

PACESETTER

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

Paula Goldberg honored by University of Minnesota

PACER Center Executive Director and co-founder Paula Goldberg has been honored by the University of Minnesota with its Outstanding Achievement Award. Goldberg was presented with the award by University President Eric Kaler on Nov. 19, 2017, during a reception at Eastcliff, the official residence of the University president.

President Kaler said, “As I read the nominating letters for Paula, I was struck by the deep affection for her from parents of children with disabilities, and by their recognition that she is not only passionately responsive to the needs of families, but outright tireless.

“Paula, your work to help children with disabilities, to stop bullying, and to help parents is simply remarkable. Your vision to, among other things, develop a coalition of disability organizations and spread the PACER impact across the nation is extraordinary. As an esteemed alumna of the College of Education and Human Development, and of the University of Minnesota, you have honored us with your remarkable body of work,” Kaler concluded.

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Legendary Jennifer Hudson to perform at PACER's Benefit



Academy Award-winning actress and Grammy Award-winning singer Jennifer Hudson will headline PACER's Annual Benefit on Saturday, May 12 at the Minneapolis Convention Center.

Hudson, who currently stars as a coach on “The Voice,” first rose to fame as a contestant on “American Idol” more than 13 years ago. Since then, the vibrant performer has gained worldwide acclaim. She won an Academy Award for her role in “Dreamgirls,” and went on to win a Golden Globe, NAACP Image Award, BAFTA, and Screen Actors Guild awards, among others. “In ‘Dreamgirls,’ a star is born the moment Jennifer Hudson opens her mouth to sing,” wrote the San Francisco Chronicle.

“We are so thrilled to welcome one of the most extraordinary talents in entertainment today,” said PACER Executive Director Paula Goldberg. “Jennifer Hudson is known for her incredible voice, and we know she will provide an unbelievable experience for PACER's guests. She has performed at presidential inaugurations, the Super Bowl, and the Oscars. This is sure to be a performance PACER's guests will never forget.”

Proceeds from the Benefit support PACER's programs for children with disabilities and their families, and PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center. Tickets start at \$75 and include the amazing silent and live auctions. The silent auction begins at 6:00 p.m., with the live auction and benefit performance at 8:00 p.m.

To reserve tickets, see page 16 of this newsletter, go online to PACER.org/benefit, or call (952) 838-9000.

PACER's Parents with High Expectations Project completes successful pilot year

PACER recently completed the pilot year of its Parents with High Expectations Project. The project's goal is to increase the engagement of parents with teachers and school staff. It was designed to ensure students have access to the resources, opportunities, and relationships that will help them be successful in life.

PACER identified parents of regular education students in Minneapolis and its first-ring suburbs from multicultural or underserved communities, and provided training and support to help them better understand their children's academic performance. Parents learned how to engage in meaningful discussions with teachers and school staff so that their children could meet their highest potential.

Some cultures are not aware of the importance of parent engagement at school, according to Hassan Samantar, one of PACER's multicultural advocates. As part of this project, Samantar worked with Somali families.

"I taught families two priorities: communication with teachers and school staff, and how to look at their children's performance in school," Samantar said. "It's complicated. For example, when test results say '20th percentile,' many parents don't understand what that means."

Samantar said that parents who are non-English speakers, and those who lack access to technology such as email, face specific challenges. He helped families brainstorm questions to ask teachers, and accompanied them to their child's parent-teacher conferences.

PACER exceeded all of the project's goals. PACER offered five workshops in four languages; provided intensive individual training; and created seven parent tip sheets that were translated into Spanish, Somali and Hmong. Those resources are available on the Parents with High Expectations page of PACER's website.



PACER's multicultural advocates are (front row, L to R): Virginia Richardson and Bonnie Jean Smith, and (back row, L to R): Jesus Villaseñor, Hassan Samantar, and Dao Xiong. They worked with parents of regular education students in the Minneapolis area as part of PACER's Parents with High Expectations Project.

Pre- and post-surveys of parents indicated significant increases in skills, such as understanding their child's school system, knowing who to contact if their child needs help, tracking their child's progress, and advocating for better educational outcomes for their child.

"We received impressive feedback from parents," said Jody Manning, director of PACER's Parent Training and Information Center.

Among the comments were "I believed school will advocate for students, now I understand I have to advocate for my children," and "This training and information will help me in the future of my child's education." The Graves Foundation supported this project.

Save the date: PACER's Housing Resource Fair is April 14

It's never too early for the families of children and young adults with disabilities to explore options for independent living and housing. Families can learn more about available opportunities by attending the 14th annual Housing Resource and Information Fair on Saturday, April 14, 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 young adults with disabilities. State and county representatives, and resource and referral organizations will be available to answer questions. For more information, email Susan.Shimota@PACER.org or call (952) 838-9000.

Goldberg honored, continued from page 1

Among those who spoke was Jan Ormasa, who nominated Goldberg for the award. Ormasa, longtime PACER advisory board member and retired special education director for the Hopkins school district, first met Goldberg as the mother of a child with severe and multiple difficulties. Their relationship has spanned three decades. Ormasa said, “Paula brings her enthusiasm, passion, and strong commitment as an exemplary, innovative, and visionary leader... she provides a legacy of hope for families and children and youth with disabilities.”

