



## School Staffing Shortages

Parent leadership is key to meeting the needs of students with disabilities

Before the pandemic, 10% of U.S. schools were having difficulty maintaining staffing levels. Those numbers have since skyrocketed – and students, especially those with disabilities, are suffering the consequences.

### Understanding the Problem

Today, most U.S. public schools are facing staffing shortages, and the teaching specialty with the highest vacancy rate is special education, according to a School Pulse survey by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education. A staggering 78% of U.S. schools reported difficulties in recruiting and hiring qualified special education teachers, leading to a 65% shortage of special education teachers in classrooms.

That isn't news to the PACER advocates who work with families every day. The disruptions of the pandemic left many students who have Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) struggling with lost progress, learning, and skills. "Students urgently need their IEP services to get back on track and make meaningful progress again, but many schools don't have the special education staff to implement IEP services effectively," said Rachel Pearson, a PACER parent advocate. Rather than catching up, she said, the lack of services means that numerous students are falling further behind.

"It is very challenging right now for students to receive the free, appropriate public education (FAPE) they are legally entitled to," said Vava Guthrie, PACER's director of parent programs and advocacy.

Staffing problems go beyond the special education teacher shortage. At a time when students' mental health needs are at an all-time high, mental health providers are in short supply and placement options for treatment are limited. Schools are also contending with inadequate numbers of related service providers and paraprofessional staff.

The consequences for students with disabilities are dire. Missing IEP services harms students' potential to make appropriate progress on their IEP goals. Not being able to rely on the support of a paraprofessional to engage in the general education classroom means lost inclusion opportunities. Students are forced into more restrictive placements because the staff and services they need to thrive aren't available. Some students can't access a full school day until staffing shortages are resolved. Others receive minimal home-based instruction while they wait for spaces to open in the programs where their complex educational needs can be met.

Continued on page 2

# TAKE CHARGE!

## What Parents Can Do

### #1: Request an IEP Team Meeting

“Under IDEA (the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), schools are required to provide FAPE, which includes following the student’s IEP,” Vava said. “If the student is not receiving the IEP services they are entitled to, the parent should ask for an IEP team meeting.”

“It’s critically important that the parent prepare for this meeting by knowing and understanding their rights and their child’s rights,” Vava said. “PACER is here to help any parent looking for assistance in advocating for their child.”

Rachel added, “Knowing the challenges schools are currently facing, parents should go into the meeting ready to identify which services are the highest priority for their child. It’s important to send a strong message about their child’s most urgent needs, so the IEP team can focus their energies and the district’s limited resources on meeting those needs.”

Parents should also ensure there is a plan in writing to make up any missing IEP services. “The Minnesota Department of Education has made it clear that even with staffing shortages, districts must provide every child their IEP services,” Rachel pointed out. “Parents should work with the IEP team to ensure that a concrete plan to make up any services the district is not providing is written into their child’s IEP. The plan should include when the child will receive the services owed – before or after school? In the summer? And how? If,

for example, the district has not been able to hire a speech language pathologist, will they reimburse the parent for speech services from an outside provider? Or will the district purchase speech services elsewhere?”

“Special education recovery services barely scratched the surface of the harm students with disabilities experienced during the pandemic,” Rachel said. “Parents have learned that it’s hard to access compensatory services after the harm is done. Don’t wait for the school staffing shortage to resolve itself. Advocate now for getting your child’s needs met, and work collaboratively with the IEP team to protect your child’s right to FAPE.”



### #2: Find Opportunities To Lead in Your District

System-wide problems demand system-wide solutions, and parents of students with disabilities have a long history of leading change in Minnesota schools. In 1971, four years before the U.S. Congress passed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Minnesota was one of the first states in the country to pass a mandatory special education law, ensuring every child with a disability had the right to a public education. Parents drove that change by raising their voices and leading.

PACER has always encouraged parents to take on leadership roles at the district level. Involvement in the district’s Special Education Advisory Council, or SEAC (pronounced “seek”), is a great way to do this. Every school district in Minnesota has a SEAC, and at least half of the designated council members must be parents of students with a disability. SEACs advise the district on policy and decision making. “Joining the SEAC makes parents part of district-level conversations about current issues impacting students with disabilities, and also connects them with other parents,” Rachel said. SEACs are covered by Minnesota’s open meeting law, so parents can attend even if they don’t join.

Vava said, “PACER offers opportunities for parents to expand their leadership experiences and build their leadership skills. All are welcome to sign up for PACER’s Day at the Capitol on March 23rd. Parents are also invited to apply for one of our four parent leadership training events, held throughout the year.”

“The current school staffing shortage is an opportunity for parents to drive system-wide solutions to advance the rights of children with disabilities again,” added Rachel. “Minnesota school districts need parents of students with disabilities to lead and help find a way forward.” ■



## TAKE ACTION!

- For information about how to get involved in your district’s SEAC, go to:

**[PACER.org/parent/parent-leadership/seac](https://PACER.org/parent/parent-leadership/seac)**

- Expand your leadership experiences! Sign up for PACER’s Day at the Capitol on March 23rd:

**[PACER.org/capitol](https://PACER.org/capitol)**

- Build your leadership skills! Apply for one of PACER’s four parent leadership training events. For more information, visit:

**[PACER.org/events/parent-leadership-training](https://PACER.org/events/parent-leadership-training)**

# PACER's 2023 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

PACER is taking an active role in Minnesota's 2023 legislative session, which opened January 3 and runs until May 22.



