helpful if you and your former spouse can focus on the needs of your child rather than on conflict between the two of you.

Can there be accommodations to help your child complete work no matter which household is home for the night? For example, would extra sets of materials or books be helpful?

Can you, your ex-spouse, and the school staff decide what homework is essential and draw up a written agreement assigning responsibility for follow-up? For your child's well-being, it is important to resolve the conflict.

**My divorce is not yet final. There is an Order of Protection filed against my spouse because of abuse. Is my spouse allowed to come to the IEP meeting?**

Unless the judge's order specifically bars your spouse from school property, the school district is legally obligated to invite both parents to the IEP meeting. For your protection, the school can take steps such as allowing your spouse to attend the IEP meeting through a speakerphone or by providing a security guard at the meeting. The school is not required to provide two separate meetings under these circumstances.

**I am remarried. Can I bring my new spouse to the IEP meeting?**

Yes. IDEA allows parents to bring other people of their choosing to IEP meetings. Unless your new spouse has adopted your child, however, he or she will not have the rights of a parent, such as signing special education consents and viewing school records. In the interest of good working relationships, it is wise to inform your former spouse that you have invited your new partner to the team meeting.

*For more information concerning special education issues related to divorce, contact PACER Center at (952) 838-9000 or (800) 537-2237 (from Greater Minnesota) or visit* www.pacer.org.

# Challenges of mental health issues

*By Patricia Bill*

With pizza and pop, there is good-natured banter, valuable information, and soul-searching statements. The youth advisory board of the Minnesota Statewide Family Network (MSFN) is meeting at PACER Center.

Although fun is part of the agenda, the eight members of the board, ages 14-19, meet for a serious reason: each faces mental health challenges and wants to help others in similar circumstances.

The youth board was established four years ago. To participate on the youth advisory board, the teens must receive special education services for emotional behavioral disorders or have a mental health diagnosis.

"The youth board is important because it gives a voice to a group of kids who may face challenges in society," said Debbie Rocco, group facilitator.

The youth board's mission statement is unpretentious: "Our mission is to educate the public on what a child with mental health issues goes through in the school and in the community."

The goals are straightforward: We hope to make a difference by:

- Reducing the stigma associated with mental health diagnoses
- Educating the public on the issues youth face
- Influencing children's mental health policy changes
- Advocating for better services
- Providing peer support
- Being better self-advocates
- Creating a youth presence in an adult-dominated world, and
- Developing our own leadership skills.

"They really want to be of help to other teens," Rocco said. "They *really* want to make a difference."

As they work toward helping others, advisory board members increase their own skills, continued Rocco. For example:

*Taylor Sukhun, Dan Roller, and Katy Imbrone share pizza and conversation at a recent meeting of the youth advisory board of the Minnesota Statewide Family Network.*

### Leadership

Members have made presentations in the metropolitan area, at a statewide mental health conference, and at the national Technical Assistance Alliance for Parent Centers in Washington, D.C. in February.

They also researched and created a Web site for other teenagers experiencing the challenges of mental health issues (*www.cmhn.org/aboutus.htm* or go to PACER's Web site at *www.pacer.org* and find the link under Minnesota sites, specific disabilities, emotional behavioral disorders).

### Self-advocacy

Members increase self-confidence and learn how to speak up for the accommodations they need at school and in the community.

### Peer support

Peer-to-peer mentoring, which encourages social skills, happens naturally when youth board members gather. They talk about behavior issues, school problems, peer relationships, and discuss why they succeeded in some situations and how to do things differently in others.

### Identity

Some of the youth face challenges at school and in the community. In the youth advisory board meeting setting, members can comfortably build a positive sense of self. Often they recognize the personal strength that comes from coping with difficulties, said Rocco.

# addressed by youth advisory board

*Doug Pistner and Rachel Silberman met with U.S. Sen. Mark Dayton. The youth were presenters at the national Technical Assistance Alliance for Parent Center Conference in Washington, D.C. last winter. Debbie Rocco is at right.*

## Optimism and sense of purpose

The youth advisory board environment tells members that others care about what they think and believe that they have strengths to contribute to the group and others.

"It translates to improved self-esteem and hope," said Rocco.

Several members have said that being on the board gives them a sense of control over their lives that will have a positive impact on their future.

## Progress

Participating on the youth board offers the teenagers a format in which they can step back to observe how far they have come. Sometimes, members offer one another encouragement.

For example, one young man mentioned at a meeting that he felt discouraged, recalled Rocco. The others quickly reminded him of his achievements. They pointed out the presentations he made and how he had contributed to an article, helped peers, and accomplished other positive things.

"Watching his face brighten was an incredible moment," said Rocco.

