

PACSETER

Expanded news and information about PACER Center



Increasing inclusion in education:

How PACER can help ... Page 10

FALL 2024 IN THIS ISSUE

Legislative highlights ... 3

Productive IEP conversations ... 4

Goldberg Award recipient ... 6

Why I give ... 8

Board spotlight ... 9

Staff profile ... 12

Bullying prevention ... 13

Upcoming workshops ... 14

EX.I.T.E. Camp recap ... 15

2025 PACER Gala ... 16

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PACER Center improves educational opportunities and enhances the quality of life for children and young adults with disabilities and their families.

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Connect with an advocate

Are you a Minnesota parent seeking support for your child with a disability? PACER parent advocates are available to help. [Contact us today!](#)

Share your story

Has your child or family benefited from PACER's services? Consider sharing your story with us. communications@pacer.org

Follow PACER on social media!

For up-to-date information on workshops and trainings, events, stories, publications, and more, find us online @PACERCenter.



Fall 2024 events *spotlight*

The critical role of interpreters in special education meetings *Wed., Sept. 25; 4 – 6 p.m.; PACER Center*

Hosted by PACER Center's multicultural advocates, this training is designed for language interpreters who support families of children with disabilities in special education meetings.

[Information and to register](#)

National Bullying Prevention Month

The entire month of October; everywhere

Every day, thousands of young people experience bullying. There are many ways to support bullying prevention as an individual or with friends, family, your school, or your entire community.

[Learn more at pacer.org/bullying](https://pacer.org/bullying)

Unity Day

Wed., Oct. 16; all day; everywhere

Unity Day encourages individuals and communities to come together in one giant orange message of hope and support. This unity visibly symbolizes that our society believes no child should ever experience bullying.

[Learn more at pacer.org/bullying](https://pacer.org/bullying)

Fun Times

Fri., Oct. 25; 6:30 – 8:30 p.m.; contact [Danna Mirviss](#) for details

PACER's Fun Times is a social inclusion program that connects teens and young adults with and without disabilities for friendship and fun. Events are held in-person throughout the Twin Cities metro and are scheduled during the school year for students ages 13 to 20.

[Learn more at pacer.org/funtimes](https://pacer.org/funtimes)

Tech for Teens Club: Introduction to soldering

Sat., Oct. 26; 10 – 11:30 a.m.; PACER Center

In this introduction to soldering workshop, teens explore the basics using a soldering iron and/or a heat gun and will gain hands-on experience assembling a weevil with light-up eyes to take home.

[Information and to register](#)

**See pages 14-15 for a schedule of PACER's workshops and trainings*



2024 Legislative Highlights

Minnesota's 2024 legislative session came to an end in May with promising achievements. Among the successes were strides in addressing mental health, including access to care, school cell phone policies, and eating disorder awareness. PACER's Public Policy Coordinator Laura Jean and Advocate Karen Malka highlighted legislation that supports enhanced state mental health infrastructure. "All of these are a win for kids with disabilities," Laura said.

School cell phone policies

Minnesota schools must adopt policies regarding student cell phone possession and use by March 15, 2025. Students who use cell phones or other technology to help manage their disability or health condition should have this accommodation outlined in their Individual Education Program (IEP) or 504 Plan to ensure that they can continue to use their devices.

Access to telehealth care in school

Schools must provide spaces for secondary students to access telehealth mental health services during the school day by October 1, 2024. The spaces must be private and include school-issued devices for students to use if needed. Additionally, mental health service appointments conducted via telehealth may be considered as valid excused absences.

Eating disorder awareness for school coaches

As of July 1, 2024, school sports leagues must provide athletic coaches with resources on eating disorder prevention education. These resources are developed specifically for school coaches and address the risks

and effects of undiagnosed and untreated eating disorders as well as prevention strategies.

DAPE assessments

As of July 1, 2024, schools may conduct assessments for developmental adapted physical education (DAPE) as a stand-alone evaluation. Previously, DAPE assessments could only be conducted as a part of a more comprehensive evaluation. This change allows for more flexibility according to the changing needs of students.

Disability protections for post-secondary students

Federally funded higher education institutions in Minnesota must develop policies that allow for students' self-disclosure of disabilities and enact a process for them to access reasonable accommodations by January 1, 2025. Schools must make information about disability resources and accommodations readily available during the application process, student orientation, in academic catalogs, and on their public websites.