## PACER's legislative priorities include:

- **FULL FUNDING OF SPECIAL EDUCATION**  
“We are hopeful that in light of the budget surplus, a long-term plan can be developed to finally fully fund special education,” said Susan Einspar, PACER's public policy director.
- **INCREASED ACCESS TO STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES**  
Student mental health needs are at a crisis point. PACER supports legislation to increase access to student mental health services at school and outside of school.
- **DECREASED EXCLUSIONARY DISCIPLINE PRACTICES**  
PACER supports legislation that decreases the use of suspensions, exclusions, expulsions, withholding recess, and other disciplinary practices that neither meet the needs of students nor promote a positive school culture, except in an emergency situation.
- **INCREASED ACCESS TO THE IEP PROCESS FOR PARENTS WITH A DISABILITY**  
Legislation would increase the ability of parents with disabilities to access reasonable accommodations that support their full participation in the IEP process.
- **ACCESS TO EDUCATIONAL SERVICES FOR CHILDREN WHO ARE PLACED IN FACILITIES FOR BEHAVIORAL SERVICES**  
“Some children in half-day programs do not have transportation to school, and so they are denied their educational rights,” Susan said. “This legislation would require districts to educate all children.”
- **REDUCTION OF PARENTAL FEE FOR COUNTY SERVICES FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES**  
These high fees can cause financial stress, resulting in many families not accessing important home- and community-based services that would be extremely beneficial to their children's health and development.

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As part of its public policy work, PACER leads the *Coalition for Children with Disabilities*, a group of disability advocacy organizations that works together on a shared legislative agenda.

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*PACER's Day at the Capitol event is paid for using private funds.*

PACER hopes families will be actively involved in our public policy work. We encourage parents to join us for PACER's annual **Day at the Capitol on March 23**, to learn more about policy issues and how to share their family's story with legislators to influence change. For more information or to register for the Day at the Capitol, visit **[PACER.org/capitol](https://PACER.org/capitol)**.

# History of PACER

## A New Book About PACER Is in the Works

Minnesota's former director of special education, Norena Hale, is writing a new book, "PACER Center: A Groundbreaking Parent Volunteer Organization."

Dr. Hale is the author of five books, including "From Voiceless to Powerful: How Parent Voices Changed Minnesota's Educational System for Children with Disabilities," published in 2020. She anticipates that her book about PACER, funded with a grant from the Minnesota Historical Society, will be published in the fall of 2024.

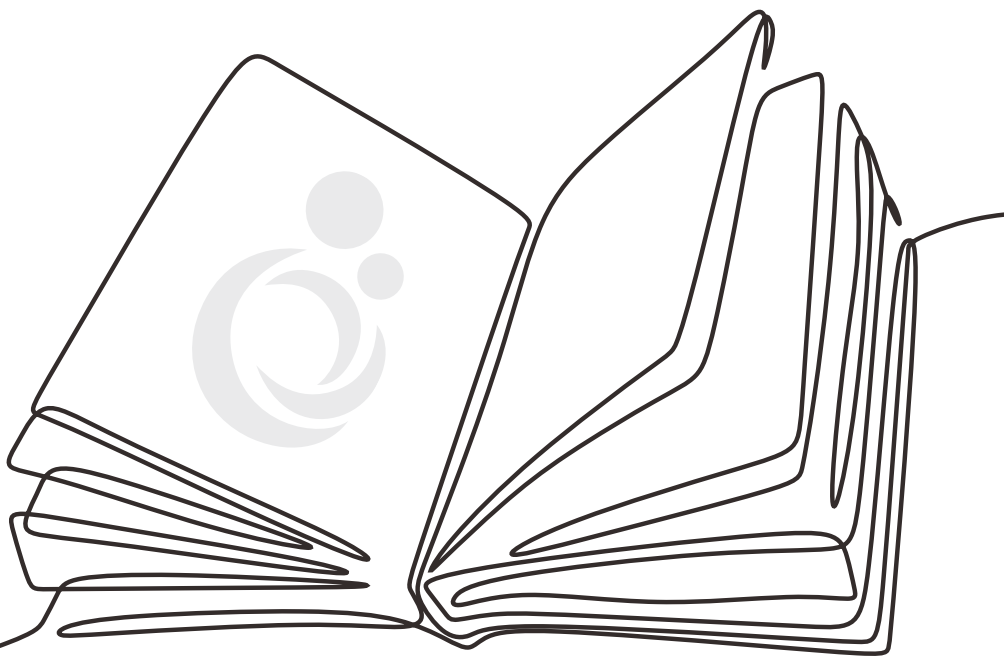
Paula Goldberg approached Dr. Hale some time ago to write about PACER's history. Hale wanted to first write about how parent involvement in Minnesota led to the creation of PACER in 1976, hence the book "From Voiceless to Powerful ...". Hale's new book will be an in-depth look at PACER from its beginnings to present. She plans to trace the history of PACER from its first days, including early staff and board members, the development of PACER's mission, and early projects and funding. "I will be covering how PACER started as women working from their kitchen tables, to renting a tiny office with donated furniture, to PACER today: an organization with a multimillion-dollar budget and an endowment to ensure its future," Hale said. "The book will explore how PACER created its mission, developed and gained funding for projects, and the projects themselves."

Gretchen Godfrey, PACER's interim executive director, commented, "We are so fortunate to have someone with Norena's background and expertise writing this comprehensive history of PACER. While we look forward to our future, it is important to recognize all the hard work and dedication that led to PACER's growth and development over the past 45 years."

The scholarly work will include information about PACER's volunteer leadership, including boards and committees; statewide impact, including legislation, public policy, and parent leadership training; impact on federal policies; fundraising, budget, and endowment; programs and projects; and PACER information sheets for parents and professionals. The book's robust appendix features interviews with past and present PACER staff and volunteers.

