

# PACESETTER

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

## Hard work, talent + high expectations = James' success

Joy Johnson always keeps one thing in mind when advocating for her sons James and John, both of whom are on the autism spectrum: "I recognize their abilities first, rather than focusing on their disabilities," she said.

When James was a preschooler, one day his parents observed him watching Sesame Street and noticed he responded to the music. This was important, because James didn't respond to his name or, Joy said, even interact much with his parents. "That's why we took him to a piano teacher," she said. "In the beginning, it was just to give him something to do."

Today James, who turns 20 in October, is an accomplished pianist who plays professionally; his parents have helped incorporate James' small business, AbiliKeys in Autism. His impressive repertoire ranges from the 50's and 60's pop tunes that please his senior citizen clients to the classical music he plays for his gigs at the Minneapolis Saint Paul International Airport – and just about everything in between. His favorite music is the ragtime compositions of Scott Joplin.

### Learning to play

It wasn't easy for James to start playing; in fact, it took a while for him to even be able to sit still for lessons. However, his parents had faith in him, and James' first piano teacher did, too. "His first teacher

*'AbiliKeys' continued on page 2*



Friends of PACER's

**Run Walk Roll**  
AGAINST BULLYING

**10<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL**

**Saturday, Sept. 28**

**9 a.m. to Noon**

**Register today at  
PACER.org/RWR  
or call (952) 838-9000**

Join PACER for the annual Run, Walk, Roll Against Bullying, the kick-off event to National Bullying Prevention Month. This fun, fully accessible event is held at Normandale Lake Park in Bloomington, Minn. In addition to running, walking, and rolling, you'll enjoy family-friendly activities, information tables, treats, and an inspiring program. Check-in and day-of registration begins at 9:00 a.m., with the Run, Walk, Roll starting at 10:00. The cost to register is \$10 for ages 7-18, \$20 for ages 19 and older. Children age 6 and under attend for free!

### Calling all students! Bring your friends to the Run, Walk, Roll!

Kindergarten through grade 12 students who want to help prevent bullying can organize a team of 10 or more people!

*And the cool part?* Not only will you be helping to raise funds for PACER's bullying prevention program, you'll also receive, from an anonymous donor, a \$50 Visa gift card! It's yours to spend, to celebrate with your team, or to pay it forward. The more people on your team, the bigger the gift card!\* Teams of 20 or more will receive a \$75 gift card; teams of 50 or more receive a \$250 gift card!

Register online today at PACER.org/RWR. IMPORTANT: At the end of the registration form, it will ask for your Organization / Team Name. Have your Teammates enter your Team Name here! PACER will provide updates to the team lead regarding how many participants have registered.

*\*Incentives are only available to K-12 student teams*

# AbiliKeys in Autism

Continued from page 1

thought he had musical talent and was patient in nurturing that talent,” Joy said. The lessons continued for several years, until the family moved from Maryland to Minnesota.

In Minnesota, his parents contacted PACER and connected with staff parent advocate Barb Ziemke. “Barb and PACER helped us tremendously. There were many IEP (Individualized Education Program) meetings and Barb gave us great advice and support.” Along with working with Barb, Joy attended PACER workshops and parent leadership training which, she said, helped her learn advocacy skills.

The Johnsons couldn’t find the right piano teacher for James in Minnesota, so his father, Daniel, who had had lessons as a boy, started to teach James himself, using the same series of books as the Maryland teacher. A few years ago the Johnsons found a music therapist at MacPhail who was very supportive, Joy said. “In 2018, he started taking lessons from Professor Elizabeth Karelse at Normandale Community College. Because James is minimally verbal, she uses exaggerated facial gestures and light touch to teach him.”

When James was 16, Joy contacted some senior living facilities and before long, he was playing for several on a volunteer basis. By the time he turned 18, the Johnsons thought he should be paid for his work. With Joy’s help, he now has 10 senior home clients, plays regularly at the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport, and just performed at his first wedding. James performs about 10 hours per week and practices three to four hours every day.



James Johnson

## A musical success

“James really likes playing,” Joy said. “Because he is so behind his peers in most ways, the encouragement and praise he gets for his music helps him feel good about himself. James understands money; he’s pretty good at numbers. He likes the routine of playing, the gigs that are scheduled regularly.” His parents are part of James’ success, though Joy quickly points out his hard work and talent. As James’ support person, she markets AbiliKeys in Autism, drives him to gigs, and communicates verbally for him.

“People said, ‘Not even typical musicians can earn a living, how can he?’ It would have been very easy to be discouraged. People say, oh, he can’t do this, he can’t do that,” Joy said. “Barb was very encouraging, and so was his music therapist. We knew this was his strength. We had to believe that if we kept working on it, it would turn out somehow. It did. With help, he is earning money, just like other people his age.”

Barb said that family support has been key to James’ success and John’s educational inclusion. “Joy is positive, persistent, and assertive. She also says ‘thank you’ and holds up her end. She has great follow through and is a contributing team member.

“Sometimes Joy had to modify the way plans were carried out. But she never modified her high expectations.”

