

PACER awarded federal grant to establish Statewide Family Engagement Center

PACER Center has received a five-year Statewide Family Engagement Grant from the U.S. Department of Education, one of just eleven awarded nationally and the only one in the upper Midwest. “We are thrilled that PACER’s ability to provide high impact activities that will provide families and schools with the tools needed to understand their educational choices and how to achieve academic success has been recognized,” said Sharman Davis Barrett, PACER’s Project Director.

“PACER believes that parents are their children’s best advocates, and this project will provide them with the tools to make the best educational decisions, based on their child’s individual needs.”

The project will emphasize serving economically disadvantaged students, particularly those who come from culturally and racially diverse backgrounds, including students who are homeless, in foster care, or have a disability. The project will focus on the changes in Minnesota’s population and diversity in urban, rural, and suburban areas, with a goal of meeting the needs of the African American, Native American, Hispanic, Hmong, and Somali communities throughout the state. “Our staff of multicultural advocates is uniquely qualified to work with parents and schools to address the racial and cultural achievement gaps,” Sharman said.

PACER’s Minnesota Family Engagement Center is partnering with the Minnesota Department of Education and 25 organizations throughout the state, including school districts, charter schools, and community organizations. Sharman commented, “Our expectations for the success of this ground-breaking project are as high as parents’ expectations for their children.” ■

The legendary Beach Boys will headline PACER Benefit



It will be a night to remember when one of the most celebrated, influential, and successful bands of all time takes the stage at PACER’s Annual Benefit on Saturday, May 11 at the Minneapolis Convention Center. The Grammy Award-winning supergroup, led by Mike Love, has sold millions of albums and performed at the White House, Super Bowl, Live Aid, and more. PACER’s Benefit will play host to one of music’s most renowned and beloved acts. Don’t miss your chance to see The Beach Boys and support PACER!

Known for their “California Sound,” The Beach Boys’ songs influenced a generation of musicians and changed the face of music forever. Their numerous hits include “Surfin’ USA,” “I Get Around,” “Don’t Worry Baby,” “The Sloop John B,” “Kokomo,” and “Good Vibrations,” which is widely considered to be one of the greatest masterpieces in the history of rock and roll.

“PACER Center is thrilled to welcome The Beach Boys to our Annual Benefit,” said PACER Executive Director Paula Goldberg. “They have recorded some of the greatest songs in the history of

‘Benefit’ continued on page 2

Benefit tickets on sale now! PACER.org | (952) 838-9000

PACER opens Innovation Lab for assistive technology

PACER's Innovation Lab, presented by Paul's Pals, is the new center for PACER projects on assistive technology, including the Tech for Teens Club, Tech for Girls Club, and EX.I.T.E. Camp. Students with disabilities come together to learn about emerging assistive technology, as well as create and collaborate with technology and learn about new and emerging technologies like virtual reality.

"Paul's Pals is thrilled to be a part of the Innovation Lab, providing kids of all abilities the opportunity to explore the world around them through technology," said Jennifer Lewin, Paul's Pals Executive Director.

"The Innovation Lab is great because whether you are a beginner with technology or advanced, we have something to make your experience great," said Paul Sanft, assistive technology specialist at PACER's Simon Technology Center.

The Innovation Lab offers a safe place to learn about science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) for students with any disability. They can learn to code, create their own websites, explore the basics of 3D printing, and create, program, and draw with robots. The Innovation Lab also hosts unique projects for parents and professionals, including workshops and live-stream events.

Some of the cutting-edge tools offered in the Innovation Lab include:

Clevertouch interactive display (height adjustable)

- Allows learners to interact with the material presented for a more immersive learning experience.

Electronic height adjustable tables

- Provides comfortable access for individuals in wheelchairs, smaller children, or for standing.



A student experiments with virtual reality in PACER's Innovation Lab.

Hue-changing, non-flicker LED lighting

- Helps eliminate stress for individuals with sensitivity to lighting. Hue-changing options allow for a warmer or cooler tone to help manage relaxation (warm) or concentration (cool).

Alternative seating options

- Provides many ways to help students stay focused. Ball chairs, for example, can help students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) release energy while staying seated.

Alternative keyboards, mice, and computer access devices

- A wide variety of devices to help people interact with computers and tablets, like keyless keyboards, switch interfaces, touch screens, braille screen readers, and more. ■

'Benefit' continued from page 1

popular music and are in the very top echelon of live performers. We are so excited for our guests to witness an amazing show that they will never forget!"

Attend this exciting Benefit for a wonderful evening that also includes PACER's fabulous silent and live auctions. Here's your chance to be part of one of the nonprofit community's preeminent events. "Our guests will have a great time while knowing the price of their ticket

supports PACER's programs for children with disabilities and their families and PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center," Paula Goldberg said.

