

PACESETTER

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

Minnesota schools required to provide more training for paraprofessionals

Paraprofessionals play an important educational role for students with disabilities, but they need training to serve students effectively. All Minnesota school districts are now required to provide disability training before or at the beginning of employment for paraprofessionals who give direct support to students with disabilities. The training will ensure that paraprofessionals have sufficient knowledge and skills in emergency procedures, building orientation, roles and responsibilities, confidentiality, and vulnerability to better meet students' needs.

The training must include understanding disabilities, the individual needs of each student according to their disability, and how the disability affects the student's education and behavior. In addition, each district must have a process for every paraprofessional to have ongoing direction from a licensed teacher or supervision by a school nurse where appropriate.

Parents may want to ask their child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) team about the specific training their child's paraprofessional has received. "We're pleased that the Legislature took this important step," said Paula Goldberg, PACER's executive director. "Now it's up to school districts to develop and implement training so that every student can be well-served."



Idina Menzel, star of 'Frozen,' 'Wicked,' and 'Rent,' will headline PACER's Benefit April 30

Tony Award-winning icon Idina Menzel, whose career traverses stage, film, television, and music, will bring her amazing talents to Minneapolis on Saturday, April 30, where she will be the headline performer at PACER's 34th Annual Benefit. Menzel is the voice of Elsa in Disney's global box office smash "Frozen," in which she sings the film's multiplatinum Oscar-winning hit "Let It Go."

Earning huge critical acclaim, Menzel reached superstardom on Broadway with her Tony Award-winning performance in the blockbuster musical "Wicked," and in her Tony-nominated role in "Rent." She has been a regular on the hit TV show "Glee," was among the stars of Disney's "Enchanted," and had her own PBS special "Barefoot at the Symphony." Following her performance on the 86th Academy Awards, Menzel made history as the first person with both a Billboard Top 10 hit and a Tony Award for acting.

One of the most commanding vocalists in modern music, Menzel has captivated audiences at sold-out concerts around the world, and has been called "the Streisand of her generation." She leads audiences through a special journey of classic pop, musical theater favorites, and her original songs, weaving together her irresistible charm, wit, and unparalleled vocal prowess.

The Benefit will be held at the Minneapolis Convention Center, and proceeds support PACER's programs for children with disabilities and their families, and PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center. Tickets start at \$70 and include the amazing live and silent auctions. Please see page 2 to order tickets, reserve online at PACER.org/benefit, or call (952) 838-9000.

PACER advocate impacts parents and professionals in the U.S. Virgin Islands

PACER Center is based in Minnesota, but its impact stretches well beyond. PACER Parent Advocate Bonnie Jean Smith was the keynote speaker in September at a major conference in the U.S. Virgin Islands. The “2nd Annual Empowered Parents = Successful Children Conference for Parents’ Advocacy” was held on the islands of St. Thomas and St. Croix.

The conference included workshops and presentations for parents and professionals. Smith spoke on children’s mental health, disability rights, and key information parents need to know about their child’s Individualized Education Program (IEP) and behavioral plans. “Parents and professionals in the Virgin Islands need information that will help children with disabilities be successful,” Smith said. “This conference brings together parents, teachers, government officials, and many others.”

Smith, who is the parent of two young adults with disabilities, has been a parent advocate staff member at PACER since 1999. “Bonnie Jean is an outstanding communicator, and her ability to connect with families and educators is terrific,” said PACER Executive Director Paula Goldberg. “There is no doubt that her visit is making a positive difference in the Virgin Islands.”



PACER advocate Bonnie Jean Smith

Reservations for PACER’s April 30 Benefit Featuring Idina Menzel

To reserve your tickets for the 2016 PACER Benefit on April 30 featuring Idina Menzel, please complete the form below and fax or mail it to PACER Center. Reservations can also be made at PACER.org or by calling (952) 838-9000.

Benefit Tickets (Please indicate number of each)

____ \$70 Friend ____ \$100 Supporter ____ \$150 Patron* ____ \$225 Benefactor*
____ \$300 Sponsor* ____ \$600 Champion* Total amount: \$_____

My check (payable to PACER Center) is enclosed. Please charge my credit card.

VISA MC AMEX DISCOVER Account # _____ Exp. date: _____

Name on card _____ Billing address _____ City/State/Zip _____

Phone (h) _____ (w) _____ (c) _____ E-mail _____

Names of persons for whom you are purchasing tickets: _____

I need: Wheelchair seating (# of spaces _____) Sign language interpretation Assistive listening device

Other _____

* Includes post-performance patron champagne and dessert party

Other Contributions/Volunteer Opportunities

Please contact me about: donating to the Silent Auction being a Corporate Sponsor (includes ticket package and ad)
 advertising in the Benefit Playbill volunteering on a Benefit committee

I am unable to attend the Benefit. Please accept my gift of: check charge

\$600 \$300 \$225 \$150 \$100 \$50 Other \$_____

Many companies match gifts. Please ask your employer for a matching gift form and enclose it with your contribution or ticket order.

Please mail or fax to: PACER Center, 8161 Normandale Blvd., Minneapolis, MN 55437-1044 Fax: (952) 838-0199

Young professionals ‘Raise a Glass’ for PACER

PACER’s Young Professionals Advisory Board hosted more than 200 guests Nov. 20, 2015 at Muse Event Center in Minneapolis for the “Raise a Glass – A Toast to PACER” beer and wine tasting event. It was a huge success as participants enjoyed sampling the best Minnesota’s local brewers and winemakers have to offer. They also enjoyed live music and plenty of fun, all while supporting PACER’s work on behalf of children and families.