Dr. Hale has five decades of experience in special education. She taught special education in Missouri and South Dakota before joining the South Dakota Department of Education as a consultant and administrator. After relocating to Minnesota, she was first assistant director and then, for more than 20 years, director of special education at the Minnesota Department of Education. She also served for five years as Minnesota's Assistant Commissioner for Vocational Rehabilitation. ■

Norena Hale, former Minnesota director of special education and author of a new book about the history of PACER





## NEW RESOURCE!

# Cyberbullying Prevention 101 Quick Guides

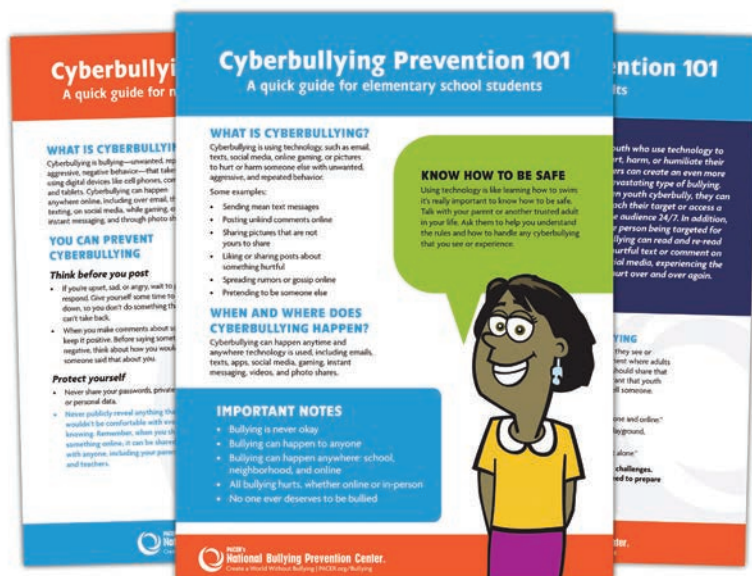
PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center (NBPC) has developed a series of three brief, age-appropriate fact sheets about cyberbullying. The "Cyberbullying Prevention 101 Quick Guides" are downloadable, double-sided, and visually appealing; there is one each for elementary students, middle and high school students, and parents.

"The Cyberbullying Prevention 101 Quick Guides outline what cyberbullying is, and how to prevent and address it," explained Julie Hertzog, NBPC director. The Quick Guides include definitions and examples of cyberbullying, along with information on how to prevent and address the behavior.

Julie says that cyberbullying, usually done out of the sight of parents and other adults, can be devastating because of how quickly and easily content can be shared with a larger audience. In addition, cyberbullying can be done anonymously, which means there are no consequences for the child who bullies. Cyberbullying can also leave a trail of hurtful words and images online that can be hard or even impossible to remove, meaning that the child targeted can be hurt over and over again.

"Our goal is to shine a light on cyberbullying," Julie said. "It's important that a student who is targeted for bullying knows that it is not their fault – that no one deserves to be bullied. Students who bully need to know that it is never okay to bully someone. Bystanders and targets need to know that they don't have to solve this alone, that reaching out to an adult for help is the right thing to do. Parents need to understand cyberbullying and how they can support their children."

**The Quick Guides are available at [PACER.org/bullying](https://PACER.org/bullying).**



## 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 Helped Otto ACHIEVE HIS DREAM

Otto Rinehart, who is partially deaf, was doing well in a private school in his school district. “The school was an excellent fit,” said his dad, Jeremie. “But in order to graduate, Otto needed to learn a foreign language. They offered Mandarin, Spanish, and German. With masking, learning these languages was impossible for him.”

Neither the private school nor his school district offered American Sign Language (ASL) as an option. After some back and forth, the district suggested that the Rineharts consider open-enrolling Otto in a district that offered ASL.

The Rineharts were willing to do that. They selected Andover High School because it offers ASL and is close to home, and Otto transferred mid-year during the 2021-2022 school year. “The Andover school district has a robust ASL program. They offer four levels plus honors ASL,” Jeremie said.

There was a problem, though. Otto is a gifted hockey goalie. Under the governing rules of the Minnesota State High School League (MSHSL), as a transfer student, he would be ineligible to play varsity hockey for a full calendar year. The rule is in place to prevent students from transferring schools simply for sports opportunities.

But Otto wasn’t transferring to be on a better team. “His transfer was based purely upon the recommendation of the prior school district due to overcoming the educational barriers related to his disability,” Jeremie said.

That doesn’t mean he didn’t want to play hockey, and both school districts, realizing the legitimacy of Otto’s transfer, agreed that he should be allowed to do so. Because Otto transferred mid-year, his parents wanted him to settle into the new school. The plan was that he would sit out the rest of the 2021-2022 school year, and play varsity hockey in fall 2022.

The plan came to a devastating halt when the MSHSL initially rejected Otto’s request to play varsity. At that point, the Andover school district suggested the Rineharts contact PACER. “We got pointed to Michael Carr, and his knowledge of the MSHSL rules proved to be invaluable,” Jeremie said. “We had a Zoom meeting, and Michael pointed out a section of the MSHSL rules that allowed students with disabilities who transferred for academic reasons to participate in varsity sports. He walked us through the petition process.”

“There is a little-known statutory exception to the MSHSL rules for students with disabilities,” explained Michael, who first started as a parent advocate at PACER fifteen years ago

and was part of PACER’s public policy team when the law passed in 2014.

The MSHSL ultimately approved the petition – and Otto is now playing with the Andover Huskies. He is also earning his best grades ever.

“We have such gratitude to Michael for his help. We owe PACER a big thank you. If it hadn’t been for Michael and PACER, we would have had to hire an attorney and pay unnecessary legal fees,” Jeremie said.

“I am glad that the law worked as it was supposed to for Otto – and I hope it will also work for many more students with disabilities,” said Michael.

“I’m just happy we were able to help Otto follow his dream.” ■



Otto Rinehart suited up to play for Andover.



