

President's Commission Calls for Revitalizing Special Education

by Cherie Takemoto

Cherie Takemoto, Executive Director at PEATC, was appointed to the President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education in November 2001. This article shares her perspectives on highlights of the Commission findings and recommendations.

"America's special education system presents new and continuing challenges. For far too many families, teachers, principals and school districts, special education presents a daunting task – a morass of rules, regulations and litigation that limits access and hinders learning. Hundreds of thousands of parents have seen the benefits of America's inclusive education system. But, many more see room for improvement."

President's Commission Report- 2002

The purpose of the Commission was to "collect information and study issues related to federal, state, and local special education programs, with the goal of recommending policies for improving the educational performance of students with disabilities." Completed recommendations of the Commission are contained in a report entitled, *A New Era: Revitalizing Special Education for Children and Their Families*. Commission findings and recommendations are also being considered as the special education

Important Facts About Special Education to Consider

- Students with disabilities drop out of high school at twice the rate of their peers.
- Enrollment rates of students with disabilities in higher education are half that of the general population.
- Preparing teachers is a problem. In 1998, only 21% of public school teachers said that they felt very "well" and "prepared" to address the needs of students with disabilities.
- Almost half of the six million children in special education have a "specific learning disability." Of these, 80% are there because they were not taught to read. Few children placed in special education with a learning disability are able to close the achievement gap.
- Children of minority status are over-represented in specific disability categories. African-American children are twice as likely as white children to be labeled with mental retardation and are more likely to be labeled with an emotional disturbance.
- Only 34% of working-age adults with disabilities report being employed. Those who work earn significantly less than adults without disabilities.

law, (IDEA) *The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*, is being reauthorized.

"Although it is true that special education has created a base of civil rights and legal protections, children with disabilities remain those most at risk of being left behind. The facts create an urgency for reform that few can deny."

President's Commission Report - 2002

Report Highlights

1. *Increase Focus on Results by Reducing Process Requirements.* Many who testified to the

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PEATC

6320 Augusta Drive, Suite 1200
Springfield, VA 22150
703-923-0010
800-869-6782 (VA parents)
email: partners@peatc.org
http://www.peatc.org

SATELLITE OFFICE

21 Professional Center
2025 East Main Street, Suite 104
Richmond, VA 23223
804-819-1999

PEATC STAFF

Cherie Takemoto, *Executive Director*
Pierre Ames
Barbara Anzelmo
Charlsie Armstrong
Ana Avanzini
Kathleen Beck
Linda McKelvy Chik
Kyppee White Evans
Bellen Joyner
Felicia Kessel-Crawley
Daaiyah Rashid
Tony Trott

The PEATC Press is designed by
Karen Vermaire Fox of Accurate
Designs.

Tony Trott, Editor
Felicia Kessel-Crawley, Editorial/
Design Consultant
Carmen Sanchez, Contributing Editor

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necesita información en español,
pueden llamar a Ana Avanzini a PEATC
al téfl: 703-569-6200 (línea en español);
o al 703-923-0010, ext. 103 (línea
directa).



Cherie's Corner

On the eve of PEATC's 25th Anniversary serving children with disabilities, their families and professionals who serve them, the state of education in America, and special education, specifically, offers little cause to celebrate for far too many children. In response, PEATC is dedicating its Silver Anniversary to expanding public awareness about how to improve our schools and increase progress for our children whose futures continue to be at risk. PEATC is also developing new programs and outreach services using state-of-the-art materials to help parents and professionals benefit from an agenda for excellence in education that will truly build better futures for children with disabilities. Here's the PEATC solution we believe will work:

AGENDA FOR EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION – A CALL FOR ACTION!

- P Parent Involvement with Schools and Professionals Promotes Excellence in Education for Children with Disabilities.** Parent/Professional partnerships promoting parental involvement have been the cornerstone of PEATC's success for children and families in special education. Research has proven overwhelmingly that when parents get involved in the lives of their children and work successfully with teachers and administrators, outcomes improve significantly.
- E Educational Excellence and High Expectations Increase Future Opportunities.** Early identification, prevention and intervention are the best methods for providing educational resources by trained teachers to all children instead of the current method that waits for them to have problems or fail before qualifying for help. Schools can raise the level of expectation by teachers and administrators for all students by providing college preparatory and career training opportunities to all students.
- A Advocacy and Accountability for Results Matter.** Children with disabilities benefit from enforceable public policy that protects them from environmental discrimination or physical and emotional abuse in our schools. Our Juvenile Justice system, without reform and disability awareness training, will continue to swell with suspended or expelled youth whose unmet learning needs have resulted in socially unacceptable behaviors. Teaching them skills to positively identify and redirect should replace punishment. Our children are not only angry, frustrated and rebellious, they are also helpless, hopeless and discouraged - their families in despair. Increased accountability by school systems could be achieved if states have a single statewide accountability system holding them accountable for adequate progress. Inclusion rather than isolation should become the guiding principle determining program reform, educational training and funding support.
- T Teacher Training, Preparation and Sound Research in Special Education Improves Outcomes for all Students.** Proper training in classroom techniques will reduce behavioral and learning problems, misidentification and poor performance caused by educational inadequacies and improper teaching methods. Knowing how to prepare children with disabilities for the constant transitions they face reduces anxiety and distraction and increases success. Society also benefits from a more versatile talent pool.
- C Community Collaboration and Communication Make Successful Futures for Children with Disabilities Possible.** Students with disabilities and their families need support, friendships and resources from their local school, church, law enforcement, human services and neighborhood community to overcome

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PEATC *Calendar of Events*

PEATC WORKSHOPS

IN SPRINGFIELD

COFFEES

10:00 A.M. – 12:00 NOON

6320 Augusta Drive, Suite 1200
Springfield, VA 22150

January 11, 2003

Advocacy from an Educators Point of View
Presented by Carol A. Rothenbarcher, Ed.D.