The Outstanding Achievement Award is the highest non-degree award conferred upon distinguished alumni by the University.



(L to R): Brad Wood, Colleen McGough-Wood, and Paula Goldberg

The Outstanding Achievement Award reads:

Paula F. Goldberg

Distinguished graduate of the University of Minnesota
Executive director and co-founder,
PACER Center

Gifted advocate and collaborator, who was instrumental in reshaping the delivery of special education services to Minnesota children and families

Innovative leader, who led the development of the Simon Technology Center and the National Bullying Prevention Center, among many other programs, to meet emerging needs in communities

Dynamic humanitarian, whose relentless efforts have enhanced the quality of life for individuals with disabilities and their families by ensuring their access to information, resources and support



(L to R): Greg West, Nancy West, Sharman Davis Barrett, Paula Goldberg, and Richard Barrett



(L to R): University of Minnesota President Eric Kaler, Paula Goldberg, and former University of Minnesota President Robert Bruinicks

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(Alternate format is available upon request)

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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Lending Library makes assistive technology available to all

PACER's Simon Technology Center (STC) is dedicated to making the benefits of technology more accessible to children with disabilities. STC's Lending Library provides convenient and effective assistive technology (AT) resources. The STC's trained staff is available to demonstrate and help members select items to try.

"While the Lending Library is regularly open every Tuesday from noon to 7 p.m. and select Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., we are glad to schedule individual appointments at a time that is convenient to anyone who is interested," said STC Director Bridget Gilormini.

ABCs of AT

Assistive technology includes items as low-tech as a paper communication board with symbols or as high tech as a robot.

"AT includes anything that can be used by individuals with disabilities to help expand or sustain the capacity of people with disabilities to function more independently," Gilormini explained. "The library is a great way for people to learn about and try more than 2,000 of the latest and greatest educational and disability-specific software, apps, and devices." She added that since parents or professionals may want to purchase some of the items, it is cost-effective to be able to "try before you buy."

Exciting options available to families

The following are just a few of the items available through the Lending Library. To access the entire catalog, go to <https://stclendinglibrary.myturn.com/library>.

- **Borrow a robot**

There are times when medical conditions or anxiety prevent children from physically attending school. PACER has stepped in to help by providing robots that allow children to be "telepresent." Gilormini said, "Not only do robots enable kids to be able to keep up with their school work, they also provide a way for



One of PACER's telepresence robots with two visitors to Simon Technology Center's Lending Library

them to stay connected with their classmates."

- **A BLAST of calm**

TouchPoints are electronic devices made to be attached to wristbands or clothing. They use Bi-Lateral Alternating Stimulation Tactile (BLAST) technology that transfers vibrations to alter the body's "flight or freeze" response to stress and anxiety. "TouchPoints users can adjust the setting to experience calm and think more clearly," said Gilormini.

- **Non-verbal communication**

Communication apps, sometimes called AAC apps, are amazing tools that can help a child who is non-verbal communicate with others. These powerful apps can also cost hundreds of dollars — but many are

available to try through the Lending Library.

Cutting edge AT

The Lending Library has just begun to offer Orcam's MyEye and MyReader devices. Gilormini is especially enthusiastic about these wearable artificial vision devices that assist people who are blind, visually impaired, or have a reading disability. She explained, "MyReader reads text aloud; MyEye recognizes faces, street signs, money notes, and products. We are so excited to be offering these life-changing products!"

Lending Library memberships

Lending Library memberships are reasonably priced: Family/individual memberships are just \$50 per year for Minnesota residents, and \$100 per year for those outside Minnesota; memberships are \$200 per year for Minnesota professionals and organizations, and \$250 per year for those outside Minnesota. For more information, call (952) 838-9000 and ask for the STC.

Lunds & Byerlys: 20 years of employing people with disabilities

Brett Nelson, son of PACER staff member Renelle Nelson, loves his job at Twin Cities-based Lunds & Byerlys, where he has worked as a courtesy clerk for more than 15 years. Lunds & Byerlys has been employing people with disabilities for more than 20 years, and some of those first employees with disabilities are still employed with them.

Tres Lund, CEO of Lunds & Byerlys, feels strongly about what people with disabilities bring to his business. “The reality is we are a better company and one that is more engaged with the community when we have a diverse workforce that reflects the communities we serve. What is abundantly clear any time you see one of these team members in action is that disabilities don’t define us. It’s just the opposite. We’re defined by our abilities.”

Spokesperson Aaron Sorenson estimates that around 100 people with disabilities work for Lunds & Byerlys. “We receive very positive feedback from our customers, as these employees play an immensely important role in creating a sensational shopping experience,” Sorenson said. “The end result is a deeply meaningful and rewarding experience not only for our customers, but



Tres Lund (left) with Brett Nelson

also for everyone on the store team.”

Tres Lund said, “For many of these individuals, this is much more than a job. It’s a career, and we couldn’t be more honored that they’ve chosen to build their career at Lunds & Byerlys.”