# PACER's Paul Sanft:

## The Incidental Leader



Paul Sanft came to PACER six years ago, after responding to a listing for an assistive technology specialist at PACER's Simon Technology Center (STC) on a local job board. He previously worked at Goodwill Easter Seals, where he had nine years' experience in presenting to people with disabilities. "I was an instructor for the job readiness program," Paul said. "I created curriculum, taught computer literacy, worked with people – many of whom had disabilities – to help them overcome barriers to employment."

"I knew what a difference technology could make for all people, including people with disabilities," he said. Paul had a desire to continue to work with people on their technology skills. Although he had a strong affinity for technology, Paul saw PACER as a chance to learn even more. "When I interviewed at PACER, I didn't even know what assistive technology was!"

He learned it so well that by late 2021, when Terri Rosen decided to leave her position as STC director, she recommended to then-Executive Director Paula Goldberg that Paul take her place. Paul said that no one was more surprised than he when Paula offered him the job.

"I had no intent or desire to be in leadership," Paul said. "I didn't think I'd be good at it. I really enjoyed my work, focusing on technology consultations and especially, Tech for Teens programming; why would I want to take on something I wasn't sure I could do as well? I was not sure I could live up to Terri's example."

Ironically, it was the success of Tech for Teens, the hugely popular program Paul developed and led, that was a major factor in Paula offering Paul the job. She believed that someone who could create such a thriving program would be a visionary leader for the STC.

Paula did not want to take "no" for an answer. She and Paul had several conversations about the position, and he took some time to think about it. "Paula broke down the strengths

needed to succeed in the job," he said. "I told her what my weaknesses were. She thought they were things I could improve. She said, 'leadership takes many different forms' and that I could find a way to develop my strengths and work on my weaknesses."

Paul found that he was interested in the potential of the position to shape programming. He thought he had some important qualities to bring to the position. "The STC team is talented and dedicated," he said. "I decided to take the job because I knew just how great the entire team is."

In addition to technology, Paul has other skills he's used at PACER, including those as a filmmaker. In addition to some small projects, Paul directed the PACER video shown at the 2022 Benefit.

Away from PACER, Paul is married and the father of two young daughters, ages two and six. His wife, Tori Bahr, MD, is medical director of pediatrics at Gillette Children's Hospital, and has worked with PACER. The Sanft-Bahr family enjoys travel, particularly outdoor adventures. "We enjoy visiting the national parks," Paul said. "We've been to 31 of 63, and we plan to visit all of them."

*"Everyone who interacts with the STC learns about something they didn't know existed. It might be a small improvement in their day, or a life-changing tool. It's exciting to be part of that."*

- Paul Sanft

Paul is enthusiastic about the future of the STC. "We have a great mission and are doing a good job – but there is more that we can do. We want to innovate: create new assistive technology using our 3D printers, among other things. We're not engineers, but we know what is needed; we can partner with other organizations to move assistive technology along, making new tech tools rather than just introducing people to the existing technology. We've already customized parts for ride-on cars, gaming controllers, screen guards, and light switches. There is a huge variety and opportunity for innovation. Everyone who interacts with the STC learns about something they didn't know existed. It might be a small improvement in their day, or a life-changing tool. It's exciting to be a part of that." ■



Kathy Graves with her son, Sam Graves

## Board Spotlight: Kathy Graves

Like many of the members of PACER's board of directors, Kathy Graves is the parent of a child with a disability. Kathy's youngest son, Sam, has spastic triplegia, which affects muscles and movement. Sam was three when the Graves family became involved with PACER; today, he is 29 with a rewarding career as a digital marketing specialist at Allyant (formerly Accessible 360).

PACER was still in its cramped Chicago Avenue office when Kathy and her husband Hazen visited with then 3-year-old Sam. "Our pediatrician told us about PACER," Kathy recalled.



Sam Graves using assistive technology to operate a computer at PACER.

"We first attended a technology open house; we have a picture of Sam using a giant tracking ball to operate a computer. PACER was a wonderful resource from the very beginning."

The Graves family has continued to use assistive technology to help Sam succeed. A PACER advocate also helped with Sam's IEP when he

was in elementary school. "Sam still uses PACER's services today," Kathy said. "Currently, he is working with Simon Technology Center staff on the next generation of voice recognition."

### Joining the Board

After meeting Paula Goldberg, PACER's late executive director, at the open house back in 1996, Kathy and Hazen became involved with PACER. "I worked on the Benefit and chaired it several times, including the year Aretha Franklin was our entertainer," Kathy said. "Hazen (an attorney) helped PACER

with legal advice on a few occasions." It wasn't long before Kathy joined PACER's board, and her involvement deepened. She has served on the board two separate times, in line with PACER's policy of rotating board terms.

Prior to moving to Minnesota from Washington, DC, and Colorado, Kathy worked in politics, and she has found it fulfilling to learn about advocacy as a PACER board member. "It is rewarding to see PACER play a significant leadership role in legislative work at the state and national levels," she said.

One of her cherished PACER experiences was attending the Washington, D.C., Reception on the Hill. Kathy was impressed with PACER's ability to engage those in power. At the reception with U.S. Senators and Representatives, she observed Senator Paul Wellstone, who spoke passionately to the crowd about the importance of IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) funding. "He had a brother with a disability," she said. "He respected PACER and the work we did, and he had built support on both sides of the aisle for IDEA."

### Peer-to-Peer in Siberia

The trip to DC was just one of the trips Kathy made on PACER's behalf. Another journey took her halfway around the world. "Paula called me in 2018 to ask me to consider an opportunity with the University of Minnesota's Institute on Community Integration (ICI)," Kathy said. Building on established work by ICI and the Rotary Club of White Bear Lake, and with funding from the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, Kathy and seven other Minnesotans traveled to Krasnoyarsk, one of the largest cities in Siberia, as part of the Peer-to-Peer project. "Parents there were pushing for integration of their children, many of whom were highly employable," Kathy said. "Just like in the U.S., parents were at the forefront."