The annual event was organized by PACER’s Young Professionals Advisory Board. Proceeds raised this year will support PACER’s Simon Technology Center (PACER.org/stc) and PACER’s National Bullying Prevention Center (PACER.org/bullying).



Above: Danielle and Misti Germundson enjoy brews from the seven breweries, two wineries, and cidery at the event.

Left: PACER’s Young Professionals Advisory Board co-chair Robert Short (left) and member Alex Levin (right) assist emcee Miss Shannan Paul with selecting winners for the prizes offered at Raise A Glass.



And the survey says... Support PACER with SurveyMonkey

Helping PACER is now as easy as taking simple online surveys. PACER supporters can sign up on SurveyMonkey Contribute to receive short surveys from SurveyMonkey customers who need opinions on a variety of topics. For every survey completed, SurveyMonkey makes a donation to PACER, and all participants have the opportunity to win \$100 in an instant win game. Participants’ identities and information remain confidential. Sign up at: contribute.surveymonkey.com/charity/PACER.

Don’t miss PACER’s Creative Kids Contest Feb. 27

Children with disabilities, ages 4 to 17, are invited to join in the fun at PACER’s 11th Annual Creative Kids Contest on Saturday, Feb. 27 from 10 a.m. to noon at PACER Center. It will be a morning of imagination and creativity, and the winning design will be featured on the 2016 PACER greeting card. This year’s contest theme is “Unity: Friendship, Inclusion, and Kindness.” To register or donate art supplies, e-mail Danna.Mirviss@PACER.org or call (952) 838-9000. Space is limited for this special event.



High expectations and PACER help teen realize her college dreams

“Where there’s a will, there’s a way,” is a good way to describe Marissa Leitzke’s attitude. The 17-year-old from Apple Valley, Minn., attends high school full time, volunteers for several organizations, runs track, and plans to attend college next year. Marissa was born with Usher’s Syndrome, is deaf, and has progressive vision loss. She uses American Sign Language, a video phone, and interpreters to help her communicate.

Despite facing obstacles, Marissa’s positive attitude, determination, and strong support system have helped her succeed. “I love learning new things and challenging myself,” said Marissa. “I want to prove to the people who say I can’t do things that I can!”

In addition to having a family that encourages her to reach her full potential, Marissa also relies on PACER Center for resources and support. Her mother Jennifer first brought Marissa to PACER when she was being bullied at school. After speaking with a PACER advocate, Marissa learned how to deal with the bullying and use other important self-advocacy skills. “Marissa was feeling pretty low when we came to PACER,”

said Jennifer. “They taught her how to be a strong advocate for herself, which completely changed her life.”

Marissa channeled her renewed self-confidence into teaching others how to stop bullying. For the past two years, she has organized events at her school to celebrate Unity Day, which was started by PACER’s National Bullying Prevention Center and takes place in October during National Bullying Prevention Month. “After going through my own bullying experience, I wanted to show others that it’s not OK and that they can stop it,” said Marissa.

Active participation in her community is important to Marissa, and she has volunteered at her high school, church, and several non-profit organizations. In 2014, Marissa received the President’s Volunteer Service Award for engaging in volunteer service and creating change in her community.

Marissa will graduate from high school this year, and she’s been



Marissa Leitzke holding her acceptance letter from the University of Minnesota Duluth’s undergraduate program.

accepted at the University of Minnesota Duluth, where she plans to pursue a degree in environmental education. Jennifer admits that she is nervous about Marissa moving away from home, but after touring the campus and speaking with disability resources staff, she is confident that Marissa will be successful in college. Their family has also used PACER resources to help with the transition process (see box at left). “Marissa has worked hard to get where she is,” Jennifer said, “and I know she will go far in life.”

Marissa encourages other youth with disabilities to challenge themselves and to never give up on their dreams, whether it’s pursuing a job or going to college. “It’s important to push yourself and see how far you can go,” said Marissa. “Believe that you can do anything. You can!”

Transition Resources for Youth

PACER offers a variety of transition-related resources for youth with disabilities (ages 14 to 21) at PACER.org/publications/transition.asp, including:

- “Mapping Dreams: The Transition to Adulthood”
- Be Your Own Best Advocate
- Chart Your Own Future: How Your Individualized Education Program (IEP) Can Help
- College or Training Programs: How to Decide (Tips for Youth)

PACER’s National Parent Center on Transition and Employment also offers videos, articles, and other resources to assist families with transition planning at PACER.org/transition.

PACER helps students with disabilities and their families in both public and private schools

PACER has long provided valuable information and assistance to families of students with disabilities who attend public schools. Resources are also available to students in private schools. Etta Barry serves as a PACER parent liaison working with private school students and educators.

As a parent of three children with learning disabilities who attended private school and have since graduated and are doing well in college, Barry has a deep understanding of PACER's resources. "I attended the PACER Symposium and PACER workshops as a parent," said Barry. "Now, I am proud to provide one-to-one assistance to families of children in private schools."

Barry is helping families with information, individual assistance, and guidance about education. "I am happy to share what I have learned both personally and professionally," she said, "so that families know they can turn to PACER for help."