Tickets start at \$75 and include the amazing silent and live auctions. The silent auction begins at 6:00 p.m. and the live auction and benefit performance at 8:00 p.m.

Reserve your tickets now! See page 16 for ordering information. ■

Q&A with Jimmy Pitaro, President of ESPN and Co-Chair of Disney Media Networks

Jimmy Pitaro, President of ESPN and Co-Chair of Disney Media Networks, is a member of PACER's National Business Advisory Board. "Jimmy has been an amazing friend and wonderful supporter," said PACER Center Executive Director Paula Goldberg. "We asked him a few questions about his involvement with PACER Center."

Q. How did you get involved with PACER?

A. My dear friend David Goldberg introduced me to his mother Paula Goldberg, PACER Center co-founder, almost twenty years ago, and I immediately saw their passion and commitment to families with children with disabilities and wanted to get involved. I consider it a true privilege to be associated with this fantastic organization.

Q. Why is your involvement with PACER important to you?

A. As the father of two school-aged children, bullying prevention has taken on greater significance to me. School today is different from when I attended—cyberbullying is rampant, and this is only amplified for kids with disabilities. We need a concerted effort to prevent bullying and help youth choose kindness. PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center is for all children who are bullied.

I want to be part of the solution. PACER's goals also directly align with ESPN's Shred Hate initiative. Shred Hate works with the X Games and Major League Baseball and is devoted to eradicating bullying in schools through education and compassion, and encouraging kids to choose kindness.

Q. What do you tell people about PACER?

A. That I am thrilled to be part of an organization that seeks to help children live better and fuller lives, and are allowed to be who they are without fear of bullying. I was honored to serve as co-chair of the first Los Angeles Gala in September 2018 and help to raise a substantial amount for this worthwhile cause. My daughter is a member



Jimmy Pitaro, President of ESPN and Co-Chair of Disney Media Networks

of the Los Angeles Youth Board for PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center. I am so proud of her for embracing PACER's bullying prevention message and being part of the solution.

Q. Why is PACER important?

A. PACER was created with a focus on families with children with disabilities. I am so proud they have taken the lead in this area and have also become the National Bullying Prevention Center, preventing all children from being bullied. They are

also leaders in helping parents improve the quality of children's lives. PACER offers a variety of inspiring programming to assist families and youth dealing with this epidemic.

Q. What do you see in PACER's future?

A. PACER will continue to make a tangible difference by educating and inspiring people to take action for a safe and supportive environment for school-aged youth. I also plan to take some learnings from my time as a business advisory board member and ensure we're all speaking with one voice in our mutual efforts to use kindness as a tool against bullying. ■

“ I am thrilled to be part of an organization that seeks to help children live better and fuller lives. ”

– Jimmy Pitaro

Parents with High Expectations Project empowers parents to play a stronger role in their children's education

Cultural barriers can prevent some parents from gaining a full understanding of their children's academic performance in order to engage in meaningful discussions with their children's teachers and school staff. Parents should be able to address the high expectations they have for their child's education, regardless of background. That's where PACER's "Parents with High Expectations Project" comes in.

"PACER's multicultural advocates met one-on-one with Hispanic, Hmong, Somali, and African American parents in their homes or community settings. We gathered baseline information from the parents to assess their involvement in their child's education, their expectations, and the challenges they faced," project lead Jody Manning, Director of PACER's Parent Training and Information Center, said about the project.

The project covers a wide range of topics, including academic progress, advocating for your child, engagement in your child's education, high academic expectations, how to communicate with school staff, information and referral, school attendance, school district structure, and state- and district-wide tests.

Hassan Samantar, one of PACER's multicultural staff advocates, works with Somali American parents. He prefaced his work with the Parents with High Expectation project by saying, "All parents, no matter

their background, want to see their children succeed in school." Hassan added, "It's challenging for parents from different cultures to monitor their children's progress and

help them succeed. There is often a language barrier, and the educational system differs greatly from the one the parents came from. The parents are used to a system where the school had sole responsibility for educating the child. In the U.S., parents are expected to participate. It can be very intimidating for them."

Hassan explained, "Most parents didn't understand how to read a report card or interpret a Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA) report. They needed to learn what it meant if their child was at the 50th percentile and why they should be concerned." The parents he worked with gathered their child's educational records, and he helped them understand their meaning.

"I went with them to a parent conference and asked questions of the teachers," Hassan said. "I modeled what the parents should ask. At the next conference, the parent asked the questions, and afterward I critiqued and offered suggestions." Hassan and the other multicultural advocates work one-on-one with parents to help them understand tests and reports, how to work with and form relationships with teachers, and how to encourage high expectations.