School removal notification policy

Beginning with the 2024-2025 academic year, schools are encouraged to create a policy to alert parents of the unscheduled removal of a student during class. These policies must incorporate child abuse prevention best practices and be included in employee handbooks.

Please note that this is not a comprehensive list of legislative updates from the 2024 session. For more information, contact PACER Center.

Tips for parents to have productive IEP conversations

PACER's updated resource offers a broad range of solutions to facilitate a positive experience at Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings.

A core component of PACER's services is to help families navigate the special education process, including educating them on their role as a part of their child's IEP team. When a parent and the school are not able to come to an agreement about a child's special education plan, there are a variety of dispute resolution processes available to help the team move forward. These include conciliation conferences, facilitated team meetings, mediations, and filing a state special education complaint.

In addition to helping parents understand the dispute resolution options available to them, PACER also encourages parents to resolve their disagreements as early as possible in the special education process through open communication with the IEP team. Not all parents are comfortable voicing their concerns, however, and it can be particularly challenging for families who are culturally and linguistically diverse to do so. Some families come from cultures where it is not acceptable to question educators, have language barriers that make communication more difficult, or are fearful of repercussions from speaking up.

To better support all parents in these conversations, PACER Center updated and translated its publication

[Tips for turning difficult conversations with your child's IEP team into productive conversations](#). Throughout this process, PACER staff noticed similarities across cultures when addressing frequent questions parents have. "Families of children with disabilities share a common denominator that creates its own culture," said Jesús Villaseñor, one of PACER's multicultural parent advocates.

The updated resource offers a broader range of solutions for parents that can help them to have a more productive and positive experience. It offers multiple strategies in scenarios that parents might face and presents options for confronting these situations with different communication styles. "This resource has something for every parent," said PACER Parent Advocate Rachel Pearson. It is available to families in [English](#), [Spanish](#), [Somali](#), and [Hmong](#).

For support to prepare for an IEP team meeting, [contact a PACER parent advocate](#). If you need assistance in Spanish, Hmong, or Somali, call **(952) 838-9000** and you'll be connected to a PACER parent advocate who speaks your language. ■

Translations are made possible using funding from the Minnesota Department of Education.



Questions about surrogate parents?

If the parents of a child with a disability are unknown, unavailable, or not legally authorized to make educational decisions for the child, the school district must appoint a surrogate parent to advocate on the child's behalf in the special education process. PACER provides individual assistance and online resources to parents and professionals seeking information on this topic and to surrogate parents already serving in this role. Read more about surrogate parents on [PACER's website](#) or [connect with an advocate](#).

Tips for turning difficult conversations with your child's IEP team into productive conversations

Conversations with your child's IEP team can be difficult. These tips are designed to help you advocate effectively for your child during IEP team meetings.

1 Before the meeting

If you feel nervous when you walk into an IEP meeting, you could ask someone you trust to go with you, such as:

- A family member who can help you feel confident
- A friend who can take notes at the meeting and help you follow the discussion
- Someone from the community who knows your child

2 Getting the information

If you're uncertain about something in your child's IEP, you could ask:

- "What do these services look like in my child's day?"
- "How does this accommodation work?"
- "Can you give me specific examples of how you're teaching my child to help them reach this goal?"

3 Sharing concerns

If school staff suggest a change to your child's IEP services that you aren't sure about, you could ask:

- "Can you share more information about how this will meet my child's needs?"
- "Can we try this on a trial basis to see how my child responds before making a change to the IEP?"
- "What will we do if this doesn't work?"

4 Addressing issues

If you have a problem to bring to your child's IEP team, you could say:

- "I've noticed that my child is struggling with _____. Can you tell me what you're seeing at school?"
- "I know my child is struggling because I notice _____. How can we use the IEP to help them?"
- "_____ works well at home. How can you use this strategy at school?"

5 Problem solving

If a school staff member says: "We don't know the answer," you could ask:

- "Who can we include to help us find out the answer?"
- "Can we pick a date to meet again after the team has had time to find out the answer?"

6 Planning next steps

If you reach an agreement about a change to your child's IEP or if something is promised to you by school staff, you could ask:

- "What are the next steps?"
- "Who will be responsible for making sure that what we agreed on gets done?"
- "Can we agree on a timeline to make this happen?"

