

Second Generation Leadership: Daniel Goldberg



L to R: Daniel (PACER Board member), Marge, and Peter Goldberg

Daniel Goldberg is in his third year on PACER's Board of Directors, and he brings a unique perspective to PACER. Like many Board members, Daniel has a family member with a disability: his younger brother Peter has brain damage and learning disabilities due to a traumatic brain injury. Daniel has another, just as important, PACER connection: his mother Marge co-founded PACER and was co-executive director until her retirement in 1998.

In a very real sense, Daniel grew up with PACER. "PACER was always front and center in our lives because Mom was always working late, either at home or in the office. We lived close to PACER so it was easy for my brother Peter and I to make trips to PACER's office anytime, day or night." He recalls being impressed, as a teen, with PACER's Count Me In puppet shows. "It seemed extraordinary to me, as a kid, that Count Me In was so creative in using puppets and puppeteers to encourage inclusion," Daniel said. He is pleased that Count Me In is still a prominent part of PACER.

Early in his law career, Daniel volunteered some time with PACER. "Working with my mom, I put together a parent guide to the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) and presented at a number of workshops." He was too busy with work to become more involved, but, he said, "I knew at some point I wanted to give back to PACER."

Mom weighs in

When Daniel told his mother he was interested in serving on PACER's Board of Directors, Marge said she thought it was "wonderful that he would look to PACER. He had such a busy life, and now that he had the time, this was something he was interested in."

Daniel said, "I reached out to Mom when I was at the point that I decided I had enough availability, and asked, 'Do you know if PACER is trying to grow their Board?' Mom called Paula who said yes, that I should apply."

Marge thinks Daniel will be an asset to the Board. "He grew up with a brother with a disability, and over the years, has had a wonderful relationship with Peter. I thought, 'you know, he's better at this than I am!'"

"As an adult, he is very nonjudgmental. Even though he may feel one way, he's open to looking at both sides. He has a progressive outlook on equality in general."

"He is interested in seeing things grow and improve. He will bring curiosity about what he doesn't know about PACER, and ask [good] questions."

Continued on page 2



Daniel Goldberg

Then and now

From his vantage point, Daniel marvels at the growth PACER has experienced. “Given the small beginnings of PACER, it was quite extraordinary to experience the growth of the organization firsthand,” he said. “The first PACER office was a hole in the wall with no private spaces. When PACER moved to the [second] office on 48th and Chicago [in 1984], I was amazed at its size, it was such a step up to a traditional office space with private offices for the co-directors and workspaces for others. When PACER moved to Bloomington, my mom was retired. After she saw the office, she described it to me, and I thought, I have got to go see what it looks like! I went on a tour... it was jaw-dropping, unbelievable the way PACER had grown.”

He is very pleased with the depth of PACER’s programming. “There is so much that PACER provides! The programming is expansive, especially with the addition of PACER’s National Bullying Prevention Center. PACER has had very strong leadership with my mom and Paula, who made PACER their life’s work.”

PACER’s future

Daniel says that one thing that has stood out to him, since joining the Board, is “the level of commitment each of the Board members has to PACER. They all take it very seriously. They are very involved and appreciative of what PACER has done for their families and other families.”

Summing up his hopes for PACER, Daniel said, “PACER is so well-established that it’s going to be around long after I, or anyone I interact with, is gone.

“PACER is here to stay.” ■

PACER’s 2022 Legislative Agenda

PACER Center is active at the Minnesota State Capitol and in Washington, D.C., advocating for the rights of children with disabilities and their families. PACER’s Minnesota legislative priorities are:

Increasing access to mental health resources

PACER supports initiatives that increase student access to equitable and appropriate mental health approaches, services, and supports, both in and out of school. “We are hearing from families about their children’s mental health needs in unprecedented numbers,” Paula Goldberg, PACER’s Executive Director, noted. “It is critically important that students have access to mental health resources.”

Supporting students’ academic recovery from COVID-related learning loss

“So many students with disabilities have struggled during the COVID-19 pandemic because of the lack of availability of in-person services and supports,” Paula said. “We want to ensure that students with disabilities can access all necessary supports and services needed to continue making academic progress and recover from COVID-related educational losses.”

Providing paid training for paraprofessionals

PACER supports funding for paraprofessionals to receive paid orientation and professional development that will enable them to better support the individual needs of students with disabilities. Providing paid opportunities for paraprofessionals to receive training and meet with students’ teachers benefits both students and paraprofessionals.

Decreasing exclusionary discipline practices

PACER supports legislation that decreases the use of suspensions, exclusions, expulsions, and other disciplinary practices that neither meet the needs of students nor promote a positive school culture.

Ensuring equitable funding for special education

PACER seeks increased state funding to ensure that the nearly one out of five Minnesota students who qualify for and receive special education services are well prepared for full inclusion in employment, housing, and all aspects of community life.



PACER's Housing Workshops:

*Providing information,
fostering independence*

PACER's 2022 Housing Workshop Series

- **March 14:** *How do we start?*
- **March 28:** *How is it paid for?*
- **April 11:** *What are the options?*

For information and to register individually for all three workshops, visit:
PACER.org/housing

As youth with disabilities approach adulthood, families turn to PACER with their questions about housing options for their young adult. One of the best ways families can support their young adult is by planning early on for the day when they move into a home of their own.

In the past, PACER has held a day-long housing fair to answer questions and provide resources and information about this important step in the transition to adulthood. In light of COVID, for the second year in a row, PACER will hold a series of three virtual workshops in March and April. The goal is to provide families with answers to questions about planning, options, and funding.

The information PACER provides in these workshops about housing for transition-aged youth isn't available anywhere else. It is invaluable to all families who have a youth with a disability. In order for parents to gain an understanding of community living, funding, and individualized housing and service options, PACER encourages families to register for and attend all three of the workshops in the series. Both housing and services a person may need to live as independently as possible in their chosen housing option are covered in the workshop series.

