



PACER

PACER Center news of today | Champions for Children | (952) 838-9000 | PACER.org

PACER circles the globe with **kindness**

When PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center planned the first virtual Run, Walk, Roll Against Bullying they set a lofty goal: "We hoped participants would collectively reach 24,901 miles, the distance around the world," said Bailey Huston, coordinator of PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center (NBPC). "We wanted to symbolically surround the world with kindness, acceptance, and inclusion," said Julie Hertzog, NBPC Director. This year the virtual event ran during the month of April.

The event was an unbelievable success that met its goal early on. When participants logged 24,901 miles by mid-April, PACER doubled the goal - and then a few days later, participants surpassed that goal too!

In the end, more than 1,500 people from across the U.S. and internationally, including people from French Guiana, Thailand, and Mexico, logged an amazing **87,412 miles – three and a half times around the world!**

The top team was the Jumping Branch Tigers (Elementary School) from Jumping Branch, West Virginia, whose team of 92 participants logged an amazing 7,462 miles.

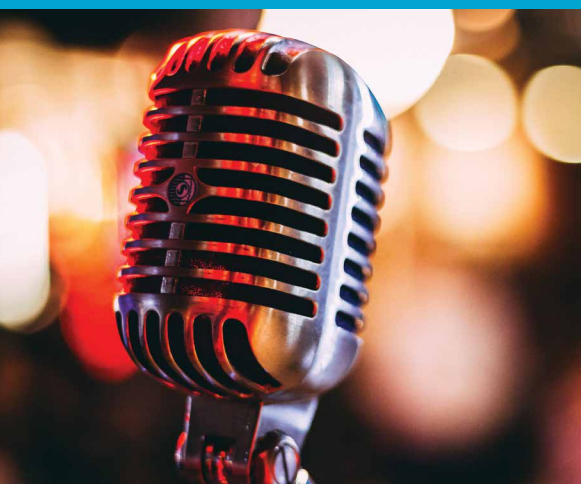
"Jumping Branch Elementary is a small school within our community and I was amazed by the end of the month how driven and involved our students had become," said Tracey Foster-Long, the school counselor who organized the team. "Honestly, it was tremendous for our mental and physical health as well during a pandemic, as we ventured outside every opportunity we had."

The total of 87,412 miles included individuals, as well as 203 teams from schools, neighborhoods, and workshops.

Thank you to our
2021 Virtual Run,
Walk, Roll Against
Bullying sponsors!



Learn more about PACER's endowment on the back cover



SAVE THE DATE:

PACER'S ANNUAL BENEFIT
SAT., NOV., 13, 2021

Guest entertainer to be announced soon!



Peggy Widtfeldt in one of her many Halloween costumes.

PACER lost two friends and colleagues

PACER experienced a loss with the passing of Peggy Widtfeldt and Jane Sternberg in June. Both Peggy and Jane worked in PACER's front office performing administrative work.

Peggy at 100

Eight years after retiring from her job at Plymouth Congregational Church, Peggy Widtfeldt ran into her neighbor, PACER's Executive Director, Paula Goldberg, at the dry cleaner. "Peggy had so many talents that I asked her to come work with us at PACER," Paula recalled. She did – and remained with PACER for 26 years, working every Tuesday and Thursday.

Peggy was known for her stylish appearance; she dressed beautifully and wore stiletto heels into her 90's. She also loved to dress up for Halloween every year, and staff looked forward to her costumes. But it was her concern for families that made her stand out. "Peggy answered the phone to many parents who were very stressed about a situation with their child. She calmed them with reassurance that an advocate would be able to help. She gave them hope," said Nancy Kleve, PACER's office manager.

After the death of Peggy's husband, Gene, PACER multicultural advocate Jesús Villaseñor frequently drove her to work. "In the 10 minutes it took to get to PACER, we talked about politics and what was happening in the world. She was very well informed. Most of the time we were in agreement. If not, she would say, 'I think differently' and we could still talk about it. I would drive her right to the door and sometimes we would stay talking. I told her that sometimes I wished she lived further away so we could talk longer."

Peggy's work ethic made a big impression on Jesús. "When PACER was getting a new phone system, she worried about learning it. She even lost sleep. But she was one of the first to catch on! She would beat others to answer the phone."

Peggy died a month after her 100th birthday. "It was an honor to have known her," Jesus said.

"A huge heart"

Jane Sternberg retired from PACER in 2019 after 17 years. "Janie was small in stature, but she had a huge personality and a huge heart," said Nancy Kleve.

Jane, who was originally from New York, once worked as the personal assistant to singer Eddie Fisher. She moved to Minnesota with her late husband, Edwin, in 1957. Jane retired from her job at the National Council of Jewish Women in 2001, but retirement didn't "take," and she joined PACER six months later.

"Jane read the New York Times every day, and when she visited New York, she loved to go to Broadway shows," Nancy said. "She would sometimes take in six shows in four days." Another of her passions was the Minnesota Vikings. Jane was supportive of the team but on Monday mornings often had comments about the team's coaches.

Nancy recalled an outing the front office staff took to see the play "Glensheen" at the History Theatre. They ran into former Vice President Walter Mondale, and Jane had her picture taken with him. "Jane confessed she had a crush on him," Nancy said.

"Jane was funny, articulate, kind, and caring. She embraced life and jumped right into new things."

