

## Steve Simon: 'I will always support PACER'

It is common for volunteers and supporters to become involved with PACER because a family member, often a child, grandchild, or sibling, with a disability has benefitted from PACER's services. Others without this connection learn about PACER and are impressed by how its services make a difference in the lives of children and families. That's how entrepreneur Steve Simon became a longtime friend and supporter of PACER.

Though it was more than 30 years ago, Steve vividly remembers the phone call that led to his involvement with PACER. "My assistant, Michelle O'Leary, came into my office to tell me that Paula Goldberg's mother was on the phone.

"At the time, PACER was a significant client of my then-business, American Sharecom," Steve recalled. "Of course I took the phone call."

Helen Friedman, Paula's mother, was calling to raise funds for PACER's Annual Benefit. "Instead of me selling her telecom services, she sold me tickets to PACER's Benefit," Steve said. For several years, he continued to support PACER, becoming a Benefit sponsor. Michelle O'Leary attended the Benefit and began to volunteer her time at the Benefit and continues to do so.

Michelle was so enthusiastic that she persuaded Steve to tour PACER and learn more about its services. "I was so impressed with PACER," Steve said. "They have always done such important, ground-breaking work. PACER is at the forefront, and Paula is an amazing leader with so many talents."



Steve Simon with his daughters Stacey Soinski (L) and Nicole Woods (R)

Steve's relationship with PACER continued to grow. It was another phone call, this time one he made to Paula, that deepened the relationship. PACER was raising funds to buy its current building at 8161 Normandale Boulevard in Bloomington, and Steve wanted to know how the campaign was going. "I asked Paula how the funding was [progressing]," he said. "She told me it had been going pretty well but had stalled.

"I asked her how much still needed to be raised, and she said, '\$800,000.' I told her that I'd like to help. Paula asked how I wanted to help." Steve said, with a smile in his voice, "I told her, 'the very best way.'"

*'Steve Simon' continued on page 2*

## Inside This Issue

PACER's 2021 MN legislative agenda .....	2
History of the Simon Technology Center .....	3
Ken Rosenblum: Why I give .....	4
National Bullying Prevention Center .....	5
Multicultural advocate Hassan Samantar.....	6

Supporting parents during the pandemic.....	7
Attending college with a disability.....	8
Dispute resolution.....	9
PACER's puppets .....	10
45 years of IDEA .....	11

PACER's Annual Benefit .....	12
2020 PACER project highlights.....	13
Workshops .....	14
PACER resources .....	15
Otto Bremer Youth Award .....	16

He went on to tell Paula, "I will give you the \$800,000 you need." Paula was, he said, "speechless."

She is not speechless when it comes to discussing how much Steve's support has meant and continues to mean to PACER. "Steve is an amazing, humble person," Paula said. "He has been such an important friend to PACER. He has made an incredible difference in the lives of children with disabilities and their families."

### **The Simon Technology Center**

From the beginning, Steve was interested in PACER's commitment to cutting-edge technology, and how it could revolutionize the lives of children. It was a natural interest for someone with a background in technology. Steve saw the difference technology could make for children in their educational and, eventually, adult lives, but it was the family relationships that touched his heart most deeply.

"There were children who could never speak, whose parents could never hear their children say 'I love you'... and now, using technology, children could express themselves, and parents could hear those words. I saw how life changing technology was for these families." When PACER's Simon Technology Center was founded in 2001,

PACER recognized the support of Steve and the Simon Family Foundation in its name.

In addition to technology, Steve singled out PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center for praise. "Bullying is a universal issue," Steve said. "Everyone recognizes how harmful it is and opposes it. PACER is the leader on this issue and deserves credit for bringing it to the forefront."

Today, Steve makes his home in Florida, but he remains devoted to PACER's mission and programs. "PACER deserves even more support and recognition for all they do for children and families," he said.

"I will always support PACER."

*"I was so impressed with PACER. They have always done such important, ground-breaking work. PACER is at the forefront, and Paula is an amazing leader with so many talents."*  
— Steve Simon

## **PACER's 2021 Minnesota legislative agenda**

PACER maintains an active presence at the Minnesota State Capitol and in Washington, D.C. "PACER has identified priorities for the 2021 Minnesota legislative session and is actively working on these four issues," said Paula Goldberg, PACER's Executive Director. Paula added, "All of PACER's state and federal legislative work is paid for with private funding."

### **Increase funding for special education**

Nearly one of five Minnesota students receive special education. PACER supports adequate state funding to ensure that these students are well prepared to become part of the Minnesota's future labor force.

### **Remove barriers to use of private nurses in schools**

Students with complex medical needs require the same level of care at school that they receive at home. PACER seeks to require school districts to allow a private nurse of the family's choice to accompany a student to school when it is medically necessary, at no cost to the school.

### **Improve access to mental health supports**

PACER supports legislation to increase student access to school support staff and mental health services both in and out of school.