In Krasnoyarsk, Kathy shared information about PACER programs and services, especially in the area of transition. Her



“Day in the life with Sam” presentation included photos, videos, and details of his education, employment supports, and other accommodations that have helped to make him successful.

“People in Krasnoyarsk loved the concept of ‘parents helping parents.’ They were also really interested in assistive technology,” she said. The week in Siberia has led to lasting friendships, cemented when groups from Krasnoyarsk and Moscow visited the Twin Cities – and PACER – after the ICI group’s visit to Russia. “Some of the visitors were so excited that they emptied their suitcases of clothing so they could

take home some assistive technology like they saw in our technology center,” she said.

## The Next Chapter

“Walking into a PACER board meeting is like coming home,” Kathy said, speaking about the supportive experience of being surrounded by other parents of children with disabilities. The board has always been highly engaged, she said, but it is especially so as the organization embarks upon its next chapter following Paula Goldberg’s death. “Paula left the organization in very stable financial condition,” Kathy said.

“We have work to do in hiring PACER’s new leader and in setting a course for the future. But we have a talented staff and are continually asking, how can we serve more people? How can we make sure we’re reaching all populations throughout Minnesota?”

As part of her board service, Kathy is helping lead development of PACER’s strategic plan with board and staff leaders. As a partner in Parenteau Graves, a strategic planning and communications firm, she is uniquely qualified to do so.

“PACER’s board is excited for what comes next, and deeply grateful for the past. Paula set PACER up for success. Our job is to make that happen,” she said. ■



Guests from Krasnoyarsk and Moscow visit PACER in January 2019. They were welcomed by Kathy Graves, along with PACER staff members Barb Ziemke, Gretchen Godfrey, and Laura Jean.

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*“Kathy has been a wonderful asset to PACER during this transition period. She has generously provided her professional expertise, and her history with PACER has been tremendously valuable to me and the entire organization.”*

– Interim Executive Director Gretchen Godfrey

## PACER’s Executive Director Search

PACER’s search for a new executive leader is active and moving forward well, said Mark O’Leary, president of PACER’s board of directors. “The board formed an executive search committee and retained Cohen Taylor to support a national search,” Mark said. “The process is thorough and has resulted in a strong pool of excellent candidates that have been vetted and narrowed to a select number by the search committee.

“Our goal is to find the next great leader for PACER to live our mission, build on Paula’s legacy, and continue to expand the positive impact PACER makes in people’s lives. With input from key stakeholders, supporters, staff, and friends of PACER, the board is confident the process will lead to a great selection for PACER’s next chapter.”

# FUN TIMES CONNECTS

## Youth With Disabilities & Typical Peers

Alisa Barnett, a 17-year-old girl with Down syndrome, loves PACER's Fun Times program. "I like meeting new people and seeing what you have in common, and coming out of my shell," she said. "I enjoy the food too! And my favorite is when we do artwork."

Fun Times, which provides an opportunity for youth with disabilities to socialize with their typical peers, has always been a hugely popular program – so much so that many teens still participated when the pandemic forced the program to go virtual. Fun Times is now back in person.

"Fun Times is a group that welcomes Minnesota teens to participate in events in the Twin Cities area," Danna Mirviss, PACER's Fun Times coordinator, explained. Some recent Fun Times events have included lawn bowling, a game night, sporting outings, art projects, a summer barbeque, and theater performances.

Alisa's mom, Michele McLaughlin, is enthusiastic about her daughter's involvement. "The beautiful thing is, when we drop Alisa off or even if it's an activity where I stay, Alisa takes charge! Recently she was arm-in-arm with an old friend – a girl she'd met at PACER's EX.I.T.E. Camp. They'd stayed connected, off and on, and now here they were together.

"It's a really warm, friendly group."

Christina DaRonco echoed Michele's sentiments. Her son Phoenix, who is on the autism spectrum, has been part of Fun Times for about a year.

"Phoenix has always struggled to make friends; he doesn't interact with peers often," Christina said. "He loves coming

to Fun Times! He enjoys the age diversity of people. Most of the people are outgoing, which is nice. They are kind and so welcoming. The adults also go out of their way to make everyone included."

### The Breck Connection

Fun Times was started in 2004 by Win Bennett, then a student at Breck School. Win saw that his older sister Mara, who has Williams syndrome, did not have the active social life he enjoyed – and he decided to work with PACER to start a social group for teens with disabilities and their peers without disabilities.

Breck students still lead the group, with assistance of Breck staff. Danna says that the involvement of Frederique Schmidt, who chairs Breck's community engagement department, is key to the program's current success. "I don't think I could run this program as well, and make it as much fun, if Frederique and Breck students weren't there to partner with us."

Frederique believes that Fun Times teaches Breck students important skills. She explained, "I facilitate community-based learning through the lens of social responsibility. Because Breck is an independent, college prep school, many of our students aren't around differently-abled or neurodiverse peers. We want to normalize differences of all kinds, and we need to make up some ground. It's in line with the idea that we want to incorporate the value of creating community to all into action."

Frederique says that about 15 to 20 Breck students at a time participate in Fun Times. Josie Skimp, a sophomore, is one of Breck's student leaders.

"I really like being able to connect with so many people in such a short time," Josie said. "I'm outgoing, and sometimes, when I see people are having difficulty socializing, I help them start conversations with others."

"I really enjoy being able to do it with people from school. It is such a positive experience – everyone seems to enjoy themselves and enjoy each other's company. I plan to be involved all through high school."

### Final Words

When asked what she likes most about Fun Times, Alisa didn't hesitate. "I'm glad we're back in person!" And then she paused.

"Thank you for Fun Times," she said seriously. ■



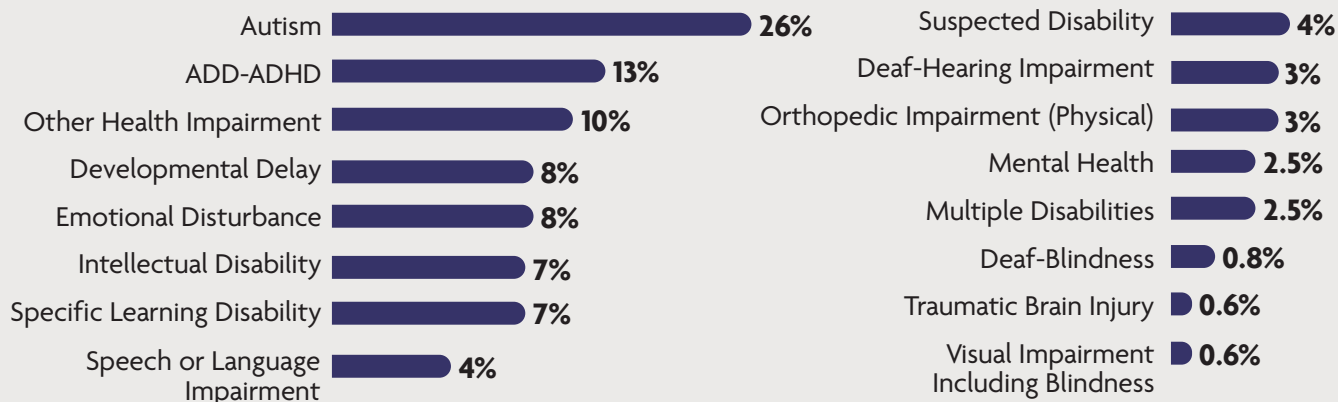
Fun Times participants enjoying an event at Breck School in October 2022.

# 2022 IMPACT:

How PACER Made a Difference For Families



## CHILD'S PRIMARY DISABILITY



**321**

Average number of requests for assistance PACER staff responded to each week

**19,222**

People attended PACER's virtual and in-person trainings and events

**230,000**

Subscribers to PACER's print and electronic newsletters

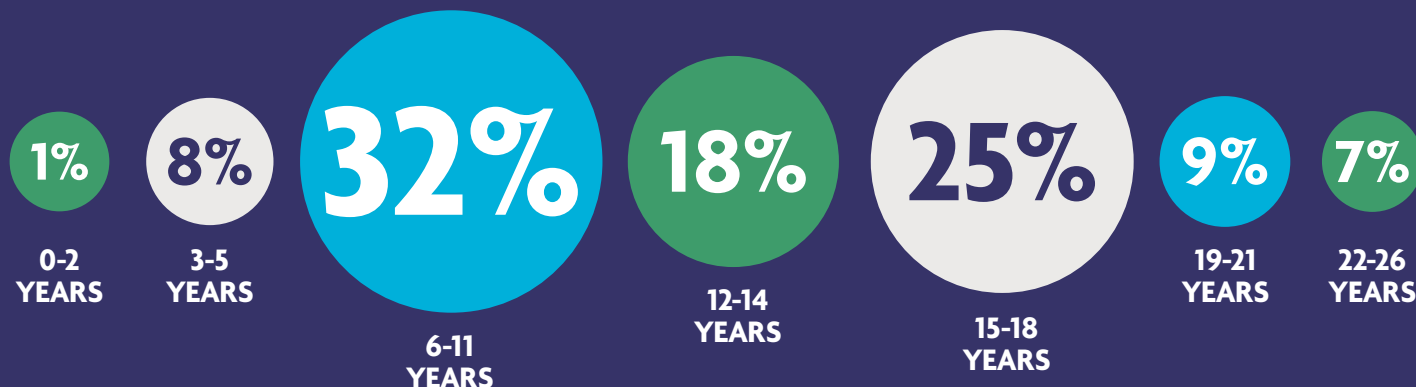
**2.2  
MILLION**

Visits were made to PACER's websites

**15%**

of PACER's expenses went to fundraising and management expenses: well below industry standards

## AGE OF CHILDREN







Pentatonix performs at PACER's 2022 Annual Benefit (photo by Chad Rieder)

# PENTATONIX

## Delights Audience at PACER's Annual Benefit

For the first time in more than three years, PACER's Benefit was live and in person. "It was great to be back at the Minneapolis Convention Center," said Gretchen Godfrey, PACER's interim executive director. "There's nothing like walking through the silent auction room and lobby surrounded by friends of PACER!"

There's no doubt that the highlight of the 40th annual Benefit, held on November 5, was the amazing performance by the iconic headliners, a cappella superstars Pentatonix. "Not only was the music fabulous, the group did a great job connecting with the audience and making the event feel personal," Gretchen said. "It was a high energy performance from beginning to end. We heard from so many guests that they just loved the show."

Benefit co-chair Nancy Kaysen commented, "It was just a wonderful evening. Everyone seemed to have a lot of fun. Pentatonix was one of the best entertainers we've had. The silent auction was fantastic – the quality was the best I've seen. I'm so appreciative of all who donated to it! I was glad to be back in the Minneapolis Convention Center, and there was a real connection to Paula. The tribute to her was so touching. Overall, it was a huge success."

Former PACER board member, local comedian and entertainer Miss Shannan Paul, was the emcee. "Shannan was so fun and energetic, and she really kept the audience engaged," Gretchen commented. Auctioneer Frank Vascellaro, WCCO-TV anchor and longtime friend of PACER, was his usual humorous and lively self as he encouraged bidders to dig deep for children with disabilities and all children who are bullied.

Additional highlights of the evening were the presentation of the first annual Paula F. Goldberg Champion for Children with Disabilities award to Maren Hulden, and the screening of the new PACER Benefit video. For more about Maren, go to page 16. View the video at [Youtube.com/PACERCenter](https://Youtube.com/PACERCenter).

"We would like to recognize the hundreds of people who made this amazing evening possible," said Debbie Andrews, director of events. "We had great volunteer leadership: event chairs Jessica Broyles, Betty Kay Crothers, Mary Holmes, Nancy Kaysen, David Kaysen, and Colleen McGough Wood; the silent auction committee, led by Becky Amlaw, Pam Benbow, and Don McNeil; and the corporate sponsorship committee, chaired by Don Davidson, Hal Lieberman, and Jim Oricchio. We owe the evening's success to the many people who supported the Benefit financially and with the gift of their volunteer time. Thank you all for your generosity." ■



Don McNeil and Tani Austin



David and Nancy Kaysen



Mark O'Leary, Sharman Davis Barrett, Mira Levinson, Dan Levinson





A) Pentatonix band members along with guests Madeline Broyles, Molly Broyles, Sam Broyles, Ben Duncan, Maggie Broyles; B) Donna and Jim Oricchio; C) Carrie and Dan Goldberg with PACER co-founder Marge Goldberg; D) Kip Holmes, Eloise Holmes, Mary Holmes, Hailey Holmes, Brooklyn Staub; E) Darren and Cassidy Dearing with Julie and Don McNeil; F) Benefit auctioneer Frank Vascellaro, Gretchen Godfrey, Benefit emcee Shannan Paul; G) Student volunteers from the University of Minnesota

# PACER Workshops

Visit [PACER.org/workshops](https://PACER.org/workshops) to view the most up-to-date listings, see full descriptions, and register. PACER workshops are currently held in person, virtually, or hybrid. If you have questions, contact [Workshops@PACER.org](mailto:Workshops@PACER.org) or call (952) 838-9000 or (800) 537-2237.

## CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH

### **Proactive Crisis Planning for Children with Mental Health Challenges: Part 1 - On Demand Video Presentation**

**Link active from Feb. 13 – March 10 (Virtual)**

This workshop will provide information on strengths-based planning in the school setting. Part 1 will be a video presentation viewers can access independently prior to the live Q & A discussion (listed below).

### **Proactive Crisis Planning for Children with Mental Health Challenges: Part 2 - Live Q&A**

**Wed., Feb. 22 • Noon – 1 p.m. and 6 – 7 p.m. (Virtual)**

**Tues., March 14 • 10:30 – 11:30 a.m. and 5 – 6 p.m. (Virtual)**

After participants have accessed the video portion of the presentation from Part 1 (listed above), they can participate in any Part 2 live question and answer session.

## HOUSING

### **Housing Workshop Series**

*Registration recommended for all three workshops in this series. Register for each session separately.*

### **Starting the Journey: Step 1 – How Do We Start?**

**Mon., April 10 • 6:30 – 9 p.m. (Virtual)**

Parents who attend this workshop will gain information to help their young adults develop their vision for community living, housing, and services. An overview of housing and service options will be provided.

### **Starting the Journey: Step 2 – How Is It Paid For?**

**Mon., April 24 • 6:30 – 9 p.m. (Virtual)**

Participants will gain a “big picture” view of how housing is funded through federal, state, and county resources, including how their young adult can become eligible for, and access, funding. Topics include income supplements and budgets.

### **Starting the Journey: Step 3 – What Are the Options?**

**Mon., May 8 • 6:30 – 9 p.m. (Virtual)**

Participants will hear a more detailed explanation of individualized housing and service options from a panel of parents, young adults, and housing providers, who will share their journeys through the process.

## SIMON TECHNOLOGY CENTER

### **Tools and Resources for Children with Dyslexia**

**Wed., Feb. 15 • 6:30 – 7:45 p.m. (Virtual)**

This workshop will feature tools, apps, and software to support students with dyslexia, from elementary school through college. Tools demonstrated will include text-to-speech, audiobooks, writing support, and notetaking.

### **Video Game Access Part 3: Switch/Virtual Reality**

**Wed., Feb. 22 • 1 – 2:15 p.m. (Virtual)**

In part 3 of Video Game Access, participants will learn about devices, software, and accessibility features specific to gaming with Switch/Virtual Reality.

### **AAC Journey: Evaluation Milestones Across the Lifespan**

**Tues., Feb. 28 • 2 – 3 p.m. (Virtual)**

Participants will learn more about what the Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) evaluation process looks like across the lifespan, and what parents and professionals need to know to support it.

### **Strengthen Focus with Tools and Strategies**

**Mon., March 6 • 4 – 5 p.m. (Virtual)**

Focus is the executive functioning ability to ignore distractions to accomplish a task. Participants will learn about a sampling of tools and strategies that can strengthen focus.

### **STEAM Rollers Spring Series**

**Sat., March 11 • 10:30 a.m. – Noon (Hybrid)**

**Sat. March 18 • 10:30 a.m. – Noon (Hybrid)**

A Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math tabletop role playing group for middle and high school students. Up to 12 participants will engage in STEAM while playing a tabletop role playing game.

### **Accessible Smart Homes: A Review of Environmental Assistive Technology**

**Wed., March 29 • 2 – 3:15 p.m. (Virtual)**

This workshop explores devices and apps that can help turn your home into a Smart Home and be more accessible.

### **Keys to Job Success: Tools to Support Executive Function at Work**

**Wed., April 5 • 1 – 2:15 p.m. (Hybrid)**

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



### **Apple Accessibility Features: A Review**

**Wed., April 19 • Noon – 1 p.m.  
(Virtual)**

Participants in this workshop will review Apple Accessibility features, including established and newly added iOS 16 and macOS Ventura features.