"Peggy and Jane were both such wonderful women, who were so dedicated to the families we help," said Paula Goldberg. "They were so respected and loved by all of us. They will be greatly missed at PACER."



Jane Sternberg with Walter Mondale

School success after distance learning

5 tips for parents

While distance learning may have been difficult for students with disabilities and mental health needs, jumping back into the classroom full time after more than a year of distance or hybrid learning brings its own challenges, said Renelle Nelson, coordinator of PACER's Children's Mental Health and Emotional/Behavioral Disorders Project. However, she added, parents can take advantage of Minnesota's long summer break to prepare their children to be in the classroom full time next fall.

Families often think of summer as a time for relaxing home routines, but this year brings different priorities, Renelle said. "This summer, families should consider bringing more structure into their children's lives so that they are ready for the upcoming school year after the disruption of the pandemic." If your child has had a different school schedule during the pandemic, and if they have struggled with learning, structured home routines can provide good preparation for going to school in person next fall.

Helpful tips for success

1 Put your child's wellness first. Make sure your child sleeps enough and eats healthy foods. If you need help providing healthy foods, the Minnesota Department of Education administers a federal program that provides meals for students when school is closed. Go to <https://www.fns.usda.gov/meals4kids> to find a location near you. It's important that your child becomes used to going to sleep and waking up at the same time they do for school. It may take time for them to adjust to a new sleep cycle, so be patient.

2 Talk about their feelings. "Some students may worry about being back in a place where they struggled," Renelle said. "Others may be concerned about how they will measure up to their peers academically, and wonder 'Will I be where others are?'" Helping your student work through these feelings with different scenarios – pointing out available supports and accommodations, while listening to their concerns – can help build their confidence.

3 Encourage positive memories. While your child will usually have a different teacher, and sometimes even a different school in the fall, talking about good memories – a favorite teacher, mastering a skill, a favorite lunch or school activity – puts your child in a positive frame of mind and reminds them that good things can happen at school.

4 Take the chance to socialize. Now that many adults are vaccinated and rules around socializing have been loosened, consider summer programming, such as day camps and summer rec programs. For younger children, arrange outdoor playdates; encourage older students to get together outside with friends who they have seen mostly virtually.

5 Give your child responsibilities with time limits attached. If your child is used to a virtual or hybrid school day with flexible timing, build timed responsibilities into their day. Rather than just asking them to set the table, ask them to do it in the next ten minutes. Help them plan ahead for the next day by preparing themselves, including setting out their swimsuit the night before a trip to the pool, or planning to wear the shirt grandma gave them for a visit at her house. Getting ready for the next day helps them get ready for the school routine of backpacks and school clothes.



Minnesota Statewide Family Engagement Center:

High expectations for all children

The mission of PACER's Minnesota Statewide Family Engagement Center (MNSFEC) is supporting families in meaningfully engaging in their child's education. The goal is to increase student achievement and well-being. The program is in its third year of serving all families with youth and children.

Though the project's emphasis is on families whose children are in regular education classes, it also serves families of children with disabilities. The Minnesota Statewide Family Engagement Center is one of just 12 family engagement centers, serving 13 states, that is funded by the U.S. Department of Education, and is the only project in the Upper Midwest.

This program serves traditionally underserved communities, said project coordinator Rose Quintero. "An important aspect of the project is our focus on working with low-income families, diverse families, homeless families, and foster families," Rose explained.

According to multicultural advocate Jesús Villaseñor who supports families from the Latino community, "A special component of the Minnesota Statewide Family Engagement Center is 'high expectations,' and this is personally very important to me because children of diverse families traditionally are affected by low expectations of both teachers and parents." He feels it's important to confront these attitudes and counter them. "Low expectations are unacceptable and [lead to] inequity and inequality."

Jesús noted that supporting Spanish-speaking families and new Americans includes "making sure that they are receiving the information they need in Spanish and delivered in a culturally competent manner," and that it's

also important that the community's culture and values are represented and considered every step of the way.

PACER's staff of multicultural advocates are crucial to the project. "Data shows the direct correlation between parent engagement and student success, but engagement in our children's education is a concept that is new to a lot of our families," explained Hassan Samantar, who works with East African families. "This is where we come in and work with families to educate them about ways they can effectively participate in their children's education."

Dao Xiong, who works with the Asian community, primarily Hmong families, agreed about the importance of culturally appropriate resources, adding that in addition to his involvement with individual families and broader outreach such as workshops and radio shows, an important piece is working with school partners to engage in family activities. Dao's outreach includes a variety of school, community, and cultural activities.

Partnerships are a key part of the program, noted multicultural advocate Bonnie Jean Smith. "We believe that when families, schools, and communities build strong partnerships and communicate well with one another, kids do better," she said. "The Minnesota Statewide Family Engagement Center has more than 22

partners across the state." Those partners include the Minnesota Department of Education, community organizations, and schools.

The project "meets families where they are at, instead of using a one-size-fits-all approach," Rose Quintero said. "This can be difficult for teachers to do on their own when they are trying to communicate with 30



"Research shows that when families are involved in their child's education, students are more likely to attend school regularly, show positive attitudes toward school, earn higher grades and test scores, graduate from high school and continue their education after high school."