The first workshop focuses on where to start. It will be held on March 14 from 6:30 to 9:00 PM. This workshop discusses defining the young adult's vision of how they will live in the community, whether it be in an apartment, single family home, townhome, or community residential setting. The purpose of planning is to put the young adult in the driver's seat, while learning how to best support them. The workshop includes an overview of housing and services available. Participants will complete a one-page profile that portrays them as an individual person, not a disability.

The second workshop focuses on funding. It will be held on March 28 from 6:30 to 9:00 PM. Participants in this workshop will learn how their young adult can become eligible for and access funding through federal, state, and county resources. Income supplements and budgeting will be discussed, and questions will be answered with the assistance of PACER's co-presenters from Hennepin County and the Minnesota Department of Human Services.

The final workshop focuses on individualized housing and service options. It will be held on April 11 from 6:30 to 9:00 PM and features a panel of parents and young adults with a variety of disabilities. Housing providers also share their expertise. Topics such as housing and staffing choices, finding a roommate, and specialty resources are covered.

Transitioning to adulthood is an exciting time for any young person. It is a time for hopes and dreams, planning for and envisioning the future. To hear young people with disabilities discuss what "home" means to them, go to **PACER.org/housing** to view the five-part "Home Is" video series. ■

"The U.S. Supreme Court, in the landmark Olmstead case, ruled that people with disabilities cannot legally be segregated, and have the right to live and receive services in their own community. PACER is here to help families support their young adults as they become more independent."

— Paula Goldberg,
PACER Center Executive Director



Maricruz Arocho, lead family advocate at the Banyan Community

PACER Partner: **Banyan Community**

PACER's Minnesota Statewide Family Engagement Center works to promote student achievement by increasing a families' engagement in their child's education. The program focuses on the needs of low-income and diverse families whose children are in regular education classes. PACER's multicultural advocates speak to families and provide resources in Spanish, Hmong, and Somali.

An effective way to reach families is through community organizations they know and trust, said Rose Quintero, the Minnesota Statewide Family Engagement Center project coordinator. The Banyan Community which serves families in south Minneapolis' Phillips community has been working with the Minnesota Statewide Family Engagement Center for three years. Phillips is one of Minneapolis' most diverse and economically challenged neighborhoods. Phillips residents often face language and cultural barriers: more than 42% were born in another country. The mission of the Banyan Community is to transform lives by developing youth, strengthening families, and creating community. Banyan currently serves approximately 100 families and has a staff of 22.

"Banyan has a very tight connection with the families they serve," Rose said. "The community trusts Banyan, and that makes it easier for PACER's Minnesota Statewide Family Engagement Center to connect with families."

Maricruz Arocho, lead family advocate at Banyan, says working with the Minnesota Statewide Family Engagement Center has been "wonderful. I am so thankful we have partnered with PACER! It is great for parents and for staff, too.

"When parents attend PACER workshops, they are so impressed! They say, 'I didn't know this!' They are grateful that we are able to bring in the Minnesota Statewide Family Engagement Center to give them a tool to use, learning to work with the schools."

"Parents are grateful that we are able to bring in the Minnesota Statewide Family Engagement Center to give them a tool to use—learning to work with the schools."

— Maricruz Arocho

Although the Minnesota Statewide Family Engagement Center's focus is on families with children in regular education, Maricruz said that the partnership has also assisted families of children with disabilities. "A lot of the parents don't know they have rights as parents of kids with disabilities. Through PACER they learn what's available to them."

Maricruz said that both families and Banyan staff have found the workshops very helpful. In addition to workshops, the Minnesota Statewide Family Engagement Center has helped Banyan's staff with professional development over Zoom. "For me, as a family advocate, the Minnesota Statewide Family Engagement Center has given me tools to help the parents I work with," she said. "I can go to their website, or Rose or Jesús [Villaseñor, PACER senior multicultural parent advocate] can guide me in helping parents. "It is a wonderful partnership for Banyan and our families." ■

Muffy MacMillan: "PACER is part of our family"

Muffy MacMillan remembers what it was like to be the mother of a young child with a disability. Her daughter Mara, the oldest of Muffy's five children, was born with Williams syndrome, a rare genetic disorder. People with Williams syndrome are developmentally delayed and have distinct physical characteristics; they are also very verbal and outgoing. Mara, who is now 36 years old, is a delightful young woman who is articulate, vivacious, friendly, and considerate of others. She has an amazing number of friends. "I am outgoing and spunky," Mara said.

Things are different today than when Mara was a young child. "Kids with disabilities weren't accepted," Muffy said. "Mara had a neighborhood friend who stopped playing with her. Her mother said, 'I'm sorry, Mara can't play with my daughter anymore.' Mara would look out the window at children going to birthday parties and ask why she wasn't included. It was very painful."

Like most parents, Muffy wanted the best for her daughter. When the family moved to Orono and she learned the school district did not have a special education program, Muffy got involved. "I worked with Karen Orcutt [Orono's longtime superintendent] and Paula Goldberg [PACER's Executive Director] to set up special education in Orono, and that's how I got connected to PACER. We set up classrooms and curriculums and hired staff. No one knew how to do this but PACER. I am very grateful to Paula."

A family affair

Muffy never forgot what it was like when Mara was excluded, and when she worked with the Orono district, inclusion was important to her. "Mara was in integrated classes," Muffy said. "She went through Orono, all the way through the transition program. Orono was very progressive, it was wonderful."

The Orono special education program was just the beginning of the MacMillan family's involvement with PACER. "There is no other organization like PACER," Muffy said. "All of PACER's programs for parents, in addition to their housing

and transition for young adults is what makes PACER unique. PACER is part of our family. When Mara was bullied, PACER stepped in and helped us address the issues appropriately."