Want to hear James play? Go to [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com) and search “AbiliKeys.” ■

## Mark your calendars! Upcoming PACER events

- Sept. 15** Simon Technology Center's Tech Expo and Family Fun Day
- Sept. 28** Friends of PACER's Run, Walk, Roll Against Bullying
- October** National Bullying Prevention Month
- Oct. 23** Unity Day, signature event of PACER's National Bullying Prevention Month

For details on these and other PACER events, go to [PACER.org](https://www.pacer.org) or call (952) 838-9000.

# PACER Advisory Board Co-chair Emmy Mastel is passionate about inclusion in education

Emmy Mastel, co-chair of PACER's Advisory Board, began volunteering with PACER in 2011. She and husband Tim are the parents of two boys: Charlie, who's 14 and a freshman in high school, was born with Down syndrome; William, who just entered the sixth grade, is typically developing. "People referred me to PACER when Charlie was born," Emmy said.

Charlie was in grade school when Emmy turned to PACER for help with his educational needs. "We accessed PACER advocates several times six years ago when we were struggling with the school," Emmy said. "It was really helpful to get additional information and assistance."

It was around that time that PACER Executive Director Paula Goldberg invited Emmy to join PACER's Advisory Board. "When I got connected professionally, I learned about the breadth of what PACER has to offer," she said. "Being on the Advisory Board has made me much more aware of PACER's programs." Today, she helps lead the Advisory Board as one of its co-chairs.

Emmy said the background of Board members is an asset to PACER. "The Advisory Board is quite large and has members from all walks of life and life experiences. Some of us are parents or grandparents of children with disabilities; others are there because they care about children with disabilities and those who are bullied. The different skillsets and backgrounds of the members help PACER gain multiple perspectives and broaden our base of support. We are also a sounding board for Paula and the PACER team," Emmy said. She noted, "Everyone is there because we are passionate about the work PACER does. We are enthusiastic about PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center because their work speaks to more people and families."



The Mastel family: Tim, William, Emmy, and Charlie

"I also think it's really important to support the Benefit. Advisory Board members sell Benefit tickets and contribute to the wine pull." Emmy said that her favorite Benefit performers were Sheryl Crow and Jennifer Hudson. "My mother-in-law is a Beach Boys fan so this year we brought her to the Benefit. She really enjoyed it and stayed until the end."

Professionally, she is a financial planner with Prudential, specializing in retirement planning; she has also carved out a niche in special needs financial planning. Outside of work, Emmy's life revolves around the activities of her two active sons. "Both of them are involved in sports. Charlie plays golf, runs track, and is in theatre too." The

*'Emmy Mastel' continued on page 4*

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**The different skill sets and backgrounds of the Advisory Board members help PACER gain multiple perspectives and broaden our base of support.**

– Emmy Mastel

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## Innovative parent mini-conference about post-high school transition is Nov. 2

Inspiring Possibilities: Living, Learning, and Working After High School, a new mini-conference for parents of teens and young adults, will be held on Saturday, November 2 from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at PACER Center.

The conference will answer the question, “How will your teen or young adult with a disability lead an active and meaningful life in the community after high school?”

The day will begin with a panel presentation by transition-age youth. “These youth have had a variety of experiences; what they have in common is they will provide parents with hope for the futures of their youth with disabilities,” said Barb Ziemke, co-director of PACER’S National Parent Center on Transition and Employment.

Informative break-out sessions will include experts discussing:

- Job training, support and accommodations
- College options and disability supports
- Social and community connections
- Supported and independent housing strategies
- Eligibility for “adult services” and public benefits

Over a light lunch supplied by PACER, parents will hear



from community specialists, ask questions, and have the opportunity to connect with other parents.

Parents of teens and young adults will find a wealth of educational material and resources on the web page of PACER’S National Parent Center on Transition and Employment, located at [PACER.org/transition](http://PACER.org/transition). The well-organized website includes a robust Learning Center, video library, inspiring stories from transition-age youth, and comprehensive video library.

Parents with questions about transition can call PACER at 952-838-9000 and ask to speak to a transition specialist.

**To register, go to [PACER.org/workshops](http://PACER.org/workshops), or call (952) 838-9000.**

### *‘Emmy Mastel’ continued from page 3*

family spends time in Big Sky, Montana; they hike and mountain bike in the summer and ski in the winter.

Another of Charlie’s activities is his participation in Fun Times, PACER’s social program that connects teens and young adults ages 13-21 with and without disabilities. “Charlie joined Fun Times this year, and it’s been really fun and important to him,” Emmy said. “The social piece outside of school has been challenging. Charlie’s peers have social lives outside of school friends and he wants that too.”

Along with her work on the Advisory Board, Emmy sees her role as “Spreading the word about the good work PACER does. I am passionate about inclusion of kids with disabilities in school. It’s important that kids with disabilities have a full, well-rounded education rather than a narrow path.

“It’s what we all want for our kids.”