Sharman Davis Barrett, MNSFEC Project Director

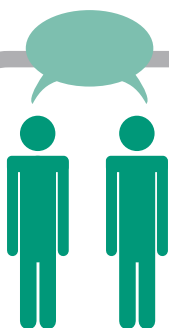
Creating a Path to Success for Children

Have high expectations

The expectations we have for our children are powerful! The Minnesota Statewide Family Engagement Center helps parents learn how to set high expectations for their student to promote success.



Partner with the school



When a child enters school, the family and school become partners in that child's education. The Center can help with strategies to promote effective family and school engagement.

Monitor educational progress

Staff with the Minnesota Statewide Family Engagement Center can help explain test scores, grades, and academic progress to parents and provide guidance on questions to ask school staff.



Support your child at home



The Center works directly with families to share a wide range of information and ideas that support student's learning and development at home.

(An infographic briefly detailing how the Minnesota Statewide Family Engagement Center can help promote educational success for children.)



different families. This project offers a bridge between educators, administrators and families, helping teachers understand how better to reach families and empowering families to be active participants.

“Teachers are trained in teaching children, not necessarily in reaching out to parents. The Minnesota Statewide Family Engagement Center fills that gap with parent training and education, as well as professional development for teachers about cultural competency. Once teachers have the training they need, they are often eager to support increasing family engagement. And once parents learn the skills they need, they are often eager participants in their children's education.”

For more information, go to: PACER.org/learning-center/family-engagement. ■



PACER's multicultural advocates:

Breaking down cultural barriers

Back row (L to R): Jesús Villaseñor, Hassan Samantar, Dao Xiong. Front row (L to R): Virginia Richardson, Bonnie Jean Smith.

Working directly with families of children with disabilities to ensure that their children receive the best, most appropriate public education possible is at the core of what PACER does. All of PACER's trained, knowledgeable parent advocates understand Special Education law and offer both expertise and the understanding of what it means to be the parent of a child with a disability. PACER's staff of multicultural advocates offer something in addition: they understand the unique experiences of multicultural families, because they are both members of the communities they serve and the parents of a child or adult with a disability.

Hassan Samantar works with Somali and East African families, Jesús Villaseñor with the Latino community, and Dao Xiong with Hmong parents. Virginia Richardson and Bonnie Jean Smith work with all families.

"Our work is carried out in a much more personalized way because of language and cultural barriers," Jesús said. "Sometimes parents would call and they might not ask a question because they don't know what to ask. They would say, 'a friend – a teacher – a neighbor said you could help me.' When a parent called me [before the pandemic], I would immediately schedule a home visit. We're a face-to-face people," he said of the Latino community.

Hassan agrees about the importance of face-to-face contacts. "Some of the parents don't read or write either English or Somali," he explained, "So explaining face-to-face is very important. I help parents connect the dots so they can understand their child's school." One thing Hassan mentioned is that some of the parents he works with don't understand

"I'm giving voice to people who feel voiceless. That makes my work very rewarding, to make a tangible difference in a child's life."

- Jesús Villaseñor

the concept of an "invisible disability" such as ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder). "Their child looks 'normal,' and they have difficulty with the word 'disability.'" Another common issue is the stigmatization of Special Education. "Some parents may have heard negative things about special ed from those who don't have a good understanding," Hassan said. "I explain everything using culturally appropriate language."

Dao agreed about the importance of face-to-face meetings with parents. "It's important to be at school meetings with parents when they ask us to be there. I explain what will happen in the meeting and what my role is: how I can help and speak on their behalf, help them understand what decisions will be made.

"Parents who are older often aren't fluent in English and don't understand technology," Dao said. "I'm here to help them." He added that even younger parents who are fluent in English and understand more of the educational system have difficulty advocating for their children.

"I'm here to help them, too." ■

Conversation with the Commissioner

PACER talks to Heather Mueller,
Minnesota Department of Education



Heather Mueller,
Commissioner,
Minnesota
Department
of Education

PACER began the discussion by stating that some students with disabilities have fears about going back to school in the fall, and asked what supports and accommodations are available.

Commissioner Mueller: “First and foremost, what we always put first, is the safety, health and wellness of our students and our staff and our families, and so we are always going to strive to have an environment that protects them. As we are working through what the fall is going to look like and the ongoing school year with our Department of Health colleagues, I think we are going to be taking an approach where we are not going to make a rush. We’re going to take some time, watch the data and then make recommendations based on the Governor’s latest announcements. We are really hopeful that this (upcoming) year is going to look more like a school year before the pandemic than this last year, knowing that it is possible there are going to be mitigation strategies.”

The Commissioner stated “Schools have to be able to look at the academic component, the social emotional component, as well as the mental health component. We know that for a number of our students, the pandemic itself was a disruption to learning, and we also have students who

struggled with mental health concerns prior to the pandemic as well as students who are [newly] struggling with mental health because of the pandemic. We’re looking at this with a holistic view, and so we’re starting first with summer programs, really the package we put forward to the legislature to look at ways for our students to really catch up and reinforce learning. The way we’re thinking about it at the Department of Education is [addressing] learning loss.”

PACER asked about lessons learned during the pandemic.

Commissioner Mueller stated that she felt that although there is the perception that education is slow to change and adapt, “We’ve seen in the pandemic that this is not true. [Education was] really the only industry during the pandemic that had eight days to really change the way they were going to do their work and deliver instruction, high quality instruction to their students – not only academics, but meals, care for school-aged children, and mental health services. So all of those pieces were really well thought through, and we learned that we are able to shift quickly when we need to.”