Muffy's children also became involved with PACER. For awhile, Muffy's oldest son Win and Mara were in the same classroom. "It became apparent sometimes in some social situations Mara would be totally left out. So Win created PACER's Fun Times program, which brings teens with disabilities and their peers together for social outings.



L to R: Muffy with daughter Mara

"Nobody has more passion and energy and a can-do attitude than Paula Goldberg."

— Muffy MacMillan

"Win was at Breck School at that point. He was able to get friends from Breck and Orono to help him with Fun Times." The program, started nearly 20 years ago, is still very active. Each of Mara and Win's siblings – Noel, Frankie, and Ben – have taken turns leading Fun Times, which Muffy still supports. "I am very proud of my children for their support of PACER," Muffy said.

Muffy and Mara volunteer their time with PACER, and both are wonderful friends and supporters, said Paula Goldberg. "Muffy and Mara both have been involved in so many ways."

Muffy co-chaired the capital campaign that allowed PACER to buy its office building, and she demonstrated her belief in PACER's future through her involvement in establishing an endowment for PACER. "It was so successfully launched," Muffy said.

PACER's Annual Benefit is important to the MacMillan family. Mara is a longtime member of PACER's Benefit committee, something she greatly enjoys. Muffy often brings many friends to the gala and introduces new people to PACER. She and Mara are always in the front row, enjoying the show and bidding eagerly at the Live Auction. "Mara is onstage at the Benefit every year," Muffy said. "Everyone is so proud of Mara when she gets up and speaks!"

Reflecting on her belief in PACER, Muffy said "PACER is a change agent as well as a supportive agency. They are truly a special organization. I will always make time for PACER." ■

"Muffy and her family are amazing people. They care about others. I'm so glad they are part of PACER."

— Paula Goldberg

Robyn Widley:

"I have the best job in the world"



Robyn Widley, Minnesota's Director of Special Education

Minnesota's Director of Special Education, Robyn Widley, has spent her entire career in special education, starting as a classroom teacher. Later she traveled the Western United States under a federal grant for special education, setting up technical assistance centers in 13 states and U.S.-affiliated island states in the western Pacific. "In some of those places the little kids were excited to see a woman from Hunter, North Dakota, with long blonde hair!" she recalled.

Robyn was living and working in Eugene, Oregon, when a job opened up at the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE). A friend urged her to apply, and she was hired. "It was time to come home," Robyn said. She has been with MDE for 32 years, and she has been Director of the Special Education Division for the past six years. "I have the best job in the world," Robyn said.

Robyn's department is responsible for providing support, training, and technical assistance to educators and other stakeholders that provide services to students with disabilities and their families. One of Robyn's key responsibilities has been creating partnerships between the MDE and families, schools, and organizations – including PACER.

"Partnerships are how MDE does what we do," she said. "I think PACER is a great organization, and our relationship is one of the most valued and positive partnerships we have. MDE looks to PACER as a recognized Parent Training and Information Center (PTI), available to all families of children with disabilities."

Challenges of the pandemic

Robyn's division and MDE face special challenges in meeting the needs of students during the pandemic. "This year, we don't have the framework of executive orders," she said. "Districts are setting their own policies to keep kids safe while allowing them to learn in the classroom. I feel for families during this challenging time, and I feel for school staff that have to keep adjusting to life with the virus."

Robyn says that Minnesota schools have worked to ensure that parents have the opportunity to meet with their students' Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams to determine how the pandemic has affected the student's learning, services, and accommodations, and how skills can be recovered. She says that the extended school year programs and additional IEP services provide opportunities for students to regain lost ground. "However, schools are having difficulty hiring and retaining staff, and in contracting for services to meet the needs of students with disabilities," Robyn noted.

She is especially concerned about the increase in student mental health needs. "There are many more calls from families and school staff about mental health," Robyn said. "The mental health needs of our students have been and continue to be a priority for all of us in education. Everyone feels the impact of these needs." She is hopeful that some of these needs can be met through the use of state and federal funding, including funds from the American Rescue Plan (ARP). A majority of funds allocated to districts under these programs is intended to be used to meet the needs of historically underserved students, with a particular emphasis on students receiving special education services.

Robyn's inspiration

"The reason I do what I do is because of my brother Brian," Robyn said. Her younger brother was born with hydrocephaly (a build-up of fluid in the cavities of the brain). In addition to moderate developmental disabilities, Brian had physical disabilities as well. "When he was born, the doctors told mom and dad they shouldn't take him home," she recalls.

"Robyn Widley is a great Director of Special Education. She is dedicated to making sure that children with disabilities have the best education possible. She has made a difference in the lives of so many people! She is a great friend to PACER."

– Paula Goldberg, PACER Center Executive Director

Growing up on a farm in rural North Dakota meant that there were not many services available to meet Brian's needs. "Brian was in many kinds of placements," she said. "Later on, he really flourished in a group home, and when he received day training and other services. It's amazing how far we've come in how we treat and view people with disabilities."

Robyn said she often thinks of how different Brian's life would have been today. "Brian knew he could do things. He loved to sing, and he could sight-read music. He learned to walk at age 18, at the Grafton State School. My mom and I stood at the end of the gym, watching, and cried when Brian took his first steps."

PACER and families

Most parents want their kids to get all the help they need to fulfill their potential, Robyn said. "Parents from different cultures, who have language and other barriers, face more difficulties. That's where PACER's multicultural advocates, along with school interpreters and other staff, come in. It's so critical that parents are involved and have the chance to express their hopes for their child."