*If you are a teenager or young adult, or the parent of one, and are interested in participating in Fun Times, contact the Fun Times coordinator Danna Mirviss at [danna.mirviss@PACER.org](mailto:danna.mirviss@PACER.org) or call her at PACER at 952-838-9000. ■*

# No one stood up for Charles when he was bullied

## Today, he stands up for others

Charles Kolin experienced bullying at school in the seventh and eighth grades, just about the time he was diagnosed with nonverbal learning disability. “My brain is wired differently,” he said. “I couldn’t read social cues. Math is hard for me, but my verbal skills are heightened,” he explained.

“I kept my disability hidden from my peers because I thought the bullying would be even worse if people knew. I went through it alone. I had nowhere to go and when people bullied me, my friends walked away and didn’t stick up for me. I was excluded, people said nasty things, made fun of me, posted things on social media, taunted me in the hallway. The school didn’t act because they didn’t look at the shunning and exclusion as bullying.”

Thankfully, Charles, who is now 16 and in his junior year of high school, is no longer being bullied. He has changed schools and attends Greens Farms Academy (GFA) in Greens Farms, Connecticut. Charles said that at GFA, he has “found a new community that is accepting of me and how I work. Unity Day is important for those who haven’t found that. It’s also important to me because I know what it’s like to not feel accepted.”

After Charles heard about Unity Day—established by PACER in 2011, the signature event of National Bullying Prevention Month—he went online and found PACER’s National Bullying Prevention Center. “I had thought about starting an anti-bullying organization but then I found PACER and thought it would be better to help this amazing organization! I reached out and PACER accepted me with open arms.”

Charles recruited a team of a dozen students and teachers for Unity Day, and used some ideas from PACER’s National Bullying Prevention Center’s website (PACER.



Charles Kolin

org/bullying). Charles and his team gave speeches, recited original poetry, and displayed artwork. The majority of the school wore orange armbands, and there were classroom discussions about kindness and inclusion. Many middle and upper school students gave up their free periods to participate. “It was a great community event,” Charles said. “Now that Unity Day was such a success, it is now an official part of the school curriculum.”

Though Charles hopes Greens Farms Academy will lead the way, he’s thinking beyond the borders of his school’s campus. Charles is reaching out to other schools and to national lawmakers. In June, he

went to Washington, D.C., to meet with 23 members of Congress, including U.S. Senator Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut, U.S. Rep. Jim Himes of Connecticut, and U.S. Reps Tom Emmer and Dean Phillips of Minnesota.

“I want Unity Day to be a national day that is recognized by Congress,” he said. “I am working with members of

Congress to create an educational curriculum that states how schools will add Unity Day to curriculums. For example, ‘On Unity Day, schools will stop their normal class lessons. In history class, for example, we’ll learn how people came together, using kindness rather than cruelty.

They will learn positivity rather than negativity. In science class,

students will learn what happens to their brains when someone shows kindness to others.’ I think it’s a great way to learn, and at the same time help others to be mindful and change hearts in the process.”

Charles himself was recognized with a national award at PACER’s National Bullying Prevention Center’s Unity Awards in May, 2019. He was awarded the Together Against Bullying award in recognition of his dedication to Unity Day.

*To learn more about Unity Day, turn to page 8. ■*

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**I reached out and PACER accepted me with open arms.**

**– Charles Kolin**

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# PACER hosts reception for members of Congress

For more than 20 years, PACER has spearheaded an important Reception on the Hill, originated by PACER Executive Director Paula Goldberg, that brings together members of Congress and their staffs with organizations representing parents of the seven million children with disabilities in the United States. Along with PACER, the sponsors of the event are the National PTA and the National Coalition of Parent Centers. More than 25 advocacy organizations are co-sponsors. Best Buy Co., Inc., presented the July 23 reception, which was financed with private funds. Best Buy was represented by Parker Brugge, their Senior Director of Government Relations.

“More than 200 people were in attendance,” noted Gretchen Godfrey, PACER’s Assistant Director and coordinator of the National Coalition of Parent Centers. Gretchen works on state and national legislative issues. “This bi-partisan gathering is a great opportunity for members and staff to meet parent center staff from their states, and for staff to learn how they can be an important resource for their members of Congress.”

A number of prominent members of Congress attended the reception, including Senators Maggie Hassan of New Hampshire, Doug Jones of Alabama, Jack Reed of Rhode Island and Tina Smith of Minnesota, and Representatives Tom Emmer (Minnesota-6), Dean Phillips (Minnesota-3), Denver Riggleman (Virginia-5), and Bobby Scott (Virginia-3). Honorary co-hosts of the reception were Senators Lamar Alexander, Patty Murray, Amy Klobuchar, and Tina Smith, and Representatives Bobby Scott and Virginia Foxx. ■



L to R: Jody Manning, PACER’s Parent Training and Information Center Director, Tammy Pust, PACER’s Board of Directors President, and U.S. Senator Tina Smith (MN)



Sharman Davis Barrett, PACER Family Engagement Center Director, and U.S. Rep. Bobby Scott (VA-3), Chair, House Committee on Education and Labor



U.S. Rep. Dean Phillips (MN-3) and U.S. Rep. Tom Emmer (MN-6)

## PACESETTER

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(Alternate format is available upon request)

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

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# Innovative, wearable devices available through PACER's Simon Technology Center

Wearable devices that look like a Fitbit or Apple Watch are some of the most popular and innovative Assistive Technology (AT) devices available through the Lending Library at PACER's Simon Technology Center.