PACER’s endowment fund: ‘Why I give’

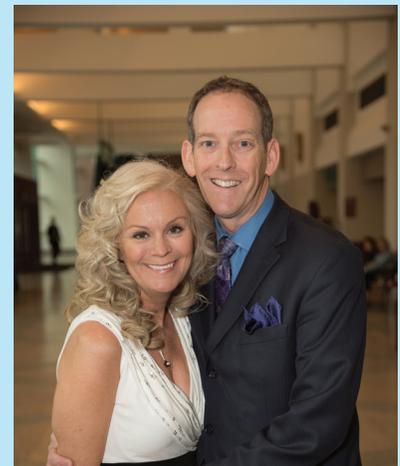
The families of children with disabilities and children who are bullied count on PACER. That’s why PACER has established a \$20 million endowment fund: to help ensure that PACER will always be there to help children and families as challenges arise.

PACER endowment fund donor Don McNeil says, “As the parent of two children with disabilities, I know firsthand how important PACER is. Families like mine count on PACER. I’m honored to do anything I can to make sure that families of children with disabilities, and those who are bullied, can count on PACER for help.”

Your gift to PACER’s endowment is permanently invested; only the annual investment income is spent. An endowment reduces the impact of economic downturns and fluctuating funding. Endowment income enables PACER to create innovative new programs, without taking away resources from the PACER programs families depend on every day. With government funding increasingly uncertain, your gift to PACER’s endowment fund couldn’t be more timely.

There are many ways to give. Donors who are older than 70-½ can donate up to \$100,000 per year directly to PACER as part of their mandatory IRA distribution without incurring income taxes on the distribution. It’s always important to consult your attorney or financial advisor to discuss how to make your contribution to PACER in a tax-friendly way.

For more information about PACER’s endowment, contact Paula Goldberg, PACER’s Executive Director, at (952) 838-9000 or pgoldberg@PACER.org.



Julie and Don McNeil

California teen is a leader for bullying prevention

Mai Mishan is committed to creating a world without bullying! She was just 10 years old when she and her family attended the opening event for the Los Angeles office of PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center in 2015.

"I did not expect that evening to have such an impact on her," said Michal Mishan, Mai's mother. "She was touched by the stories of those who have been bullied, and she wanted to do something about it."

Now 13 years old, Mai continues to work with PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center in Los Angeles and with Judy French, its staff member there, to organize fundraisers and coordinate Unity Day activities at her school. She is a member of PACER's Youth Advisory Board on bullying prevention in Los Angeles.

In October 2017, Mai and Michal organized a charity ride at Soul Cycle, an indoor cycling studio, in Calabasas, Calif. The studio was decorated in orange, uplifting and inspiring songs were played, and all participants received PACER's official bullying prevention T-shirt.

Mai followed up the successful fundraiser by coordinating school-wide events on Unity Day, Oct. 25, and involved every teacher and the more than 1,200 students at her school; she distributed handwritten notes to the faculty and spoke at the school's first-ever Unity Day assembly.

School officials wholeheartedly supported Mai's efforts; one said they appreciated her "initiative and positive energy."



Mai Mishan (left) and her mother Michal organized a successful fundraiser at Soul Cycle in Calabasas, Calif., for PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center.

As a result of Mai's influential leadership, Unity Day is now an official date on the school calendar.

"I appreciate her drive and her passion," Michal said, adding that Mai is seen as the face of bullying prevention at school and in the community.

"It is so wonderful what Mai and Michal have done to raise awareness of bullying prevention," said PACER Executive Director Paula Goldberg. "They are inspirational leaders and make the world a better place."

Bullying prevention toolkits offer year-round resources

PACER initiated National Bullying Prevention Month, held during October, to bring the issue of bullying to the forefront at the start of the school year, and PACER continues to provide innovative resources that can be used all year long.

The newest resource is "All In," a free year-long classroom toolkit with a new lesson each week for educators. It is designed to create environments in which every student is included, involved, and invested in preventing and addressing bullying. The toolkit features 32 weeks of online materials, which contain resources and activities appropriate for grades K-12, that can be downloaded from PACER's website.

"These online resources are easy for educators to implement, and they inspire students to be invested in creating safe and supportive schools and communities through education, engagement, and peer interaction," said Julie Hertzog, director of PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center. "Since 'All In' was launched in September, more than 740 educators have registered to access the materials."

Each month focuses on a theme, and a new discussion topic is introduced each week. The lessons can be delivered within 20 minutes or can be adapted to fit other time constraints or other related classroom activities.

‘Choose Kind’: Official T-shirt from the film *Wonder* benefits PACER

In November, PACER supporters had the unique opportunity to see an advance screening of the highly anticipated film *Wonder*, starring Julia Roberts, Owen Wilson, and Jacob Tremblay, at the newly remodeled Imagine Willow Creek Theatre in Plymouth, Minn.

Based on the New York Times bestseller, *Wonder* tells the inspiring and heartwarming story of August Pullman. Born with facial differences that, up until now, have prevented him from going to a mainstream school, Auggie becomes the most unlikely of heroes when he enters the local fifth grade. As his family, his new classmates, and the larger community all struggle to find their compassion and acceptance, Auggie’s extraordinary journey unites them all and proves you can’t blend in when you were born to stand out.