She is also working with private school administrators, teachers, and learning specialists to connect them to meaningful resources. In addition to serving as a liaison between families and educators, Barry has helped launch parent support groups and done workshops on topics such as bullying prevention.

"The schools I have met with have been very welcoming," Barry said. "They want to serve their students better



and they recognize that PACER has the knowledge and resources to help them do that."

Being the parent of a child who struggles in school is not easy. It's also challenging for educators seeking solutions and resources for their students. PACER can help by sharing what works in other schools as well as relevant resources.

Regardless of the schools they attend, students with disabilities may benefit from the assistance PACER offers. "Families are so appreciative of what PACER provides," Barry said. "All students can benefit from our resources and expertise."

PACER offers resources on children with mental health and emotional or behavioral challenges for parents, youth, professionals, and the community

For families of children with mental health and emotional or behavioral disorders, it can be challenging to locate and receive the supports and services their child needs. PACER's Children's Mental Health and Emotional or Behavioral Disorders Project provides resources and support for parents, youth, professionals, and the community at PACER.org/cmh. PACER has been helping children with mental health needs since 1984. "PACER is committed to supporting, educating, and promoting understanding to parents, educators, and the community," said project coordinator Renelle Nelson. "We want children with mental health challenges and emotional or behavioral disorders to experience success."

'Children's Mental Health & EBD E-news'

PACER's electronic newsletter — "Children's Mental Health & EBD E-news" — is a free quarterly publication that contains helpful information on resources for families, changes in systems of care, special events of interest to families, and related PACER initiatives. To subscribe, e-mail PACER@PACER.org.

To learn more about PACER's resources for children with mental health and emotional or behavioral disorders, visit PACER.org/cmh, e-mail PACER@PACER.org, or call (952) 838-9000.

Educators rely on PACER's puppets to teach understanding and inclusion year after year

A lot has changed over the years in the way children are educated — think SmartBoards and iPads and web-based instruction — but PACER's COUNT ME IN® puppets are still one of the most effective teaching tools available. Just ask Mary Hurwitz, a physical education teacher at Greenwood Elementary School in Plymouth, Minn., who has the PACER puppets kick off a week-long unit on understanding differences. “It is a wonderful program, and there is so much valuable information,” said Hurwitz, who started having puppet shows in her classroom in 1994. “The children are really engaged by the puppets. On more than one occasion there have been students who suddenly shouted out that they have the same disability as the puppet.”

As educators know, capturing the attention of young children isn't easy, but PACER's endearing, life-size, multicultural puppets have a way with kids that simply works. Using an engaging, child-friendly approach, trained volunteers present a message-filled show that is creative and fun yet deals with sensitive subjects in a realistic way. Through skits, songs, guessing games, and discussion, the puppets educate, entertain, and inspire.

After the puppet presentation, Hurwitz's students do activities in which they discover what it is like for someone to have a disability. Older students also learn what it's like to have a hidden disability such as dyslexia or Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD).

“We have a number of students in our school who have visible and invisible disabilities,” Hurwitz said. “Students learn to empathize, and how to help their classmates. They learn that all children enjoy many of the same

things — playing games, listening to music, laughing, and having fun. It's a more hands-on way of internalizing what it means to have a disability.”

Making an impact

Donna Dahl is a social worker at Groveland Elementary School in Minnetonka, Minn., where the PACER puppets have been part of the kindergarten curriculum for 17 years. She describes them as “young and animated,” and says the way they share information about their disabilities helps children remember key messages. “The kids are truly caring and enthusiastic about the puppets,” Dahl said. “They get excited about the different activities that are part of the puppet show.”

Since 1979, more than 350,000 children have seen PACER's COUNT ME IN® (disability awareness) and KIDS AGAINST BULLYING (bullying prevention) puppets. “The program is affordable and teachers appreciate it,” Dahl said. “We want to create an awareness that all students want to be included. Showing respect, care, and understanding are valuable characteristics for students to have as life-long skills.”

There's no doubt that PACER's puppet shows make a tremendous impact. Hurwitz recalls a student of hers in the 3rd grade who had learned about Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) as part of the awareness program. “She went home and told her mom that she finally



understood why her brother acted the way he did,” Hurwitz said. “The mother shared this with me and I knew that what we were doing was making a difference.”

Be a PACER puppeteer!

Would you like to be part of the fun, creative team of PACER puppeteers? No experience is needed! To learn more about the program, or book puppet shows for your school or organization, visit PACER.org/puppets, e-mail puppets@PACER.org or call (952) 838-9000.

Pique Travel supports PACER's puppets

Every time a PACER supporter takes advantage of Pique Travel's unique approach to travel planning and books a trip (7+ days at a 4-star experience or better) and mentions PACER, the company will donate \$100 to bring a PACER puppet show to a school or preschool in the Twin Cities. Learn more by e-mailing JimB@PiqueTravel.com or call (612) 801-1332.

Students find creative ways to raise funds for PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center

Students across the country are committed to raising money to support bullying prevention and they come up with many creative ways to do it. This past summer, Needham, Mass., 8th graders Jackson and Yoojee held two concerts to support bullying prevention, featuring 12 songs on acceptance, equality, and love. As musicians, the boys know that music has the power to break down barriers and forge ideas of acceptance.

“Every day thousands of children stay home from school to avoid being bullied based on differences that they should be embracing,” said Jackson and Yoojee. “We decided to take music and apply it to the cause that we’d like to help.”