### **Reduce exclusionary discipline practices**

PACER supports legislation to support increased use of positive behavioral interventions and reduced use of suspensions, expulsions, and seclusion.

Parents and professionals who are interested in keeping up to date on legislative issues can email [shari.grob@PACER.org](mailto:shari.grob@PACER.org).

*"Although it is a challenging year at the legislature due to COVID-19 and the state's budget deficit, it's more important than ever that PACER ensures the concerns of children with disabilities and their families are heard at the Capitol."*  
—PACER Associate Director Gretchen Godfrey

## History of PACER

# The legacy of PACER's Simon Technology Center

PACER's Simon Technology Center (STC) has been at the forefront of providing innovative technology resources for individuals with disabilities since opening its doors in 1987. Notable achievements include:

With support from Apple and the Minnesota Department of Education, PACER opens its Computer Resource Center, Minnesota's first assistive technology center for children and youth with all disabilities.

1987

In recognition of a wonderful gift from the Simon Family Foundation, the Computer Resource Center is renamed the Simon Technology Center.

2001

Through a partnership with Minnesota STAR Program (System of Technology to Achieve Results) of the Minnesota Department of Administration, the STC gains access to expanded assistive technology resources.

2009

Tech for Teens Club is introduced, offering innovative programming to boys and girls with an emphasis on robotics and coding.

2017

An assistive technology lending library is added and further expansion of services and projects occurs, including Project KITE (Kids Included Through Technology are Enriched), which prepares educators and parents to use assistive technology.

Two new Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) projects for girls are added: EX.I.T.E. Camp, the first STEM day camp for middle school girls with disabilities, and the Tech for Girls Club, which provides exciting workshops on topics from computer coding to astronomy.

The GoBabyGo Project, which modifies ride-on cars to improve the mobility of young children with disabilities, is developed.

With funding from the Adelman Foundation, the STC opens the Innovation Lab, a learning space with cutting-edge technology that is accessible to students with all types of physical, sensory, and other disabilities.

2018





# Ken Rosenblum: Why I give to PACER's endowment

Ken Rosenblum, M.D., first met PACER Executive Director Paula Goldberg more than 25 years ago. "I met with Ken and his then-wife, Marissa, when their son David was four years old," Paula recalls. "They were looking for advice about David's education." David Rosenblum, the oldest of Ken and Marissa's three sons, was born with Down syndrome. David was also on the autism spectrum and survived childhood leukemia.

Out of that first meeting with Paula blossomed a long-term relationship between Ken and PACER. Ken, who is an entrepreneur, served for many years on the corporate sponsorship committee of PACER's Annual Benefit. Today he serves on PACER's Board of Directors.

"PACER is unique in its advocacy for children with disabilities and their families," Ken said.

As a Board member, donor, and the parent of a child with a disability, Ken believes strongly in the importance of giving to PACER's endowment. "An endowment is so important to an organization's continuity," he said. "Government funding can be uncertain. The endowment is important to the future of PACER. The profits from the endowment are helpful in funding PACER's operating budget to ensure PACER is always here to serve families of children with disabilities."

As an entrepreneur, Ken has unique insights into what makes an organization strong and healthy. "I'm very impressed with PACER's growth," he said. "Some



*Ken and David Rosenblum*

organizations are not able to maintain their passion as they became larger and more complex, but PACER has become stronger and maintained its passion for advocacy and the rights of children with disabilities. That's commendable."

David Rosenblum died in September of 2019, but he lives on in the memories of the many people who loved him. "I miss him every day," Ken said. "David radiated warmth, and he had a fantastic laugh." Though David was largely non-verbal, there were a few words he spoke: cookie, French fries, ketchup, and cheeseburger. "There was no one better to have a cheeseburger with," Ken said.

**For more information about PACER's endowment, contact Paula Goldberg at (952) 838-9000.**

## 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](https://contribute.surveymonkey.com/charity/PACER).

# United for kindness, acceptance, and inclusion

## PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center

Last October, PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center (NBPC) held a Unity Day unlike any other in its ten-year history. While COVID-19 made the goal of uniting more complicated, these challenges made Unity Day's virtual message of creating a kinder, more accepting, and more inclusive world more important than ever.

"It was so exciting to see all the creative ways that the community participated in person and virtually on Unity Day 2020," said NBPC Director Julie Hertzog. "The response exceeded all expectations!"

Individuals celebrated by wearing and sharing orange, participating in school activities on bullying prevention, and engaging online by sharing orange images to #UnityDay2020. Teachers adapted unique activities, projects, and lesson plans to engage students both in the classroom and at home.

An amazing 99% of those who responded to a Unity Day survey reported that Unity Day helped raise awareness of bullying prevention in their school or community, and 95% felt that the event helped change the way students and staff think about bullying.