*For information about the Minnesota Statewide Family Network Youth Advisory Board, visit* www.pacer.org/links/minnesota/disability.htm#6.

## Finding assistive technology is as easy as 1-2-3

"A.T. Finder" is a new, easy-to-use database of more than 2,000 assistive technology items available in PACER Center's Simon Technology Center (STC) Library. STC Library members can use it at no cost.

Here's how:

### 1. Go to *www.pacer.org/stc* and follow the link to the STC Library.

Log on with your STC Library password.

### 2. Select the search criteria.

Tailor your search by choosing as many factors as you wish by:

- Child's age
- Category (such as communication, computer access tools, environmental modifications/daily living aids, learning/cognitive, recreation)
- Keyword
- Media type (software or video)
- Platform (Macintosh or Windows)
- Specialized software (for vision, hearing, switch accessibility, touch window, or language)

### 3. View the results.

A list of products matching your search guidelines comes up. Select a product to find a detailed description and photo, as well as information on the manufacturer, price, and platform. There are also evaluations and ratings from others who have used the technology. When you find a product you like, request it directly from the Web site and the STC will mail it to you.

Not a member? Join the STC Library by calling the PACER Center at (952) 838-9000 or visiting *www.pacer.org/stc.* The annual membership fee is $50 for families and $100 for organizations or schools.

# How to choose a school that makes the

*By Marcia Kelly*

At some point in your child's life, you may have the opportunity to select a school for him or her to attend. Your child may be about to enter kindergarten, or perhaps you have moved to a new town, or your current school is closing.

Whatever prompts the process, educating yourself about how to choose a school will help you find a good fit for your child.

The right school environment can help your child with disabilities develop and succeed in many ways

The decision is important. The right school environment can help your child with disabilities develop and succeed in many ways. The school's quality and your own expectations are both important factors in making your selection. How do you begin to sort through all the issues and options?

"I find it important to start by thinking about your priorities," said Virginia Richardson, a PACER advocate and mother of a daughter with disabilities. "Ask yourself, 'what do I want in a school?' Then you are ready to define your priorities."

The list that you develop will help you evaluate the schools you are considering. Some factors to think about are the school's distance from your home, its level of academic challenge, the degree of parent participation, and the school's outcomes for all students, including those with disabilities. You might consider the availability of before- and after-school activities, how children with disabilities are included, and the overall school climate. You may have other criteria as well.

Once you have defined your priorities, you can turn your attention to the schools in your district. Since each district is unique, you will want to gather information specific to your area. You can either call the district or go online to find out about its options, including guidelines, geographic boundaries, application deadlines, and so on.

Since each district is unique, you will want to gather information specific to your area

At that point, equipped with your priorities and the list of schools available, you can begin collecting and evaluating information that will help you make an informed decision.

"The academic performance report card on each public school developed under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law may provide useful and specific data to consider," said Dixie Jordan, co-director of PACER coordinator. "Every school district issues one each year. Parents are entitled to this information," she said. (See "What is NCLB?" below)

"The report cards are a valuable way to learn about school quality and performance," Jordan added. They provide details on whether students in special education are making adequate yearly progress in reading and math, how much is spent on special education instruction, graduation rates, and more. "You want to make sure the academic challenge is there," she said.

"The report cards also can tell you such things as the teachers' qualifications and whether the school is flagged as being 'in need of improvement,'" Jordan said. All of the report card measurements are important indicators of a school's quality and how well it serves students and families.

In Minnesota, you can obtain report cards by calling the school district or logging on to the Minnesota Department of Education Web site at *education.state.mn.us/ReportCard2004*. The U.S. Department of Education also recommends *www.schoolmatters.com,* where you can find state-by-state, school-by-school reports on student and school performance. PACER's Web site *www.pacer.org* links to both sites.

Once you review the report cards and select a narrower list of schools to consider for your child, you can begin a more detailed inquiry. You may want to arrange a visit to the schools and classrooms that interest you. If you have questions, you may

## What is NCLB?

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) is a federal law that seeks to raise academic achievement and close the achievement gaps between groups of students. Every public school in the country must measure the academic progress of all its students.

NCLB emphasizes four principles:

- Accountability for results
- Emphasis on doing what works, based on scientific research
- Parental involvement and options
- Local control and flexibility

You can learn more at the U.S. Department of Education's NCLB Web site. Visit *www.ed.gov/nclb/landing.jhtml* or *www.pacer.org.*

# grade for your child with disabilities

want to set up a meeting with the teacher.