AT refers to any device that assists people with disabilities in achieving greater independence at school or in daily living. The Lending Library includes AT devices as simple as a pencil grip and as sophisticated as a robot. "The beauty of the Lending Library is that it allows families and educators to try out a wide variety of AT before making a purchase decision," said Terri Rosen, Director of PACER's Simon Technology Center. "Knowledgeable PACER staff provide personal assistance in choosing devices to try at home, in the community, or at school. We can even mail devices for free to members who live in greater Minnesota."

Two of the newest and most innovative wearable devices in the STC Lending Library are:

- **KEEN Habit Aware**  
This device works by helping people who engage in repetitive or compulsive behaviors. "It can be common for someone with autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD,) or obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) to engage in repetitive behaviors such as nail biting, or hair or eyelash pulling," Terri said. "The KEEN Habit Aware recognizes these behaviors and gives a gentle vibration to alert the wearer that they are occurring. It also helps the wearer to track the patterns of when they are engaging in the behavior so they can address what is triggering it."
- **ReVibe**  
This device helps people who have difficulties staying focused. It encourages them to stay on-task by sending reminder vibrations and text messages that show up on the watch screen. When the student feels the vibration, the watch can give them a reminder to get back on task. It also reinforces positive behaviors: if a student is focused and on task, the watch tells them "Good job!" Additionally, students receive text reminders on the ReVibe that remind them of what they should be doing in their daily schedule.

Both of these devices are easy to program through a



Both ReVibe and KEEN Habit Aware are available for trial from PACER's Simon Technology Center's Lending Library.

phone or iPad app. Best of all, students who use them can blend right in with their peers since the devices are silent and worn on the wrist. Devices like the KEEN Habit Aware and the ReVibe promote independence in the classroom, Terri noted. "For many kids, this can mean more meaningful inclusion and success in classroom activities."

*For more information about the Lending Library and wearable devices, go to [PACER.org/stc/library](http://PACER.org/stc/library), email [stclibrary@PACER.org](mailto:stclibrary@PACER.org), or call 952-838-9000. ■*

## Visit the Lending Library

PACER's STC Lending Library hours are:

**Tuesdays, noon - 7:00 p.m.**

**Thursdays, 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.,**

Select Saturdays (Sept. 7, Oct. 19, Nov. 9, and Dec. 14) from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Families may also schedule an appointment to visit the Lending Library during business hours, Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. with at least one business day's notice.

# October is National Bullying Prevention Month



**UNITY DAY**  
**OCT 23, 2019**

**WEAR AND SHARE  
ORANGE  
IN SUPPORT OF  
BULLYING PREVENTION**

**TOGETHER  
WE ARE UNITED FOR  
KINDNESS  
ACCEPTANCE  
INCLUSION**

**#UNITYDAY2019  
PACER.ORG/BULLYING**

Sponsored by PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center since 2011

## Get involved: Help raise awareness

PACER founded National Bullying Prevention Month in 2006 and Unity Day in 2011, and now they're celebrated nationally and in countries around the world! Over the past 13 years, PACER has worked with students, schools, corporations and organization to raise awareness of bullying and the ways to solve it.

"No longer is bullying accepted as a childhood rite of passage," said Julie Hertzog, Director of PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center. "Progress has been made, yet one in five children still reports being bullied. Local action is so effective in calling attention to bullying prevention!

"There are so many ways individuals and schools can get involved in National Bullying Prevention Month and Unity Day, which is Wednesday, October 23. From ordering and wearing the official orange Unity Day T-shirt to spreading the word online and more," Julie said. "You can color your virtual world orange with PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center's collection of downloadable photos, social media shares, banners, badges, and a customizable frame for your Facebook profile. You can contact your elected officials to let them know you care and ask for their help. Schools and communities can order National Bullying Prevention Month materials and hold events."

**To order the official Unity Day T-shirt and posters, go to [PACER.org/Bullying/NBPM](http://PACER.org/Bullying/NBPM)**

## And the survey says... Support PACER with SurveyMonkey

Helping PACER is now as easy as taking simple online surveys. PACER supporters can sign up on SurveyMonkey Contribute to receive short surveys from SurveyMonkey customers who need opinions on a variety of topics. For every survey completed, SurveyMonkey makes a donation to PACER, and participants have the opportunity to win \$100 in an instant win game. Participants' identities and information remain confidential. Sign up at [contribute.surveymonkey.com/charity/PACER](http://contribute.surveymonkey.com/charity/PACER).

# ‘Best PACER Symposium ever!’

More than 900 attendees, including parents, teachers, administrators, and other professionals, gathered at the Minneapolis Convention Center on Aug. 12 for PACER’s 14th Annual National Symposium About Children and Young Adults with Mental Health and Learning Disabilities. It was an enthusiastic crowd: one attendee exclaimed, “This is the best PACER Symposium I’ve ever attended.”