**Access the full version of this resource in English, Spanish, Somali, and Hmong languages at [pacer.org](https://www.pacer.org).*



Nicole Mae Palmer

Nicole Mae Palmer: *Leader, advocate, and role model*

Meet the 2024 recipient of PACER's Paula F. Goldberg Champion for Children with Disabilities Award

In April, Nicole Mae Palmer took to the stage at the Minneapolis Convention Center to accept the 2024 Paula F. Goldberg Champion for Children with Disabilities Award. She is the second recipient of this award created to honor the life and legacy of PACER's former Executive Director, Paula Goldberg. Each year, the award recognizes an individual or group who has demonstrated exceptional advocacy and leadership in support of the rights of children with disabilities.

A cause close to home

Nicole is a graduate student who is pursuing a master's degree in nonprofit leadership and management at Metropolitan State University and has exemplified these traits through her studies and volunteerism. She has given of her time and talent to organizations and causes she holds close to her heart, including

the Marfan Foundation and Camp Odayin, a summer camp for children with heart disease. "I have a specific passion for disability issues and advocacy work, since I have disabilities myself," she said.

At four years old, Nicole was diagnosed with Marfan syndrome, a connective tissue disorder that affects her entire body. As a result, she has experienced chronic pain, PTSD from medical trauma, and has struggled with visual disabilities and other impairments throughout her life. "Growing up, I wasn't able to participate in any sports, so I decided that I was going to make my studies my focus," she said.

However, her academic life came with its own challenges. "Because I was such a strong student, my school didn't always realize that I needed assistance," she said. Without supports, schoolwork took Nicole

"She views her disabilities not as barriers; but as opportunities to work passionately to create a more accessible environment for everyone, especially children with disabilities."

-Christine Palmer, referring to Nicole Mae Palmer

much longer to complete. She often needed text enlarged and was unable to read notes on the whiteboard because of her visual impairments. "A few of my teachers were very thoughtful and accommodating. However, many of my teachers lacked an understanding of and openness to accommodations, which created some challenging barriers to my educational journey," she said.

"Different teachers were more accommodating or understanding than others, so that could really create a barrier," she said.

Getting involved

Nicole attended Camp Odayin as a junior in high school and has returned to volunteer for seven sessions. Hosted at Camp Knutson, a medically-sound campsite in Crosslake Minnesota, the camp has become a place for kids with heart disease and disabilities to feel safe, be themselves, and make the most of summer. "It's a very cool environment to be a part of, many of the volunteers have their own heart stories or medical experiences and can really relate and be mentors for the kids," she said. Nicole has served as a leader for her campers, empowering them to grow in confidence and embrace their uniqueness and disability identity.

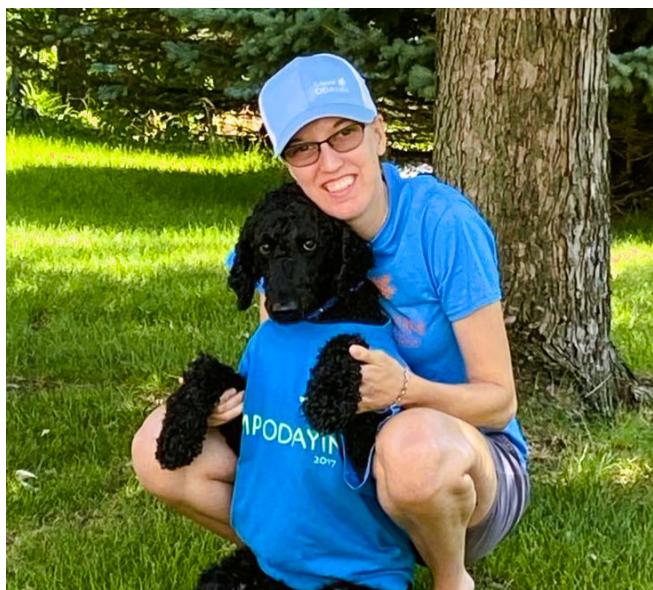
She also was an advocate for change and representation of children with disabilities at Big Friend Little Friend, a college mentorship program she was involved in during her undergraduate studies at the University of Minnesota Morris. Christine Palmer, who nominated Nicole for the award, said about her leadership efforts: "Nicole has a growth mindset and views the opportunities in front of her not 'as they are' but imagines what 'they could be.' If a clear path is not already established, she is not afraid to forge a new one. She views her disabilities not as barriers; but as opportunities to work passionately to create a more accessible environment for everyone, especially children with disabilities."