The inspiring take-away message of the story is to always “choose kind.”

To coincide with the theatrical release of the film, an official “Choose Kind” T-shirt is available for purchase through the online fundraising site Omaze (Omaze.com/wonder). Thanks to a partnership with *Wonder* and Lionsgate, a portion of the T-shirt sales support PACER’s National Bullying Prevention Center.

The film’s stars helped to promote this wonderful campaign and shared photos of themselves wearing the shirts on social media, encouraging fans to show the world that kindness matters.



Daveed Diggs, who stars as Auggie’s teacher Mr. Browne in *Wonder*, showcases the “Choose Kind” T-shirt. To order, visit Omaze.com/wonder.

“We are thrilled to partner with Omaze, Lionsgate, and this incredible film,” said Julie Hertzog, director of PACER’s National Bullying Prevention Center. “It’s so important to reach young people and help educate them about bullying prevention. We need to take a lesson from Auggie and always choose to be kind.”

Omaze reported that this has been one of their most successful campaigns to date, and the campaign has been extended. To learn more and to purchase a shirt, visit Omaze.com/wonder.

Continued from previous page

“All In’ provides everything needed for a presenter to deliver information on addressing and preventing bullying within the school, in online platforms, and in the community,” Hertzog said. It is available to download for free at <https://tinyurl.com/pacerallin>.

PACER also produces the “You’re Not Alone, We’re Here for You” toolkit, designed for awareness raising events at a school or in the community.

The toolkit comes with items for 50 participants, including posters, flyers, handouts, buttons, bookmarks, and more. It can be used in coordination with a bullying prevention event, school open house, or parent teacher conferences, or can be used as a stand-alone activity.

The “You’re Not Alone, We’re Here for You” toolkit is \$75 and can be ordered via the website at <https://tinyurl.com/paceryourenotalone>.



Advocate Hassan Samantar is a lifeline for Somali, East African families

PACER staff multicultural advocate Hassan Samantar works primarily with families from his native Somalia and other East African countries, such as Ethiopia and Eritrea, places where special education is understood differently among parents.

“It’s very difficult for [East African] parents to understand the concept of special education, particularly when we’re talking about invisible disabilities such as attention deficit disorder or emotional and behavioral disorders,” Samantar said. “They see disabilities as being physical or cognitive, or having something to do with mental health. There’s not even a comparable word for ‘disability’ in the Somali language.”

In his day-to-day work with families, Samantar works through both language and cultural barriers to educate parents that the U.S. special education system will help their child be successful. Over the last 10 years, Samantar guessed that he’s helped more than 500 children.

Among them is an 18-year-old girl who had been a refugee and was dealing with severe anxiety. Her mother was diagnosed with cancer, and the girl was working the night shift at a turkey processing plant to help support her parents and younger siblings.

Academically, she was a strong student, but her anxiety hampered her ability to take standardized tests. She fainted twice while attempting to take the tests.

“A county social worker who worked with the girl’s mother suggested that she call PACER,” Samantar said. “I recommended that she start by getting a diagnosis, which she did, and then we had her evaluated for special education services.”

The girl was initially denied, but Samantar pursued an Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE), which qualified her for services. After six or seven meetings with school staff, the girl’s Individualized Education Program



Hassan Samantar

(IEP) team agreed for her to graduate based on the work she had completed.

“If PACER was not there, she was on the verge of dropping school,” Samantar said. “A few years later, she called to thank me and tell me that she was graduating from the Minnesota State University, Mankato with a nursing degree.”

Samantar has proved to be a trusted advocate for families in his community, but his journey to PACER was somewhat unconventional.

He was 20 years old when he left Somalia in 1985, after graduating from high school. He spent some time in Europe before coming to the United States to study marketing in Washington, D.C.

After graduation, Samantar was recruited by Nordstrom, and he was consistently promoted through the company, from department manager to retail buyer. In 2007, he and

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“

There’s not even a comparable word for ‘disability’ in the Somali language.

— Hassan Samantar, PACER advocate

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PACER's 2018 Minnesota Legislative priorities

An important part of PACER Center's commitment to children with disabilities is ensuring that the state and federal laws protecting their rights remain strong. PACER works in coalition with other disability organizations in Minnesota to support special education laws and other related legislation.

Minnesota's Legislature convenes this year on Feb. 20. PACER's state legislative priorities for the 2018 session are:

- **Improve the use of assistive technology (AT)**

PACER has learned from its work with families and professionals that assistive technology (AT) is often underutilized as a tool to support students' learning and communication needs. Although it is required that AT be considered for all students with disabilities as part of their Individualized Education Program (IEP), parents are not always meaningfully engaged in that discussion. PACER is a member of the Minnesota Department of Education's Assistive Technology Advisory Group, which was formed as a result of legislation requiring that the state study the use of assistive technology in Minnesota schools. The group surveyed families and districts and is currently finalizing a report that will include recommendations for changes to improve implementation of AT for students who need it.

- **Secure adequate funding for special education**

PACER seeks increased state funding for special education to ensure all Minnesota children receive the quality of education they need.