The day consisted of three nationally-known keynote speakers, 15 breakout workshop sessions, and a panel discussion by PACER’s Youth Advisory Board on Mental Health. Participants who completed evaluation forms remarked that the keynote speakers and workshops were both helpful and enjoyable. “Speakers made complex subjects easy to understand and very relatable to the audience,” said one attendee.

Keynote speakers included Rosemarie Allen, Ed.D., President and CEO of the Institute for Racial Equity and Excellence, who spoke on trauma and family engagement; Abigail Gewirtz, Ph.D., of the University of Minnesota, who talked about the importance of parents and teachers in an uncertain world; and Richard Petty, M.D., a psychiatrist, neurologist, and internal medicine specialist from Georgia who discussed learning and behavior. One attendee commented, “Dr. Perry was outstanding! I was glued to my seat and learned so much from both of his sessions! His sense of humor added to the learning experience.”

The well-received workshop sessions, presented by national experts and PACER staff, included presentations on technology and the brain; the middle school years; working with diverse families; beginning ADHD treatment; coping strategies for parents and teachers; mental health and special education; language-based learning disorders; helping children with anxiety; trauma and resilience in young children; and self-injury.

Dr. Richard Petty, who first addressed the PACER Symposium several years ago, was such a popular presenter that he was brought back this year. The admiration is mutual: “I was very impressed by PACER when I was here in 2017,” he said. “I really like what PACER is doing and the quality of attendees and presenters.

“I’ve presented all over the world, in 50+ countries, and I have a nose for people and places. I’d be absolutely delighted to come back to PACER anytime.” ■



Two Symposium attendees smile before moving to a breakout session



Rosemarie Allen, Ed.D., presents a breakout session on trauma and family engagement

## Write in PACER for your United Way pledge

Choose PACER this fall when making donations through your workplace giving (payroll deduction) campaigns. You can be a Champion for Children! Here’s how to contribute.

### United Way Donor Choice Program

On the United Way pledge card, you can write in PACER Center, 8161 Normandale Blvd., Minneapolis MN 55437 under the “Donor Choice” designation.

# ‘Science is awesome!’ PACER’s EX.I.T.E. Camp transforms girls’ lives

In August, PACER’s Simon Technology Center welcomed a group of 31 middle school girls with disabilities to PACER’s 16th Annual EX.I.T.E. (Exploring Interests in Technology and Engineering) Camp, held for five days every summer at PACER Center. “It’s so important for girls with disabilities to gain confidence in their ability with science and consider careers in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM),” said EX.I.T.E. Camp coordinator Tina Hanson of PACER’s Simon Technology Center.

The girls worked with staff and volunteers from Accenture, C.H. Robinson, 3M, Medtronic, and Microsoft to complete hands-on projects and experiments. Their days were spent doing everything from working with supply chain logistics provider C.H. Robinson, one of the world’s largest third-party logistics and transportation providers, to create s’mores packaging that could withstand a heat and water test to watching Medtronic’s “heart surgery” on a stuffed monkey. “The girls couldn’t stop talking about it,” Tina said. “They learned what was wrong with the monkey’s heart, how it was fixed and put back together.” The girls also created their own emojis, used circuits to design light-up greeting cards, made binary code key chains, and created and launched bottle rockets.

Another fun learning activity the girls enjoyed was provided by new partner Microsoft. Using block coding, the girls were able to code a Harry Potter wand; when they moved the wand around, different objects on the screen moved, got bigger, or changed color. “We did a deep dive into learning tools,” said Ida-Lea Richardson of Microsoft. “It was great to see the girls learn that they can be just as successful as anyone else in working with technology.”



EX.I.T.E. campers show off their rockets.



Greg West, C.H. Robinson VP of LTL Transportation, leads a trivia game.

Other special guests included The Works Museum, who presented on how light travels and how it’s perceived; the Bakken Museum, who led the girls in creating catapults; and the Raptor Center, which brought a live horned owl and falcons to PACER. “The girls were just spellbound by the raptors. They loved seeing them and learning about the work of the Raptor Center,” Tina said.

Along with learning, the girls had fun, and most importantly, they learned how much fun STEM can be. One girl spoke for all of the campers when she told her mother excitedly, “Mom, science is awesome!”

EX.I.T.E. Camp was initially a program of IBM. PACER’s EX.I.T.E. Camp is the only one of the 30 original programs still in operation. ■



**It's so important for girls with disabilities to gain confidence in their ability with science and consider careers in STEM.**

**– Tina Hanson, EX.I.T.E. Camp coordinator**



# Early inclusion is key for young children with disabilities

When you think of classroom inclusion, does an older child come to mind? Research findings and PACER's experience show that it's just as important for preschool children (ages 3 to 5) with disabilities to experience the benefits of inclusion early on.

According to Judy Swett, PACER's Early Childhood coordinator, this means participating in high-quality preschool programs with their typically developing peers as much as possible. Judy added, "Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), students with disabilities of all ages, including preschool children, are to be educated alongside their typical peers to the maximum extent possible, in the least restrictive environment."