Nicole Mae pictured with service dog Bailey both wearing Camp Odayin tshirts.

Paying it forward

When Nicole learned of the award, she immediately connected to Paula's story of persistence, leadership, and disability advocacy. "Although at times disability can be seen as a weakness or a setback, my experiences living with different disabilities have helped me to grow and become an advocate for others. Having courage and being kind to others is so huge." In addition to recognition across PACER's platforms, each winner of the award is presented with \$5,000 to support their ongoing efforts. Nicole generously passed this financial portion on to Camp Odayin and Camp Knutson to help support children with heart disease and medically complex disabilities. "I am blessed to be the recipient of this award, however, I believe everyone can be a champion for children with disabilities in their own way," she said.

The Paula F. Goldberg Champion for Children with Disabilities Award is presented at PACER's annual fundraising event. The 2025 award will be presented at PACER's Gala on May 10, 2025. Stay tuned for more information about upcoming nominations. To learn more about the award and its recipients, visit [PACER's website](#). ■





Joanne and Don Davidson

DON DAVIDSON: *Why I give to PACER*

Don Davidson is a proud father, grandfather, and business leader. For the past forty years, he has given back to his community and to PACER as a dedicated donor and volunteer. He is currently the Dealer Principal at Sears Imported Autos, serves as a PACER advisory council member, and is co-chair of PACER's corporate sponsorship committee.

Like many, Don's experience with PACER began as a parent. His daughter Stacy has ADHD and when she was six years old, he received a call from her school requesting an Individualized Education Program (IEP) conference to discuss some of the concerns they had regarding her behavior. A friend suggested that he contact PACER before the meeting. "I am so glad that we did," he said. PACER helped prepare Don and his wife, Joanne, to better navigate the meeting and ensure the best outcome for their daughter.

PACER continues to be there for my family and friends when no one else is able to help. In the darkest times, PACER was there for us.

- Don Davidson

Almost 46 years ago, Don was approached by a customer who asked that his company become a corporate sponsor for PACER's Annual Benefit. "I gladly said yes," he said. Later, he gave of his time as a volunteer on PACER's corporate sponsorship committee. "PACER continues to be there for my family and friends when no one else is able to help. In the darkest times, PACER was there for us," he said.

From a young age, Don learned the importance of giving back. He was raised on a dairy farm and saw firsthand all that his parents did to help the community around them. "My parents helped so many people. They taught me that it was our responsibility to help our neighbors," he said. He has continued their legacy of self-service by giving back to PACER. "I am simply being a good steward to the community like my parents once were," he said.

Don invites fellow parents and business leaders to consider becoming [more involved with PACER](#) through volunteering or monetary donations. "Whatever path you choose to be engaged in, you will find it rewarding and enriching. You will not regret it," he said.

If you wish to share why you give to PACER, contact development@pacer.org.

Support PACER today

— any amount is appreciated!

pacer.org/donate





Tina Smith (second from left) with her family.

Board spotlight:

TINA SMITH

Finishing up her first year as a PACER board member, Tina Smith reflects on her journey from a parent of a child with learning disabilities to becoming an advocate for others.

A parent first

Tina Smith and her husband Chris Vernier are proud parents to their three children. When their youngest son Hayden came along, there were some behavioral issues that they had not experienced with their first two. “It wasn’t our first rodeo, it wasn’t even our second, but we couldn’t figure it out,” Tina said.

Hayden had been seen by specialized pediatricians, therapists, and more. “We were trying to project manage the issues like we would at work, but nothing was really hitting. He continued to act out at school,” she said. In Tina’s experience, his school had been punishing his behaviors instead of looking deeper as to why they were occurring. “They didn’t want to talk to us about how to help him have a better educational experience. It was affecting his mental health and our family,” she said.

When Hayden was in third grade, Tina and Chris had him assessed with an outside provider. The results showed that he had dyslexia, dysgraphia, and ADHD. “When we told him that he had a diagnosis, he was so relieved. It explained so much,” Tina said. After his diagnosis, they worked with his pediatrician on medication options for his ADHD, implemented reading interventions out of his school setting, and eventually switched him to The Blake School by the time he was in fourth grade. “It’s amazing what a diagnosis can do, he’s excelling,” she said.