'High Expectations' continued on page 5



94% of parents said their child is now performing better in reading because of the help the parents received from PACER's multicultural staff.

Alison Bakken:

A healthy endowment helps PACER families

Alison Bakken is involved with PACER in three ways: as a parent of a daughter with a disability, as a long-term volunteer, and as a donor who focuses most of her giving on PACER's endowment.

"I'm passionate about PACER's mission," she said. "As the parent of a child with a disability, I want to support other families in the same situation."

Alison connected with PACER more than 10 years ago, and she's served in a variety of roles on PACER's Board of Directors and as a member of the audit committee. She was on the Board when the endowment was established. "Establishing a strong endowment is so important for being able to serve families and children now and in the future," she said. "A healthy endowment means PACER can weather short-term funding ups and downs so that families continue to receive the services they need."

Alison gives to PACER in two ways: through her United Way payroll deduction, she supports current programming, and a larger gift is earmarked for the endowment. "I tie my year-end gift to PACER's phone-a-thon, letting the caller know that the gift is coming and it's for the endowment."

Alison explained, "PACER has helped me become an advocate for my daughter. PACER advocates have



Alison Bakken and her family

come to Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings when needed. PACER's Simon Technology Center has given us access to a number of augmentative communication devices."

Alison hopes others will join her in supporting PACER's endowment. "Knowing that our community is committed to PACER through the endowment is exciting! It means PACER will be there for all families who need its help, and that we can do more, have an even greater impact. It's so needed, especially now."

"The great thing about the endowment is that there are so many ways to contribute! PACER can help find one that works best for you."

For more information about PACER's endowment, call Paula Goldberg at 952-838-9000. ■

'High Expectations' continued from page 4

The multicultural advocates measured the project's impact by following up with the parents after working with them for at least six months. The results were very positive and exceeded expectations. For example, 94 percent of the parents said their child is now performing better in reading because of the help the parents received from PACER's multicultural staff.

Parents were very happy with the skills-building training they received and the knowledge they gained. "I can see the difference in my child's efforts. For the first time, I'm involved in my child's education," one parent commented.

Another parent said, "My son and daughter are performing better in school this year because I know how to communicate and work with their teachers. My son is a lot happier and more engaged."

Along with one-on-one work with individual parents, the Parents with High Expectations Project includes community workshops, an academic tracking form, and a project website with informational resources available for download in four languages. Special thanks to the Graves Foundation for supporting this important project. ■

Creating their own future:

Empowering students to plan their post-high school life

PACER parent advocates Deanne Curran and Rachel Pearson hold “The ABCs of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) for Transition-age Students and Their Parents” workshops four times annually in a variety of locations around Minnesota. This workshop is unique in that most of PACER’s transition workshops are presented to parents; for this workshop, parents and their youth, eighth grade and older, both attend and divide into their respective groups. Deanne explains transition laws to parents and answers their questions, and Rachel works with the youth, creatively presenting content that is tailored to engage students with a variety of disabilities in different ways.

The advocates’ work with the family often isn’t finished when the workshop is over: Rachel recently received a phone call from the mother of a student who attended the workshop. The student had just learned she would not be allowed to participate in commencement because her IEP

included transition services after 12th grade. During the workshop, Rachel prepares students for this possibility. “Some school districts don’t allow students whose IEP includes post-high school special education services to participate in commencement,” Rachel said.

The student’s mother told Rachel, “My daughter is destroyed by this. She is so upset she can’t talk on the phone.” The student wanted advice about writing a letter to the school board to contest the district’s policy.

Rachel suggested that the student check the district’s website for its mission and core values, and focus her letter on connecting them to her right to participate in commencement. She encouraged the student to tell how hard she had worked to earn her cap and gown.

“Celebrating commencement with the kids who have been by your side for your entire school career is a rite of passage that happens once in a lifetime,” Rachel said.

The student’s heartfelt letter to the school board had a powerful effect. Not only did the district honor the student’s request to participate, they invited her to speak at commencement.

“The student’s mother said it was the happiest her daughter had ever been,” Rachel said.

The student’s self-advocacy resulted in the district changing their policy to allow any senior with an IEP to participate in commencement, and they thanked her for making their school a more inclusive place.

“That student found her voice and used it to carve her own path. We work hard at our ABCs workshops to give every student tools and resources so they can advocate for themselves.”