*"COVID made Unity Day plans very challenging this year. My student leadership team and I are very grateful for all of PACER's support and innovation during this difficult time!"*

— A teacher

FRIENDS OF PACER'S  
(VIRTUAL)

**Run**  
**Walk**  
*Roll*

AGAINST BULLYING

To accommodate current times, PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center (NBPC) is planning the first virtual Run, Walk, Roll Against Bullying. This April, rather than a one-day, in-person Minnesota event, Run, Walk, Roll will be a month-long challenge in which anyone can participate! Over the course of the month, the goal is to collectively reach a combined 24,901 miles, the circumference of the earth, symbolizing the call to "Create a World Without Bullying."

Participants can register online and contribute their miles by walking, running, biking, rolling, strolling, or wheeling. PACER's NBPC will have unique ways for participants to stay engaged and connected throughout the month with a Facebook group, virtual activation kits, T-shirts, prizes, fundraising opportunities, and more! **Learn about how to participate in this year's virtual Run, Walk, Roll Against Bullying by visiting [PACER.org/Bullying](https://PACER.org/Bullying).**

# Hassan Samantar offers hope to Minnesota's Somali community

PACER multicultural advocate Hassan Samantar has worked with Somali families in Minnesota for 13 years. Minnesota is home to the largest percentage of Somali families in the U.S., and the Twin Cities metro area has the largest concentration of those families.

Many Somali-American students are the first in their families to be born in the United States. "Often Somali parents struggle to engage with their child's school because they were educated in Somalia and don't understand the U.S. educational system and standards," Hassan explained. For example, in Somalia, students do not progress to the next grade unless they achieve superior marks. Some of the parents Hassan has worked with assume that their child is doing well if they are promoted to the next grade.

The pandemic and move toward distance learning have compounded the challenges that Somali families were already facing. "The pandemic has made it more difficult to resolve challenges, due in part to communication issues," Hassan said. "Language barriers are more difficult to resolve when communication is virtual, and it has become more challenging to coordinate with school liaisons and translators."

Families are dealing with a number of issues unique to the pandemic. In Somali culture, large families are the norm, and extended families often share the same home; as a result, students often lack quiet spaces in which to work or attend virtual classes. It can be difficult for parents to support their students if they have lost their jobs and are struggling financially, and those parents who are still employed are forced to choose between work and being at home to help with their children's education.

"Somali parents who had challenges before are now completely overwhelmed by the pandemic and distance learning," said Hassan. "Many feel helpless, as if their only option is to wait things out and hope for the best."



*Hassan Samantar*

Hassan is dedicated to finding answers for parents who feel lost. The first step in this, he says, is educating them about the American educational system and the rights of children and families. PACER has a wealth of translated material for Somali speakers that Hassan guides parents through, covering topics such as interpreting their child's report card, building effective communication skills with school staff, and understanding special education and the Individualized Education Program (IEP). He also offers parents the option of including him in communications with school staff, so that he can model the types of questions to ask for more effective academic outcomes.

Hassan advocates for families directly with school staff and other officials, saving them time when they have

little of it to spare. One mother he worked with had a child who was enrolled in school but wasn't receiving the transportation written into their IEP. "She didn't know who to contact at the school to resolve this," Hassan said. "With other children at home to care for and educate, she didn't have the time or resources to get the information on her own." Hassan's advocacy work relieves some of the stress these families are facing.

Hassan has also identified ways to increasing families' engagement and providing more consistent support by using methods and tools they are most familiar with. For example, he found many families use WhatsApp daily. Hassan shares this information with teachers, helping them use the best tools to connect with Somali parents and involve them in their children's learning.

There is no denying the impact that the pandemic has had on education. Dedicated PACER advocates like Hassan give families the support the need to ensure their children receive the education they are entitled to..

**To connect with Hassan or another PACER advocate, email [PACER@PACER.org](mailto:PACER@PACER.org) or call (952) 838-9000.**



# Supporting parents' mental health during the pandemic

Parenting during a pandemic is challenging, and when your child has a disability, the challenges can be even greater. Renelle Nelson, who heads PACER's Children's Mental Health and Emotional or Behavioral Disorders Project, reports that during the global pandemic, PACER staff are hearing from parents who are concerned not only about their children but about their own ability to deal with challenges. "When parents call us for advice on how they can better support their kids, they often tell us that they are also experiencing increased stress and anxiety," Renelle said.

"In addition to their concerns about their children's mental health, parents are worried about a number of issues relating to the pandemic. Economic issues mean people have lost jobs or worry about losing them. We are all more isolated, and people may feel helpless. We are glad when parents call, because hope is the light at the end of the tunnel, and we can offer suggestions that help them feel better."

Renelle advises parents that they need to attend to their own wellbeing in order to support their children. "Part of wellbeing is identifying how you function when you're feeling good, so you can recognize when you're not doing as well and take steps to turn things around. Are you feeling angry or short-tempered? Are you having issues with sleep or your appetite? Recognizing these symptoms is really helpful in developing strategies to help improve your mood.