February 22, 2003

*Custody Issues and Special Education
Know Your Rights!*

Presented by Shirley Norman-Taylor, Esquire

March 22, 2003

*Effective Use of Timeout, Consequences
and Limit Setting*

Presented by Barbara Bradford, M.Ed., M.S.

AROUND VIRGINIA

January 14, 2003

12:00 Noon - 3:00 p.m.

Brown Bag Luncheon -- *The ADA and Childcare*

Presented by Bill Tucker of VOPA
PEATC Office in Richmond

January 16, 2003

6:30 p.m.

How to Talk So Schools Will Listen

Prince Edward County Public Schools
School Board Office

March 20, 2003

6:30 p.m.

How to Talk So Schools Will Listen

Prince Edward County Public Schools
School Board Office

REGISTER FOR A WORKSHOP

- ◆ *Please register by the Monday before the workshop by calling 703-923-0010 or 800-869-6782 or email partners@peatc.org. Please let us know if any special accommodations are needed.*
- ◆ *Find out about workshops in and around VA by visiting our website at www.peatc.org.*
- ◆ *Share information with others -- post this sheet on bulletin boards and hand it out at meetings.*

OTHER PEATC-SPONSORED EVENTS

January 16, 2003

10:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Resource Fair

Chesterfield County, Cloverleaf Mall -
Common Area

Call 804-276-8652 for directions

Registration not required

January 21, 2003

10:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.

***Mini Workshop on Understanding
Special Education (USE)***

Lunenburg School Board Office

Call PEATC to register

Call Frances Wilson at 434-696-2116

for directions

February 18, 2003

Transition Fair

Williamsburg/James City
County

March 14 - 15, 2003

***Accessibility Leadership
Summit***

McLean Bible Church, Vienna, VA

Contact: Jackie Mills Fernald 703
790 5590

Future Events

Juvenile Justice Summit II -- Plans
are in the works for a follow up to
last year's Summit in early 2003.

If you are interested in helping

For the Love of Reading

Be a Story Builder

by Bellen Joyner

Do you have an elementary or middle school-aged child who has difficulty reading? If so, let me tell you about a free, fun, online reading tool that has really helped my child.

Approximately two years ago, my youngest son Franklyn had started fifth grade and I had just come to work for PEATC. He and I were invited to be a part of a literacy pilot program jointly developed by PEATC and the Helen A. Kellar Institute for Human disAbilities at George Mason University (GMU). The mission of LiteracyAccess Online (LAO) is to develop, test and refine a universally accessible, web-based literacy learning tool for students with disabilities ages 9 through 14. LAO is available at no charge to anyone with a computer and Internet access. Located at www.literacyaccessonline.com, the site is rich with information and instructional material for you to browse at your leisure.

LAO Story Builder

In this article, I am going to walk you through Story Builder. This is the part of the site that was of particular interest to my son. Story Builder lets you and the reader create a story to use with the other tools in LAO. A story can either be completely original with scanned in pictures or it can be copied and pasted from other websites.

Because Story Builder allows you to choose the topic and you can build a story around a subject that is meaningful to you. If the reader wants to learn to read using a story

about Michael Jordan or Mia Hamm, he or she can do it. This tool makes LAO flexible, interesting and appropriate for all ages. For example, a 14-year-old boy who is learning to read may not want to read stories written for second graders. He can create his own story with Story Builder about whatever he chooses written at his reading level.

Here's how to get to Story Builder:

- Go to www.literacyaccessonline.com and log in (if you are a first time user you will have to join before you can access Story Builder).
- Once you are logged in to the site, select "Literacy Explorer" from the top navigation bar and then choose "Story Selector" from the new navigation options.
- Scroll down the page and select "Build A Story" and that will take you to the start of Story Builder.
- From here you can choose to build a new story or to review stories previously created.

If you choose to create a new story, Story Builder will first let you see the basic structure the story will follow. It gives you word and sentence per page limits. There is also a reminder to save pictures to a separate file to be submitted along with the final story. Story Builder is very user-friendly and has clearly marked input areas for information about the story you are creating.

You can get help to:

- **Search for story content on Web** This option offers help to those trying to find Web pages with text and graphics to use in your story.
- **Include pictures in your story** At this location you learn how to include pictures in your story that you may import from anyplace on the web by.
- **Copy and paste reading content** Where you choose to learn how to copy and paste reading content from another website into the Story Builder.

The whole site is amazing. The instructions are clear, concise and easy to follow. The many things to do to enhance the stories like computer programs for sounding out word meanings are quite helpful. Instruction on how to make the computer do what you want it to do, like "copy" and "paste" are great practice for use in other parts of the computer where everything isn't spelled out for you. And, most important, moving around the site is easy and non-threatening. Not once in my exploration was I jettisoned off the site to have to find my way back nor did I get locked out of where I wanted to be. I remember my son liking this part when we worked together on the pilot. Now, I understand why. This site is educational, exciting, interesting and enticing --all at the same time!

ABA Report Cites Juvenile Justice Disabilities

by Cherie Takemoto

The juvenile justice system is not working for far too many children in Virginia, according to a recent report released by the American Bar Association (ABA). Many of the findings and solutions in this report complement the recommendations from the Juvenile Justice Summit co-hosted by PEATC in October 2001. PEATC plans to co-host a follow-up event in early 2003 to develop policy, program and funding for Virginia to correct problems highlighted in both reports in the following areas:

Prevention – Time spent on prevention will pay dividends later. Too many children are ending up in correctional facilities when there are more effective options and opportunities in their own communities and schools. If information were more readily disseminated, defense attorneys, court services workers and judges could redirect youth to programs that work. Sadly, with less than one-half of incarcerated youth receiving special education services, over 75% of all incarcerated youth are more than four years behind in reading and math. The ABA report indicated that because they have inadequate council, children end up with fewer opportunities for rehabilitation and treatment than adults.