Workshop is tailored to students

The workshop is tailored to Minnesota students with disabilities. Under state law, planning for their transition to post-high school life begins no later than ninth grade. “The IEP is a critical planning tool for life after high school. How that life looks is different for each student,” Rachel said. She explained that when students reach transition age, it’s crucial that they move toward directing the IEP so that it reflects their hopes and dreams.

‘Future’ continued on page 7

Transition Publications

Transition Trek Game

An innovative and engaging board game that helps youth and young adults plan for life after high school. Players draw cards with questions related to careers, independent living, and self determination. Six game pieces included.

\$15 / ST-23

IEP Meeting Parent Tip Card for Transition-Age Students with Disabilities (Ages 14+)

Laminated cards with questions to ask during your child’s Individualized Education Program (IEP) meeting about the transition planning process. One copy free to Minnesota parents.

\$0.25 / 100+ copies, \$.20 each / AP-47

To order these publications, call PACER at (952) 838-9000, email PACER@PACER.org, or go to PACER.org/publications.



PACER's Health Information Center provides information, support, and advocacy

PACER's Health Information Center is a resource for families of children and young adults with disabilities and special medical needs such as diabetes, asthma, and other health issues. "We provide parents with support, advocacy, and information about the health care system, insurance, and government programs," said coordinator Pat Lang. "PACER promotes family-centered care and encourages family and professional collaboration at all levels of health care."

Pat and health advocate Linda Goldman Cherwitz provide individual help, trainings and workshops, online resources, and collaboration with local health care professionals and state and local agencies. "We work with parents to help them acquire advocacy skills within the health care system and information about health insurance and government programs," Pat explained.



Pat Lang and Linda Goldman Cherwitz

Linda also coordinates PACER's Parents and Residents Together program. The program brings together University of Minnesota resident doctors and parents to learn from each other about the care of children and youth with special health needs and disabilities.

Families can contact the Health Information Center at (952) 838-9000, by emailing pat.lang@PACER.org or linda.cherwitz@PACER.org, or online at PACER.org/health. ■

'Future' continued from page 6

"The evening flows like a conversation," Rachel explains. After an ice-breaker game—"Transition Trek," a board game developed by PACER to help young adults plan for life after high school—they discuss the meaning of the word "transition," the four federal laws that relate to transition planning, and important parts of the IEP. They also create a "Student Snapshot" for each student to use as a self-advocacy tool at IEP team meetings.

Because the students have a variety of disabilities, it's important to involve them in different ways. The slides presented are full of concrete, colorful images to engage the students.

"The goal of the workshop is to explain the process of transition planning on the IEP, and give the students some tools to better understand and actively participate," Rachel explained. She stresses the importance of self-advocacy as students plan their educational and employment paths after high school, and start thinking about what they may need to live as independently as possible in their community.

More information about IEP workshops is available on page 13 of this newsletter and at PACER.org/workshops. For more transition information and resources, go to PACER.org/transition. ■

Visualizing their futures

The student-centered ABC's workshops are highly visual and interactive. Students leave the workshop with helpful tools and access to PACER resources.

Students receive a flash drive that contains their "Student Snapshot" for use in IEP meetings. Rachel encourages them to add pictures, videos, and unique content that paints a picture of themselves. "After all, it's a snapshot of you," she tells them.

Another take away is a keychain containing a QR code (two-dimensional barcode) that, when scanned, links them to PACER's 'Transitioning to Life after High School' website. "The website contains a wealth of online information about transition planning created specifically for transition age students," Rachel said, "There are so many wonderful resources there for them to explore!" The website is located at PACER.org/students/transition-to-life.

Unity Day inspires a worldwide display of orange

National Bullying Prevention Month, founded by PACER 12 years ago, was celebrated not only in Minnesota but coast-to-coast and around the world in October. Unity Day, Oct. 24, was the centerpiece of the month's bullying prevention awareness activities.

King Features Syndicate cartoonists created innovative comic strips about what bullying looks like and how to be proactive about bullying prevention. Working closely with PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center, these artists celebrated Unity Day by promoting kindness, acceptance, and inclusion. The cartoons—which included strips Dennis the Menace, Baby Blues, Six Chix, and many others—incorporated orange and featured story lines highlighting the many different forms of bullying.

“Every day thousands of people experience bullying ... at school, work, or on the street. After speaking with PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center, we were inspired to highlight their efforts and all the good they do in our strips,” said Six Chix cartoonist Isabella Bannerman.

Schools across the nation and in Mexico, Brazil, and New Zealand showed their true colors by promoting Unity Day and its values of kindness, acceptance, and inclusion. Anne Arundel County School District (which includes Baltimore) in Maryland celebrated Unity Day using resources from PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center (NBPC). District superintendent George Arlotto took the lead in putting Unity Day front and center, saying “The AACSD family has been encouraged to wear orange on Oct. 24 to create a powerful and visible statement that we are committed to fostering acceptance and inclusion and eliminating hate and bullying.” PACER resources used by the district included 900 NBPC Unity Day posters displayed in 128 schools!