Finding PACER

However, Tina and her family still had to deal with Hayden’s issues at school. “[The school] was trying to address the challenges my son was having by punishing him. I’m a lawyer, so the first thing I wanted to do was sue the school district,” Tina said. After a difficult school meeting, Tina confided in then-coworker (and now fellow board member) Jay Jackson. He advised her to look to PACER for help. Initially, Tina called expecting a referral to a lawyer. However, after speaking with PACER Advocate Michael Carr, she decided to pivot.

“He was absolutely perfect,” she said. He empathized with her anger, advised that spending her time going after the school was not going to help Hayden to be successful, and re-focused her energy on what was really important — Hayden. He also reviewed several options with her, including how to communicate with the school about Hayden’s needs and how to help the school consider creative, supportive options for Hayden. Ultimately, Tina decided to focus on helping Hayden achieve a learning environment where he could be supported.

Joining the board

During the Covid-19 pandemic, Tina considered what the next steps would be for her professionally. “I thought about what Michael said to me and I started to become more involved in organizations that helped kids with learning differences. I felt that was a good way that I could give back and have an impact,” she said. Soon, she was approached by Jay about joining PACER’s board of directors, with her board rotation beginning in September 2023.

She has spent her first year on the board getting to know the other board members, hearing their stories, and finding where she can be the most useful with her legal and human resources background. “I see so much potential for PACER to help support children and families,” she said. Hayden is now 15, and she continues to learn from her own experience as a parent. She has enjoyed providing a perspective for topical matters in the industry as well as things that have impacted her son directly. “I’m using my personal experience as well as my board service to help,” she said. ■

“I’m now using the skills that I gained from my professional life to have an impact in my community.” - Tina Smith



Increasing inclusion in education: *How PACER can help*

PACER, parents, and educators are all working towards the same goal — for students to grow, learn, and become successful in their adult lives. A lack of inclusion in schools can make achieving that goal more difficult for students with disabilities.

Increasing accessibility and inclusion

Simple solutions can create school environments that are more inclusive. Possibilities include providing headsets or quiet areas during loud assemblies, assigning school lunch buddies, and collaboration between general and special education teams to increase the ability for students with disabilities to learn and participate alongside their peers. “Ultimately disability should be normalized, and we need to be more accepting of it,” PACER Early Childhood Advocate Judy Swett said.

Educating teachers and students about disability can also help classrooms be welcoming places for students with disabilities. “If children with disabilities are included [in general education classrooms] at an early age, other students can learn acceptance,” Judy said. She added that it helps if classrooms are structured in ways that allow flexibility for how students with disabilities learn best.

One strategy to encourage inclusion in classrooms is to educate students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment (LRE) that is appropriate for them. Many students with disabilities can find success in general education classrooms with the help of necessary supports and services instead of separate special education classrooms.

“There’s a philosophy that kids will have to ‘earn their way out’ [of special education classrooms] and prove that they can be successful in a general education classroom without supports,”

Judy said. She explained that this is not an accurate portrayal of how students with disabilities learn. “The reality is that those kids are not going to be successful in a general education classroom without the supports and services they need, and they are going to appear to fail. It becomes a vicious cycle,” she added.

Oftentimes, parents rightfully think that their children will do better with a lower student to teacher ratio, which is frequently found in special education classrooms. An alternative mindset that Judy proposes to parents is to think about school as preparing students for life. “Early exposure to typical peers in general education can open up a lot more of the world to them as adults,” she said. Additionally, this strategy can help typical students learn to be more inclusive and accepting of people with disabilities.

PACER can help

PACER advocates can help parents navigate the special education and Individualized Education Program (IEP) process so that their child receives accommodations and modifications that will help them succeed in a more inclusive learning environment. “I look for functional goals and objectives and how they are going to help the child long-term,” Judy said.

For parents who believe their child’s classroom placement should be changed, Judy said, “Contact PACER with that desire. We can help you understand your options and brainstorm potential supports and services that would help them navigate a general education classroom.” PACER can also help parents



“Ultimately disability should be normalized, and we need to be more accepting of it . . . If children with disabilities are included at an early age, other students can learn acceptance.”

Judy Swett, PACER parent advocate

work with schools to come up with other accessibility and inclusion solutions for their child if a special education classroom is still an appropriate placement for them. “PACER can help parents have that conversation so that they can effectively achieve their goals and objectives for their child,” she said.