Anti-discrimination within the Juvenile Justice and Special Education Systems – Children and youth of color are over-represented in both the juvenile justice and

special education systems. The ABA report found that minority youth are not only treated disparately, but are less likely to have legal help, and end up incarcerated at rates higher than their peers. In special education, minorities are more likely to be labeled as having an emotional disability or mental retardation. They also drop out at rates much higher than their peers.

Training, Education and Information for Attorneys, Courts, Correctional Education and Communities – Lack of training and public awareness about disabilities, educational rights, community services and effective practices prevent those who should care from doing the right things for children and youth in the juvenile justice system. Information needs to be available through consultation, training and other tools in order to ensure these children get a second chance for success.

Legislation – Funding and intervention efforts should be redirected into prevention programs. Civil rights legislation could be strengthened with enforcement policies and accountability measures. Policy needs to be developed to ensure prevention, access to services and transition. There needs to be an increased focus on getting children back on the right track instead of sending them to the adult court system for

felonies. The adult penal system is not set up to give children and youth an effective opportunity for growth and rehabilitation in ways that will help them be contributing members of society.

The Reports from the Juvenile Justice Summit and the American Bar Association can be downloaded from the PEATC website www.peatc.org. For more information on juvenile justice and special education, call Pierre Ames in the PEATC Satellite Office in Richmond, 804-819-1999.

DRVD Goes to VOPA

The Department for the Rights of Virginians with Disabilities (DRVD) has been transformed into an independent state agency called the Virginia Office for Protection and Advocacy (VOPA). The change was a result of legislation passed earlier this year to make Virginia's protection and advocacy organization an independent state agency (reporting to a Board of Directors instead of the Governor.)

VOPA will provide the same services and maintain the same address and phone number as DRVD. The website URL has changed: www.vopa.state.va.us.

Perspectives

Twenty-Five Years of Negotiating the Maze

by Taisie Berkeley

Michael Flynt, a slender, six-foot, blonde teen, was in an Alexandria basement with friends when he discovered a box of old keys. “This one goes to your car,” he told his friend’s father, holding up a dusty key. “That can’t be, Michael, our car is only six months old. These keys must be at least ten years old.” “No, it goes to your car,” Michael insisted, taking the old key to the new car to try it out. When he turned the key, the engine started.

Michael, despite profound learning disabilities, was right because he knew the tine pattern of that key was the same as that of the new one. “Michael can be like a savant when it comes to cars and visual memory,” says his dad, PEATC Board Chairman Dick Flynt.

In 1978, Dick’s former-wife Mary recognized that three-year old Michael was showing classic signs of learning disability. Desperate for guidance, the Flynts contacted PEATC which had just been founded. With PEATC’s support, they transferred Michael to Resurrection Preschool, a place where preschoolers with special needs are mainstreamed. From there he was mainstreamed into kindergarten and first grade in the Alexandria public school system which proved less than successful.

“By the time he reached first grade, mainstreaming had created isolation rather than inclusion for Michael.”

“Michael was ostracized by his peers. He was dyslexic, couldn’t read or do math and was overwhelmed by the environment,” says Dick. “In school and out, he’d get into situations where he was like a puppy, trapped on a median strip of a highway —paralyzed by the motion and noise around him.” In short, by the time he reached first grade, mainstreaming had created isolation rather than inclusion for Michael.

“We couldn’t imagine sending our beautiful, sensitive child away.”

For second grade, the Flynts continued to maneuver the special education maze with the school system and transferred Michael to Washington’s Lab School for children with learning disabilities where he stayed through seventh grade. “Even there, he was among the lowest functioning students,” says Dick, “and by seventh grade, the school said they couldn’t do much more for him.” Both Michael’s pediatric psychiatrist and his school counselors recommended a residential placement, which the Flynts

resisted. “We couldn’t imagine sending our beautiful, sensitive child away.” But when Michael emerged that summer from a Charlottesville, Virginia camp for LD kids, begging to go back there as a residential student for the regular school year, (Oakland Farms School), the Flynts decided to try it. Michael thrived there.

As an active partner with the Flynts and the school system, PEATC helped the Flynts navigate the special education maze successfully. The search for a “good” or “appropriate” school placement is very often a learning process for all parties that can also be long and disheartening. The parents can also expect to do the lion’s share of the searching. Working as a team, the Flynts were able to achieve school system-funded outplacement and an appropriate IEP. Michael’s mom Mary was a relentless advocate for the most appropriate educational placement for her son. Michael

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Focus on PEATC

Negotiating the Maze

(Cont'd. from P. 6)

stayed at Oakland Farms until he aged out. He graduated from the Riverview School on Cape Cod at age 22 with a high school diploma. He also was awarded a high school diploma from Alexandria's TC Williams High. He subsequently attended Riverview's "Grow" program and then the "Life" Program, which offers group living with 24-hour on-site counselors teaching life skills. At age 27, Michael currently lives in a condominium with an old friend from high school and works as a customer service representative for Jiffy Lube.

"He's truly a success story – thanks to PEATC!"

"When I remember Michael in kindergarten and first grade I think of him at the back of lines with no friends and obsessively collecting keys by the hundreds; incapable of reading or doing math or anything. And now he is a mature, functioning and productive adult, out there working with health benefits and a retirement plan, driving a car, living in a condo --a *contributing* to society. He's truly a success story – thanks to PEATC!"