In the early days, she said, many families lacked an understanding of due process systems and rights, and students were

treated differently. "Many students with disabilities didn't spend time in regular classrooms. Now we want kids to be integrated in settings with same-age peers."

When asked about the importance of integration, she spoke again of her brother Brian. "My brother was not able to be in integrated settings until the last years of his life. Parents want their children to live and learn, work and play in the most integrated setting."

Robyn is passionate about early childhood education. "In Minnesota, we offer special education services as early as birth. I'm really proud of that, we are one of only five states in the country that offer special education services to children under three.

"That happened because of advocacy organizations like PACER, and medical professionals who chimed in about the importance [of early childhood education]. PACER provides tremendous, valuable support and expertise to families in multiple ways. In Minnesota we wouldn't be where we are, helping families and kids achieve great results, without our partnership with PACER." ■

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- **PACER's Minnesota Statewide Family Engagement Center E-News:** This newsletter provides parents and professionals with the latest tips, tools, and resources for supporting family engagement with schools.
- **PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center E-News:** This newsletter provides practical tools and resources, inspiring stories, and breaking news.
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Renelle Nelson,
coordinator
of PACER's
Mental Health
and Emotional/
Behavioral
Disorders Project

Children's Mental Health Crisis *Hits Home*

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, PACER has received many calls from parents about their children with mental health needs. According to Renelle Nelson, coordinator of PACER's Mental Health and Emotional/Behavioral Disorders Project, "We are in a mental health crisis that started before the pandemic, but the pandemic has accelerated it."

The facts back this up. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), suicides of people ages 10-24 increased by nearly 60 percent between 2007 and 2018. "Almost every call I take is a crisis call," Renelle said. "Parents are really fatigued, scared, and angry."

She shared her own experience as the parent of a child with mental health issues, during the time she worked as a therapist. "I would be in the middle of a therapy session, and someone would come in and interrupt and say, 'you have to take this call, it's your son's school.' It is hard to support a family and keep a career going when you are struggling with your child's issues – imagine what it is like for a parent who earns an hourly wage."

According to PACER advocate Laura Jean, "the calls are much more intense and take a lot longer because of the mental health component. Parents need the support of being heard. They don't know where to go or what to do. Some of them are referred to us by someone else. They really feel alone."

Renelle said there is a "perfect storm" that has caused the crisis. A major factor, she said, is unequal access to mental health screenings, diagnosis and treatment for children of color, children from low-income families, and children with disabilities. "Many children were being served with in-person services and supports written into their IEPs (Individualized Education Programs). When the pandemic hit, schools struggled to follow IEPs because the services and supports couldn't be provided in person.

"There were challenges with technology and even now, schools are sometimes offering a hybrid model of in-person and distance learning. Schools are understaffed and struggling to hire support staff. Most schools have honorable intentions. They want to support kids, but they are stuck."

Renelle says that in supporting children with emotional or behavioral disorders, relationship building is key. "A student needs to know that someone has their back – someone who will understand and validate the student's feelings, even if consequences follow a student's actions."

She used a hopeful example to illustrate. "A 16-year-old boy in a rural school who has Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder was in a school meeting to determine if he would be expelled. In the beginning, he was slumped in his chair with his hoodie pulled up. The principal was working hard to figure out a way to support this kid with empathy and compassion. I watched as the student heard and felt this, and he started sitting up higher and higher in his chair.

"It was clear from what the boy said that he knew the rules but didn't understand cause and effect. Once he was validated, not blamed, he began to participate and ask for help. He said, 'I know I'm going to do something wrong. It looks like I'm choosing it, but I'm not. When I get in trouble, I need help in managing that, in problem solving. Can I have trusted helpers to help me figure it out?' This was a huge breakthrough."

Renelle is hopeful that bringing attention to the mental health crisis will lead to prevention, treatment, and solutions. "There is some increased funding for schools (through the American Rescue Plan); the Minnesota Department of Education has started work groups and recently held a Children's Summit to address the issue; legislation has been increased to fund more school-based mental health services. We wouldn't have seen this urgency prior to COVID.

"Awareness is, I think, a ray of hope. Parents can come to places like PACER for help and support, and we will be there to help problem solve and, as new resources emerge, give parents the information needed to access those resources." ■

NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS ASK CONGRESS FOR HELP

In October 2021, American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, and Children's Hospital Association declared a national emergency in children's mental health. They urged Congress to act quickly to address the crisis, citing emergency room statistics gathered from March through October 2020:

- Emergency room visits for mental health emergencies among **children ages 5-11 increased by 24%**
- Emergency room visits for mental health emergencies among **children ages 12-17 increased by 31%**
- Emergency room visits for suspected suicide attempts by **girls ages 12-17 increased by more than 50%**

Joseph reaches for his **DREAM**

When Joseph Mikosch, who is on the autism spectrum, was in tenth grade, his mother, Danna, attended a PACER workshop on post-high school transition. “Deanne Curran ran the workshop and it was great!” Danna said.

Deanne Curran said, “Danna is one of the most motivated moms I’ve ever worked with. She isn’t afraid to try things. If something doesn’t work, she doesn’t get down; she just keeps trying.”

The transition workshop was not Danna’s first experience with PACER. She initially called PACER for help with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) meeting when Joseph was in the fourth grade. “I started attending PACER workshops and calling PACER advocates when I had questions. I’ve learned so much from PACER over the years.”

After attending the transition workshop, Danna said, “PACER gave me information about what transition is and what it could do for Joseph. I received good advice from PACER about what rights we have and what we can ask for.”

“Deanne told me that Joseph could receive tutoring through Vocational Rehab for his driver’s permit,” Danna said. She credits the tutoring with helping Joseph, who is now 21, pass the written test for his driver’s permit.