Minnesota celebrations were numerous and varied. KARE-11's “Breaking the News” featured the International School of Minnesota's celebration. The in-depth story about Unity Day spotlighted PACER Center, including an interview with NBPC Coordinator Bailey Huston. KARE-11 pointed out that PACER launched the day in 2011 as part of its National Bullying Prevention month.

Celebrities displaying a bright blaze of orange on Unity Day included Leighton Meister, Kelly Ripa, Ryan Seacrest, Carrie Underwood, and the hosts of ABC-TV's “The View.” In Hawaii, Governor David Ige appeared in a Unity Day video that encouraged Hawaiians to “Be kind. Live aloha every day.”

KARE-11's Karla Hult summed it up: “The Unity Day movement that started here in Minnesota is now reaching all corners of the world.” ■



Sunset Hill Elementary School in Minnesota



Students at Byran Middle School in Mississippi



Students at Minetto Elementary School in New York

PACER holds first L.A. Gala

PACER's first-ever Los Angeles Gala, which raised funds for the L.A. office of PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center, was a glamorous event that drew a star-studded crowd of 250 guests. The Gala, held on Sept. 13, was co-chaired by Jimmy Pitaro, ESPN President and Co-Chair, Disney Media Networks, and Chris Moore, producer of *Good Will Hunting* and *Manchester By the Sea*, both of whom are longtime members of PACER's National Business Advisory Board. Minnie Driver and the cast of her hit ABC-TV series "Speechless" were honored at the event. ■



Co-Chair Chris Moore



L-R: Kevin Campos, Sarahi Morales, Judy French, and Allison Levine



Guest of honor Minnie Driver, star of "Speechless"



Standing (L-R): Jonathan Blinderman, Bob Yari, and Amanda Harvey. Seated (L-R): Mary Holmes, Karen Davis Hodges, Laura Ziegler, and Kathryn Schotthoefer



Muffy MacMillan and Sarah Pillsbury



School avoidance, truancy, and mental health

school and parent, can help support the child.

Warning signs

What can a parent do to help a child who is struggling to get to school? Awareness of warning signs that can lead to school avoidance is a good start.

If a child starts to express concerns about what to expect at school or is concerned about being away from a

parent, has difficulty starting or completing their work, seems cut off from peers, or seeks frequent adult attention, they may be on the cusp of school avoidance. Renelle said, “It’s important to pay attention to these behaviors and address the student’s needs, because it is much easier to tackle school avoidance if it’s caught early on.”

Typical avoidant behaviors include:

- Complaining about feeling sick
- Crying or sadness
- Becoming easily frustrated or quick to anger
- Refusing to leave home, get on the bus, or walk into the school building

What parents can do

It’s important to rule out a medical issue by making an appointment with your child’s doctor. If there’s no physical cause for your child’s symptoms, work with the doctor to develop a plan to help your child manage their symptoms. The plan should include attending school every day. Next, you can start a conversation with your child about what is going on at school. “If they share their reasons for not attending school, validate their feelings and discuss how they can resolve stressful situations,” Renelle said. “Connect with school to see if they have noticed anything that is causing your child stress or

When students refuse to do their school work or go to school, families and schools often struggle with how to respond. “School refusal isn’t a behavior problem, it’s a sign that something isn’t working for the child,” says Renelle Nelson, coordinator of PACER’s Children’s Mental Health, Emotional and Behavioral Disorders Project. “Unlike truancy, it is not a deliberate choice.”

Sometimes school refusal is mild, and with support and understanding, children are able to return successfully. But two to five percent of all children experience school refusal as a result of anxiety or depression. “School avoidance may be a mental health issue,” Renelle explained. “A child or teen with anxiety or depression may find school overwhelming and, as a result, struggle to get to school or stay at school.”

Sometimes school districts and counties don’t recognize the difference between school avoidance and deliberate truancy. When a student misses a certain amount of time at school, excused or not excused, school districts are obligated to follow state rules related to truancy. Even when the parent has attempted to support their child’s school refusal at home or through collaboration with the school, lack of consistent attendance at school may be referred to the county for truancy. Once a child is referred to a county for truancy, it’s up to the county to determine next steps. Some counties have programs that help students with school avoidance or other legitimate reasons for lack of attendance, and together with the

“ **A child or teen with anxiety or depression may find school overwhelming and, as a result, struggle to get to school or stay at school.** ”
– Renelle Nelson

'School avoidance' continued on page 11

2019 Minnesota legislative priorities

An important part of PACER Center's commitment to children with disabilities is making sure that strong state and federal laws exist to protect their educational rights. At the state level, PACER works in coalition with other Minnesota disability organizations to support special education laws and related legislation.