On the use of American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds from the federal government:

The Commissioner named a number of priorities for this funding, including:

- Providing small group and individual mental health support throughout the summer, not only for students, but also for staff
- Increased early intervention services
- Targeted funding to children and youth who are receiving Special Education services, including looking at IEPs (Individualized Education Programs) and thoughtful consideration of additional support students need. ■

“As we are working through what the fall is going to look like and the upcoming school year... We are really hopeful that this [upcoming] year is going to look more like a school year before the pandemic than this last year, knowing it is possible there are going to be mitigation strategies.”

- Commissioner Heather Mueller

Dorothy Slegman:

"I felt very proud of the respect PACER commanded"



Dorothy Slegman

When a co-worker asked Dorothy Slegman to consider serving on PACER's Board, she never imagined that 20 years later, she would still be involved with PACER. In accordance with PACER bylaws, Dorothy has rotated on and off the Board.

Dorothy's involvement with PACER goes back even further. "I remember meeting with Paula Goldberg and Marge Goldberg when PACER was in its office on Chicago Avenue. Paula and Marge reached out to me about how PACER could serve kids whose native language wasn't English."

"I don't know of any other organization in the country or even in the world that has done what PACER has to serve children and families."

– Dorothy Slegman

Dorothy was a logical person for PACER to partner with. The Missouri native came to Minneapolis in 1979 to start a program for English Language Learners who were in Special Education. Dorothy recalled, "I was hired because Minneapolis was not serving the children in Special Education who were bilingual or who had a first language that was not English. It was federally mandated that the city do so.

"At the time, there were 72 different languages spoken by the students," she said. Dorothy realized quickly that she couldn't do it alone, and she developed a team of multidisciplinary experts, modeled on the Saint Paul school district's team. The two districts worked together, and also worked closely with the Minnesota Department of Education.

"I remember first meeting with Dorothy for lunch at Pepito's on Chicago Avenue," Paula Goldberg said. "Her knowledge and expertise with language issues were so invaluable in helping PACER. She is also a wonderful human being who cares deeply about children with disabilities."

Dorothy remembers the hiring of PACER's multicultural advocates, Jesús Villaseñor, Dao Xiong, and Hassan Samantar. "PACER worked tirelessly to serve students who were bilingual or whose first language wasn't English. So often underserved populations get overlooked, but PACER put its heart and soul into serving multicultural communities."

Dorothy said that she wore two hats, as a school employee and a PACER Board member. "Sometimes I walked a thin line. When a school employee would say, 'Oh my goodness they're sending a PACER representative!' I felt very proud of the respect PACER commanded. I had to be careful because I was employed by the schools, they were paying my salary, they expected me to be supportive. People would say, 'We have to dot our i's and cross our t's because PACER is here.' I would sit in those meetings with Jesús or Dao or Hassan and it was such a joy, nothing slipped by them, they made sure the children received everything they had the right to, all the services and evaluations."

Dorothy's long history with PACER gives her a great vantage point from which to view the organization. "PACER has grown and changed exponentially while maintaining programs here and nationally, including the California office, and internationally too. PACER has also done a great job of using technology to create access to education for children. I don't know of any other organization in the country or even in the world that has done what PACER has to serve

children and families. I can't state strongly enough how much I respect Paula and Marge and Virginia Richardson. They are true visionaries."

Dorothy also has a personal connection to disability. She saw a speech therapist as a child: "I had trouble articulating my 'r's," she said. "I still do." But even more importantly, she is very proud of her brother, who is 73 years old and on the autism spectrum. "There wasn't any help for kids with autism when he was in school in the 1950's. There was no diagnosis. My mother advocated for him, and he was pretty successful, graduating from high school and college and attending graduate school. He wasn't diagnosed until he was an adult. He has struggled."

Since her 2012 retirement from the Minneapolis Public Schools, Dorothy has remained active. She and her husband enjoy hiking and spending time at their cabin. She loves to travel and read. She is mother to a grown son who lives in New York and has a stepson in California and a stepdaughter in the Twin Cities. And, of course, there is her passion for PACER.

"I've never been more impressed with a Board than I am with PACER's," Dorothy said, "I've never seen a more intelligent, respectful, hard-working board in my life. The neat thing is that the board is dedicated to all kids with disabilities and making change so things are better for the kids. They're up on legislation and new technology. I've just never seen a more forward-facing group of people. They are always looking to the future, never to the past."

"It's a joy to be involved with PACER, and a privilege to serve on the Board." ■

4 easy ways to support PACER

1

Sign up for AmazonSmile and support PACER while you shop

Amazon.com will donate a portion of the price to PACER every time you shop through the AmazonSmile program, at no cost to you!

To sign up, visit smile.amazon.com, select "get started" and sign in with your email or cell phone number. Name PACER Center as your beneficiary, and Amazon will donate 0.5% of your purchases to PACER. Everytime you shop, go to smile.amazon.com.

2

Donate to PACER's Silent Auction

PACER's Silent Auction is part of PACER's Annual Benefit. You can donate an item or reach out to a business you support and ask them to donate an item or service. This is a great way to support PACER! For more information, contact Silent Auction coordinator Raleigh Johnson at Raleigh.Johnson@PACER.org.

3

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* and contribute to the United Way Donor Designated Funds Program:

On the United Way pledge card under the "Donor Designated Funds" designation, you can write in **PACER Center, 8161 Normandale Blvd., Minneapolis, MN 55437**

4

Make a tax-deductible contribution

When you donate to PACER, you are helping to provide opportunities for children and youth with all disabilities, and all children who are bullied. Your contribution helps PACER provide services to families free of charge. PACER is fiscally responsible: 84 percent of your tax-deductible donation goes directly to programs and services that serve children and families; just 16 percent of PACER's funds go to management and fundraising.

You can mail a check to PACER Center, 8161 Normandale Blvd., Minneapolis, MN 55437, or give online at PACER.org/help/donate.asp. To donate a gift of stock or to include PACER in your estate plan, contact Paula Goldberg, PACER's Executive Director, at pgoldberg@PACER.org.

PACER welcomes contributions in a variety of ways, and all contributions are appreciated.



PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center staff (L to R): Danna Mirviss, Judy French, Julie Hertzog, Bailey Huston



Run, Walk, Roll Against Bullying participants performing the "Unity Dance" in 2011



Ellen DeGeneres at the PACER Symposium in 2010

History of PACER

PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center

In the early 2000's, PACER's staff noted an alarming increase in the number of calls from parents whose children with disabilities were experiencing bullying behavior. "Some of the situations were very extreme," said Paula Goldberg, PACER's Executive Director. "We were concerned that many children were being hurt and humiliated, and became fearful about going to school."

At the time, bullying behavior was often excused as a "childhood rite of passage" and "just kids being kids." As an advocacy organization, PACER recognized the need to address these beliefs and the bullying behavior of school age children.

Around this time PACER's Julie Hertzog discussed with Paula the need for education and awareness to help parents understand how to help their children in bullying situations. "Paula agreed," Julie said. "The result was a national curriculum about the rights of students with disabilities when they are bullied."

Along with the phone calls PACER was receiving, Julie had a personal motivation: her middle child, David, who had been born with Down syndrome, would soon be entering kindergarten, and she was thinking about ways for him to be socially connected to his peers.

As discussions within PACER about how to address bullying progressed, Paula said, "We need to create a national program."

"Paula always thinks and dreams big!" Julie said. "She was able to secure \$100,000 in funding from the Robins, Kaplan, Miller and Ciresi Foundation, and in 2005 we started work on an innovative, animated website for elementary-aged students, with youth contributing directly to the content."

In 2006, PACER formed the National Bullying Prevention Center (NBPC), with Julie as its Director, and launched the PACER's Kids Against Bullying website for all children, including an emphasis on those with disabilities. PACER volunteers, in particular the marketing board, played a major role in developing the project. "They really believed in the cause and the work we were doing," Julie said. "They had visionary ideas about how to generate awareness around bullying and promote PACER."

PACER also founded "National Bullying Prevention Awareness Week" (later to become a month-long celebration), with national partners including the National Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), National Education Association and American Federation of Teachers.

As PACER shaped the NBPC, there were internal discussions about the new project's goals: Raising awareness of the prevalence and impact of bullying; changing the perception of bullying as a "childhood

rite of passage” to the realization that bullying had serious physical, emotional, and mental health consequences; and framing the discussion in a positive way that made it clear that change was possible, such as using the term “bullying prevention” rather than “anti-bullying.”

Early on, the involvement of teen singing sensation Demi Lovato was a major factor in raising the project’s national profile, especially for the teen audience. Demi was a national spokesperson for the cutting-edge Teens Against Bullying website when it made its debut in 2009, when they were 16 years old.

Every year brought new and exciting changes to the NBPC. In 2010, National Bullying Prevention Month replaced National Bullying Prevention Awareness Week. The first Run, Walk, Roll Against Bullying was held that year. The NPBC exploded onto the national media scene with incredible publicity on the Today Show, the CBS Evening News, and CNN, and in People magazine and other national media. A Facebook-sponsored campaign reached more than 15 million people.

Also in 2010, the NBPC attracted the attention of Ellen DeGeneres. During a visit to the Twin Cities, Ellen made an appearance at PACER’s annual Symposium, and she featured the project on her website as a respected bullying prevention resource.

The project momentum was unstoppable. Every year brought new ideas, new programming, and new national attention to the cause. The first Unity Day, in 2011, attracted thousands of participants to “Make it orange, make it end, unite against bullying.” Unity Day became the singular event of National Bullying Prevention Month. Among those who wore orange was Ellen DeGeneres, on her talk show.

Other NBPC highlights:

- In 2011, the FBI awarded PACER’s National Bullying Prevention Center its “Director’s Community Leadership Award”
- In 2017, a second office was opened in Los Angeles
- In 2017, the PACERTalks About Bullying video series made its debut



Paula Goldberg receives the "Director's Community Leadership Award" from FBI Director Robert Mueller in 2011

- In 2017, Julia Roberts modeled the CHOOSE KIND shirt, the official t-shirt of the movie WONDER, with proceeds donated to PACER’s National Bullying Prevention Center

By 2018, the NBPC had contributed to raising awareness of the harmful effects of bullying, so that the project’s statement of purpose no longer referred to ending the view of bullying as a childhood rite of passage; the updated statement focused on prevention. “We started using the word ‘bullying’ less and instead, using the phrase ‘promoting kindness, acceptance, and inclusion’ to show the behavior we want children to exhibit,” Julie explained.

Today, the NBPC is the undisputed leader in providing respected, relevant web-based education focused on preventing bullying and promoting kindness, acceptance, and inclusion, and well as opportunities for youth, parents, educators and community members to become involved at the local level.