Inching toward his dream job

Joseph’s dream has always been to join the police force. “He wanted to wear the uniform when he was four years old,” Danna remembered. When he was in high school, Joseph attended the Police Explorers program, which is designed to provide young people with a hands-on look at law enforcement while teaching character development and promoting personal growth.

Joseph loved the program, and it was very good for him, Danna said. “He learned it was not appropriate to talk about hurting bullies, and he really became a rule follower. He also made friends on the police force. He has breakfast with them, they’ve been to our home for dinner, and they came to his transition program graduation.”

Today, Joseph is a busy guy. He is working at the local Runnings retail store and is a student in the occupational skills program at Ridgewater Community College in Willmar, Minnesota,



L to R: Danna and Joseph Mikosch

where the family lives. “He has a good job, he is valued and they are kind to him. He really loves it,” Danna said.

“The people I work with at Runnings are pretty cool and nice,” Joseph said.

Ben Larson is Joseph’s instructor at Ridgewater. “We are working together on his career goal of being a police officer,” Ben said. With Ben’s help, Joseph will soon start working at the Willmar Police Department. Through “job carving,” a supported employment situation that looks at a profession and “carves out” the tasks that can be performed by a person with a disability while meeting an employer’s needs, Joseph will be detailing police cars for two hours weekly.

“I hope he will be valuable and prove himself,” Ben said. “Personally, I’m really excited for him. He’s very capable and working with the police has been his career goal for a long time. It’s great to see it come together!”

The police job carving program is based on a similar program in Wyoming, Minnesota. Between Ben and Danna, they have worked out pre-employment funding and a job coach who will go to work with Joseph.

Joseph is excited, and has been thinking about how to succeed. “I’ve been itching to do something at the Police Department. If I wash cars, I could also vacuum them, spray the windows, use some foam cleaner on the tires,” he said. “I have quite a few friends on the police force. I plan to work my way up, little by little.”

Ben is proud of his student. “This actually came together more quickly because Joseph had a relationship with a police officer who helped get it approved,” Ben said.

“Joseph has a lot of people pulling for him.” ■

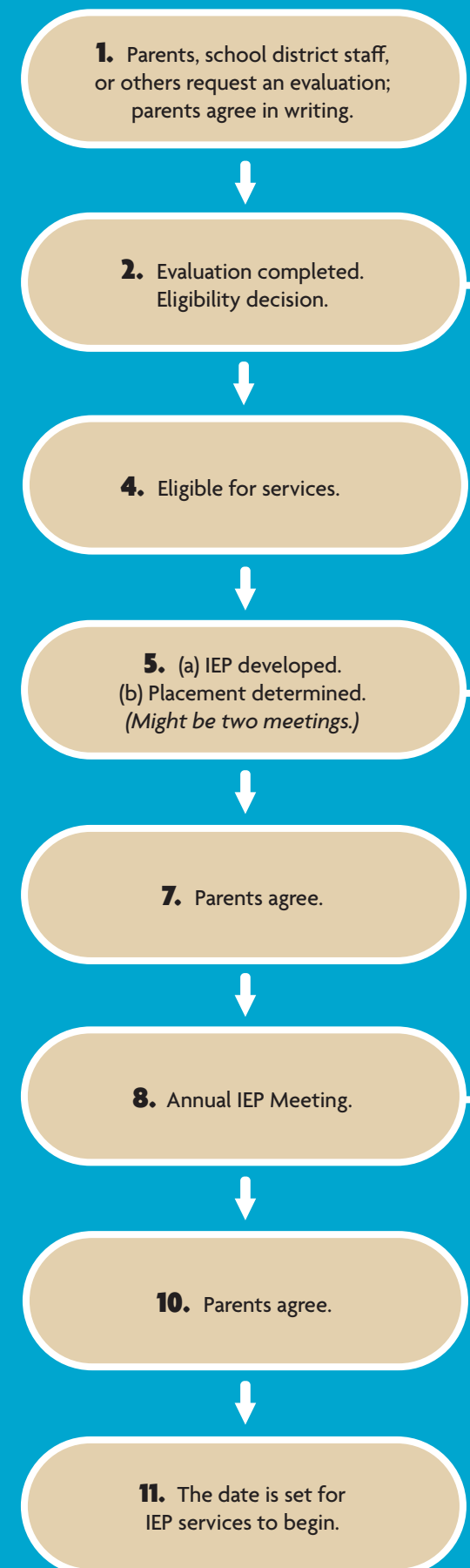
Special Education: Beginning the Process

The special education process starts when a child is referred for an initial evaluation and is identified as having a disability. An Individualized Education Program (IEP) is then developed by a team made up of a school district representative; a special education teacher of the child; a regular education teacher of the child, if the child participates or may participate in regular education; and the child's parent(s), guardian, long-term foster parent or surrogate parents.

A look at the special education process

1. Parents, school personnel, students, or others may request an evaluation to determine whether the student has a disability and needs special education. If a parent requests an evaluation, the school district must complete a full and individual evaluation. If a district requests the evaluation, they must provide appropriate notice and let parents know their rights. Parents must be asked to give their permission in writing for an initial evaluation. A proposal for an evaluation must be offered in a reasonable amount of time, not more than 60 calendar days after receiving a referral to evaluate.
2. Parents and a team of qualified professionals review the results of the evaluation and determine the student's eligibility for special education services. Evaluation and invitation to meet with the IEP team to discuss evaluation results must be completed within 30 school days of signed Prior Written Notice (PWN).
3. If it is determined that a student doesn't qualify for special education services, the parent is notified and the process ends. Parents have the right to disagree with the results of the evaluation or the eligibility decision; if they do, they have the right to an Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE). The IEE is completed by someone who does not work for the school district. The school district is required to either pay for the IEE or show at a due process hearing, conducted by an impartial party, that the district's evaluation is appropriate.*
4. If the parent and the school district agree that the child is eligible for services, they work together at an IEP team meeting to plan the child's Individualized Education Program (IEP). Parents are equal members of this team.