Along with meeting with legislators and providing testimony on bills, PACER holds an annual Day at the Capitol, where families speak with legislators about their concerns and experiences. The 2019 event will be held on March 6.

When the Minnesota Legislature convened this year on Jan. 8, a total of 37 new members were sworn into the Minnesota House, comprising nearly 30 percent of its membership. PACER has been meeting with these new members, said PACER Center Assistant Director Gretchen Godfrey. "It's important to introduce legislators to PACER and to the rights and needs of children with disabilities," she said.

The composition of the Minnesota House is notable for another reason: Minnesota is the only state in the nation with a "split legislature." Democrats will be in the majority in the Minnesota House for the first time since 2015, while the Senate will remain under Republican control. ■

PACER's 2019 state legislative priorities include:

- **Increased funding for children's mental health services**
"There is broad agreement on the need for more mental health services for students," said Michael Carr, PACER's Public Policy Coordinator and a Parent Advocate. "We are hopeful that this will lead to bipartisan support for additional school-based mental health services."
- **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. "It's important that children with disabilities are seen as part of the 'regular' school population, and that the cost of special education services isn't blamed for budget problems," Gretchen said. "It's vital that the funding formula ensures that all children have access to the supports and resources they need to be successful in school."
- **Maintain Minnesota's strong special education laws**
Through the advocacy efforts of PACER and other disability organizations, Minnesota has enacted laws that support successful outcomes for students with disabilities. PACER will monitor proposed legislation to ensure that important provisions are maintained.
- **School discipline reform**
PACER has worked with other organizations on legislation that would limit the use of suspension and expulsion in schools, an important issue for all children. "We feel it's critical that students aren't excluded from school because they can't learn if they're not in class," Gretchen said.

'School avoidance' continued from page 10

anxiety. Share the plan you've made with your child's doctor with the school nurse or health staff."

Use a team approach to work with the school and your child to decrease identified sources of anxiety and stress that are causing the school avoidance or work refusal. Schools may use the school counselor, school social worker, or health aide to help support your child. Parents may find outside mental health support, and learn about relaxation training and how to set up consistent routines and expectations at home that include good sleep habits and proper nutrition.

Moving forward

Empathy should not extend to allowing your child to

miss school, Renelle noted. "Insist that your student attend school every day, even if it is initially for a limited amount of time. The longer a child is away from school, the harder it is for them to return successfully."

There is no quick way to fix school refusal, but by validating your child's struggle, developing an action plan to address it, and offering unconditional love and support, your child is more likely to get back on track for a successful school experience.

PACER's website has helpful information about children's mental health issues, including resources on understanding mental health and school avoidances, and a tip sheet for educational planning. Go to PACER.org/CMH for more information. ■

Workshops

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

CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH, EMOTIONAL/BEHAVIORAL

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

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

- **Feb. 7, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (PACER)**
Streaming option also available

Working With Families to Address School Avoidance and Truancy for Children With Mental Health Needs

Educators, mental health providers, social workers, and other professionals will gain information about supporting families with children who have mental health needs that impact school engagement and attendance.

- **Feb. 21, 12:00 p.m. to 1:00 p.m. (Online)**

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

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

- **Feb. 25, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (Willmar)**
- **March 11, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (Rochester)**
- **April 8, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (Forest Lake)**

Anxiety and School Success: Creating a Plan that Works

Parents and others will learn positive interventions for youth who struggle with anxiety and challenging behaviors, including the role of Section 504 and special education.

- **March 4, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (PACER)**
Streaming option also available

EARLY CHILDHOOD

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

Families will learn to understand and actively participate in the transition process from Part C Early Intervention services to Part B preschool services or other services in the community.

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

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

Parents of children ages three to five will gain an understanding of the early childhood special education process and learn how to take an active lead in the IEP process.

- **Feb. 19, 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 receive information to plan for this transition and learn strategies to help their child be successful.

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

Improving Learning Outcomes for Your Young Child

Families of young children ages birth to five will learn about evidence-based practices and how they can be used to increase family engagement and improve learning outcomes.

- **March 14, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (PACER)**
Streaming option also available

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

Cultural liaisons and language interpreters will increase their capacity to collaborate and provide assistance to enhance families' understanding at Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) and Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings for children ages birth to five.