Through the concerts, Jackson and Yoojee raised \$1,000 for PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center. “We wanted to take a stand and try to make a difference through music,” they said.

Going the distance

After experiencing bullying, 14-year-old Spencer decided to hold a bullying prevention run in Florida. Spencer gathered pledges and reached out to local schools and businesses for sponsorship, raising \$16,000! He donated proceeds from the race to PACER, his elementary and middle school, and to other local schools to start a bullying prevention task force. “I believe it’s important to stay true to who you are,” said Spencer. “Don’t let anyone make you feel bad about being different. Everyone is different!”

PACER has a free toolkit to plan a Run, Walk, Roll Against Bullying event in your community. It’s available at PACER.org/bullying/nbpm/runwalkroll.

Giving the gift of friendship

For her 11th birthday party, Anistyn thought big — and kind! She didn’t want anyone to feel left out, so she invited her entire middle school to a themed party she called, “Be a Friend, Bring a Friend, Make a Friend.” In lieu of presents, Anistyn asked for donations to bullying prevention and more than \$1,300 was raised for PACER.

The donation was wonderful, but for Anistyn it was more special to make new friends and to ensure that everyone felt included and accepted. Through this experience, Anistyn said, “I realized how fun it is to be friends with people who are different.”



Jackson and Yoojee, along with some of their friends, performed concerts in Needham, Mass. to raise money for PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center.

“We are so grateful to individuals like Jackson, Yoojee, Spencer, and Anistyn for coming up with creative ways to raise funds for our bullying prevention programs,” said Julie Hertzog, director of PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center. “Together, we are making our schools kinder, safer, and more accepting places.”

Read more inspiring stories about people who are doing special things to support bullying prevention at PACER.org/bullying/stories/fundraising.

Safe and Supportive Schools Conference Jan. 22 in St. Paul

Don't miss the Minnesota Safe and Supportive Schools Conference on Friday, Jan. 22, 2016 in St. Paul. This important one-day conference, hosted by the Minnesota Department of Education in partnership with PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center, will bring together educators, school support staff, parents, student leaders, and others to increase knowledge about bullying prevention and how to create a positive school climate. The event is from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at the Anderson Center on the campus of Hamline University, and the cost to attend is \$30. Learn more at PACER.org/Bullying (see the right-hand column of the homepage).

PACER'S National Bullying Prevention Month

National Bullying Prevention Month was developed in 2006 by PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center in Minneapolis. Today, it is recognized around the world as students, schools, communities, and corporations come together in support of those who have been bullied. In October, there were countless events and activities, from PACER's Run, Walk, Roll Against Bullying in Bloomington, Minn., to celebrations at Disney Interactive in California, which kicked off the month on Oct. 1 with the release of its public service announcement, "You are Braver, Stronger and Smarter Than You Think" in support of PACER. The inspiring two-minute video has been seen by 2.4 million viewers. On Oct. 21 — Unity Day — gatherings were held at schools nationwide and overseas as people everywhere proudly wore orange and united against bullying and for kindness, acceptance, and inclusion.



First place finisher Steve Knier had help as he crossed the finish line at PACER's Run, Walk, Roll Against Bullying on Oct. 2 in Bloomington, Minn.



Students at Saints Peter and Paul School in Easton, Md. participated in activities for Unity Day on Oct. 21.



High schoolers at Incarnate Word Academy in Corpus Christi, Texas got into the spirit of Unity Day.

PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center opens California location



Bullying prevention supporters Ella Goldberg (left) and Maddie Altman (right) were on hand Sept. 26, along with "Girl Meets World" television star Sabrina Carpenter (center), at the opening of PACER's new office in Los Angeles.

More than 200 guests were on hand Sept. 26 for the opening of the Los Angeles office of PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center. Miss America Kira Kazantsev was the emcee of a wonderful evening of outstanding entertainment and inspiring stories complete with Hollywood celebrities, special guests, and PACER's Southern California supporters. "It was wonderful to see so many people come to welcome PACER to the community," said Paula Goldberg, PACER's co-founder and executive director. "We are grateful to Michael and Hayley Miller for hosting the event at their beautiful home in Bel Air."

PACER is now serving the schools and communities of Los Angeles with programming and bullying prevention resources and will continue to expand its reach in the months ahead. For more information on PACER's work in California and elsewhere, visit PACER.org/bullying or call (310) 749-8782.

'You're Not Alone: We're Here for You'

Students who are bullied often say they feel like nobody understands what they are going through; that no matter what they do, the bullying will never stop; that no one cares and they are all alone. Developed by PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center, the "You're Not Alone: We're Here for You" campaign was designed to assure young people that they are not alone, that others do care, and they are willing to help.

The campaign is focused on creating communities that are together against bullying — and united to provide kindness, support, and hope for those who have experienced bullying. "This campaign inspires students, adults and communities," said Julie Hertzog, director of PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center. "We do that through conversation and education, offering a classroom activities toolkit, an event toolkit, and an online gallery that inspires community, support and hope."

Unite together against bullying

Think about how it must feel for someone being bullied when everyone around you looks the other way, ignores you, and maybe even sides with the person who is hurting you. What would it be like to feel that there is no way to change what is happening to you? When you're the one being bullied, it's hard to believe in yourself, and it can be difficult to see that life will ever be better. "That's a very lonely place to be," Hertzog said.