A brief overview





3. Not eligible.*

6. Parents disagree.*

9. Parents disagree.*

- 5.** The IEP lists any special services the student needs, including goals the student is expected to meet in one year, and objectives or benchmarks that show progress. The team determines what services are in the IEP, as well as modifications and where the services will be provided. Sometimes the IEP and placement decisions will take place at one meeting. At other times, placement is made at a separate meeting. The student must be placed in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) appropriate to their needs. They will be placed in a regular classroom unless the IEP team determines that, even with additional aids and services, the child cannot be successful there. Parents are part of the team that decides the type and location of services. The IEP must be written within 30 calendar days of agreeing to services.
- 6.** When a parent disagrees with the IEP and/or the proposed placement, they should first try to work out an agreement with their child's IEP team. If the team cannot agree, parents can use their due process rights, which include dispute resolution options.* The school must conduct a conciliation conference within 10 calendar days from the date the district receives a parent's objection.
- 7.** If parents agree in writing with the IEP and placement, the student receives the services that are written into the IEP. Parents will receive reports on their child's progress at least as often as parents of children without disabilities receive them. If progress reports show that changes need to be made to the IEP, parents can request that the IEP team meet.
- 8.** The IEP team meets at least once per year to discuss progress and write any new goals or services into the IEP. Parents can agree or disagree with the proposed changes. Disagreements should be made in writing.
- 9.** If a parent disagrees with changes to the IEP, the student will continue to receive the services listed in the previous IEP until the parent and school reach agreement. Parents should discuss their concerns with the other members of the IEP team. If a parent still disagrees, their options include asking for additional testing or an Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE), or resolving the disagreement using due process.* The school must conduct a conciliation conference within 10 calendar days from the date the district receives a parent's objection.
- 10.** The student continues to receive special education services if the team agrees that the services are needed. A reevaluation is completed at least once every three years, unless the parent and school district agree that reevaluation is not needed to determine the student's continued eligibility for special education services and the services they need.

*Go to:
[PACER.org/parent/php/PHP-a25.pdf](https://pacer.org/parent/php/PHP-a25.pdf)
for information on Minnesota's due process
options or call PACER at (952) 838-9000.

Still have questions?

PACER advocates are here for you!

Staff are working remotely due to COVID, so please leave a voicemail message at (952) 838-9000 or email PACER@PACER.org. Our front office staff will forward your inquiry to the appropriate PACER advocate who will respond.

Behind the scenes with Nancy Kleve

Nancy Kleve, PACER's front office manager of 21 years, juggles a number of responsibilities at PACER. "I'm a behind-the-scenes person," Nancy said. "Being part of PACER is very rewarding. I'm in awe of PACER's incredibly talented staff that work one on one with parents, conduct workshops, write materials, and help in so many other ways. Our staff is amazing, they are experts in their field and very credible."

Nancy likes the variety in her work: she is responsible for contracting and supervising everything from heating, ventilation, and cooling systems (HVAC) to lawn mowing, snow removal, garbage pickup and more. "We're fortunate to have our beautiful building," she said, "It's also a very functional space for staff."

Nancy supervises the front office staff of six and is a key person for PACER's annual Benefit. "I really enjoy being involved in many facets of our annual Benefit," she said. "We have a great group of volunteers who make up our Benefit committee. It's rewarding to work with the passionate, creative people who make the Benefit possible. We've formed some wonderful friendships. PACER is blessed to have the amazing volunteers who work on the Benefit Committee as well those who return year after year to help the day of the event."

Nancy's work on the Benefit includes coordinating nearly 400 volunteers. She also helps with logistics, organizing the move of many items to the Convention Center, including 1000+ silent auction items. "A lot of time is put into the planning, but it's so rewarding to see it all come together for a successful event!" Like much of her work, that's changed since the Benefit has been virtual and PACER staff has been working remotely.

Prior to the pandemic, "The front office staff was the first contact for parents, over the phone, via email, and in person," Nancy said. While that has changed, she still manages the updating of mailing lists, publication orders, and shipping. "We are extremely busy during National Bullying Prevention Month in October, making sure that the wonderful resources are sent out in a timely manner."

"We have had to become creative and adapt to working remotely during the pandemic, and I think PACER's been very successful at being flexible and adaptable."

When Nancy applied for her job 21 years ago, she says she "looked into PACER, and I was extremely impressed by the mission and opportunity to work for an organization that really makes a difference."



Nancy Kleve, front office manager at PACER

"I've seen PACER grow and adapt to the needs of parents and the community. I've watched how, when a need is identified, Paula [Goldberg, PACER's Executive Director] pulls together staff to brainstorm how to meet that need. PACER is very innovative at advancing and growing programs that are needed in the community."

Nancy thinks that innovation mindset has benefitted PACER staff and families of children with disabilities during the pandemic. "With technology, we're able to reach more people," she said.

Technology and programs have changed during Nancy's 21 years with PACER, but one thing, she says, remains constant: "PACER has a unique culture. All PACER staff care about the mission and one another."

"The front office is the support staff for the whole agency. It's a great team! Most have been with PACER for more than 10 years; our newest member has been here for seven years. It takes a team, all of us, to make sure things are done in the best way possible."

"We care about the families PACER serves. Sometimes we'll take a tough phone call about a child who is struggling. Often a parent advocate will come back to us and say, 'We're getting this resolved.' It's all about the human factor."

"I'm honored to work for an organization that makes such a difference in people's lives." ■

"Nancy is very modest about all she does. She is an important part of PACER, and is dedicated to her work, which supports PACER staff and helps us serve all families."