- **Support the implementation of state system for online Individualized Education Programs**

PACER supports efforts to implement a statewide online Individualized Education Program (IEP) system that will enhance efficiency of record keeping and allow IEP information to easily be transferred when a student moves between school districts.

Other priorities PACER supports include:

- Training time for paraprofessionals to better understand students' unique needs
- Continuing expansion of positive behavioral interventions and supports, and limiting the use of suspension and other exclusionary discipline practices
- Improving educational services for young children with emotional or behavior disorders
- Helping youth with disabilities obtain meaningful employment in the most integrated setting

PACER's public policy work is paid for with private funds.

Continued from previous page

his family decided to relocate to Minnesota.

Upon arrival, he happened to meet an old friend at a community event who knew PACER Executive Director Paula Goldberg.

"I never knew PACER services existed for kids who had disabilities," Samantar said. "I just made a comment that I would love to have a position that allowed me to give back to my community in a similar way. Two days later, I got a call from Paula, and I was in her office for an interview."

Coming from the corporate world, where success is measured by profit, Samantar said PACER gave him an opportunity to make a real difference in the lives of children and families.

Research shows that special education is most effective when parents participate in their child's educational experience. Samantar serves as a role model for the

families he works with, showing how to be engaged with teachers and school staff, particularly when discussing a child's Individualized Education Program (IEP).

"Unlike an interpreter, who can only legally translate the language, I can elaborate on what is being said in IEP meetings and explain what the school is proposing and how it helps the child," he said. "Parents don't always understand that they have the right to due process and to disagree with what the school is proposing. In Somalia, parents are not involved with the school."

Samantar takes a very hands-on approach to working with families. He helps them understand the basic ideas of special education and an IEP, and presents workshops that he adapts to the needs of parents.

"The work I do," he said, "it's very rewarding and very gratifying."

Minnesota faces shortage of special education teachers

Public schools in Minnesota and across the nation are facing the most serious shortage of teachers since the 1990s. Special education is one of the hardest hit teacher specialties, second only in severity to math.

Supply and demand

According to Robyn Widley, director of the Special Education Division of the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), there are complex factors contributing to the shortage. In the end, she said, it comes down to supply and demand. Along with overall increases in student enrollment, there is an increase in the number of Minnesota students receiving special education services. At the same time, Widley noted, “We have seen a reduction in supply; nationally, there was a 35 percent reduction in teacher education enrollment between 2009 and 2014.”

Along with declining numbers entering the teaching profession, teacher attrition contributes greatly to the teacher shortage. According to the nonprofit Learning Policy Institute, nearly 8 percent of teachers leave the profession each year. Along with baby boomers retiring, younger millennial teachers tend to change jobs more frequently.

A plan in place

Widley said that MDE and its multi-agency partners are focused on a variety of strategies to recruit and retain teachers. “This group is using Minnesota special education workforce data, current research and policy recommendations related to recruitment and retention, and strategies being utilized in other states and countries to inform the development of a five-year plan. In addition, the importance of diversifying the workforce is a key consideration in all MDE Special Education activities related to recruitment and retention of special educators.”



Minimizing the impact

Widley said that administrators and teachers in Minnesota are extremely committed to meeting the needs of students receiving special education services.

“They do a remarkable job of filling positions in challenging circumstances,” she said.

Currently, districts and regions use strategies that include signing bonuses, requesting special permission licenses for current staff, and “grow your own” efforts that include tuition support and pathways for paraprofessionals to become licensed teachers.

“All of these strategies are aimed at minimizing any impact on students in special education,” Widley said.

Individuals who are interested in helping with the shortage situation can contact Rebecca Jackson of the MDE at (651) 582-8409 or Rebecca.Jackson@state.mn.us.



Robyn Widley

MDE recruitment strategies

- Tuition support
- "Grow Your Own" initiatives (assisting public school employees in becoming licensed teachers)
- Alternative pathways to licensure
- Troops to Teachers (attracting qualified military personnel to enter teaching as a second career)
- Teacher Cadet training (introducing high school students to teaching through a dual-credit accrual high school course)

Teens and depression: Thoughts from a parent advocate

Sometimes teens are moody or disagreeable, but if that moodiness grows into an overwhelming sense of anger or despair that does not go away, parents should take notice.

Renelle Nelson, who heads PACER's Children's Mental Health and Emotional or Behavioral Disorders Project, says that it can be hard for parents to know the difference between a teen who is experiencing depression and one who is showing typical teen behaviors.

The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) reported in 2015 that approximately three million teens, aged 12 to 17, have experienced a major depressive episode. This is equivalent to more than 12 percent of adolescents. "Signs that your child is depressed includes behavior that interferes with their relationships or prevents them from accomplishing things they want to do," Nelson said. "Teens who are depressed may have issues with insomnia or loss of energy. Their self-image may suffer and they may have a hard time concentrating."

Nelson noted that experiencing symptoms for seven to 10 days may indicate depression. "Depression can also be triggered by, among other things, bullying, struggles in school, or an unmet mental health need," she said. "Sometimes it is not obvious. Teens may try to mask their symptoms and instead complain about frequent physical discomfort, or be overly sensitive to criticism and rejection."

Nelson advises parents not to overreact, but to pay close attention to their teen if they start to see risky behaviors.