Dick flashes back to the desperate moments he experienced during Michael's youth. "When you've got two weeks before your IEP or triennial and your social worker is gearing up to try to put your kid in a vocational class or a class for the emotionally disturbed that you know is wrong for him, you feel helpless.

I remember being at a table, intimidated by school staff far more knowledgeable than I, and wondering how I was going to get Michael what he needed from these people who had never taken the time to get to know him or understand how they could help him realize his full potential? Our knowledge alone of the statutes, laws and procedures required to navigate successfully through this maze was no match for theirs. But that's where PEATC made all the difference.

"You call PEATC and they say, 'Here's what you might try and here's how it works.' They are

caring and trained individuals who will strategize personally with you, but use their organizational power to encourage active partnerships between parents and the school system. PEATC is there to help *you* secure the services that are just right for your kid."

"Today, Michael is a wonderful, good hearted person and natural caregiver," says Dick. "He gravitates to anyone who is downtrodden or having a hard time. He is happy and engaging. He will ask you a million questions and wants to know everything about you."

No Child Left Behind Website

by Tony Trott

President Bush signed the *No Child Left Behind* Act of 2001 (NCLB) into law on January 8, 2002. The NCLB contains the President's plans for education reform. It has four basic principles designed to improve education in the United States: "stronger accountability for results, increased flexibility and local control, expanded options for parents, and an emphasis on teaching options that have been proven to work."

A website was developed for the NCLB and it is located at www.nclb.gov. The site features:

- Frequently Asked Questions about the new law and the changes it brings.
- Fact sheets about many different aspects of education.
- Glossary of terms used in education.

- Current and past issues of the NCLB newsletter, *The Achiever*, at www.nclb.gov/Newsletter/index.html.
- A long list of federal and state resources: www.nclb.gov/next/where/index.html.
- A special list of resources developed and aimed specifically at parents. The parent information is located at www.nclb.gov/parents/index.html.
- The latest breaking news and events relevant to education. The news section is located at www.nclb.gov/media/index.html.

The contact information NCLB is:
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202
1-888-814-NCLB

You Ought to Know

New Juvenile Justice Guide

The National Mental Health Association (NMHA) has released a new publication: *Checking Up on Juvenile Justice Facilities: A Best Practices Guide*. This publication offers practical advice for those interested in using a visit to a juvenile justice facility as a catalyst for community action on behalf of incarcerated youth.

Community leaders in five states had a first-hand look at the conditions that exist for youth in juvenile facilities; this guide highlights the lessons learned from the five Mental Health Association (MHA) affiliates who organized these tours. The Child Watch Visitation Program, a successful public awareness and advocacy initiative of the Children's Defense Fund, was used to conduct these tours. These facility tours prompted critical momentum in forming child advocacy coalitions and providing new energy to existing ones to create systems change.

Mental Health Association affiliates and other child advocates are encouraged to use this planning guide to learn how to build a coalition, organize and conduct a tour of a juvenile justice facility, raise the consciousness of key state and local policy makers, educate the public about the needs and problems that give rise to juvenile offenses and encourage the development of effective community-based alternatives to incarceration.

The guide can be downloaded through a link on the PEATC website: www.peatc.org or by visiting www.nmha.org. To learn more about NMHA's Juvenile Justice Program, contact Hazel Moran, Program Associate, Juvenile Justice, at 703-837-4798 or via email at hmoran@nmha.org.

GMU Life Program

The LIFE (Learning Into Future Environments) program is a transitional post secondary education program designed for students with mild mental retardation or moderate to profound learning disabilities who have aged-out of high school typically with an IEP diploma. The LIFE program will be located at the George Mason University Fairfax campus.

The focus of the program is to help these students enhance their levels of independence and to facilitate career and transition training through

courses and on-campus employment. LIFE students will spend their days taking classes, working in different jobs on campus, interacting with other college students and participating in social activities while enhancing their independent living skills. George Mason is accepting students for the Spring 2003 semester. Tuition per semester is \$7500. Contact Jennie Schaff, Program Director, at jschaff@gmu.edu or Tamara O'Sullivan, Program Coordinator at tcoriaty@gmu.edu or call them at 703-993-3670.

Medication Policy

The 2002 session of the Virginia General Assembly passed legislation directing the Board of Education to develop and implement policies regarding medication recommendations by school personnel (Code of Virginia §22.1-274.3).

The Board of Education subsequently approved the following policy that became effective on July 1, 2002.

School personnel cannot recommend the use of psychotropic medications for any student. School health staff, classroom teachers or other school professionals may recommend that a student is evaluated by an appropriate medical practitioner. In addition, school personnel may consult with a medical practitioner who is serving the student with the written consent of the student's parent.

For the purpose of this policy, "psychotropic medications" means those medications that are prescribed with the intention of altering mental activity or state, including, but not limited to, antipsychotic, antidepressant, anxiolytic medication and behavior-altering medication.

Should you have additional questions please contact Gwen P. Smith, School Health Specialist at (804) 786-8671 or email to gsmith@mail.vak12ed.edu.

Cherie's Corner

(Cont'd. from P. 2)

frustrating situations and enjoy a meaningful place in their communities. Finding success for students with disabilities is not always easy. Positive communication can promote the partnerships and problem-solving necessary to overcome obstacles.

Despite improvements, too many children are still being lost in a system that lacks accountability, focuses on process rather than progress and ignores the unique individual needs of the child. More children in special education today drop out of public school than their peers and don't attend college while minorities are inexplicably over-represented in mental retardation and emotional or behavioral disabilities. The President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education recently reported that 80 percent of all children in special education, including those identified with a specific learning disability, are there simply because they have not been taught how to read! Sadly, once in special ed, they are highly unlikely to catch up with their peers in reading or other core skills.