"It isn't always about seeing a therapist or taking medication, though there are certainly times when that

*"We are glad when parents call, because hope is the light at the end of the tunnel, and we can offer suggestions that help them feel better."*

*— Renelle Nelson*



is helpful or necessary. Often, there are approaches you can take that will make a difference. We are here to help parents figure them out."

Renelle offered the following tips:

- **Take care of your body.** Getting enough sleep and exercise can impact your mood, as can developing healthy eating habits. "Grabbing a banana instead of a bag of potato chips makes a difference."
- **Connect with others.** "Don't let social distancing turn into social isolation. A phone or video chat can help with feelings of loneliness. If you are part of a faith community, stay in touch virtually to feel connected."
- **Take a break from watching or reading the news.** "Take ten minutes to read something that has nothing to do with current events. A constant news diet can be overwhelming, especially when the news isn't good."
- **Make time to relax and unwind.** "Find activities and hobbies that you enjoy, whether it's sewing, crafts, do-it-yourself home projects, journaling, or caring for plants."
- **Think positive.** "Remember times you have overcome difficulty and realize that you can do that again. While no one would suggest that parents deny the stress they feel, positive thinking helps you manage your stress and can improve your physical and mental health."

**View PACER's video on self-care during the pandemic at [PACER.org/cmh/covid.asp](https://www.pacer.org/cmh/covid.asp)**



# Attending college with a disability: The student is in the driver's seat

For any student, a successful transition to college begins with choosing the right program and institution, but there's another important factor if the student has a disability: Ensuring that the college offers disability services that are a good fit for their needs.

Whether a student is considering four-year colleges or universities, two-year community colleges, or technical programs, it's important that they touch base with the school's disability services office to ensure that they will be able to receive the services they need to succeed. All colleges that receive federal funding or accept federal student loans are required to provide equal access to college programs, facilities, and services to qualified students with disabilities. "Most colleges have a disability services office or resource center; some go beyond the minimum requirements for access and provide additional services and supports," said Barb Ziemke, Co-Director of PACER's National Parent Center on Transition and Employment.

A college is not required to provide services or accommodations unless and until a student asks for them. If there is any possibility that a student will need accommodations, the time to learn what the college's disability services office offers is before the student commits to a college. Sometimes a student resists contacting a college's disability services office because of privacy concerns. They often don't realize that their

meetings with a college's disability services office are protected by privacy laws. "The tricky part is that a lot of young adults don't want to disclose their disability," said Barb Ziemke. "They need to weigh whether or not the benefits of disclosing, which is potentially receiving accommodations they may need, outweighs their concerns."

Even when a disability is physically apparent, college staff won't know the student requires accommodations unless the student chooses to disclose this. There are no Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) or 504 plans in college. The student has the primary role in obtaining needed accommodations, including providing requested documentation of a disability, deciding whether or not to take advantage of accommodations, and following through as needed each semester.

The college's disability services office will determine what accommodations a student is qualified for. If the student decides to take advantage of the accommodations, the student's professor is notified. Privacy is an important part of the equation: When the professor is informed of approved accommodations, they are not told what the student's disability is. "A common accommodation is extra time for testing," explained Kayla Allen, an accessibility services specialist with the Office of Disability Services at Normandale Community College. "Why the time is needed is not disclosed to the professor."

*'College' continued on next page*

## The changing role of the parent

Parents of students with disabilities are used to being involved in their children's education. When their child goes to college, their responsibilities undergo a dramatic shift, said Kathleen McGillivray, director of Augsburg University's CLASS (disability services) office. "The student is now in the driver's seat, and the parent shifts to a support role," she said. "They can provide some valuable feedback and input about what has worked well for the student in the past, but the student is the one who requests accommodations. The parent can provide advice and support, but they really take more of a back seat," Kathleen said.

One major change is related to the student's privacy. "Colleges cannot, by law, disclose information about the student to anyone without the student's written permission, with very few exceptions," said Barb Ziemke. "Even if the student consents, the school may be unwilling to share information directly with a parent. It's important for families to discuss their expectations."





# When parents and schools don't agree:

## Exciting new PACER resources for dispute resolution

Sometimes parents and their child's school see things differently when it comes to meeting a student's educational needs. The federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Minnesota state special education laws provide parents with several options for alternative dispute resolution if they can't come to an agreement.

PACER has developed a series of checklists to prepare parents to take an active role in the dispute resolution process. To download these checklists, go to [PACER.org/publications/disputeresolution.asp](https://PACER.org/publications/disputeresolution.asp). These checklists help parents prepare for meetings and provide tips for effective participation. They include:

- **Preparing for a conciliation conference.** Parents can request a conciliation conference if they object in writing to a Prior Written Notice from the school district which proposes or refuses to take a specific action related to their student's special education evaluation, identification, placement, or services.
- **Preparing for a facilitated team meeting.** Either parents or the school district can request a facilitated

team meeting if they cannot reach agreement on how to write an appropriate Individualized Education Program (IEP) or Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) for a student. Open and respectful communication is supported at this meeting by an impartial facilitator assigned by the Minnesota Department of Education.