## It all starts with the IEP

The least restrictive environment (LRE) is determined by the child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) team, which includes the child's parents. The LRE for each child is based on the team's determination of where the child will make the most progress in preschool, and on their IEP goals. Parents play a critical role in the development of the IEP, Judy said. "It's so important that parents share their hopes and dreams for their child with the IEP team, in many cases, that will mean inclusion in a regular education classroom. A regular classroom is the first placement choice the IEP team must consider."

Part of the placement decision includes determining what the child needs to be successful in a regular classroom, including extra supports, supplementary aids, and services. Examples of these may include assistive technology, special behavior strategies, use of a resource room, and changes in the curriculum and assignments.

"One of the benefits of being in a classroom with typical kids is encouragement in developing skills," Judy said. "For example, children with language delays will hear peer role models talking and learn how words should sound. This is true with a variety of other skills as well."

Also important, she said, is the ability to form friendships that children gain in a regular classroom



setting. "Developing social and emotional skills are very important in a child's ability to succeed in school and in the community," Judy said. These skills include understanding others' feelings, practicing self control, and getting along with other children.

Classroom educators, including teachers and paraprofessionals, play a critical role in inclusion. "It's important that the teacher is intentional in making it clear to the class that this child is part of the classroom, whether or not they use a wheelchair, a communication device, or leave the classroom for services," Judy said. She said that when a paraprofessional is present, it's important that they are not always at the child's side. "If an adult is always with the child, other children may be reluctant to come up to a child with a disability."

While the least restrictive environment is important, a regular preschool environment is not always appropriate for all young children with disabilities. If an IEP team agrees that a child could not make progress in a typical preschool program, other settings are then considered, such as being educated only with other children with disabilities for all or part of the day; this will be spelled out in the IEP.

## High expectations

In addition to the social and academic aspects of a general education, it's important that preschool children with disabilities have the chance to participate in typical non-academic activities as much as possible. Inclusion in high quality preschool programs and high expectations from teachers and parents are important in helping preschoolers to reach their full potential. ■

# Workshops

PACER Center workshops are free to Minnesota parents. For information and to register, call (952) 838-9000 (metro area) or toll free at (800) 537-2237 (Greater Minnesota), or visit [PACER.org/workshops](http://PACER.org/workshops).

## CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH, EMOTIONAL/BEHAVIORAL

### Getting it Right: Mental Health and Special Education

This workshop will provide information on the challenges students with mental health needs have in the school setting and offer tips and strategies for using the IEP to provide support and instruction.

- **Oct. 3, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (PACER)**  
Streaming option also available
- **Oct. 21, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (Bemidji)**

### Getting it Right: Mental Health, Special Education, and 504 Plans

This workshop will provide information on the challenges students with mental health needs have in the school setting and offer tips and strategies on providing instruction and support at school.

- **Oct. 15, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (Winona)**

### Supporting Children and Youth with Trauma in School

This workshop will help parents and others learn positive interventions for youth who struggle with trauma and challenging behaviors, including the role of Section 504 and special education.

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

## EARLY CHILDHOOD

### Getting Ready for My Individualized Education Program (IEP) Meeting

IEPs for children ages 3 to 5 focus on the educational needs of the child. This workshop will help prepare parents to actively participate in developing their child's IEP.

- **Sept. 10, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (PACER)**  
Streaming option also available

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

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

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

### What's So Special about Turning Three

Before their child's third birthday, families on IFSPs will learn how to actively participate in the transition from Early Intervention services to Preschool Special Education services or other community-based services.

- **Oct. 15, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (PACER)**  
Streaming option also available

### Making the Move: Your Child's Transition from Early Childhood Special Education to Kindergarten

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

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

### Family Participation on Committees and Councils

Parents of children ages birth to five who are on Individualized Family Service Plans (IFSP) or Individualized Education Program (IEP) will be prepared to actively participate on committees at the local, regional, and state level.

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

## PARENT TRAINING

### Tips and Tools for Talking with School Staff

This workshop will provide parents of special education students with practical tips and interactive problem-solving experiences to build the skills necessary to communicate effectively with school staff and resolve differences.

- **Sept. 12, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (Crystal)**

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

This workshop will help parents understand how to use the IEP to benefit their child. Parents will learn how each required part of the IEP can be developed to meet the child's needs.

- **Sept. 23, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (Brainerd)**
- **Sept. 24, 6:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. (International Falls)**
- **Oct. 22, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (PACER)**

### 10 Topics to Help Your Child Succeed in School

Parents will learn about 10 important areas in special education, and acquire skills, knowledge, and useful tools to help their child with disabilities succeed.

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

### Special Education: What Do I Need to Know

Parents will gain an understanding of special education, how to resolve disagreements, and the role they can play in the process.

- **Oct. 1, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (Coon Rapids)**
- **Oct. 24, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (St. Paul)**

### Bullying Prevention: What Parents Need to Know

Bullying can be an isolating experience, not just for the kids involved, but for their parents, too. Fortunately, there is help. This workshop will offer a comprehensive overview for parents to learn what they can do to address and prevent bullying.