"Communication between parents and teens can be a challenge, and this gets even harder if your child is depressed," she said, adding that a good first step is to have your child undergo a checkup that includes a mental health screening by their pediatrician.

Don't wait to get help if your teen is mentioning suicide or is engaging in self-harming behaviors. Take immediate steps to get them support through a mental health provider or crisis response. In Minnesota, Mental Health Crisis Response is available in every county; go to childcrisisresponse.mn.org to obtain a local phone number.

How to help

When teenagers face depression or other mental health challenges, parents may worry about how to help support them. Finding professional help for a teen with depression can be challenging, but keeping your teenager engaged in their treatment means paying attention to what they want. Schools can also help support a teenager with depression



by providing them with extra support through a social worker, nurse, a 504 Plan, or special education.

Members of PACER's Youth Advisory Board on Mental Health, many of whom struggle with depression, wrote a resource for parents, teachers, and others on how to help support a teen with mental health needs. Here are some ideas they suggest:

- **Ask me if it's a good time to talk.** Teens are individuals; some may want to talk immediately, others may want to think things over first.
- **Listen to me without interrupting.**
- **Let me choose how to communicate.** Your teen may prefer to write a letter.
- **Be patient with me.** Sometimes a teen with depression won't be able to follow your words, and you may need to repeat them.
- **Allow me to approach you when I feel you're ready to listen.**
- **Let me talk to another trusted adult for help.** Your teen may not feel comfortable talking to you about depression.

For more suggestions from the Youth Advisory Board, go online to <https://tinyurl.com/paceryouthtips>

Supporting a teenager with depression means being patient, understanding, involved, and supportive. It also means educating yourself. PACER Center has advocates who can help answer your questions related to mental health, insurance, county systems of support for children and youth with mental health needs, and school support. For more information go to PACER.org/cmh.

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, or visit PACER.org/workshops.

CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH, EMOTIONAL/BEHAVIORAL

Parent Leadership Training on Children's Mental Health

Parents will learn to effectively share their story in order to influence better services and supports in their local areas for children and youth with behavioral health needs in Minnesota.

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

Working Effectively with Culturally Diverse Families of Children and Youth with Behavioral Health Challenges

A unique panel of parents who are advocates and experts in cultural diversity will share effective strategies for building collaboration with diverse families.

- **Jan. 23, Noon to 1:00 p.m. (Online Webinar)**

Challenging Behaviors & Transition Planning Strategies for Success

Parents will learn about the role of special education and Section 504 in promoting effective transition planning for teenagers with behavioral health challenges throughout the high school years.

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

Crisis Planning at School for Children with Challenging Behaviors: Making a Plan That Works

When children or teenagers experience escalating behaviors at school, a proactive crisis plan can help support recovery and wellness. Parents will gain information on strengths-based planning in the school setting.

- **Feb. 27, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (Chisago Lakes)**
- **March 13, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (Willmar)**

Challenging Behaviors & School Success: The Role of Section 504 and Special Education

Parents will learn how Section 504 and special education can address school-based concerns.

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

EARLY CHILDHOOD

Becoming an Active Partner in Your Child's Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Parents of children ages 3 to 5 will gain an overview of the early childhood special education process and how to take an active lead in the IEP process.

- **Jan. 11, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (PACER)**
Streaming option also available

Becoming an Active Partner in Your Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP)

Parents will learn about early intervention services, the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP), how they can be involved in writing child and family outcomes, and become active participants in the IFSP process.

- **Jan. 27, 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. (PACER)**
Streaming option also available
- **May 7, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (PACER)**
Streaming option also available

A Seat at the Table: The Family Voice is Needed

Parents of children ages birth to five who are on IFSPs or IEPs will become prepared to actively participate as informed stakeholders at all levels of decision-making.

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

Early Childhood Parent Leadership Training

This interactive training for parents of young children up to age seven with developmental delays or disabilities will help parents learn how to make their voices heard and enhance their knowledge of the early childhood special education process. Email jswett@pacer.org for additional information.

- **April 21, 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. (PACER)**

Working with Culturally or Linguistically Diverse Families in Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education (EI/ECSE)

Cultural liaisons and foreign language interpreters will build their capacity in order to enhance communication and families' understanding at IFSP and IEP meetings for children ages birth to five.

- **April 27, 9:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. (PACER)**
Streaming option also available

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

Families will learn how to actively participate in the transition process from Part C Early Intervention Services to Part B Preschool Services, or other services in the community.

- **Feb. 20, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (PACER)**
Streaming option also available

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

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

- **March 13, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (PACER)**
Streaming option also available

HEALTH

Getting the Help You Need

This workshop will offer information to parents of children with special health care needs on state and county services, including what is available, who is eligible, and how to find what you need.

- **March 8, 6:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. (PACER)**

Medical Transition: Transitioning from Pediatric to Adult Care

Families will learn to navigate the transition from their pediatric provider to adult care provider with tips and a strategic plan to make the change successfully.

- **March 15, 6:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. (PACER)**

Care Coordination: Empowering Families

Parents of children with special health care needs will learn to organize medical information, coordinate care, navigate the health care system (including waivers and insurance), and improve communication skills. Email Linda.Chervitz@PACER.org for an application to participate.