- **Preparing for and attending mediation.** When parents and the school district are struggling to resolve a disagreement, especially over multiple meetings, mediation helps build positive working relationships and restore a focus on the student's needs. An impartial mediator assigned by the Minnesota Department of Education assists at this meeting to find common ground and write a formal agreement that is legally binding on both parties and can be used to amend an IEP.

PACER's staff of parent advocates is always available to answer questions and provide support throughout the alternative dispute resolution process. **You can reach an advocate by calling (952) 838-9000 or emailing [Rachel.Pearson@PACER.org](mailto:Rachel.Pearson@PACER.org).**

### *'College' continued from previous page*

Some students choose to try college classes without accommodations. While the student always has this option, experts advise that students have at least an initial meeting with the college's disability services office. "If a student is on the fence about whether or not they want or need accommodations, it's a good idea to go through the process of meeting with the disability services office and finding out what accommodations they qualify for," Kayla said. These are not always the same as the accommodations a student received in high school. Meeting with disability services and mapping out a plan doesn't mean a student is obligated to use the obligations they are granted. "They still have the option to try classes without accommodations."

In that first meeting, which occurs ideally before the first semester, "We talk about credit load, self-advocacy, and accommodations on a case-by-case basis. A student might say, 'I have Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), what accommodations will I receive?' The

answer is, it depends. Each student is an individual and accommodations are tailored to their needs."

One reason Kayla recommends meeting with disability services prior to starting school is that accommodations are not retroactive. "We don't want to see a student panicked after midterms because they are struggling," she said. "If a student is connected and has their approved accommodations, they can access them when they need to. College is supposed to be challenging, not overpowering."

**PACER's National Parent Center on Transition and Employment** has a wealth of information about post-secondary education for students with disabilities on its website at [PACER.org/transition/learning-center/postsecondary](https://PACER.org/transition/learning-center/postsecondary). Parents and students can also contact a transition specialist by calling (952) 838-9000 or emailing [transition@PACER.org](mailto:transition@PACER.org).

# PACER's puppets are ready for their close up

PACER's Puppet Program has engaged young learners for more than 40 years. The program's "Count Me In" show focuses on including students with disabilities, and "Kids Against Bullying" has a bullying prevention theme.

Due to the pandemic, live performances had to be put on hold, but the need is great. "During this stressful time, it's important to emphasize kindness and inclusion to support students' emotional and mental health," said Lynn Dennis, co-coordinator of PACER's Puppet Program. "These shows offer teachers and students a way to learn that is different and exciting."

The solution was clear: Go virtual. Last fall, the Puppet Program presented three "Kids Against Bullying" pilot shows in a new digital format. Typically, the shows feature volunteer puppeteers, but for safety reasons, Lynn and co-coordinator Katie Kaufmann recorded portions of the show in an isolated environment with masks and social distancing.

Teachers and students were thrilled by the virtual performances. By using Google Meet to broadcast the performance, the teachers were able to include both students in the classroom and those learning at home.

"The kids loved the show, and the staff felt the message was good and very kid-friendly," said one teacher. "They

had some good discussions afterward. Katie did a great job of including all the kids, even those at home."

Thanks to the success of the pilot performances, PACER will present the "Kids Against Bullying" show to as many schools in the Twin Cities area as possible in 2021, and this spring will branch out to include pilot performances of the Pre-K "Count Me In."



*Puppet Gina models her mask to help students understand how mask wearing helps keep us healthy.*

**To learn more about the virtual shows or schedule a performance for a classroom, visit [PACER.org/puppets/schedule.asp](https://PACER.org/puppets/schedule.asp) or call PACER at (952) 838-9000.**



*Puppet program co-coordinator Katie Kaufmann (top right) presents a puppet show over Google Meet to an elementary classroom.*

## PACESETTER

©2021 by PACER Center, Inc. | Published three times yearly  
Circulation: 135,682  
8161 Normandale Blvd. | Minneapolis, MN 55437-1044  
Voice: (952) 838-9000 | Toll-free: (800) 537-2237  
[PACER@PACER.org](mailto:PACER@PACER.org) | [PACER.org](https://PACER.org)

PACER Executive Director: Paula F. Goldberg  
Editor: Michele St. Martin  
Designer: Jenna Hanson  
(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.

An Equal Opportunity Employer, PACER is funded by grants from the U.S. Departments of Education, Labor, Health and Human Services, and other sources, and from foundations, corporations, and individuals. Views expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the Departments or other donors. Contributions to PACER are tax-deductible. For information, call PACER at (952) 838-9000.



# 45 years of IDEA

The landmark civil rights legislation that would become known as the **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)** forever changed the landscape of public education for children with disabilities. With the enactment of IDEA, students with disabilities gained the right to a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE), tailored to their individual needs.