Jordan suggests asking:

- *Does the school have a mission or vision statement?* Schools that have such statements tend to have a climate and philosophy that reflect how they value children.
- *Does the school have a harassment policy? Schools* that have one are likely to be sensitive to the needs of children with disabilities and will act if problems occur.
- *What percent of the time are children with disabilities educated in regular classrooms?* Children with all disabilities must be educated to the maximum extent appropriate with children who do not have disabilities. It is the law. If children with disabilities spend most of their time in special classrooms, you would want to know if the services there meet state standards.
- *Is there an active parent committee?* If so, it is a good way for interested parents to ensure that children with disabilities are represented in all school activities.

After you have obtained answers to these and any other questions you have, you will be in a strong position decide which school you would like your child to attend. Your clear priorities, sound information, and thorough research should all help you choose a school where your child can succeed.

# State lawmakers update disability language

At PACESETTER press time in late May, the 2005 Minnesota Legislature was still in session, and many lawmakers were expecting a special session in June. Most policy proposals affecting people with disabilities had not been resolved.

Nevertheless, the Minnesota House and Senate did pass a bill changing language and terminology. The new law was signed by Gov. Tim Pawlenty and will take effect on Aug. 1, 2005.

It says that the revisor of statutes will make the following changes in state statutes:

"Mental retardation" becomes "developmental disability"

"Mentally retarded" becomes "developmentally disabled"

"Handicapped persons" becomes "disabled persons"

"Handicapped children" becomes "disabled children" or "children with disabilities"

"Handicaps" becomes "disabilities."

The Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities and the Minnesota Departments of Administration and Human Services will also review Minnesota Rules and advise the revisor of statutes to change them as well as the statutes.

State agencies will use the new terms when printed materials and signs are replaced and new materials are obtained. The agencies do not need to replace existing materials.

For the latest updates on these bills and laws, visit *www.pacer.org*.

## LD authority named to research post

Edward J. Kame'enui, an international authority on learning problems and special education, has been named the nation's first commissioner for special education research.

He will lead the National Center for Special Education Research, a newly established office within the Institute of Education Sciences (IES)—the research, evaluation and statistical arm of the U.S. Department of Education.

The center was established by Congress in the 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

## PACER plans workshops on education law

PACER Center plans three free workshops for parents on No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the federal law that affects students in public elementary and secondary schools.

"NCLB: What Parents of Children with Disabilities Need to Know" will help families understand the implications of the law for children in special education. The workshops are:

**Thursday, Aug. 25 at PACER Center – 6:30 to 9:30 p.m.**

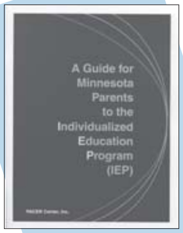
**Monday, Sept. 26 in Marshall – 6:30 to 9:30 p.m.**

**Tuesday, Sept. 27 in St. Cloud – 6:30 to 9:30 p.m.**

For information or to register for the workshops, call PACER at (952) 838-9000 or (800) 537-2237 (toll free in Greater Minnesota) or visit *www.pacer.org.*

# Resources

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


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

PACER Center, Inc.

The 2004 edition of this popular booklet continues as a staple for Minnesota parents of children in special education. It explains why parent involvement at IEP meetings is so important and guides families through the IEP process, clarifies the Minnesota forms, and explains the information parents need to make informed decisions about their child's education.

■ $3 10+ copies, $2 each PHP-a12

## Working with Doctors:

A Parent's Guide to Navigating the Health System


Working with Doctors

A parent's guide to navigating the health system

PACER Center

The book helps parents be effective advocates for their children in the health care system. The easy-to-read content covers information such as effective advocacy, communicating with medical professionals, choosing a physician, medical record keeping, and other important topics.

■ $8 10+ copies, $6 each HIAC-h11

PACER's *Catalog of Publications* lists more than 200 items for families of children with disabilities and the professionals working with them. For your free copy, call PACER at (952) 838-9000 or (888) 248-0822 (toll free).

---

# *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 3). 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 | 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:*

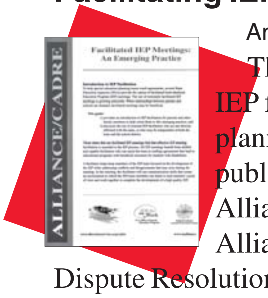
Birth date of child with disability: ______________ Disability: ______________

☐ Please send me a PACER *Catalog of Publications*

# Resources

**NEW**

## Facilitating IEP Meetings:

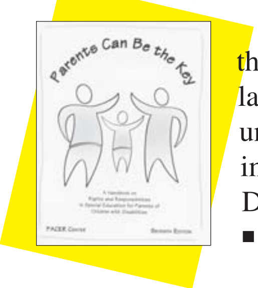


An Emerging Practice

The 8-page guide introduces the idea of IEP facilitation to help special education planning teams reach agreements. It is published by PACER's Technical Assistance Alliance for Parent Centers project (the Alliance) and the Consortium for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education (CADRE).