— Paula Goldberg, PACER Executive Director

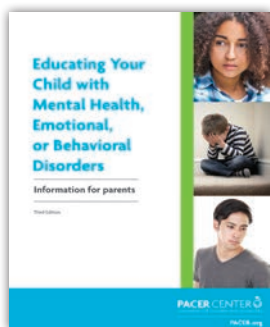
PACER Resources

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

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

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

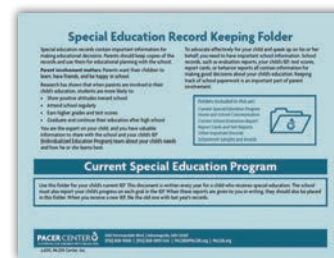
\$5 | 10+ copies, \$4 each | PHP-a21



Special Education School Record Keeping Folders

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

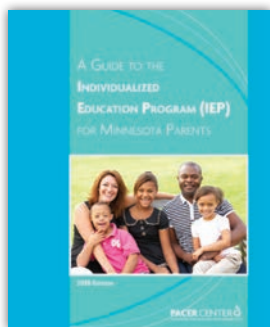
\$10 | 11+ copies, \$8 each | PHP-a5



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

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

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



General Education School Record Keeping Folders

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

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



Did you know that many of PACER's publications are translated into **Hmong, Somali, and Spanish?**

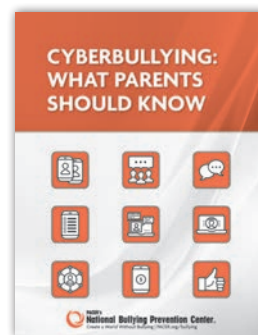
To learn more, visit **PACER.org/translations** or call PACER at (952) 838-9000.



Cyberbullying: What Parents Should Know

Students have instant access to cell phones, tablets, and computers, which open the door to exciting new ways of connecting, interacting, and learning. However, these modes of communication also present challenges. This 16-page booklet has information for parents on how to guide children through this virtual world. Free to download. Available in English and Spanish.

\$3 | 10+ copies, \$2 | BP-23



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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PACER Workshops

CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH

Back on Track for School Success: Mental Health and Education

Thurs., Feb. 10 • 12:00 - 1:30 p.m.

Many children and youth experienced challenges managing their mental health and emotional wellness during the past school year. This webinar will provide parents and others with information and strategies for supporting school success when mental health impacts learning.

Working Towards Positive Educational Outcomes: Mental Health and Special Education

Thurs., Feb. 24 • 6:30 - 8:00 p.m.

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 learning. **This webinar is funded by a grant from the Minnesota Department of Education.*

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

Tues., March 15 • 6:30 - 8:00 p.m.

This workshop will help parents and others understand the role of Section 504 and Special Education when supporting a child with mental health needs who struggles with school attendance.

Mental Health Technology: Destress and Decompress

Wed., May 18 • 1:00 - 2:00 p.m.

Part one of this two-part series on mental health assistive technology will feature apps and devices to help manage everyday stressors. Tools demonstrated will be appropriate for late elementary-aged students and older.

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Tools to Help Your Child De-stress

Thurs., Feb. 10 • 6:30 - 7:30 p.m.

Is your child or grandchild struggling with anxiety, depression, or just feeling overwhelmed? Many children and teenagers are experiencing extra stress or mental health challenges due to COVID, changes in school schedules, and social unrest. Come learn about some basic online tools they

can use on their phone or computer. These tools can help a child deal with stressors related to school, friends, and life. This information is relevant for all children, including those with a mental health diagnosis.

HOUSING

Housing: Starting the Journey - How Do We Start? (Step 1)

Mon., March 14 • 6:30 - 9:00 p.m.

Parents can help their young adults develop their vision for community living, housing, and services. An overview of housing and service options will be provided. Registration recommended for all three workshops in this series. Register for each session separately.

Housing: Starting the Journey - How is it Paid for? (Step 2)

Mon., March 28 • 6:30 - 9:00 p.m.

Gain a "big picture" view of how housing is funded through federal, state, and county resources, including how your young adult can become eligible for, and access, funding. Topics include income supplements and budgets. Registration recommended for all three workshops in this series. Register for each session separately.

Housing: Starting the Journey - What are the Options? (Step 3)

Mon., April 11 • 6:30 - 9:00 p.m.

A more detailed explanation of individualized housing and service options will be provided by a panel of parents, young adults, and housing providers as they share their journeys through the process. Registration recommended for all three workshops in this series. Register for each session separately.

PARENT TRAINING

Resolving Disputes Through the Special Education Process

Tues., April 5 • 6:00 - 8:00 p.m.

A webinar with Q&A to help parents increase awareness of dispute resolution options in the special education process. **This webinar is funded in part by the Minnesota Department of Education.*

SIMON TECHNOLOGY CENTER

Lunch & Learn: All About Switches

Wed., Feb. 16 • 12:00 - 1:00 p.m.

Switches can help individuals with disabilities control devices such as toys, computers, tablets, or communication devices. This workshop will cover different types of switches, switch interfaces, and matching switches to needs.

Help Organize Me! (Part 1): Planning the Schedule

Tues., March 1 • 2:00 - 3:00 p.m.

Part one in this executive function series, geared towards older students, will focus on tools and strategies for planning a schedule, calendar, task list, and time management.

Tools to Support Independent Living: Taking Care of Your Home

Wed., March 2 • 2:00 to 3:00 p.m.

Attendees will learn about technology to support independent living skills. The tools featured in this workshop will help teens and adults with disabilities develop skills needed to care for their home and live more independently. Apps and devices to support completion of household tasks with reminders, timers, task directions, and visual and audio prompts will be featured.

Help Organize Me (Part 2): Remembering the Schedule

Tues., March 29 • 2:00 - 3:00 p.m.