“Over the years we have driven a lot of change in the community, continually creating resources to meet the need,” Julie said, “But there is one thing that will always remain the same: PACER’s National Bullying Prevention Center’s commitment to creating a world without bullying.” ■



Progression of the Unity Day t-shirt



Recipients of the 2019 Unity Award

Virtual or in person, **Fun Times** for all!

Six times yearly during the school year, a group of young people with disabilities socialize with their typically developing peers. The group is called Fun Times, and prior to the pandemic, their outings included everything from movies and plays to sporting events, game nights and craft outings. During the pandemic, the group has been meeting virtually, which, according to members, has been almost as much fun.

PACER's Fun Times social group was started in 2004 by high school student Win Bennett. He noticed that his sister, Mara McMillan, who has Williams syndrome, a genetic condition that causes developmental delays and learning disabilities, didn't have the same opportunity for social activities that he and his typical friends enjoyed. Win reasoned that if Mara, who's very outgoing and friendly, was missing these opportunities, other young people with disabilities might be as well.

After Win graduated from Breck School, each of his and Mara's siblings – Noel, Frankie, and Ben – took turns in leadership roles in Fun Times.

Breck School has become an important partner in Fun Times, said PACER's Fun Times coordinator, Danna Mirviss. "The students and faculty advisor are wonderful and welcoming, and they really make it fun for everyone involved. There has been such a demand for the group and Breck students and faculty have stepped up as the group has expanded."

Fun Times member Ben Duncan

Ben is a 17-year-old high school sophomore who has been a Fun Times member for five years. Ben became involved through his friend Sam Broyles. "Sam and Ben are good friends. Ben started attending after Sam invited him, and he loves it," said Ben's mom, Sharon.

Ben has enjoyed the virtual meetings. "I liked [virtual] Bingo." He also enjoyed the "Virtual Green Room," Sharon said. "One time Sam played the guitar while Ben sang! They had so much fun." During the virtual meetings over Zoom, Ben liked rotating between the activity rooms.

Thinking about the future, Ben said, "I would like to go to (sports) games again with Fun Times." Ben is very active in a number of activities, including his church's choir and swimming and hockey through Special Olympics. Fun Times is one of his favorites, Sharon said.

"The people in Fun Times are very nice," Ben added. "Come to Fun Times – it's really fun."

Fun Times member Kathleen Degnan

Longtime member Kathleen has been part of the group for eight years! Kathleen became involved after her dad, Joe, contacted PACER when Kathleen was finishing her high school transition program. Kathleen's mom, Annette said, "PACER really listened and had a genuine interest in trying to help us." Along with other resources, PACER suggested Fun Times – and Kathleen has been a member ever since.

Kathleen likes to research topics, enjoys keeping up with the news, and is a registered voter, which she takes very seriously. She is inquisitive and loves learning new things.

"When Kathleen walks into Fun Times, she is greeted like a peer," Annette said. "People are genuinely interested in her. She was invited to graduation parties [of her typical friends who are in Fun Times]."

Though she is looking forward to the time when Fun Times is in person again, Kathleen has also enjoyed the virtual meetings. "I liked the music trivia. I guessed every song and artist!" ■



Kathleen Degnan



Ben Duncan

Fun Times meets
approximately six times
during each school year,
and is open to teens with
all disabilities.

**New members are always
welcome! Parents or
students can contact
Fun Times coordinator
Danna Mirviss for more
information:**

Danna.Mirviss@PACER.org

Vava Guthrie:

"My heart led me to PACER"

Vava Guthrie was preparing to go back to graduate school to become a school psychologist when the phone call came. "Two weeks after I applied to grad school, a friend called to tell me that PACER had a job opening for a parent advocate," Vava recalled. "I knew I had to apply."

When she was offered the job, Vava followed her heart and chose PACER over graduate school. That was 29 years ago, and Vava has made a difference in not only the lives of many children and families, but in PACER, too.

Like many PACER staff, Vava is the parent of children with disabilities: two of her three children have learning disabilities. When her oldest son was in first grade and struggling in school, "I was told, 'He's a smart little boy, he'll catch on.' But I saw what was happening. If homework was supposed to take 10 minutes, it took him an hour. Later, an hour's homework took five or six hours. He was exhausted from trying to learn."

Vava became her son's advocate. "I just read everything about learning disabilities and Special Education I could get my hands on," she recalled. "I talked to parents, I joined the school's Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC)."

Vava brought her passion for advocacy to PACER. "Parents know more than they think they do," she said. "They know their child best; PACER enables them to learn what they need to know to be the advocate their child needs in order to receive appropriate services."

She never forgets what it was like to be the parent of a school-age child. "When my older son was struggling, I knew more than the Special Education teachers, but I let them make the decisions because I didn't realize how important I was."

As Vava grew in her job at PACER, it expanded to encompass her knowledge and skills, and she adapted to PACER's needs. One of Vava's major accomplishments has been developing (with Carolyn Anderson) PACER's training program for parent advocates. "We have a five-inch thick binder of Special Ed laws and rules," she said. She is the trainer for each new advocate, working with them for an hour every day during their first year. "It's my job to make sure they not only learn about

Special Ed laws, but to 'PACER-ize' them so that they learn the advocacy skills necessary to support parents and be successful in school meetings," she said.

One thing Vava impresses on new advocates is to put the child at the center of everything. She tells new advocates, "Remember, your job isn't to 'win' in a meeting with a school: it's to make sure the family has the rights they are entitled to, and the child has what they need to learn."

In addition to training advocates, Vava supervises several of them. She helped develop PACER's database program, and trains all new staff in its use. She schedules all workshops and is the director of PACER's parent programs.

During the pandemic Vava, who lives near PACER, volunteered to take on another role: she is the only staff member who is in the office full time. Vava answers the

initial phone calls and emails and returns messages left on PACER's voice mail. She learns enough about each parent's situation so that she can then assign the call to a parent advocate. It is a major responsibility – in the last year, she says, she has answered more than 3,000 phone calls from parents.

There are two reasons Vava is still at PACER, she said. "One reason is my colleagues. They are unbelievably dedicated to children and families. I'm so impressed with how Paula's vision has allowed us to make such a difference.

"The other is my belief in PACER's mission. No matter what I am doing at PACER, whether it's working with a parent, scheduling a workshop, or training a new staff member in Special Education law, I absolutely know one thing:

"My colleagues and I are making a difference in the life of a child." ■



Vava Guthrie, PACER advocate

"Vava works exceptionally hard and is a strong advocate for families. She is very valued at PACER. Vava is a good and kind person who cares about children with disabilities and their parents."

– Paula Goldberg, PACER Executive Director

Workshops

PACER Center workshops are FREE to Minnesota parents.
For information and to register, call (952) 838-9000, (800) 537-2237, or visit PACER.org/Workshops.

PACER Center is using new, innovative techniques to best serve students, families, and professionals during the COVID-19 pandemic. At this time, all PACER Center workshops are held virtually as a Livestream, webinar, or Zoom meeting. More information regarding the platform used for each workshop can be found at PACER.org/workshops.

PARENT TRAINING

Back to School 2021: A Conversation About How to Get Ready for Parents of Students with IEPs

A new innovative webinar guided by parents' burning questions! When you register, tell us your concerns about your child or youth with a disability returning to school after the pandemic, and we will address them.

- **Aug. 25, 12:00 p.m. to 1:00 p.m.**

SIMON TECHNOLOGY CENTER

Reading and Vision: Accessibility in Your Pocket

This presentation will introduce a sampling of built-in features on Apple and Android mobile devices that assist with reading and vision accessibility.

- **July 20, 2:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.**

Lego Stop-motion Videos

Learn how to create stop-motion style videos using a mobile phone and LEGO toys. Learn the techniques to create smooth animation with the Stop Motion Studio app (iPhone & Android), then create your own stories and bring your characters to life!

- **Aug. 21, 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.**

TRANSITION

Planning for Transition: Promising Practices

This workshop will include viewing short videos that demonstrate effective transition practices, and a discussion of how to incorporate similar strategies when planning for your youth's future.

- **Aug. 17, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.**

For the most up-to-date listing of PACER workshops and for additional information, visit:

PACER.org/Workshops

Call PACER Center with any questions or to discuss virtual platforms.

**PACER Center:
(952) 838-9000
(800) 537-2237**

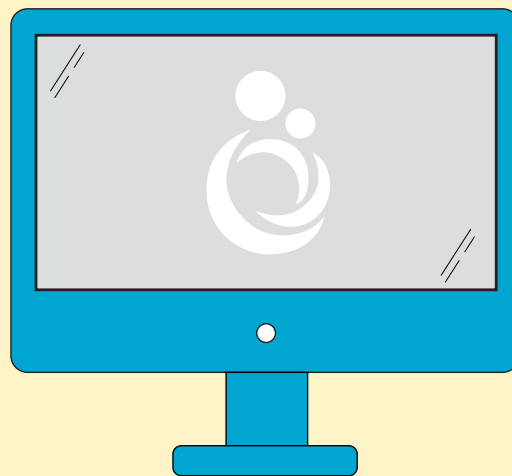
PACER in your in-box

Subscribe to one or more of PACER's FREE E-Newsletters! They are:

- **PACER's E-News**
PACER's main newsletter keeps you up to date on what's new at PACER, including special events. *Published monthly.*
- **PACER's Children's Mental Health and Emotional/Behavioral Disorders E-News**
This newsletter provides family-friendly, culturally competent resources to help parents advocate for their child with a mental health or emotional/behavioral disorder. *Published quarterly.*
- **PACER's Minnesota Statewide Family Engagement Center E-News**
This newsletter provides parents and professionals with the latest tips, tools, and resources for supporting family engagement with schools. *Published every other month.*
- **PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center E-News**
This newsletter provides practical tools and resources, inspiring stories, and breaking news. *Published quarterly with extra editions during October (National Bullying Prevention Month).*

- **PACER's National Center on Transition and Employment E-News**
The "Inspiring Possibilities" newsletter features resources and strategies to help youth achieve their post-school goals with support from their families and other natural supports. *Published every other month.*

Go to PACER.org/newsletters or call (952) 838-9000 to subscribe to one or more of these valuable publications.



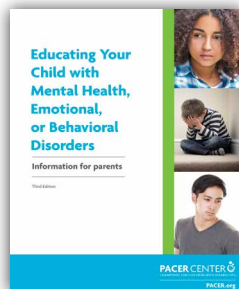
Resources

To see the full list of PACER publications and to order, go to PACER.org/publications.
You may also order by calling (952) 838-9000 or (800) 537-2237.

Educating Your Child with Mental Health, Emotional, or Behavioral Disorders: Information for Parents

This guide helps parents of children with mental health, emotional, or behavioral disorders participate effectively in Special Education planning, including school discipline policies, placement options, and behavioral and emotional support needs.

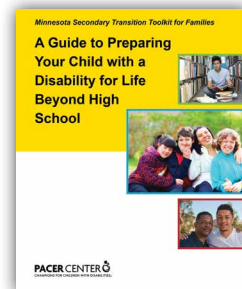
\$5 | 10+ copies, \$4 each | PHP-a21



Minnesota Secondary Transition Toolkit for Families: A Guide to Preparing Your Child with a Disability for Life Beyond High School

This toolkit helps make transition planning easier. Topics include health care, benefits planning, postsecondary education, housing and more.

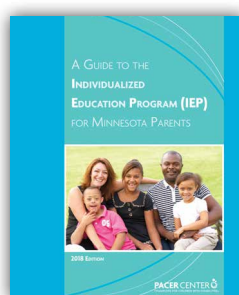
\$9 | ST-41



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

This booklet helps parents work with schools to address each child's special needs through understanding the required components of the IEP. Includes examples from a sample IEP form.

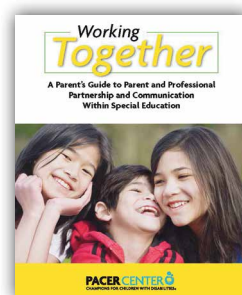
\$3 | 10+ copies, \$2 each | PHP-a12



Working Together: A Parent's Guide to Parent and Professional Partnership and Communication Within Special Education

This book helps parents communicate effectively with Special Education professionals as they develop their child's educational program.

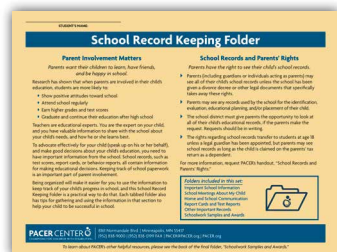
\$6 | 10+ copies, \$5 each | PHP-a19



General Education School Record Keeping Folders

These folders are a practical way for parents of typical children to stay organized to keep track of their student's progress in school. Each of the six folders have tips for gathering and using the information to help your child be successful in school. Available in English, Spanish, Hmong, and Somali.

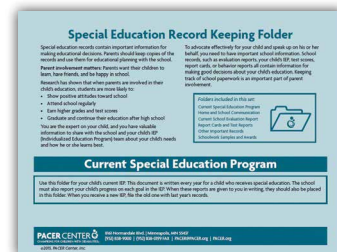
\$10 | 11+ copies, \$8 each | MPC-6



Special Education School Record Keeping Folders

These folders are a practical way for parents of children in Special Education classes to stay organized to keep track of their student's progress in school. Each of the six folders have tips for gathering and using the information to help your child be successful in school. Available in English, Spanish, Hmong, and Somali.

\$10 | 11+ copies, \$8 each | PHP-a5



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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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IN THIS ISSUE

PACER circles the globe	Cover
PACER lost two friends and colleagues	2
Back to school success.....	3
Fostering high expectations	4
Breaking down multicultural barriers	6
Conversation with the Commissioner	7
PACER Board member	8
4 easy ways to support PACER	9
History of PACER.....	10
Fun Times social group	12
PACER staff feature.....	13
PACER workshops and E-news	14
PACER resources	15
PACER's endowment.....	Back

Save the Date!

PACER Symposium: Mon., Aug. 16, 2021

“Why I give to PACER's endowment”

“Disabilities affect us all,” said Dorothy Slegman. “I don't think I know one family who doesn't have a connection to someone who has a disability.” Dorothy, who is a donor to PACER's endowment, is especially proud that her brother, who is on the autism spectrum, is also an endowment donor.

“PACER helps so many families. It's important to know that PACER's work will always continue,” Dorothy said. “Contributing to PACER's endowment helps keep this work in the forefront so families feel supported and people have access to PACER's services.”

PACER's endowment comes from donor gifts: cash, stock, estate plans, or other assets. These gifts are placed in a legally restricted fund that is permanently invested. The interest and investment earnings can be used for PACER's programs or operations, but the principal is kept intact.

An endowment helps PACER plan for the future and ensures that PACER's programs will be always be there to meet the emerging needs of families and children with disabilities and all children who are bullied. An endowment is not subject to the ups and downs of government funding; it helps provide a strong foundation that means PACER's funding will remain stable, even when times are uncertain.

There are many ways to give to PACER's endowment. Endowment donors may choose to make a one-time gift, plan regular gifts, or make PACER part of their estate plan. One PACER donor likes to give at the end of the year; another gives small amounts monthly. Some donors who give on a regular basis also combine their methods of giving, such as making PACER a beneficiary of their estate plan or donating appreciated stock.

An endowment can also benefit a donor's tax situation. “Because every situation is different, I encourage you to contact your tax professional or financial advisor to discuss the best way to contribute to PACER's endowment,” said PACER's Executive Director, Paula Goldberg.

To discuss your role in PACER's endowment, email Paula Goldberg at pgoldberg@PACER.org.

“It's a great feeling to know that contributing to PACER's endowment helps make sure that kids will continue to have the educational rights they are entitled to.”

- Dorothy Slegman