The U.S. Department of Education advocates "Reform + Resources = Results." PEATC families want results, too. We believe the best way to help is to provide clear direction for developing solutions. PEATC is committed to developing an *Agenda for Excellence in Education for Children with Disabilities* that is truly a Call for Action that aligns with many of the reform initiatives by advocacy groups, the President's Commission recommendations and the No Child Left Behind Act. This Call for Action will provide the opportunity to unite the voices of parents, professionals, teachers, organizations, corporations and individuals committed to excellence in education.

Now that America's preeminence in education is being challenged globally, we, at PEATC, believe the substandard record of achievement

and tradition of exclusion presented in special education specifically, underscores the critical need for improved conditions for all students. It is important that educators, school officials and legislators understand that children with disabilities are first and foremost, general education or "regular ed" students in the public

school system – not just "special ed" kids. Success will only be achieved when we raise the standard of general education for all children, thereby improving the quality of and access to special education resources for those children who need them most. Our kids can't afford to wait another 25 years! Can we?

Thank You Phenomenal PEATC Partners!

- **Steel City Telecom** and **Joe Hannan** for in kind donations of increased server space for www.peatc.org.
- **Barbara Bradford** for presenting at our September Coffee.
- **Reta Y. Lewis**, Intervention Strategist, for our November IEP Clinic.
- Advocates participating in Brown Bag sessions: **Jane Barbin, Howard D. Deiner, Esq., Gayle Hixon, Denise Jones, Reta Y. Lewis, Ilene Schwartz, Judith Stern, and Shirley Norman-Taylor, Esq.**
- **Shirley Cappetta** of Curry Printing for their ongoing service and inkind generosity for our printing needs.
- **Stephen Chitwood**, PEATC co-founder, author and consultant for in-kind contributions of strategic management and training expertise to Board and staff members.
- **Kenneth Clark**, VP of Communications for Verizon for being a new corporate partner in literacy project development discussions.
- Those following organizations and individuals who volunteered to work at the PEATC booth at the Virginia State Fair: **Stanley Ames, Jr., Deborah Ames, Marcel Ames, Alexandre Ames, Olivia Ames, Nancy Guadagno, Chantel Taylor, Gloria Taylor; Regina Myrick/Arc of Virginia; David Mills/DMHMRSAS; Iona Picou and family/Mid Atlantic Juvenile Defender Center; Dr. Pamela Waaland and family; Sheila Marble and Heather Mathews/PADDA; Parent Resource Centers: Jane and Ralph Carlucci/Henrico; M. Conrad/Richmond; Gail McEse and Kim Masseck/Poquoson; Suzanne Stuart/Williamsburg; and Virginia Office of Protection and Advocacy (VOPA): Ann and Keith Banton, Patricia Cosby, Faye Adams and Deborah Barfield.**

Frequently Asked Questions in Special Education

In each issue we try and answer some frequently asked questions in Special Education. If you have a question you would like to have answered, you may want to first try looking for answers on the PEATC website: www.peatc.org. If you don't find your answer, please call or email your question to us at: partners@peatc.org.

by *Daaiyah Rashid*

Q. What can I do to help my child have a successful year?

A. Parent involvement is the most important ingredient to your child's success at school. Get to know each and every one of your child's teachers separately and let them know how they can contact you if they need to. Ask them how you can help. If your child is receiving special education services either through an IEP or a 504 plan, become as knowledgeable as possible about the process and your rights. The laws that govern special education can be very confusing and the language difficult to understand but we can help. Be sure to ask lots of questions and don't forget to ask your child what he or she needs and if solutions are working. Try to observe any patterns or persistent types of behaviors and make a note of them for your meetings or conversations with teachers or your pediatrician. If your child is not receiving any special education services but you have concerns about whether he or she should, be sure to ask for a conference with his teachers or counselor ahead of time. Feel free to call us if you just want to do some research to learn more about suspected problems. Remember, get involved and stay involved. Develop good relationships with school personnel, as well as other parents at your child's school and in your community. Find opportunities to participate in your child's school activities and projects. There are lots of opportunities to volunteer, even if it can't be much. By getting to know your child's teachers, you have an ideal opportunity to help them get to know your child – from the expert's point of view – YOURS!

Q. What can be done if there seems to be a personality clash with your child's teacher?

A. First and foremost, keep your priorities straight. Your child must be successful in the classroom and the teacher's guidance and cooperation is essential to achieving that. Try to examine your own feelings if

they are preventing respectful or productive communication from taking place. Also try to identify for yourself the reasons why there is a clash. Figure out your part in it and then separate, if you can, your feelings from the issues. For example, are you uncomfortable about how your child is being treated or do you have some concerns about the teacher's qualifications or do you feel there is not enough respect in your communications with that teacher? Once you've spent some time thinking about your contribution to the problem, it's possible you may wish to share your feelings with that teacher in order to move forward. You could request a meeting, just the two of you, and talk openly about what has occurred. She may be feeling some of the same things or reacting to things that have nothing to do with you or your child and a fresh start could benefit all. Of course, if you've tried all of the above and the relationship is having negative effects on your child, you may wish to speak privately with the principal or counselor about your feelings and discuss making a class change. Children need consistency and change is always difficult, however, making these decisions as a part of a team always works best for everyone – especially your child.

Q. My child feels isolated with no friends at school. What can the school do to include my child?

A. Success for our children at school includes their social and emotional well-being. If your child expresses feelings of isolation or loneliness, complains of having no friends or you are concerned about what you have observed, talk with his or her teachers or counselor about it. If the student has an IEP, bring your concerns to the case manager or school administrator or mention it during the next meeting. The IEP team is responsible for social interaction and identifying extracurricular activities that can help. As members of the IEP team, parents and professionals should consider all the possibilities for a well-rounded education program for each student. Membership in school clubs provide an excellent opportunity for students to feel they belong to the school society.

Peer Mentor Clubs are specifically designed to assist with integrating all students into the student

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Frequently Asked Questions

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body. Peer mentors can also be leaders in the school who volunteer from the honor society, sports teams, civic clubs and student council to name a few. A study period can be used to allow mentors to interact with students who need help with regular classes. Mentors can attend classes with students who have a disability and take notes or tutor them one on one. Peer mentors can also serve as positive behavioral role models for students who need to learn more appropriate behavior. They gain a friend, new confidence and sense of self-worth through helping others. The credits the peer mentors earn may count as community volunteer service or an elective.

Q. What can I do about harassment and retaliation?

A. Make the principal and school officials aware by writing a letter stating the facts in the incident(s) and requesting a meeting with school personnel to discuss it. Sometimes it's helpful to have your child write about it in his or her own words or dictate it to you so you can write it. Ask school officials to see their policy on discrimination, harassment and retaliation and be sure you understand what they intend to do. Have them explain how they intend to follow-up on their procedures for remedy. While federal anti-discrimination laws hold local educational agencies responsible for stopping harassment of students, an open awareness in the school of their policies is more likely to stop harassment and to show that the school does not accept nor tolerate it. You may need to file a complaint with the Office of Special Education, Office of Civil Rights (OCR) or Virginia Office of Protection and Advocacy (VOPA).¹ More on *Bullying* is available in a fact sheet on the PEATC website, www.peatc.org.

Q. What are Procedural Safeguards?

A. The Notice of procedural Safeguards: Rights of Parents of Students with Disabilities explains the specific rights and responsibilities of the parent in the special education process. These are written guidelines put in place to help ensure parent participation, confidentiality of records, to provide the guidelines for parents' rights and notices, to keep the parent informed and allow for review of all student records that are kept on file by the school. Parents are a vital part of the student's education and should be involved in every aspect of the decisions concerning the student. Title 34 Code of Federal

Regulations (CFR) Section 300.504 requires that public schools, which include district and charter schools, provide parents of students with disabilities a copy of the procedural safeguards during initial referral for evaluation and reevaluation, before each IEP meeting, whenever a request for a due process hearing is received and anytime a decision to take disciplinary action is necessary. It must include full explanation of the following: Independent Educational Evaluation, Prior Written Notice, Parent Consent, Access to Educational Records, Opportunity to Present Complaints and Due Process Hearings, Placement of a child during/pending Due Process proceedings, Procedures for students in an Interim Alternative Educational Setting, Requirements for Unilateral Placement by Parents in Private Schools at Public Expense, Mediation, Due Process Hearings, Civil Actions, Attorney's Fees and State Complaint Procedures.

¹Virginia Office of Protection and Advocacy (VOPA) is the new independent agency formerly the Department For the Rights of Virginians with Disabilities (DRVD).

Visit the PEATC Website www.peatc.org

PEATC's website is a great source of information about the programs, products and services we offer children, families and professionals looking for help with special education and related healthcare needs.

You can find:

- Information about the laws governing special education
- Fact Sheets (in pdf format) about different aspects of special education, communication and coping
- Information about foster care services
- A calendar of many of the special education or disability-related events in or near Virginia
- A self-study about transitions and preparing for life after school
- Everything you always wanted to know about special education
- Important links to related sites and reports

President's Commission

(Cont'd. from P. 1)

Commission complained about paperwork and monitoring. Special education teachers spend too much time on documentation to show that they are complying with special education requirements. The due process system and monitoring focus more on procedures than results. This means that most disagreements between parents and schools center on compliance, when the focus should be on results. Likewise, when students are making minimal or no progress parents have little recourse if the school has done its paperwork. Commission recommendations in this area reduce regulatory and monitoring burdens for schools in exchange for substantive educational and developmental outcomes and results. Failure to meet these outcomes/results would bring additional assistance or enforcement under the law.

2. *Embrace a Model of Prevention, not a Model of Failure.* Too many children are placed in special education after regular education has failed them. Already behind, it can be even more difficult to catch up. Using proven reading and behavioral intervention programs can prevent this situation from occurring in the first place. Failure in this area has also contributed to an over-identification of minority students in special education. Early intervention can prevent disabilities in many children and lessen their impact for many who develop them.

3. *Children Placed in Special Education are Still General Education Children.* Though not intended, special education and general education operate as

Significant Recommendations

- **Alternative Dispute Resolution** -- Require states to develop ways to avoid conflict and promote agreement between parents and schools such as IEP facilitators. Require states to make mediation available anytime it is requested and not only when a request for a hearing is made. Permit parents and schools to enter into binding arbitration.
- **Inclusion** -- Recognize least restrictive environment as a basic civil right with students in the most integrated setting possible. This means that if the student is not in the regular education setting, all possible educational and school social experiences with nondisabled peers is included including nonacademic and extracurricular activities.
- **Early Intervention** -- Screen all children for learning and behavioral difficulties in early grades so that such difficulties can be addressed before they become insurmountable problems.

separate systems. Too often, children with disabilities are excluded from general education curriculum and stereotyped into vocational training. For many students who are capable of completing a regular high school diploma for college entry, these doors are closed off because special education students don't have access to the curriculum. Too many schools leave students with disabilities out of meaningful accountability systems and do not invest general education resources to help them succeed. Too many students are sent to segregated placements and classes with low expectations and dismal outcomes. They are removed from their peers. *(The Commission did recommend increased funding for special education; however, it failed to recommend the call for 40% funding for the cost of students in special education. Instead it recommended a formula that would increase funding for students who are the most expensive to educate.)*

The report included numerous recommendations for monitoring and accountability; funding formulas; the federal office of special education programs; teacher preparation, training and retention; research; and interagency collaboration. The Commission believes these recommendations would ultimately improve results for children with disabilities.