Part two in this executive function series, geared towards older students, will feature strategies and tools for remembering a schedule, calendar, task list, and managing time.

Lunch & Learn: Apps to Support Social - Emotional Skills

Wed., April 6 • 12:00 - 1:00 p.m.

This workshop will provide demonstrations of iPad apps that can be used with K-12 students to support social-emotional learning and skills.

Help Organize Me (Part 3): Doing the Schedule

Tues., April 26 • 2:00 - 3:00 p.m.

Part three in this executive function series, geared towards older students, will provide strategies and tools for doing and following through on a schedule, calendar, task list, and time management.

Succeed at Work: Tools to Support Executive Function

Wed., May 4 • 2:00 - 3:15 p.m.

This workshop will explore technology to support executive function at work. Topics will include managing time, staying organized, completing tasks, and maintaining focus using devices and mobile apps.

TECH FOR GIRLS CLUB

Tech for Girls Club: Creative Coding - Using Code to Make Art

Sat., Feb. 12 • 10:00 - 11:00 a.m.

We can use coding to do many things, even make art! Join this virtual workshop where we'll use TurtleArt coding to create works of art and share them with each other.

Tech for Girls Club: Deep Sea - Bioluminescent Creatures

Sat., March 12 • 10:00 - 11:00 a.m.

How do creatures see in the depths of the ocean? You'll learn all about it in this virtual workshop about bioluminescence (a creature's ability to create its own light) and how it helps deep sea creatures navigate.

Tech for Girls Club: Earth Day - Cleaning an Ocean Oil Spill

Sat., April 23 • 10:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.

Ocean spills have far-reaching impacts. In honor of Earth Day, we'll explore the impacts of oil spills and how scientists help the environment and animals recover.

Tech for Girls Club: May the Force Be with You - Light up Lightsabers!

Sat., May 14 • 10:00 - 11:00 a.m.

The Force has chosen YOU! Come join us in this virtual workshop as we celebrate Star Wars month by creating our very own lightsabers using paper circuits and LED lights.

TECH FOR TEENS CLUB

Tech for Teens: 3D Printing Online

Sat., Feb. 26 • 10:00 - 11:30 a.m.

In this Zoom Webinar you'll learn the basics of creating printable 3D models using Tinkercad online software. Learn to bring your ideas to life through modeling with simple shapes, and about public resources available for printing your models with a 3D printer.

Tech for Teens: Lego Stop-Motion Videos

Sat., March 26 • 10:00 - 11:30 a.m.

Using just a mobile phone and LEGO brand toys, this workshop will help you learn to create stop-motion style videos. Learn to create smooth animation using the Stop Motion Studio app (iPhone & Android), and then bring your own characters to life! Requirements: one mobile device with a camera (iOS or Android) and the Stop Motion Studio app installed, and your choice of movable figures or objects such as LEGO brand toys.

Tech for Teens: Intro to Coding and Video Games

Sat., April 16 • 10:00 - 11:30 a.m.

This virtual workshop introduces teens with disabilities to the fundamentals of coding through the use of MIT's Scratch online software. Teens will create interactive games and stories while developing basic programming skills. This workshop is designed for students with basic computer skills, but no previous coding knowledge is required. Students of all abilities are encouraged to attend.

Tech for Teens: Coding Websites

Sat., May 28 • 10:00 - 11:30 a.m.

This workshop will introduce teens with disabilities to the basics of coding for the internet with HTML and CSS. Students will create their own unique website and publish it on the Internet. Students will be able to experiment with code and see the results online in real-time.

TRANSITION

Inspiring Possibilities (Part 2): Living, Learning, and Working After High School - Transition Mini-Conference for MN Parents

Fri., March 4 • 9:00 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Part two of PACER's free, virtual transition-to-adulthood mini-conference for Minnesota parents will feature community experts and PACER transition specialists on a variety of need-to-know topics. Ask questions and connect with other parents. Informative sessions will include:

- Life Planning: Guardianship and Conservatorship
- Life Planning: Special and Supplemental Needs Trusts
- College Options for Students with Intellectual Disabilities

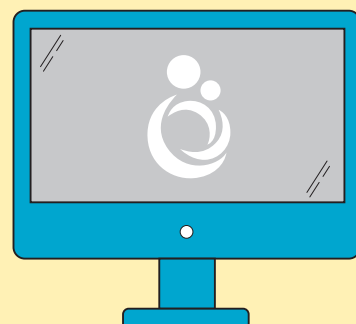
PACER workshops are *FREE* to Minnesota parents!

At this time, all PACER Center workshops are held virtually. Visit PACER.org/workshops and click on the registration link to learn which virtual platform will be used. If you have questions contact PACER.

For additional information and to register, visit PACER.org/workshops.

Contact PACER with questions at:

- (952) 838-9000
- (800) 537-2237
- PACERworkshops@PACER.org



For the most up-to-date listing of PACER workshops, visit: PACER.org/workshops

IN THIS ISSUE

| | |
|---|-------|
| PACER Board member Daniel Goldberg | 1 |
| Legislative agenda..... | 2 |
| Housing workshop series | 3 |
| PACER partner: Banyan Community | 4 |
| Friend of PACER: Muffy MacMillan | 5 |
| Robyn Widley: MN Spec. Ed. Director | 6-7 |
| PACER e-newsletters | 7 |
| Children's mental health crisis | 8 |
| Success story: Joseph Mikosch | 9 |
| Special education process overview | 10-11 |
| PACER staff highlight: Nancy Kleve..... | 12 |
| PACER publications | 13 |
| PACER workshops | 14-15 |

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For up-to-date information on PACER workshops,
events, stories, publications, videos, and more, go to:



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Facebook.com/**NPCTE** (PACER's National Parent Center on Transition and Employment)



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