- **March 22, 9:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. (PACER)**
Streaming option also available

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

Families will learn about Early Intervention services, the IFSP, and how they can be involved in writing child and family outcomes to become active participants in the IFSP process.

- **April 23, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (PACER)**
Streaming option also available

Early Childhood Parent Leadership Training

Parents of young children up to age seven with developmental delays or disabilities

participate in an interactive one-day training to learn how to make their voices heard, learn about the early childhood special education process, and build leadership skills. Contact Judy Swett for additional information. E-mail jswett@PACER.org.

- **April 27, 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. (PACER)**

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

Families will learn how to understand and actively participate in the transition process from Part C Early Intervention services to Part B preschool services or other services in the community.

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

EARLY CHILDHOOD AND ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY STREAMING WORKSHOP SERIES

This workshop series will introduce parents, early educators, and related service providers to the range and scope of the many assistive technology tools available to help young children with disabilities. **Live captioning provided.**

Introduction to Assistive Technology (AT) for Young Children

Participants will learn about the continuum of early childhood assistive technology, from simple to complex, and the research that supports the use of AT with young children.

- **Feb. 14, 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. (Online)**

AAC for Young Learners

Participants will learn about Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) and explore strategies and resources to implement communication tools in early childhood routines, settings, and classrooms.

- **Feb. 19, 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. (Online)**

Assistive Technology (AT) and Play in the Natural Environment

Participants will learn about assistive technology tools and strategies that make play more accessible for young children with disabilities in their natural routines and environments.

- **March 12, 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. (Online)**

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. 11, 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. 25, 6:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. (PACER)

Step 3 — What are the options?

A more detailed explanation of some 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 12, 6:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. (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. 28, 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 current school evaluation and IEP.

- March 2, 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. (PACER)

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

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

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

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

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

- April 1, 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. (Waseca)

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.

- April 16, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (Guardianship) (PACER)
- April 30, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (Trusts) (PACER)

SIMON TECHNOLOGY CENTER

Switch it Up! Understanding Switch Access for Computers and Tablets

Switches can help individuals with disabilities control a variety of devices, including computers, tablets, and communication devices. This workshop will provide information about how to set up switch access on an iPad, Android tablet, and computers.

- March 28, 1:00 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. (PACER)
Streaming option also available

A Recipe for Summer: Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)

Successful augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) implementation includes consistency and opportunity. Learn more about how to support the use of AAC over the summer break from school.

- May 15, 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m., (PACER)
Streaming option also available

TECH FOR GIRLS CLUB

Roll up your sleeves and get messy while having fun with science, technology, engineering, and math! Girls with disabilities, ages 11-18, of all skill levels are welcome.

Chariot Racing with Robots

Thomson Reuters will lead girls with disabilities in building their own chariot and learning how to code a Sphero robot to make their chariot move and race.

- Feb. 16, 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. Students

of all abilities are encouraged to attend.

Building Robots

Assemble a robot and program it to respond to the environment. Learn about the entire process of building a robot, from assembly to executing code.

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

TRANSITION

Supplemental Security Income (SSI): First Steps

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

- Feb. 4, 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. (New Ulm)
- March 27, 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. (Fond du Lac)
- April 30, 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. (St. Cloud)

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

Parents and students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) in 8th grade and above will learn to use the IEP to support the transition to adulthood. Students can register separately to attend a student workshop.

- Feb. 5, 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. (Faribault)
- Feb. 12, 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. (Woodbury)
- April 11, 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. (Fairmont)

Off to College: What to Know Before You Go

Families of youth who will attend two- or four-year postsecondary programs will gain essential information about changing rights, roles, and responsibilities, along with practical tips for student success.

- March 7, 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. (PACER)
Streaming option also available

Making the Transition Beyond High School: Technology to Support Success for College and Career

Learn about assistive technology that supports youth with disabilities at college and in their career. Demonstrations will include tools and apps for executive function, computer access, reading, writing, and notetaking.

- March 21, 2:00 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. (PACER)
Streaming option also available

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

Resources

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

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.

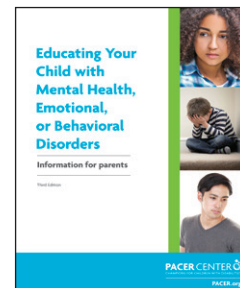
\$10 | 11+ copies, \$8 each | PHP-a5



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

This guide helps parents of children with mental health, emotional, or behavioral disorders participate effectively in special education planning, including school discipline policies, placement options, and behavioral and emotional support needs. Updated 2018.