How to get in touch with an advocate

PACER has parent advocates available to help with questions about navigating the special education process, transition beyond high school, special health care needs, and more. To get in touch with an advocate, parents and caregivers can fill out a contact form available online at:

Connect with an advocate

We will respond to your message as soon as we can. Thank you for contacting us! ■

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE): What parents need to know

School curriculum can be taught in various special education settings. The more a student with disabilities can be involved in the general education classroom, the more likely they are to meet academic standards.

The IEP team looks at a student’s educational goals and evaluates what placement is the least restrictive environment where services can be provided. The general education classroom is the first placement choice the IEP team must consider. They will look at what supports can help a child:

- Advance toward their goals.
- Learn with other children with and without disabilities.
- Make progress in the general education curriculum.
- Participate in extracurricular or nonacademic activities.

Learn more about LREs from PACER’s resource: [Least Restrictive Environment: What parents need to know.](#)

Ableism contributes to challenges

Ableism can make inclusion difficult. According to Boston University¹, ableism can be defined as a prejudice, bias, or discrimination that is directed towards people with disabilities. Within special education, it can be looking at how a student with a disability “needs to be fixed” instead of embracing their differences. Sometimes, it can be produced by a fear of not knowing how to teach a student with disabilities.

Ableism can be combated through greater education about disability and helping students accept and embrace their disability as part of their identity. During the 2024 session, the Minnesota legislature passed a bill that encourages professional development for teachers on ableism and disability justice to better prepare them to incorporate inclusive practices into their classrooms.

¹Rabia Belt, J.D., Ph.D., “Ableism,” Boston University, <https://www.bu.edu/antiracism-center/files/2022/06/Ableism.pdf>.



PACER Center welcomes Lisa Elm

Lisa Elm pictured with husband Tommy, and children Mariella, Robby, and Mia.

This summer, former board member Lisa Elm joined PACER's staff as the new director of social inclusion.

Lisa Elm was a member of PACER's board of directors for over five years and is a parent of a child with disabilities who has experienced firsthand the services and support that PACER offers. As the director of social inclusion, she will oversee the National Bullying Prevention Center (NBPC) and PACER's other social inclusion programs. The NBPC was led by Julie Hertzog for 18 years who retired over the summer. "The most important thing for me right now is executing on what she's established, she's leaving the NPBC in such a wonderful place," Lisa said.

Finding PACER

Lisa and her husband Tommy have three children, Robby, Mariella, and Mia. The family was first introduced to PACER 16 years ago when Mariella was diagnosed with Williams Syndrome at 17 months old. "We just wanted to give her every opportunity to be able to live her best life and reach her full potential," she said.

Over the years, Lisa and Tommy have gained valuable information through PACER's workshops and resources. "Having PACER and knowing it's in our backyard was really helpful," she said. Mariella is now a senior in high school and is excited to be exploring her post-secondary education options.

Giving back

Lisa began her early professional life in the marketing and development department of Mortenson

Construction. Eventually she transitioned to work in the field of financial services, where she grew her career for the next 20 years. Throughout her work she found a passion for corporate social responsibility and helped to create opportunities for employees to give back. "I tried to bring in PACER where I could because I knew they were doing such great work," she said.

In 2017, she met PACER's then Executive Director Paula Goldberg when Mariella was attending EX.I.T.E. Camp. The pair connected a few months later to discuss Lisa's corporate social responsibility work. "Before I knew it, she was asking me to become a board member," Lisa said. Lisa officially joined PACER's board of directors the following January and enjoyed the coming years of further connecting with PACER and working to make a difference.

Joining PACER

Now, she is eager to follow her passion of giving back as PACER's director of social inclusion. "I've always been a helper at heart, it's how I've operated and it's what I've wanted to continue to do more and more," she said.

Through her new role, Lisa is determined to make a difference. "I'm seeing the need for bullying prevention show up in ways I would have never anticipated. It makes it clear to me that this is the work I am supposed to be doing," she said. PACER is excited for the opportunities ahead with Lisa's leadership and passion for meaningful work. "If I can help those most vulnerable at a time that is most impactful for them, I'll be doing good work," she said. ■



Students celebrating Unity Day 2023 in Wisconsin.