On November 29, 1975, President Gerald Ford signed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, which became IDEA, into law. Since the enactment of IDEA, there have been dramatic improvements in the education of children with disabilities, as illustrated by the following statistics:

- In the 1976-77 school year, 3,694,000 children and youth with disabilities were served under IDEA. By the 2018-19, the number had more than doubled, to 7,539,553.
- The number of infants and toddlers increased from 154,065 in 1993-94 to 410,887 in 2018-19.
- In 1995, 52% of students with disabilities graduated from high school with a regular diploma. In 2018, the number increased to 72.7%.
- The percent of students with disabilities who dropped out of school decreased from 34% in the 1994-95 school year to 16% in the 2017-18 school year.



## The main elements of IDEA

- **Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)**
- **Individualized Education Program (IEP)**
- **Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)**
- **Appropriate Evaluation**
- **Parent and Teacher Participation**
- **Procedural Safeguards**

## History of PACER

### PTIs receive national funding after IDEA is enacted

After IDEA was enacted, leaders of the few Parent Training and Information Centers (PTIs), knew that it was critical for parents to understand their rights under the new law, and sought funding to create more PTIs.

Paula Goldberg of PACER Center and the late Martha Ziegler of the Boston-based Federation for Children with Special Needs met with a U.S. House leader, who agreed that funding was needed. They then met with Michael Morris, legal counsel to the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on the Handicapped.

It was a stroke of luck Michael was the staff person they met with. "I was excited about this because I was very familiar with PTIs," Michael said. "I had come to Washington from Georgia, where I was executive director of the ARC, one of the early PTIs."

Michael worked for Senator Lowell Weicker of Connecticut. "Senator Weicker was the new subcommittee chair," Michael recalled. That, too, was a stroke of luck: The Senator from Connecticut had been reluctant to chair the subcommittee. One of the reasons he agreed was to do so was that he had a young child with Down syndrome. "Senator Ted Kennedy talked him into it," said Michael.

Senator Weicker was a strong advocate for the rights of people with disabilities. He agreed to Michael's suggestion that funding for PTIs be a line item in the budget, which all but guaranteed that the funding would continue. "It's much harder to take something out than it is to put it in," Michael said.

Prior to Paula and Martha's meeting with Michael, there were about a dozen PTIs in the entire U.S. Today, there are a total of 66, with at least one in each state.



# PACER's Annual Benefit: A virtual success

Every year the Twin Cities community and supporters who are able to travel to Minneapolis look forward to attending PACER's Annual Benefit. When the 2020 Benefit, originally scheduled for May, had to be rescheduled as a virtual event due to the pandemic, there were concerns that the event might not be as successful. Happily, the Benefit, held on November 14 and featuring headliner Smokey Robinson, was a huge success.

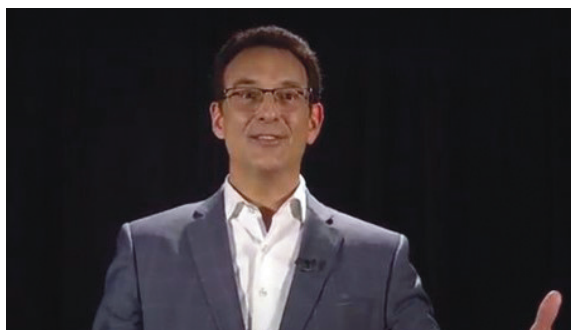
"This year, people from all over the country were able to join PACER and enjoy the Benefit from the comfort and safety of their homes," said PACER Executive Director Paula Goldberg. "It was wonderful for the many people who normally might not have been able to attend!"

The program was emceed by Academy Award-winning producer Chris Moore (*Good Will Hunting*, *Manchester*

*by the Sea*), and featured PACER's silent auction and live auction, conducted by WCCO-TV anchor Frank Vascellaro, and the presentation of the Otto Bremer Youth Leadership Award to Sam Kripotos (see back page).

The undisputed highlight of the evening was the amazing performance by Motown great Smokey Robinson, who had people up on their feet and dancing in living rooms from Seattle to Miami.

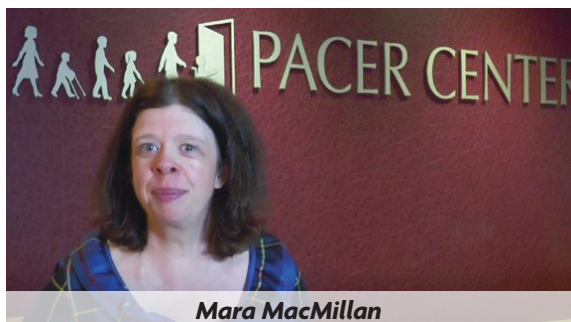
PACER's Benefit supports work on behalf of the families of children with disabilities and all children who are bullied. "PACER is so thankful for the generous Benefit sponsors, supporters, and volunteers who help make it possible to provide services free of cost to children and families," Paula said.