Some other recommendations that would change special education for children with disabilities and their families include:

- **School Accountability** -- Set high standards for reading and math performance. Improve graduation rates, post-graduation outcomes and parent satisfaction. Include students with disabilities in school-wide assessment. Make information public about how schools are performing for students with disabilities.
- **Information to Parents** -- Increase parental empowerment

(Cont'd. on P. 13)



(Cont'd. from P. 12)

by giving parents meaningful information about their children's adequate yearly progress and how assessment measures a child's strengths and weaknesses, yearly progress and directs education services that evidence shows to be successful.

- **Parental Empowerment --** Empower parents as key players and decision-makers in their children's education. Developing processes that avoid conflict and promote IEP agreements. Allow parents to make choices about schools and/or services when schools fail to make adequate yearly progress for three years.
- **Support Teachers --** Recruit and train general and special education teachers and other professionals who are highly qualified to educate students with disabilities.
- **IQ tests --** Simplify identification of students by eliminating IQ tests for determining eligibility for special education services, particularly for students with learning disabilities.
- **Accessibility for Assessment --** Make sure that assessments that measure accountability are designed to include any accommodations and modifications for students with disabilities.
- **Transition --** Students with disabilities may need intensified supports and services during the transition years (14-22) including developing their skills in the areas of: self-determination, self-advocacy, social skills, organizational skills, community and peer connection, communication, conflict-resolution,

career skill building, career development and computer/technological competency. Clarify how schools, vocational rehabilitation agencies and other community organizations charged with providing services to individuals with disabilities should work together.

- **Parental Involvement in Transition --** Ensure that students and their parents fully participate in the type and delivery of transition services. Support parents in navigating the transition from the entitlement model under IDEA to the eligibility model used by other programs providing post-school services to people with disabilities.

Next Steps

The administration intends to incorporate many of the recommendations from the report by adopting recommendations that can be implemented without legislation; incorporating recommendations and ideas into other Department of Education and federal initiatives; framing the Administration's positions on the reauthorization of IDEA. Congressional staff are considering findings of the report as they draft their IDEA bills.

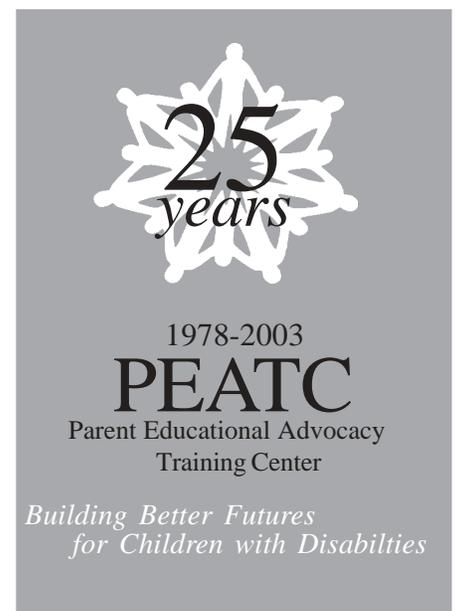
The President's Commission report can be accessed through a direct link to the PEATC homepage www.peatc.org or linking directly to the Commission homepage <http://www.ed.gov/inits/commissionsboards/whspecialeducation/index.html>

As executive director of PEATC, Virginia's Parent Training and Information Center serving children

with disabilities, their families and the professionals who serve them, I believe the work we completed on the Commission has the potential for making a significant impact on the quality of education and futures for children with disabilities. The message of inclusion, for raising standards and expectations for all children, empowering parents, training professionals including those with disabilities, is certainly an encouraging one. Now it is time for advocates for children with disabilities and decision makers to make this vision for quality education and better futures for children with disabilities a reality.

"Leaving no child behind also means children with disabilities. These children include students at high risk of academic difficulties because of learning disabilities or emotional disturbance and those children with disabilities in foster care or juvenile justice facilities, from the early elementary grades through high school. We must raise the bar for these children with disabilities to reach their potential."

President's Commission Report - 2002





PEATC exhibited at the 8th Annual Joint Services EFMP Special Needs Awareness Family Forum at the Chesapeake Conference Center in Chesapeake in August 2002. PEATC caught up with some friends from the Tidewater area: (l-r) **Tony Trott**, PEATC Project Coordinator and PADDA employees, **Sheila Marble**, **Deborah Smith-George** and **Mark Jacob**, Executive Director.



(Above) **Suzanne Stuart** from the Williamsburg Parent Resource Center joined several other organizations and individuals to help staff the PEATC exhibit at this year's VA State Fair in Richmond.

PEATC *at Work*



PEATC and George Mason University presented their LiteracyAccess Online (LAO) project at the OSEP Project Director's event. (l-r) **Cherie Takemoto**, PEATC Executive Director; **Felicia Kessel-Crawley**, PEATC Development Coordinator and **Kenneth Clark**, V.P. Communications for VERIZON.



In the second of several Brown Bag sessions in the PEATC Office over the summer, advocates and staff met to discuss better ways to work together for families. (l-r) **Barbara Anzelmo**, PEATC Director of Administration and Finance; **Tricia Chogich**, advocate, **Bellen Joyner**, PEATC Information Specialist and advocates **Denise Jones** and **Gayle Hixon**.