Now imagine how all of that can change. Imagine if those who witness bullying — be it another student, a parent, an educator, or community member — were to send the powerful message that they are here to help. Imagine if those people reached out and provided kindness, support,



and hope. Imagine how it would feel during the pain of being bullied to know that you are not alone.

"The good news is, we can all be that person, and we can also encourage others to be there, too," Hertzog said. "There are many ways to get involved as an adult, as a student, or in the community. Together, we can change what has happened to so many for so long, and we can share the message that all students have the right to feel safe and be included."

Classroom and event toolkits

The "You're Not Alone, We're Here for You" classroom toolkit can be used by educators to help create environments where students feel involved and empowered. The materials provide opportunities for discussion, visual reminders of the message, and rewards for participation. Toolkits are also available for planning bullying prevention events.

Learn more about this exciting campaign, and how you can be involved, at PACER.org/Bullying/YoureNotAlone.

Order toolkits for the classroom or for an event

These toolkits help teach students, adults, and community members that support, kindness, and hope is something everyone can give!

Classroom toolkit

Opportunities for meaningful conversation, visual reminders, and participation incentives. Includes posters, discussion guides, educational handouts, and stickers. The toolkit has materials for 100 students and is appropriate for K-12 students. \$50 per toolkit.

Event toolkit

Resources for holding a public event at school or in the community with posters, petitions, handouts, and give-aways. The toolkit has materials for 50 participants. \$75 per toolkit.

To order your toolkit, go to PACER.org/Bullying/YoureNotAlone

What a difference a year makes

In the summer of 2014, 12-year-old Talitha Mueller attended EX.I.T.E. camp “virtually” with the help of a VGo robot from PACER’s Simon Technology Center. Even though she was being treated for leukemia at a Minneapolis children’s hospital at the time, Talitha was able to participate in most camp activities while making new friends and learning about science, technology, engineering, and math. In 2015, Talitha was back at EX.I.T.E. camp with nearly 30 other middle school girls with disabilities. This time she attended in person.

PACER’s VGo and Double robots are available on long-term loan to schools for families of children who are not able to attend school or other activities because of a significant health condition or disability. The devices enable students to see, hear, talk, and move around a remote location without physically being there. “Even though she was very sick, she was able to focus and follow along,” said Talitha’s mother Laurie Kabes. “It was just amazing!”

Learn more about the robots and other exciting assistive technology at PACER.org/stc/library/PaulAdelman.asp



Talitha (right) and her sister Charisma (left) attended EX.I.T.E. Camp in 2015.

Apply now for PACER’s 2016 EX.I.T.E. Camp

Middle-school girls with disabilities won’t want to miss the 14th Annual Exploring Interests in Technology and Engineering (EX.I.T.E.) Camp coming this summer to PACER Center, where students discover how much fun science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) can really be. Applications for the free five-day camp are due May 1, and enrollment is limited. For more information, visit PACER.org/stc or call PACER’s Simon Technology Center at (952) 838-9000.

PACER’s Housing Resource Fair is April 9

It’s important for parents of children and young adults with disabilities to explore options for independent living and housing as early as possible. To learn more, families can attend PACER’s 12th Annual Housing Resource and Information Fair on Saturday, April 9 from 9 a.m. to noon at PACER Center.

Families will have the opportunity to meet with service providers and discuss housing options, services, supports and related issues for children and young adults with disabilities. State and county representatives, and resource and referral organizations, will be available to answer questions.

For more information, e-mail Susan.Shimota@PACER.org or call (952) 838-9000.



Families, superheroes explore assistive technology at Family Fun Day & Tech Expo

More than 250 people attended PACER's Simon Technology Center (STC) Family Fun Day & Tech Expo on Sept. 19, 2015 where they learned about assistive technology (AT) and participated in hands-on games and activities with the help of some of their favorite superheroes. From high-tech gadgets to technology that supports everything from play to learning to employment, there was a lot to test and try.

Children with disabilities, their families, and professionals explored what's possible with assistive technology, and enjoyed interacting with a variety of devices for infants, toddlers, children, teens, and adults. This year's event had a superhero theme, which was fun for everyone.

For more information on PACER's assistive technology resources, visit the Simon Technology Center online at PACER.org/stc



Learn about assistive technology at your own pace

Families have the opportunity to experience how assistive technology can benefit their child with disabilities in their own home and on their own schedule through the Center on Technology and Disability (CTD), a collaboration of FHI 360, the American Institutes for Research, and PACER Center. The center, a project funded by the U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), helps make learning about assistive technology online more readily available for educators and parents of children with disabilities.

The CTD website (ctdinstitute.org) has a variety of helpful resources including the CTD Café. It features free webinars every month on different assistive technology topics of interest to parents and professionals. You can sign up for an upcoming webinar, or view archived webinars, at ctdinsitute.org/cafe. The CTD Library (ctdinstitute.org/library) is an easy-to-browse collection of assistive technology information grouped into important topics such as Family and Student Support, Early Childhood, and Transition.

PACER Center also offers many of its assistive technology workshops via Livestream. Participants can either attend the workshop in person at PACER or attend via Livestream over the Internet using their computer or tablet. Both opportunities are free and allow for interaction with the presenters. For information on upcoming workshops, visit PACER.org/workshops and look for the blue "Live: Web Streaming Available" box next to the description title. Archived presentations can be viewed via PACER's Livestream page at <http://tinyurl.com/STCLivestream>.

Workshops

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

CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH, EMOTIONAL/BEHAVIORAL

Challenging Behaviors, Positive Supports, and School Success

This workshop will discuss what challenging behavior in school may look like and the importance of identifying positive supports specific to each child's needs. Special Education, 504 Plans, and other school support options will be discussed.

- **Jan. 26, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (St. Paul)**
- **March 17, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (PACER)**
Also available by live streaming

Challenging Behaviors and the IEP: Making a Plan that Works for Children and Youth

This workshop is for parents and others on the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team who want to learn how to more effectively use the special education process to help children and youth with challenging behavior achieve better outcomes.

- **Feb. 25, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (St. Paul)**

Special Education and Challenging Behaviors

This workshop will discuss the development of an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for children who struggle in school due to their behavior. Parents and others will learn strategies to communicate effectively with the IEP team about their child's behavior needs, how to address the school discipline policy in the IEP, and how to resolve disagreements between the school and parents.

- **Feb. 9, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (PACER)**
- **April 12, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (Rochester)**

EARLY CHILDHOOD

Families Are Important

This workshop features an overview of families' rights, roles, and responsibilities within the early intervention system. It also addresses services in the natural environment, the Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP), and child and family outcomes.

- **Jan. 23, 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. (PACER)**
- **May 3, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (PACER)**
Also available by live streaming

Everything You Need to Learn Before Your Child Turns 3

This workshop will help families understand the transition process from Part C Early Intervention services to Part B preschool services. Topics include transition requirements, Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), Inclusion, and Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals and objectives.

- **Feb. 13, 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. (PACER)**

Making the Move from Early Childhood Special Education to Kindergarten

Kindergarten is a big step in any child's life. For a child with disabilities, being ready for kindergarten often requires some intentional preparation. This workshop will help parents plan for this transition and learn strategies to help their child be successful and make the first elementary school experience a good one.

- **March 12, 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. (PACER)**

How to Describe My Child's Strengths and Needs

This workshop will provide parents of children ages birth to 5 with tips on how to talk with early childhood professionals about their child's strengths and needs, as well as the opportunity to talk and connect with other parents to share experiences and lessons learned along the way.

- **March 22, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (PACER)**

If I Knew Then What I Know Now

A panel of experienced parents of children with disabilities will share insights gained while raising and educating their children. Participants will be encouraged to ask questions and share their insights and experiences.

- **April 5, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (PACER)**

Early Childhood Family Leadership Summit

This free event for parents of children ages birth to 7 with developmental delays or disabilities is a dynamic, interactive one-day training to help parents enhance their communication and leadership skills. Includes networking opportunities. Contact Judy Swett (jswett@PACER.org) for more information.

- **April 16, 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. (PACER)**

Early Childhood Development and Strategies to Support Early Learning Skills

This workshop is for parents of children

ages birth to 5 with developmental delays or disabilities. Participants will learn about the typical stages of child development and strategies to support emerging learning skills so they can become more involved in their child's early education. There will also be networking opportunities with other parents.

- **April 25, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (PACER)**
Also available by live streaming

HOUSING

Three-part Housing Workshop Series: Part 1—First Steps to Independent Living

This interactive workshop will focus on person-centered planning concepts and tools to help youth develop their vision for independent living, housing, and services. "One-page profiles" will be discussed as a tool to begin exploring housing and services. An overview of housing and services options will be provided.

- **Feb. 8, 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. (PACER)**

Three-part Housing Workshop Series: Part 2—Housing Eligibility and Funding

Parents will gain a big-picture view of federal, state, and county funding of housing, and learn how their youth can become eligible for and access funding. Topics include income supplements and budgets.

- **Feb. 22, 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. (PACER)**

Three-part Housing Workshop Series: Part 3—Individualized Housing & Services Options

This interactive workshop will provide a more detailed explanation of individualized housing and services options so that parents and young adults can consider what might be a good fit for them. A panel of parents, young adults, and housing providers will share their journey through the housing process.

- **March 7, 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. (PACER)**

PACER's 12th Annual Housing Resource and Information Fair

Families and young adults can meet service providers, state and county representatives, and resource and referral organizations to discuss housing services, supports and related issues for young adults with disabilities. A keynote speaker will be featured.

- **April 9, 9 a.m. to Noon (PACER)**

PARENT TRAINING

Special Education: What Do I Need to Know?

This workshop will help parents understand special education, learn how to resolve disagreements, and discover the role of parents in the process.

- **Jan. 21, 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. (Forest Lake)**
- **March 8, 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. (Mahtomedi)**

Planning for Educational Inclusion: A Viewing of “Including Samuel”

Please join us for a screening of “Including Samuel,” a documentary by filmmaker Dan Habib about educational inclusion. He documented his family’s efforts to include their son Samuel in all facets of their lives, a journey that transforms each of them. Q & A with a PACER advocate will occur before and after the film.

- **Feb. 2, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (PACER)**

Special Education and the Important Role You Play for Your Child

Parents play an important role in the special education process. Participants in this workshop will learn how parents can use their rights and abilities to advocate for their child and work effectively with the school. This workshop will also provide valuable information for surrogate parents, foster parents, and the professionals who work with them on behalf of children.

- **Feb. 11, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (Shakopee)**

The ABC’s of the IEP – A Guide for Minnesota Parents to the IEP

This workshop will help parents understand how to use the Individualized Education Program (IEP) to benefit their child. Presenters will use the PACER booklet, “Guide for Minnesota Parents to the IEP,” to help participants understand how each required part of the IEP can be developed to meet the child’s needs.

- **March 3, 6:30 p.m. to 9 p.m. (PACER)**
- **April 7, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (North Branch)**

Hot Tips on the Individualized Education Program: Is your child’s IEP individualized and appropriate?

Participants in this hands-on workshop will learn how to use the information on their child’s special education evaluation report to determine how well the Individualized Education Program (IEP) addresses the child’s unique needs. Parents need to bring a copy of their child’s most recent school special education evaluation report and current IEP.

- **March 5, 9 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. (PACER)**
- **March 28, 5:30 p.m. to 8 p.m. (Maple Grove)**
- **April 12, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (Austin)**

Tips and Tools for Talking with School Staff

This workshop will provide parents of special education students with practical tips and interactive problem-solving experience so they can have the skills to communicate with school staff and effectively resolve differences.

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

Six Skills for Effective Communication

Parents will learn six skills they can use to be more effective advocates for their child with a disability, including understanding the child’s disability, using effective communication, and knowing how to resolve disagreements.

- **April 11, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (Lino Lakes)**

Meeting the Financial Challenge: Helping To Ensure Quality of Life for Loved Ones with Special Needs

Guest speaker Emmy Mastel from Prudential Special Needs Solutions, who is the parent of a youth with disabilities, will provide helpful information on what families should consider when planning for future financial and care needs of their son or daughter.

- **April 28, 6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. (PACER)**

Life Planning for People with Disabilities

Participants will learn about guardianship-conservatorship laws, power of attorney, trust, and other life planning issues. Plan to attend both sessions as they cover different information.

- **May 9, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. (Guardianship) (PACER)**
- **May 19, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. (Trusts) (PACER)**

SIMON TECHNOLOGY CENTER

Including AT in the IFSP or IEP

Assistive technology (AT) is important for many children with disabilities but it isn’t always clear how to document this need in the Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) or Individualized Education Program (IEP). Families, teachers, and other professionals will learn how to be intentional about the process of considering AT and including AT in the IFSP or IEP.

- **Jan. 25, 6:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. (PACER)**
Also available by live streaming

Technology for Girls: STEM Club

Middle school girls with disabilities are invited to join PACER Center and members of the Green

Girls Robotics Club from Eagan for hands-on exploration of science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). From using engineering skills to build dog houses to experimenting with frozen bubbles, these workshops will have you exploring, creating, and learning about the world around you using STEM.

- **Jan. 26, 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. (PACER)**

How Your Smartphone Can be a Boost to Your Education, Career Readiness, and Daily Life

Smartphones can be helpful tools to organize one’s life, keep track of school work, and more. Workshop participants will learn how smartphones are part of a larger strategy to increase independence, organization, and time management skills.

- **Jan. 28, 6:30 p.m. to 8 p.m. (PACER)**
Also available by live streaming

Tablet Accessibility

Tablets are popular devices but users may not know about their built-in accessibility features. Workshop participants will learn about accessibility features on Apple and Android tablets that can open new possibilities for you, your child, or your students.

- **Feb. 17, 6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. (PACER)**
Also available by live streaming

Child-Centered AT Plan

This workshop will walk participants through a process for considering and providing assistive technology (AT) for children ages birth to 5. The TIKES Project has created a set of planning tools to provide families, teachers, and other professionals with guidance to considering AT. Participants will receive helpful planning documents for this process.

- **Feb. 18, 6:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. (PACER)**
Also available by live streaming

Time Flies: Tools to Help with Task Planning & Time Management

Task planning and time management are critical life skills for academic, vocational, and personal success. Some individuals need extra support with these executive function skills. This workshop will explore various tools and strategies to help, including task lists, calendars, reminders, timers, and more.

- **Feb. 25, 6:30 p.m. to 8 p.m. (PACER)**
Also available by live streaming

Top Reading and Writing Apps for Teens

Workshop participants will discover the most versatile and effective reading and writing apps for teens. Apps for both Apple and Android devices will be demonstrated, discussed, and compared to show the many ways mobile apps

support struggling readers and writers. This workshop is designed for students in middle school and up, their parents, and educators.

- **March 16, 6:30 p.m. to 8 p.m. (PACER)**
Also available by live streaming

Acquiring Assistive Technology

Assistive technology (AT) can be a powerful tool for young children with disabilities. In this workshop, we will discuss a variety of ways to acquire, fund, and reuse AT.

- **April 14, 6:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. (PACER)**
Also available by live streaming

Keyboards for All Learners

Keyboarding is an essential skill today but typing on a traditional keyboard can be challenging for students with disabilities. Participants will learn about alternative computer keyboards, Bluetooth keyboards for tablets, and keyboard apps for the iPad.

- **May 18, 6:30 p.m. to 8 p.m. (PACER)**
Also available by live streaming

TRANSITION

The Bridge to Work: Supplemental Security Income and Employment Planning

This workshop will provide information on how parents of youth with disabilities can apply for Supplemental Security Income and Vocational Rehabilitation Service benefits for young adults at age 18. Parents will learn how Social Security, the Ticket to Work program, and Vocational Rehabilitation can help their youth meet his or her goals for postsecondary education, training, employment, and independent living.