WCCO-TV anchor Frank Vascellaro



Emcee Chris Moore



Mara MacMillan

## Save the Date! PACER's 2021 Benefit is Nov. 13



Smokey Robinson performed with his band from Los Angeles.

## Special thanks to:

### Major Sponsors

Steven C. Simon family  
Al and Kathy Lenzmeier

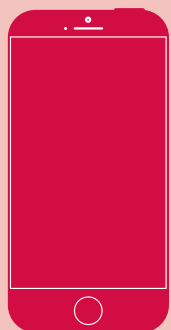
### Auction Sponsors

Wheels for Wishes and Wellness  
Paula Goldberg

### Friends of PACER

American Express  
Coordinated Business Systems  
Lisa and Richard Erickson  
Phyllis Heilicher  
Nordstrom  
John Slegman  
Twin City Fan Companies

# 2020 highlights: PACER continues to surpass its goals in meeting the changing needs of families



**38,161**

Requests for individual assistance, information, and support were responded to by PACER staff via phone calls, mail, email, and in person



**2.3  
Million**

Visits to PACER's innovative, interactive websites



**26,619**

Parents and professionals attended PACER's free workshops and presentations in person and via Livestream



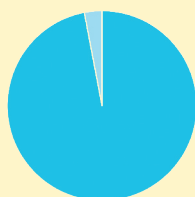
**135,682**

*Pacesetter* newsletters are mailed to parents and professionals around the country.

**2 billion+**



People read about PACER in online articles and social media



## **PACER HELPS STUDENTS SUCCEED IN SCHOOL**

94% of parents said they would use information from PACER workshops to help improve their child's educational outcomes



## **PACER IS A GOOD FINANCIAL STEWARD**

84% of PACER's funds go directly to programs. PACER's management and fundraising expenses are only 16%, well below industry standards.

# 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](https://PACER.org/workshops).

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

## CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH, EMOTIONAL/BEHAVIORAL

### Educating Your Child with Mental Health Needs: Special Education

Children with mental health needs may experience challenges with transitioning between multiple learning models, including in-person, and distance or hybrid learning. This workshop offers strategies for using the IEP to provide support.

- Feb. 9, 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

### Working Toward Positive Educational Outcomes: Mental Health and Special Education

This workshop will provide parents and others with information to help prepare for a positive IEP team approach to supporting a child's mental health needs in school and during distance or hybrid learning.

- March 2, 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

### Educating Your Child with Mental Health Needs: Special Education

Children with mental health needs may experience challenges with transitioning between multiple learning models, including in-person, and distance or hybrid learning. This workshop offers strategies for using the IEP to provide support.

- March 16, 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

## EARLY CHILDHOOD

### Transition to Kindergarten: A Big Step for You and Your Child

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.

- Feb. 23, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

### Communication with School Staff in the IFSP Process

Families on Individual Family Service Plans (IFSPs) will learn skills to effectively communicate with the other members of their IFSP teams so the

IFSP reflects their concerns and priorities and the strengths and needs of their child.

- March 23, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

## FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

### Carrying the Light in the Darkest Season

A session for professionals to recognize the work they have done to support families in a historic time of transformation, anxiety, and hardship.

- Feb. 11, 3:30 p.m. to 4:45 p.m.

## HOUSING

### Housing: Starting the Journey, Three-part Workshop Series

#### Step 1 — How do we start?

Help your young adult with their vision for community living, housing, and services. An overview of housing and services options will be provided.

- Feb. 22, 6:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

#### Step 2 — How Is Housing Paid For?

The "big picture" view of how housing is funded through federal, state, and county resources. Learn how your young adult can become eligible and access funding for housing. Topics include income supplements and budgets.

- March 8, 6:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

#### 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 22, 6:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

## PARENT TRAINING

### How Parents Can Effectively Communicate with the IEP Team

Are you effective when advocating for your child at IEP team meetings? This interactive workshop will help parents improve communication skills

with their child's IEP team.

- Feb. 11, 1:00 p.m. to 2:30 p.m.

### The ABC's of the IEP: Making the Individualized Education Program (IEP) Work for Your Child

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

- March 30, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

## SIMON TECHNOLOGY CENTER

### Lunch & Learn: Apps to Develop Social-Emotional Skills in Young Children

This workshop will feature iPad apps that parents and professionals can use to support social-emotional learning for young children.

- Feb. 10, 12:00 p.m. to 1:00 p.m.

### Google Chrome for Students Part 1: Tools to Support Reading

This session will explore Google tools that make text more accessible with visual supports and text-to-speech. This workshop will be helpful for students in middle school through college.

- Feb. 23, 2:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.

### Lunch & Learn: Sensory Supports for Children

This workshop explores what "sensory processing" means and will demonstrate assistive technology to support children's sensory needs when they become overwhelmed.

- March 9, 12:00 p.m. to 1:00 p.m.