Parent Centers

These centers offer information, assistance, referrals and workshops to parents and educators. Call the center nearest you for information on classes, support groups and other resources.

VIRGINIA

State Team:

Anita Swan 800/422-2083
Judy Hudgins

Albemarle Co./
Charlottesville 434/975-9400
Alexandria 703/706-4552
Allegheny Co./
Covington 540/863-1621
Arlington Co. 703/228-7239
Bedford Co. 540/587-8990
Brunswick Co. 434/848-2157
Caroline Co. 804/633-7083
Chesapeake 757/482-5923
Chesterfield Co. 804/743-3703
Colonial Heights 804/524-3452
Culpepper Co. 540/829-2108
Dinwiddie Co. 804/861-4563
Fairfax Co. 703/204-3941
Fluvanna Co. 434/975-9400
Franklin Co. 540/483-0280
Frederick Co. 540/535-9006
Fredericksburg 540/372-1127
Giles Co. 540/626-7287
Goochland Co. 804/556-4867
Greene Co. 434/975-9400
Hampton 757/896-7623
Hanover Co. 804/365-4596
Henrico Co. 804/343-6523
Henry Co. 540/632-7248
Hopewell 804/541-6443
King George Co. 540/775-0589
Lexington/Buena Vista/
Rockbridge Co. 540/261-7340
Loudoun Co. 703/771-6765
Lynchburg 434/522-3737
Madison Co. 540/923-4716
Montgomery Co. 540/381-6175
Nelson Co. 434/975-9400
Newport News 757/886-7859
Norfolk 757/451-4140
Orange Co. 540/672-9525
Page Co. 540/652-1582
Petersburg 804/861-4563
Poquoson 757/868-7564
Powhatan Co. 804/598-3034
Prince George Co. 804/733-2698
Prince William Co. 703/791-8846
Pulaski Co. 540/643-0204
Radford 540/731-3679

Richmond 804/780-6220
Roanoke 540/853-2089
Roanoke Co. 540/772-2161
Russell Co. 540/889-6500
Salem 540/389-0130
Smyth Co. 540/783-4183
Spotsylvania Co. 540/582-3616
Stafford Co. 540/658-6448
Suffolk 757/925-5579
Sussex Co. 804/861-4563
Virginia Beach 757/437-6539
Warren Co. 540/635-2171
Williamsburg/
James City Co. 757/229-1341
Wise Co. 540/395-5516
York Co. 757/890-1017

Community Parent Resource Center

Serving the Tidewater Area in VA
PADDA 888/337-2332

MARYLAND

State Contact:

Family Support Services Coord.
800-535-0182

Allegany Co. 301/689-2407
Anne Arundel Co. 410/222-3805
Baltimore City 410/396-8995
Baltimore Co. 410/887-5443
Calvert Co. 410/535-7240
Caroline Co. 410/479-2893
Carroll Co. 410/751-3955
Cecil Co. 410/996-5637
Charles Co. 301/609-3154
Dorchester Co. 410/221-0837
Frederick Co. 301/236-8430
Garrett Co. 301/334-4251
Harford Co. 410/638-3858
Howard Co. 410/313-7161
Kent Co. 410/778-7167
Montgomery Co. 301/657-4969
Pr. George's Co. 301/925-2811
Queen Anne's Co. 410/758-3693
School for Blind 410/444-5000
School for Deaf 410/480-4597
St. Mary's Co. 301/863-4069
Somerset Co. 410/651-1964
Talbot Co. 410/822-0550
Washington Co. 301/766-8221

Wicomico Co. 410/572-6955
Worcester Co. 410/632-4531

WEST VIRGINIA

State Team:

Nancy Drake
Ginger Huffman
Kathy Knighton 304/558-2696
800/642-8541

Barbour Co. 304/823-2939
Berkeley Co. 304/263-5717
Brooke Co. 304/797-9854
Cabell Co.3 04/528-5208
Calhoun Co. 304/354-9504
Doddridge Co. 304/873-2778
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Mineral Co. 304/788-4213
Mingo Co. 304/235-3333
Monongalia Co. 304/291-9258
Monroe Co. 304/753-5495
Ohio Co. 304/243-0331
Pendleton Co. 304/358-2013
Pleasants Co. 304/684-7205
Putnam Co. 304/586-0547
Raleigh Co. 304/256-4667
Ritchie Co. 304/869-3512
Roane Co. 304/927-6412
Taylor Co. 304/265-2497
Tucker Co. 304/478-3829
Wayne Co. 304/272-5116
Webster Co. 304/847-5638
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Parent Educational Advocacy
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*Building Better Futures
for Children with Disabilities*

6320 Augusta Drive, Suite 1200
Springfield, VA 22150
703-923-0010
www.peatc.org

T'IS THE SEASON TO SUPPORT PEATC

This holiday season, PEATC has even more to celebrate than ever. The new year marks our 25th Anniversary serving children with disabilities, their families and professionals who serve them. We will dedicate 2003 to expanding public awareness about how to improve schools and increase progress for our children whose futures continue to be at risk. PEATC is developing new programs and outreach services using state-of-the-art materials to help parents and professionals benefit from an agenda for excellence in education that will truly build better futures for children with disabilities.

SAY YES, I want to become a PEATC Partner for Excellence in Education and help build better futures for children with disabilities. Enclosed is my tax-deductible gift of:

**VIP PLATINUM*

- \$50,000*
- \$25,000
- \$10,000

GOLD

- \$5,000
- \$2,500
- \$1,000

SILVER

- \$500
- \$250
- \$100

STAR

- \$50
- \$25
- \$_____

____ Personal check (payable to PEATC) ____ Visa ____ Mastercard ____ AMEX

Account Number _____ Expiration Date _____
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