October is NATIONAL BULLYING PREVENTION MONTH

Throughout October, National Bullying Prevention Month (NBPM) raises awareness to prevent childhood bullying and promotes kindness, acceptance, and inclusion across communities. The signature event of the month is Unity Day on Wednesday, October 16.

Bullying can have long-lasting and devastating effects including a loss of self-esteem, increased anxiety, and depression. National Bullying Prevention Month encourages students, teachers, and communities to take action against bullying and work towards safer and more supportive school environments.

Unity Day is a day for people to come together and wear and share the color orange to send a visible message of building community through kindness, acceptance, and inclusion. This vibrant statement shows support for students who have been bullied, raises awareness for bullying prevention, and becomes a conversation starter that encourages people to get involved and learn more.

Order Unity Day t-shirts today!

The 2024 official orange Unity Day t-shirt (\$15) features a new word cloud design that shows all the qualities that embody unity. Your purchase of the shirt helps the NBPC continue to provide free bullying prevention resources to students, families, and educators. [Order your shirt today.](#)

Share your Unity Day

Use the hashtag #UnityEveryDay to spread the word online and share photos of how you're celebrating National Bullying Prevention Month and Unity Day.

#UnityEveryDay

"Celebrating National Bullying Prevention Month and Unity Day is a powerful way to take action to help end bullying. These events bring communities, schools, and individuals together to create more inclusive environments."

- Lisa Elm, Director of Social Inclusion Programs

Everyone can help to create a world without bullying. Start planning today to participate in October.

- **Show your support:**
Sign up to be a champion against bullying, take the pledge, respond to polls, and more.
- **Learn the history:**
Read about how NBPM started and its impact.
- **Spread the word:**
Share information about NBPM with your community, reach out to local leaders, and post about NBPM and Unity Day online.
- **Order a Student Activity Kit:**
The kit, developed by PACER, helps students to explore, plan, celebrate, and reflect on how to prevent bullying in schools and communities.
- **Download the Unity Day Guide:**
This informative guide provides a comprehensive overview of important things to know about.
- **Order Unity Day posters (free):**
Available in English and Spanish to display at school, in your community, or at a business.
- **Watch the Unity Day video:**
This animated video describes Unity Day from a student's perspective.

PACER Workshops & Trainings

Visit pacer.org/workshops to register and view the most up-to-date listings.
If you have questions, contact workshops@pacer.org or call (952) 838-9000 or (800) 537-2237.

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

Beyond keyboards: Alternative tools for controlling your computer

Tues., Sept. 24, 2024
1 – 2 p.m. (Virtual)

This workshop will explore alternative ways to control computers and mobile devices. Tools will include voice control, switches, adaptive mice, keyboards, and more. It will include a demonstration of several simple and complex setups to make accessing computers easier.

Assistive technology for reading

Thurs., Oct. 24, 2024
2 – 3 p.m. (Virtual)

This workshop will demonstrate assistive technology to help with all stages of reading. It will explore apps and tools to help with learning the basics, minimizing the effects of dyslexia, and more.

Assistive technology for writing

Thurs., Nov. 14, 2024
2 – 3 p.m. (Virtual)

This workshop will explore assistive technology to help with various writing skill levels. Participants will look at apps that help with different writing stages from drafting to revising, along with learning the basics and various digital and voice options.

Using Chrome extensions to support reading

Tues., Nov. 19, 2024
2 – 3 p.m. (Virtual)

This workshop will explore Chrome extensions (apps) that provide support for reading with a Chromebook or the Google Chrome browser. It will address visual supports, literacy skills, and text-to-speech. Attendance is recommended for middle school through

college students with dyslexia and other learning challenges, including ADHD.

Accessibility Series: iPhone and iPad

Thurs., Dec. 12, 2024
2 – 3 p.m. (Virtual)

iPhones and iPads have many accessibility settings built-in to their operating systems. This workshop will teach participants about different ways to modify these Apple devices to make them more accessible, including voice control, text-to-speech features, head tracking, and more.

HEALTH

Advocating for your child with significant health care needs

Thurs., Sept. 26, 2024
6:30 – 7:30 p.m. (Virtual)

Parents and guardians of children or young adults with significant health care needs bring a wealth of information to their health care team. This workshop will teach parents to use service plans (IHPs, IEPs, and 504 Plans) as advocacy tools, help them to understand the roles of the medical team supporting their child, and provide possible solutions for common problems.