- **April 7, All day event (Twin Cities area)**

HOUSING

Housing: Starting the Journey, Three-part workshop series

Step 1 — How do we start?

Help your son or daughter get started with their vision for community living, housing, and services. An overview of housing and services options will be provided.

- **Feb. 12, 6:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. (PACER)**

Step 2 — How is it paid for?

The “big picture” view of how housing is funded through federal, state, and county resources. Learn how your son or daughter can become eligible for and access funding. Topics include income supplements and budgets.

- **Feb. 26, 6:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. (PACER)**

Step 3 — What are the options?

A more detailed explanation of individualized housing and services options will be provided by a panel of parents, young adults, and housing providers as they share their journeys through the process.

- **March 13, 6:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. (PACER)**

PACER's 14th Annual Housing Resource and Information Fair

Families can meet with service providers, state and county representatives, and resource and referral organizations to discuss housing options, services, supports, and related issues for children and young adults with disabilities.

- **April 14, 9:00 a.m. to Noon (PACER)**

PARENT TRAINING

The ABCs of the IEP: Making the Individualized Education Program (IEP) Work for Your Child

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

- **Feb. 5, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (Mound)**
- **March. 1, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (PACER)**

Special Education and the Important Role You Play for Your Child

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

- **Jan. 23, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (PACER)**

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

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

- **Feb. 22, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (Mound)**
- **March 3, 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. (PACER)**

Meeting the Financial Challenge: Helping Ensure Quality of Life for Your Son or Daughter with Special Needs

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

- **March 19, 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. (PACER)**

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

A screening of “Including Samuel,” a documentary by filmmaker Dan Habib about educational inclusion. Q & A with a PACER advocate will occur before and after the film

- **April 26, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (PACER)**

Life Planning for People with Disabilities

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

- **May 8, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (Guardianship) (PACER)**
- **May 22, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (Trusts) (PACER)**

SIMON TECHNOLOGY CENTER

‘Appy Hour’: Apps for Health & Wellness

This ‘Appy Hour’ will feature a variety of apps to support health and wellness for all ages, including those apps for monitoring mood, tracking physical activity, learning about guided meditation, and more.

- **Jan. 18, 11 a.m. to noon (PACER)**
Streaming option also available

PODD: Pragmatic Organization of Dynamic Displays – 2-Day Introductory Training

This two-day introductory training on Pragmatic Organization Dynamic Displays (PODD) with Kelly Fonner introduces participants to a low-tech robust communication system for non-verbal children and young adults. Cost: \$275. Lunch included in price.

- **Feb. 8 & 9, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. (PACER)**

Harnessing the Power of Google: Chrome Extensions for Reading, Writing, and Organization

This workshop will explore Google Chrome extensions and apps to increase student productivity and learning in high school, college, and beyond. Tools that support

students with reading, writing, and organization will be discussed.

- **Feb. 15, 1:00 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. (PACER)**
Streaming option also available

Assistive Technology: What Is It and How to Use It

Students with disabilities can benefit from assistive technology (AT). What AT is, the consideration process, and what tools are available for students of all ages will be discussed.

- **March 21, 11:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. (PACER)**
Streaming option also available

TECH FOR GIRLS CLUB

Roll up your sleeves and get messy while having fun with science, technology, engineering, and math! Middle school girls with disabilities of all skill levels are welcome.

Programming Lights and Sounds

Get geeky in this hands-on lab! Learn how to program lights and sounds on the LightBlue Bean, a simple-to-use microcontroller that is perfect for smart phone projects.

- **Jan. 20, 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. (PACER)**

Koding with Kodu

Come learn how to code with Kodu, a visual programming language created by Microsoft. Use coding skills to create your own game!

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

TECH FOR TEENS CLUB

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

Programming Robots

It's all about robotics!

- **Jan. 6, 10:00 a.m. to Noon (PACER)**

Building Websites

Learn how to create your own website!

- **Feb. 3, 10:00 a.m. to Noon (PACER)**

A Star Wars 3D Printed Universe

A guest speaker from a galaxy far far away will present the basics behind 3D printing!

- **March. 3, 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. (PACER)**

Building Robots

Robots are cool!

- **March 17, 2018, 10:00 a.m. to Noon (PACER)**

TRANSITION

Supplemental Security Income (SSI): First Steps

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

- **Jan. 31, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (PACER)**
- **Feb. 27, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (Faribault)**
- **March 7, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (Arden Hills)**
- **March 28, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (St. Cloud)**
- **April 9, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (New Ulm)**

Mapping Dreams: The Transition to Adulthood

Don't miss this workshop for families of 7th to 12th grade students! Learn what you can do to plan a successful transition from high school to postsecondary education training, employment, and independent living. Receive a free planning guide.

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

What Families Need to Know about Youth Career Pathways and WorkForce Centers

Families will learn about career planning options for in-school and out-of-school youth with disabilities, and where to find help launching youth on the path to employment.

- **Feb. 15, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (Duluth)**
- **April 19, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (Rush City)**

ABCs of the IEP for Transition-age Students and Their Parents

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

- **March 6, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (Burnsville)**
- **March 15, 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. (Bemidji)**
- **April 11, 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. (Marshall)**

Assistive Technology that Supports Independent Living for Young Adults with Disabilities

Learn how assistive technology can help young adults with disabilities gain independence. Discussion will include tools to support time management, decision-making, healthy living, and money management.

- **April 5, 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. (PACER)**
Streaming option also available

Transition: Pathway to the Future

Parents of students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) in eighth grade and above will gain a broad understanding of how appropriate transition services support planning for life after high school.

- **April 12, 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. (Willmar)**

Getting and Keeping the First Job

Competitive employment is the cornerstone of a successful transition to adult living for youth with disabilities. Youth and parents will learn about preparing for and keeping a job.

- **April 24, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (PACER)**
Streaming option also available

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

Resources

Special Education Record Keeping Folders

Special education records contain important information for making educational decisions. This set of six folders helps parents organize school paperwork to help them make good decisions about their children's education. Also available in Spanish, Hmong, and Somali. 2014.

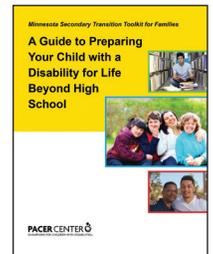
\$10 | 11+ copies, \$8 each | PHP-a5



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

Helps make transition planning easier. Topics include healthcare, benefits planning, postsecondary education, housing, and more. Updated 2017.

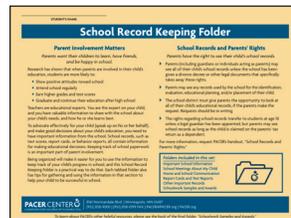
\$9 | ST-41



School Record Keeping Folders (General Education)

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

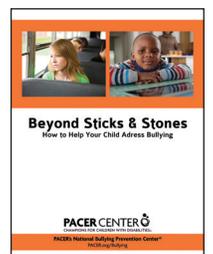
\$10 | 11+ copies, \$8 each | MPC-6



Beyond Sticks & Stones: How to Help Your Child Address Bullying

This book offers bullying prevention strategies for children at home, in school, and online. It is filled with information and practical tools that can help parents and others take action against bullying. A special section of the book provides specific tips for parents of children with disabilities.

\$5 | BP-7



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.

PACER offers ‘life changing’ technology for teen with learning disabilities

Misty’s 14-year-old daughter has a diagnosis of dyslexia and dysgraphia (a writing disorder), as well as other learning difficulties and anxiety. Misty first contacted PACER’s Simon Technology Center (STC) when the teen was a preschooler, and Misty describes those initial interactions as “life changing” for her daughter.

“We were introduced to beginner apps to help with reading and to a visual schedule,” Misty said. “My daughter thinks in pictures; once PACER helped me realize that, it changed how I teach her and how I parent her.”

Earlier this year, Misty and her daughter, who is now in ninth grade, returned to the Simon Technology Center to try out more sophisticated software and devices to help with written language. They focused on Dragon NaturallySpeaking, speech recognition software, at the STC.

“Paul Sanft, an assistive technology specialist at PACER, was so patient and kind,” Misty said. “My daughter was nervous to try the software, but Paul put her at ease and made it fun and relaxed.”

The teen had used other speech recognition or voice-to-text programs, but they were not as accurate; Misty’s daughter often internalized the mistakes and thought that she was doing something wrong.

“Paul assured her that she wasn’t doing it wrong and that voice-to-text is never perfect,” Misty said. “He also made it clear that using these tools is an important way of getting things done.”

Sanft said he was impressed by how quickly the teen mastered the software. “By the end of our time, she was actually training her mom on the software,” he said.

Since their time at the Simon Technology Center, Misty has noticed a “huge difference” in her daughter’s skills



Paul Sanft, PACER Assistive Technology Specialist, assured Misty’s daughter that tools such as voice-to-text software are an important way to get things done.

and confidence. She has written a report for school and is working on writing a book for her dad, detailing what she likes about him.

Additionally, she’s a big music fan, and enjoys both writing and searching for songs. The teen has become adept at searching for all kinds of information online.

“She’s confident now when she’s looking up information,” Misty said. “She’s fairly intuitive about the screen and great at navigating it, which is her strength.”

“She may struggle with academics for a long time, but she’s less scared to try now, and I appreciate where she is,” Misty added. “PACER gives us the tools to let her express herself better than before. A special thank you to PACER.”

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 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.

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Jennifer Hudson

PACER's Annual Benefit
Saturday, May 12, 2018

Tickets on sale now!



To reserve your tickets for the 2018 PACER Benefit on May 12 featuring Jennifer Hudson, please complete the form below and mail with check payment to PACER Center. **Reservations can also be made with credit card at PACER.org or by calling (952) 838-9000.**

Benefit Tickets (Please indicate number of each)

___ \$75 Friend ___ \$100 Supporter ___ \$150 Patron* ___ \$225 Benefactor*
___ \$300 Sponsor* ___ \$600 Champion* Total amount: \$_____

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

* 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

Please mail to: PACER Center, 8161 Normandale Blvd., Minneapolis, MN 55437-1044 | Email: PACER@PACER.org