### **Build a Sensory Space: DIY Options to Create a Sensory Room**

**Wed., May 10 • 2 – 3:15 p.m.  
(Hybrid)**

In this workshop, presenters will demonstrate easy DIY options that can be used to create sensory rooms or spaces.

### **Choosing Reading Tools to Match Reading Material**

**Mon., May 15 • 4 – 5 p.m.  
(Virtual)**

Reading can be challenging for many with reading disabilities and visual impairments. In this workshop, presenters will introduce how to match reading tools to the type of reading material. Tools include auditory and visual modifications.

### **Tech for Mental Health: The Latest Tools and Resources**

**Wed., May 24 • 2 – 3:15 p.m.  
(Hybrid)**

This workshop will discuss various tools and strategies for using technology to improve mental health and promote positive mental health practices.

### **Assistive Technology Supports for Math**

**Wed., June 21 • 2 – 3:15 p.m.  
(Virtual)**

Participants in this workshop will learn about math tools that can help build math skills for all skill levels.

## **TECH FOR TEENS CLUB**

### **Tech for Teens: Intro to Robotics**

**Sat., Feb. 25 • 10 – 11 a.m.  
(In-Person Only)**

Participants in this in-person Tech for Teens workshop will learn the basics of robotics, including how to assemble a Mbot robot and how to use simple commands to control the Mbot.

### **Tech for Teens: Robotics – The Next Level**

**Sat., Feb. 25, 2023 • 11 a.m. – Noon  
(In-Person Only)**

In this robotics workshop, participants will learn how to program the robot to do more than basic commands. Attendance at the intro workshop is not required to attend this workshop.

### **Tech for Teens: Wind Energy Part 1**

**Sat., April 22 • 10 – 11 a.m.  
(Hybrid)**

Participants will learn about the science behind this renewable energy source, and then get hands-on with building different types of wind turbines. This workshop is a great opportunity to learn about the potential of wind power.

### **Tech for Teens: Wind Energy Part 2**

**Sat., April 22 • 11 a.m. – Noon  
(Hybrid)**

Participants in Part 2 will learn how to harness the wind to generate electricity. During the workshop, they will select a wind turbine design, and then build a model that will generate electricity.

### **Tech for Teens: May the Force Be With You – Star Wars Lightsabers**

**Thurs., May 4 • 5:30 – 6:15 p.m.  
(Virtual)**

Participants in this virtual workshop will celebrate Star Wars month by creating their very own lightsabers using paper circuits and LED lights.

### **Tech for Teens: May the Force Be With You – Build R2D2**

**Sat., May 6 • 10:30 a.m. – 12:15 p.m.  
(In-Person Only)**

In celebration of Star Wars Day, participants will build R2D2! This in-person activity involves building a controllable R2D2 robot, learning about engineering, 3D printing, and coding.

### **Tech for Teens: Web Development – HTML and CSS**

**Sat., June 17 • 10 – 11 a.m.  
(Hybrid)**

In this STEM workshop, participants will learn the basics of website development and craft their own webpage using HTML and CSS.

### **Tech for Teens: Web Development – JavaScript**

**Sat., June 17 • 11 a.m. – Noon  
(Hybrid)**

In part 2 of this STEM workshop for teens, participants will learn more advanced website development skills and tools including learning to code JavaScript.

## **TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD**

### **Navigating the Ins and Outs of Government Programs and Community Resources**

**Thurs., Feb. 23 • 1 – 2:30 p.m.  
(Virtual)**

This workshop will teach families of transition-age youth and young adults about Disability Hub MN, a free statewide resource network to help problem solve, navigate the system, and plan for the future.

### **The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Rights and Responsibilities of Students**

**Thurs., March 16 • 1 – 2:30 p.m.  
(Virtual)**

The ADA protects persons with disabilities from discrimination and provides equal access and opportunity for participation in education and employment. This training provides information on ADA rights and responsibilities of students who plan to work and/or attend a post-secondary institution following high school graduation.

### **Young Adults and Customized Employment: What You Need to Know**

**Tues., March 28 • 7 – 8:30 p.m.  
(Virtual)**

This training will provide an overview of customized employment and the discovery process. Customized employment is an option for individuals who are significantly impacted by their disability and desire competitive, integrated employment. The presentation will cover how discovery process has led to successful employment outcomes for many Minnesotans.

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## Maren Hulden Named Winner of Paula Goldberg Award



Maren Hulden received the first annual Paula F. Goldberg Champion for Children with Disabilities Award at PACER's Annual Benefit on November 5th, 2022. The award carries with it a \$5,000 contribution to support the recipient's ongoing advocacy work.

Maren, a supervising attorney at the Minnesota Disability Law Center, was previously an advocate with their Legal Services Advocacy Project. She has been instrumental in helping pass legislation, including recovery education, inclusive childcare, and more.

Julia Page, who nominated Maren, wrote: "Maren possesses a perfect combination of warmth, empathy, story-telling, and deep knowledge of data and policy. In addition to her vast knowledge as an attorney, her experience as an educator and mother of a young child with a disability gives her a deep understanding of the barriers that children

with disabilities and their families face. Maren is constantly working to promote and protect the human rights of people who have disabilities, and she is deeply deserving of this award."

Maren said, "It is such a tremendous honor to receive this award and to be part of honoring Paula in this way. Paula was such an icon, a fierce advocate and builder who forever changed how students with disabilities experience schools by empowering their parents and schools. I learned so much from Paula and will always be grateful to have gotten to learn from her example. As a parent of a kid who has a disability in Minnesota, I'm also so grateful that he gets to be in schools that have been shaped for decades by the parent advocacy fostered by this community Paula built.

"Thank you so much to PACER for this incredible honor and for your partnership in this work."

*"Working with families is the greatest privilege, and it's their resolve, ingenuity, and tenacity that fills me with so much hope for a future where kids who have disabilities experience true inclusion."* – Maren Hulden