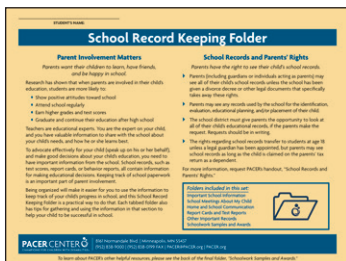
\$5 | 10+ copies, \$4 each | PHP-a21



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 be successful in school. Also available in Spanish, Hmong, and Somali.

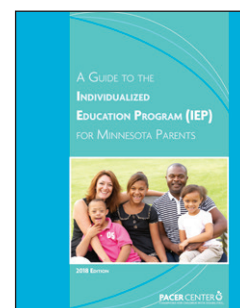
\$10 | 11+ copies, \$8 each | MPC-6



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

This booklet helps parents work with schools to address each child's special needs through understanding the required components of the IEP. Includes examples from an example IEP form. Updated 2018.

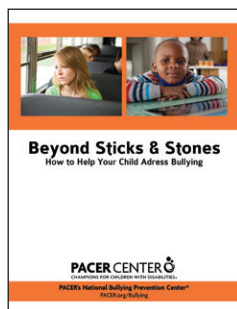
\$3 | 10+ copies, \$2 each | PHP-a12



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.

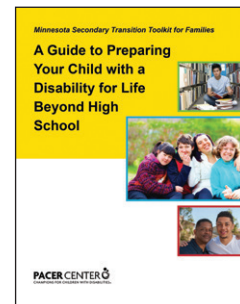
\$5 | BP-7



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 health care, benefits planning, postsecondary education, housing, and more. Updated 2017.

\$9 | ST-41



PACESETTER

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PACER Center enhances the quality of life and expands opportunities for children, youth, and young adults with all disabilities and their families so each person can reach his or her highest potential. PACER operates on the principles of parents helping parents, supporting families, promoting a safe environment for all children, and working in collaboration with others. PACER is also the National Bullying Prevention Center, offering innovative resources for students, parents, educators, and others.

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'Raising a Glass' to PACER's Simon Technology Center

Attendees at the annual Raise A Glass | A Toast to PACER, organized by PACER's Young Professionals Advisory Board, combined a fun evening at Summit Brewing with a great cause: coming together to support PACER.

The Young Professionals Advisory Board chose PACER's Simon Technology Center to benefit from funds raised at Raise A Glass. PACER's Simon Technology Center connects children and adults with disabilities to technology to help them lead more independent lives at home, at school, and in the community.

In attendance at Raise A Glass were both long-time PACER supporters and those just learning about PACER. Rick Strobel, the Young Professionals Advisory Board Co-Chair, said that the board planned the happy hour

"to encourage guests to learn more about PACER and the Simon Technology Center."

"Guests experienced firsthand some of the incredible, cutting-edge assistive technology available at PACER,"

Rick said. PACER staff

demonstrated several of the more than 1,700 items available in the Simon Technology Center's Lending Library.

"It's truly an honor to be involved with such an incredible organization," Rick said. "I believe firmly in the mission of PACER, and have seen what a difference PACER's services make in the lives of families of children and adults with disabilities."

If you're interested in joining PACER's Young Professionals Advisory Board, email Jackie.Saffert@PACER.org or call 952-838-9000.

“It's truly an honor to be involved with such an incredible organization.”
— Rick Strobel

Special thanks to event sponsors: Old National Bank, Koch Companies, and Xcel Energy; to the members of the Young Professionals Advisory Board: Jeff Koch, co-chair, Rick Strobel, co-chair, Jesenia Eduarte, Jonathon Hatch, Josh Herman, Casey Merkwán, Amy Peterson, John Samec, Tim Schwalbe, and Ben Zack; and to Summit Brewing for donating the event space.



Clockwise, from top left: Don McNeil, Mici O'Grady, Craig Gerkin, Azja Kennedy, and Megan McNeil



Back row (L-R): Tim Schwalbe, John Samec, Casey Merkwán, Jesenia Eduarte, Ben Zack, and Jackie Saffert. Front row (L-R): Jenna Hanson, Amy Peterson, and Rick Strobel

INSIDE

The Beach Boys at PACER's Benefit	1
Innovation Lab	2
Q&A with Jimmy Pitaro	3
High Expectations Project	4
PACER's Endowment	5
Transition Workshop	6
Health Information Center	7
Unity Day	8
School Avoidance	10
MN Legislative Priorities	11
PACER Workshops	12

Change Service Requested



PACER's Annual Benefit May 11, 2019

Minneapolis Convention Center

Tickets on sale now!

To reserve your tickets for the 2019 PACER Benefit on May 11, featuring The Beach Boys, 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 and include first and last names of attendees)

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

* Includes post-performance patron champagne and dessert party

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

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