- **Feb. 10, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (Anoka)**
- **March 9, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (Rochester)**
- **April 13, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (Cloquet)**

From Disability to Possibilities: the Power of Parents' High Expectations in IEP Transition Planning

Parent expectations have a powerful influence on future outcomes. High expectations are associated with higher achievement and "can do" skills for students with disabilities. This workshop will help parents communicate high expectations for youth and young adults.

- **March 1, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (PACER)**
- **March 29, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (St Cloud)**

Self-Advocacy Tools You Can Use

An advocate can be broadly defined as "someone who speaks up to make things better." The goal of this workshop for transition-age students and their families is

to help them learn about the importance of self-advocacy and to develop and learn to use some helpful tools.

- **April 5, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (Mound Westonka)**

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

Competitive employment and continuing education beyond high school are goals many youth with disabilities have. This free workshop for parents and youth will provide information on how education after high school increases the likelihood of employment, and offer strategies to help youth prepare for success in work and postsecondary education.

- **April 12, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m., (St. Cloud)**
- **April 21, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m., (Roseville)**

Transition: Pathway to the Future

This workshop will help parents of children with disabilities understand how to use the special education transition process to help their youth plan for life after high school. Parents of students in the 9th grade and beyond are encouraged to attend.

- **April 19, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (PACER)**

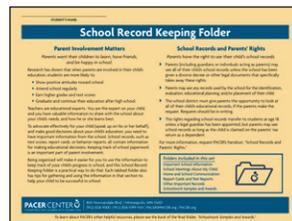
Resources

New! School Record Keeping Folders

This School Record Keeping Folder is a practical way for parents to stay organized to keep track of their student's progress in school. Each of the six tabbed folders also have tips for gathering and using the information to help your child to be successful in school. 2014. Also available in Hmong, Somali, and Spanish.

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

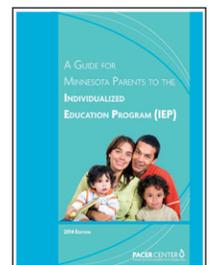
Optional additional Children's Mental Health Folder: \$2 each



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

Updated for 2014. Helps parents work with schools to address each child's special needs through understanding the required components of the IEP. Includes examples from the Minnesota state-recommended form.

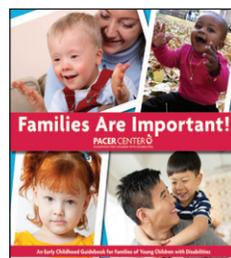
◆ **\$3 | 10+ copies, \$2 each | PHP-a12**



Updated! Families Are Important! An Early Childhood Guidebook for Families of Young Children

Helps families of children with disabilities or delayed development understand Minnesota's early intervention system and how to access services for their child. 2014.

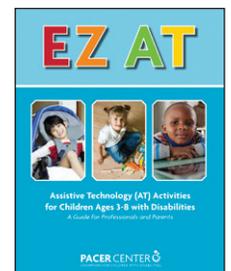
◆ **\$7 | 10+ copies, \$6 each | AP-44**



Updated! EZ AT

A guide for parents and professionals working with children ages 3-8 with disabilities. It provides assistive technology activities to encourage inclusion among all students. EZ AT offers information on a wide range of devices and products that promote best practices for home and classroom learning. 2015.

◆ **\$5 | 10+ copies, \$4 each | STC-16**



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PACESETTER

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8161 Normandale Blvd. | Minneapolis, MN 55437-1044

Voice: 952-838-9000 | Toll-free: 800-537-2237 (Minnesota)

Toll-free: 888-248-0822 (National) | FAX: 952-838-0199

E-mail: PACER@PACER.org

PACER Executive Director: *Paula F. Goldberg*

Writer-Editors: *Grant McGinnis, Angela Ardolf*

Designer: *Jenna Hanson*

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. An Equal Opportunity Employer, PACER is funded by grants from the U.S. Departments of Education, Labor, Health and Human Services 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.

PACER website: PACER.org

MN SEAC site: mnseacinfo.org

BULLYING: PACER.org/Bullying

PACERKidsAgainstBullying.org | PACERTeensAgainstBullying.org

(Alternate format is available upon request.)

March 16: Be a Champion for Children at the State Capitol

Parents of children with disabilities will have their voices heard in St. Paul, Minn., on Wednesday, March 16 during "Be a Champion for Children with Disabilities Day" at the Minnesota State Capitol. Participants will attend a dynamic workshop led by advocacy and education leaders and legislators to hear about potential legislation affecting special education, education funding, school discipline reform, mental health, and more. Parents will learn how to effectively share personal stories before meeting with their state legislators. Space is limited. Register online at PACER.org or call (952) 838-9000.

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Change Service Requested

TAG You're It!

Show your support for bullying prevention by being a part of **Together AGAINst Bullying**,™ an exciting international campaign for PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center, inspired by the performer Carrot Top. Donate, receive stickers to **TAG** your friends, and share on social media! Your support means one less student being bullied, one more person speaking out, or one more student knowing that he or she isn't alone.

Participating in **TAG** is easy:

1. Go to: TogetherAgainst.org
2. Make a donation of any size to receive virtual and real stickers.
3. **TAG** friends, family, and coworkers and share on social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, using the hashtags #TogetherAgainst and #TagItForward.
4. Visit PACER.org/Bullying to learn what you can do in your community.



Viktor the Viking was TAG-ged during October's Run, Walk, Roll Against Bullying in Bloomington, Minn.

Join Together AGAINst Bullying™, Donate, and TAG it forward!