- **Oct. 10, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (PACER)**

### Planning for Educational Inclusion: A Viewing of "Including Samuel"

Please join us for a screening of "Including Samuel." A documentary by filmmaker Dan Habib about educational inclusion. Q & A with a PACER advocate will occur before and after the film.

- **Oct. 29, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (Edina)**

### Hot Tips on the Individualized Education Program (IEP): Is your child's IEP individualized and appropriate?

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

- **Nov. 5, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (PACER)**

### Preparing for your Loved One's Future

Guest Speaker Julie Sherman from Thrivent Financial, along with Cathryn Reher, Attorney with Long, Reher, Hanson, & Price, P.A., will discuss financial and legal strategies in light of available government benefits and the interplay with special and supplemental needs trusts.

- **Nov. 14, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (PACER)**

## SIMON TECHNOLOGY CENTER

### STC Family Fun Day and Tech Expo

Join us at the Simon Technology Center's Family Fun Day and Tech Expo to learn about PACER's resources, explore assistive technology and get creative with accessible art and do-it-yourself activities.

- **Sept. 21, 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. (PACER)**

### Apple's New Accessibility Features

Join us to learn about the new accessibility features in Apple's latest operating system. We will also review existing accessibility features and how they can help individuals access an iPhone or iPad.

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

### Living on Your Own Series

#### Part 1: Taking Care of Yourself — Technology to Support Health and Wellness

Join us to learn about developing independent living skills with technology that supports health and wellness. Tools and apps will cover managing medications, establishing healthy habits, and maintaining personal wellness.

- **Nov. 13, 2:00 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. (PACER)**  
Streaming option also available

#### Part 2: Taking Care of Your Home —Technology to Support Household Tasks

This workshop will discuss technology to help individuals with disabilities to complete household tasks and live more independently. We will demonstrate apps and devices that include reminders, timers, and task directions.

- **Dec. 11, 2:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. (PACER)**  
Streaming option also available

#### Part 3: Technology for Meal Planning, Grocery Shopping, and Cooking

In this workshop we will demonstrate apps and devices for meal planning, making a grocery list, and following cooking instructions to help adults with disabilities live more independently.

- **Jan. 15, 2:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. (PACER)**  
Streaming option also available

## TECH FOR GIRLS CLUB

Roll up your sleeves and get messy while having fun with science, technology, engineering, and math! Girls with disabilities,

ages 11-18 at all skill levels are welcome. These workshops will be led by TPT, Twin Cities Public Television. No programming, coding, or photography experience is necessary.

### Mad Scientist: Chemistry Experiments

Join us to conduct experiments using common household items! In this workshop, girls will learn about the scientific method and make hypotheses about what happens when you mix certain items together. Girls will also make a rainbow using milk and create their own slime!

- **Oct. 12, 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. (PACER)**

### Dinosaur Mayhem with Sphero Robots

In this Tech for Girls workshop, robots and dinosaurs collide and girls will put their coding skills to work. Sphero robots are trapped inside of a maze with dinosaurs on the loose! Help the Sphero robots escape by coding them through the maze to safety.

- **Nov. 9, 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. (PACER)**

### Amusement Parks & Physics

Have you ever wondered how a roller coaster works? It's not magic; it's physics! Join us in this Tech for Girls workshop to learn the physics behind amusement park rides. Girls will also make their own marble roller coaster to put their knowledge into action!

- **Dec. 7, 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. (PACER)**

## TECH FOR TEENS CLUB

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

### Intro to Coding & Video Games

Teens are introduced to the fundamentals of coding. They will create interactive games and stories while developing basic programming skills.

- **Oct. 19, 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. (PACER)**

### Building Websites

Teens will learn the basics of coding, create their own unique website, and publish it on the Internet.

- **Nov. 16, 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. (PACER)**

### Take Apart a Computer

Take a computer apart to learn about the different components that make it work.

- **Dec. 14, 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. (PACER)**

### Building a Robot

Learn about the entire process of building a

robot, from assembly to executing code. This workshop is designed for all levels of coding experience.

- **Jan. 18, 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. (PACER)**

## TRANSITION

### Planning for Transition to Adulthood Workshop Series

#### Transition: Pathway to the Future

This workshop for parents of students in the eighth grade and above who have Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) will explain how to develop transition services to support planning for life after high school.

- **Oct. 3, 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. (Bemidji)**
- **Oct. 22, 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. (Shakopee)**

#### ABC's of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) for Transition Age Students and Their Parents

This workshop will help parents and their students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) in eighth grade and above understand how to use the IEP to assist with the transition to adulthood.

- **Oct. 10, 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. (Grand Rapids)**
- **Nov. 21, 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. (Chanhausen)**

### Supplemental Security Income Benefits and Employment

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

- **Oct. 15, 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. (Montevideo)**

### Inspiring Possibilities: Living, Learning, and Working After High School

A free mini-conference for parents providing essential information on how to help young adults with disabilities lead meaningful lives after high school.