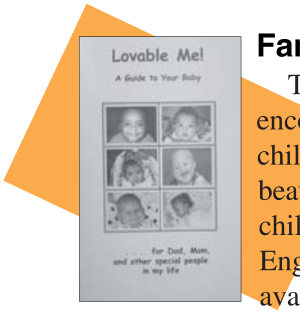
■ $3 10+ copies, $2 each ALL-26

## Parents Can Be the Key



Parents rely on this popular handbook that describes basic special education laws and procedures. Written in easy-to-understand language, it offers insight on important aspects of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA '97).

■ $3 10+ copies, $2 each PHP-a1



## Family Strengths Series

This series of five booklets teach, encourage, and affirm parents of young children (birth to five). Simply worded and beautifully illustrated with photos of children and families, the booklets are in English, Spanish, and Hmong and are available on audiotape.

*Lovable Me! A Guide to Your Baby - LPA-32*
*Lovable Me! A guide to Your Toddler - LPA-33*
*Lovable Me! A Guide to Your Preschooler - LPA-34*
*I Am My Child's First Teacher - LPA-35*
*My Child has a Disability - LPA-36*
$5 each 10+ copies, $4.50 each; 100+, $4 each

**NEW**

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

The new curriculum includes topics that families need to know to ensure a quality education for their children with disabilities. School choice, supplemental services, and adequate yearly progress are only a few. It is available in an electronic PowerPoint™ or printed overheads format.

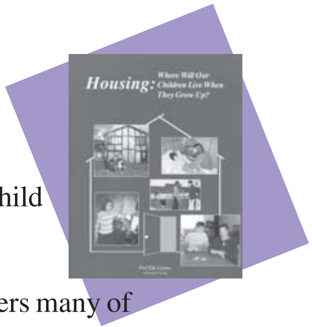
$15 CD-ROM ALL-27
$295 Overheads in 3-ring binder ALL-28

## Here to Stay (Video)

The compelling 15-minute video for professionals offers a glimpse of how Minnesota's special education services affect children with disabilities in the Hispanic community. *Here to Stay* focuses on four families. As they relate their experiences, the parents offer insights that can inform and assist school staff working with the Hispanic community. Spanish and English are exchanged throughout the video.

$35 Rental $10 (three weeks) VID-27

## 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

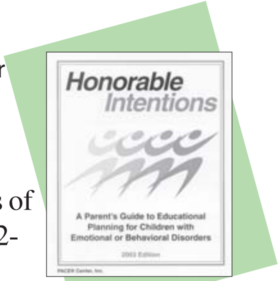
## Is Your Child a Target of Bullying?

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 on CD-ROM or in a three-ring binder.

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

## Honorable Intentions:

A Parent's Guide to Educational Planning for Children with Emotional or Behavioral Disorders



This third edition carries up-to-date information on issues challenging parents of children with EBD. A comprehensive 172-page guide for parents, advocates, and others, it addresses assessments, IEPs, school discipline, mental health services, communication, resolving differences, and more.

■ $15 10 + copies, $12 each PHP-a29

# About PACER...

## What kind of help can I receive?

PACER assistance ranges from helping parents and professionals understand special education for an individual child with disabilities, to finding state-of-the-art assistive technology or up-to-date information about research and resources for families and children.

PACER's staff have information about regular and special education, No Child Left Behind, insurance, technology, and other issues affecting children with disabilities or special health needs.

## What is the cost?

Most PACER services and materials are free to Minnesota families of children with disabilities.

906,000 people visited PACER's Web sites last year.

## How can I contact PACER?

By telephone, Internet Web site, e-mail, or fax. When parents call for help during PACER office hours, a staff member answers the telephone, takes information, and directs the caller to the appropriate staff person. Parents and professionals can reach PACER at:

**(952) 838-9000** (metro area)
**(800) 537-2237** (Minnesota toll-free)
**(888) 248-0822** (national toll-free)
**(952) 838-0199** (fax)
**pacer@pacer.org** (e-mail)
**www.pacer.org** (Web site)

8,500 attended PACER workshops last year.

## What are the hours?

PACER's switchboard is open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday-Friday. Federal holidays are observed. Voice mail is available when PACER is closed.

9,172 attended PACER presentations last year.

## Where can I learn more?

PACER's Web sites are:
**www.pacer.org**
**www. taalliance.org**
**www.fape.org**

More than 36,000 people sought assistance from PACER last year.

## PACER resources

PACER has many to share. They include newsletters, books and booklets, handouts, brochures, videos, curriculums, and workshops.

91.6 percent of PACER's funds go to programming. Only 8.4 percent goes to management and fundraising.

PACER CENTER

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

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
**PAID**
Permit No. 2723
Minneapolis, MN

**Address Service Requested**

## Inside