### Choosing Reading Tools to Match Reading Material

Reading can be challenging for many with reading disabilities and visual impairments. Presentation will explain how to match reading tools to the type of reading material. Tools include auditory and visual modifications.

- March 23, 10:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.

### Google Chrome for Students Part 2: Tools to Manage Time, Focus, and Information

This workshop will explore Google tools to help



students manage time, maintain focus, and organize information. This session will be helpful for students in middle school through college.

- **March 30, 2:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.**

### Getting Ready for Kindergarten

Explore tools to use with your young child to get them ready for Kindergarten and school success. This webinar is designed for all families and professionals, including children with disabilities.

- **April 15, 4:30 p.m. to 5:45 p.m.**

### Google Chrome for Students Part 3: Tools for Notetaking and Writing

This session will explore Google tools for taking notes, using dictation, and writing school papers. This workshop will be helpful for students in middle school through college.

- **April 27, 2:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.**

### Don't Forget to Remember: Tools to Support Memory

Memory is a helpful, and sometimes challenging, executive (thinking) function for increasing independence. Learn about a variety of apps, programs, devices, and strategies

to help remember instructions, tasks, appointments, and more.

- **May 11, 10:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.**

## 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.

### Code a Ping Pong Game

In this virtual Tech for Girls workshop, participants will use Scratch to code their own ping pong game. Girls will learn how to code sounds, movement and point scoring to their game. No coding experience required.

- **Feb. 20, 10:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.**

### Koding with Kodu

Come learn how to code with Kodu, a visual programming language created by Microsoft. Middle school girls with disabilities will use their coding skills to create their own game! Kodu is designed to be accessible for children and enjoyable for anyone.

- **March. 20, 10:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.**

## 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.

### 3D Printing Online

In this Zoom webinar Tech for Teens, we'll be learning how to create a 3D model using Tinkercad online software. Then we'll learn about what public resources are available for printing your own 3D models.

- **March 6, 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.**

### Intro to Coding and Video Games

An introduction to the fundamentals of coding. Teens will create interactive games and stories while developing basic programming skills. This workshop is designed for teens with all levels of coding experience.

- **April 3, 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.**

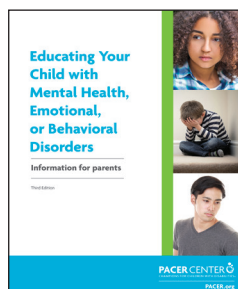
# Resources

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.

## 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.

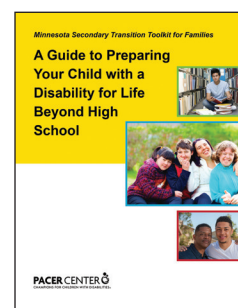
**\$5 | 10+ copies, \$4 each | PHP-a21**



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

This toolkit helps make transition planning easier. Topics include health care, benefits planning, postsecondary education, housing, and more. Updated 2017.

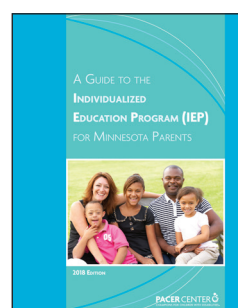
**\$9 | ST-41**



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

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

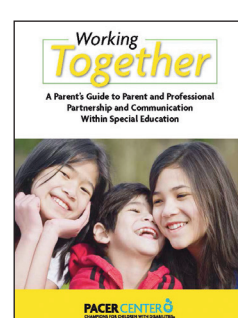
**\$3 | 10+ copies, \$2 each | PHP-a12**



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

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

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



**PACER's complete list of publications can be found at PACER.org/Publications**

**Change Service Requested**

## Sam Kripotos honored with Otto Bremer Youth Leadership Award

Sam Kripotos received the fifth annual Otto Bremer Youth Leadership Award at PACER's Annual Benefit on November 14. Sam's mother, Kristie Kripotos, and grandfather, Jim Oricchio, presented Sam with the award.

When Sam was diagnosed with autism, a doctor told his parents, "Your son will never be a normal kid. He won't develop friendships and will probably never graduate from high school. You may have to look at group homes for him when he's older." That's when Jim, a longtime PACER volunteer, reached out to PACER.

Kristie recalled, "When I talked to the PACER advocate, something he said really stuck with me: 'Never take no for an answer.' From that day forward, I never did," she said.

Sam also learned not to take "no" for an answer. "I decided to make goals for myself. I worked hard and advocated



*Sam Kripotos*

for myself, and in 7th grade, I moved out of special math and into the regular math class, and a year later I was able to be in all regular classes," he said.

The boy who would "never graduate from high school" did so right on schedule in 2019. He also received his school's Student of the Year award for self-advocacy and academic achievement. Today, Sam is a student at Century College with an interest in entrepreneurship.

"Sammy plans to start his own business someday," says his proud grandfather. "I have no doubt he will succeed. Every goal Sammy has set, he has accomplished. When he gets knocked down, he gets right up again.

"Don't underestimate kids like Sammy. They have so much potential!"