- **Nov. 2, 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. (PACER)**

### ABC's of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) for Transition Age Students and Their Parents

This workshop will help parents and their students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) in eighth grade and above understand how to use the IEP to assist with the transition to adulthood.

- **Dec. 12, 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. (Spring Lake Park)**

# Resources

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

## Special Education Record Keeping Folders

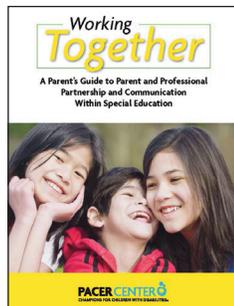
Special education records contain important information for making educational decisions. This set of six folders helps parents organize school paperwork to help them make good decisions about their children's education. Also available in Spanish, Hmong, and Somali.



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

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

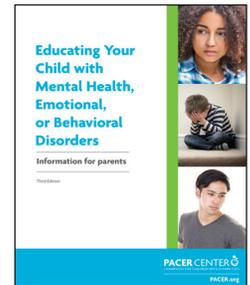
This book helps parents effectively communicate with special education professionals as they develop their child's educational program.



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

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

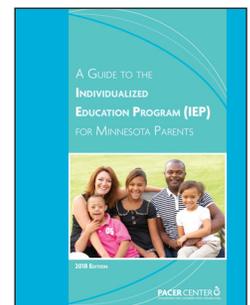
This guide helps parents of children with mental health, emotional, or behavioral disorders participate effectively in special education planning, including school discipline policies, placement options, and behavioral and emotional support needs. Updated 2018.



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

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

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



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

## You and your family are invited to PACER's Family Fun Day and Tech Expo on Sept. 15!

Children and youth with disabilities, their families, and professionals are invited to explore high-tech tools and technology that supports everything from play to learning to employment. Participants will discover the possibilities of assistive technology and enjoy interacting with a variety of devices for children, teens, and adults. Explore the Innovation Lab, learn about coding robots, attend story time, get creative with accessible art and do-it-yourself activities, and learn about PACER's resources. Family Fun Day runs from 10:00 a.m to 2:00 p.m. at PACER Center. Admission is free but advance registration is encouraged. To register, call 952-838-9000 or go to [PACER.org/specialevents](http://PACER.org/specialevents).



# 2018 highlights: PACER continues to surpass its goals in meeting the changing needs of families



**43,160**

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



Visits to PACER's innovative, interactive websites



**34,350**

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



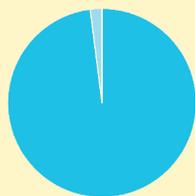
**228,000**

Individuals receive PACER's print and electronic newsletters

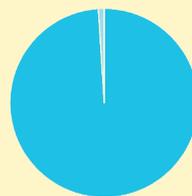
**2.7 billion**



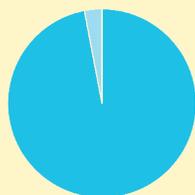
People read about PACER in online articles and social media



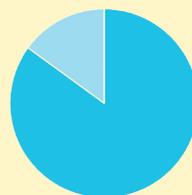
**PACER INFORMS PARENTS**  
98% of parents who attended PACER's educational workshops and trainings reported they learned new and helpful information



**PACER PROVIDES EXCELLENT MATERIALS**  
99% of workshop participants stated they received high quality materials



**PACER HELPS STUDENTS SUCCEED IN SCHOOL**  
97% of parents said they would use information from PACER workshops to help improve their child's educational outcomes



**PACER IS A GOOD FINANCIAL STEWARD**  
85% of PACER's funds go directly to programs. PACER's management and fundraising expenses are only 15%, well below industry standards.

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**Change Service Requested**

## 'Where you put your money is what you value' Why Matt Woods contributes to PACER's endowment

Matt and Suzanne Woods first came to PACER for help 23 years ago when their oldest son, Andrew, was six years old and they needed help with his Individualized Education Program (IEP). Andrew and his brother Alex are both on the autism spectrum. Matt and Suzanne attended workshops and worked with a parent staff advocate. "PACER's resources and help with self-advocacy were a godsend for us," Matt said. Matt and Suzanne became donors, but Matt wanted to do more.



Matt Woods

"Four or five years ago, I had more time available, and I wanted to give back to this organization that was so instrumental in our lives," Matt said. He joined PACER's Board of Directors, eventually becoming president.

"PACER's mission is so important and the need is so great. Contributing to PACER's endowment is tending the garden so it grows and prospers," Matt said. "If we don't tend the garden, it not only doesn't grow, it withers.

PACER needs to be here and healthy not just for our kids, but for our kids' kids."

Matt believes it's important for PACER's Board to lead the way in supporting PACER's endowment. "People watch to see who contributes," he said. "When the Board gives, it sends a message not only to the community, but to PACER's team and staff that we are committed to them. Where you put your money is what you value. PACER has stellar programs and robust outreach. It's important to honor

our commitment to PACER not only with time but with real world coin.

"I contribute because none of us got where we are on our own. I wouldn't be where I am without someone helping me. I want to be sure PACER's always there to help."

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