MENTAL HEALTH

Working toward positive educational outcomes: Mental health and special education

Thurs., Sept. 26, 2024
Noon – 1 p.m. (Virtual)

This introductory workshop will provide parents with information to help them understand the special education process, how to prepare for a positive Individualized Education Program

(IEP) team approach to support their child's mental health needs, and how to navigate IEP team disagreements.

Addressing challenging behaviors

Wed., Oct. 23, 2024
Noon – 1 p.m. (Virtual)

Academic, behavioral, and social expectations can overwhelm students with mental health, emotional, or behavioral needs and increase challenging behaviors. This workshop will provide information and resources to help parents support their child or youth with challenging behaviors at home, at school, or in the community.

Creating an evaluation plan for your child with mental health needs

Wed., Nov. 20, 2024
Noon – 1 p.m. (Virtual)

This workshop will teach parents of children with mental health needs what to expect from the special education evaluation process. Participants will work through a sample evaluation plan that will help them to create a list of their concerns and provide them with a better understanding of how to ensure those concerns are addressed in their child's evaluation.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

The critical role of interpreters in special education meetings

Wed., Sept. 25, 2024
4 – 6 p.m. (PACER Center)

Hosted by PACER Center's multicultural advocates, this training is designed for language interpreters who support families of children with disabilities in special education meetings. Participants will learn about language access laws, strategies for supporting parent engagement in special education meetings, and ethical considerations

when interpreting for parents and school staff.

Special education paperwork and the Prior Written Notice

Thurs., Oct. 10, 2024
Noon – 1 p.m. (Virtual)

This workshop will help parents learn about the purpose of paperwork, what needs to be kept and for how long, and everything they need to know about the Prior Written Notice (PWN).

Effective communication with the IEP team

Thurs., Oct. 24, 2024
Noon – 1 p.m. (Virtual)

This workshop will teach parents how to effectively collaborate with their child's IEP team. Participants will learn how to have productive discussions at IEP meetings and engage in their child's educational planning.

TECH FOR TEENS

Code your own website

Tues., Sept. 24, 2024
5 – 6 p.m. (Virtual)

This workshop will introduce teens with disabilities to the basics of coding for the internet with HTML and CSS. Students will create their own unique

website and publish it using a free online tool at Glitch.com. Students will be able to experiment with code and see the results online in real time.

Intro to soldering

Sat., Oct. 26, 2024
10 – 11:30 a.m. (PACER Center)

In this introduction to soldering workshop, participants will explore soldering basics using a soldering iron and heat gun. Participants will also gain hands-on experience by assembling a weevil with light-up eyes that they can take home.



2024 EX.I.T.E. Camp recap

The camp returned for another summer of fun, inclusive, and hands-on learning.

PACER's annual EX.I.T.E. Camp welcomed middle school girls and gender-expansive youth with disabilities this July for another summer of exploration and innovation. Campers learned about careers and activities in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) while creating valuable memories and friendships along the way. PACER's STEM Program Coordinator Christine Retzlaff reflected on her first year running the camp. "The biggest benefit is making connections. It was great to see relationships forming over the short time we had," she said.

Campers were exposed to many different sides of the STEM world, from zookeeping to computer programming and beyond. Local industry professionals from 3M, Medtronic, IBM, and more made it an engaging and educational experience for everyone. "Seeing all the volunteers with different companies was incredible, there was a lot of planning and logistics that went into presenting, and I was thankful they made my job easy my first year," Christine said.

PACER extends a special thank you to our sponsors, partners, and volunteers for making EX.I.T.E. Camp possible. Sponsors: 3M, Best Buy Foundation, C.H. Robinson, Xcel Energy Foundation, Donaldson Foundation, JKMS Williams Foundation, CenterPoint Energy Foundation, Protolabs, and individual donors. Community Partners: The Minnesota Zoo, The Works Museum, Xcel Energy, 3M, Greenberg Traurig, Minnesota Department of Transportation, IBM, and Wold Architects and Engineers.



Participants from PACER's 2024 EX.I.T.E. Camp (not all pictured)

Stay tuned for more information about EX.I.T.E. Camp 2025 at pacer.org/exite.

Email christine.retzlaff@pacer.org for more information or with questions.

Save the Date

PACER's Gala

*Saturday, May 10, 2025
JW Marriott, Mall of America*

More information coming soon!

PACER CENTER 
CHAMPIONS FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES.