

Newsline

The Federation for Children with Special Needs
Summer 2023 Edition



FCSN Summer
2023 Newsline

Welcome to the Summer Edition of Newsline!

by Pam Nourse, Executive Director

Dear Community,

I am thrilled to welcome you to the Summer Edition of Newsline, the quarterly newsletter of the Federation for Children with Special Needs. I am delighted to share with you the latest updates, resources, and stories that matter to our community.

Continued on Next Page.

What's Inside

Welcome to the Summer
Edition of Newsline!

For Our Friend David Bartley

Tis' the Season of Blooming!

New IEP Form

Expanding Our Language and
Cultural Access



FCSN Newsline
Summer 2023 Edition

Table of Contents

Welcome to the Summer Edition
of Newsline! • P.1 - P.4

For Our Friend David Bartley
• P.5 - P.8

Accessible Playgrounds in
Massachusetts • P.9

Tis' the Season of Blooming
• P.10 - P.11

The New IEP Form • P.12 - P.13

School Finder • P.14

Parent Consultant Training Institutes: 2023
• P.15 - P.16

Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS)
and Timely Services • P.17 - P.18

Expanding Our Language
and Cultural Access • P.19 - P.20

Transition Planning • P.21 - P.23



Welcome to the Summer Edition of Newsline!

By Pam Nourse, Executive Director

We know that for many, there's really no such thing as taking the summer off. This time of year brings unique challenges and opportunities for families of children with special needs. In this issue, we aim to provide valuable insights and support, whether you are a parent, a professional, a volunteer, or all three.

Before diving into our articles around summer activities, please take a moment to read and reflect on the contributions of Speaker Bartley to our community. We pass on our condolences to his family and will continue to honor his legacy.

One of the key highlights of this edition is our coverage of summer school preparedness. We believe that every child deserves an enriching and inclusive educational experience, even during the summer months. Our team has compiled valuable tips, resources, and expert advice to ensure that your child's summer learning is both engaging and beneficial.

Additionally, we shine a spotlight on accessible playgrounds in Massachusetts. We believe that play should be accessible to all children, regardless of their abilities. We explore the importance of inclusive play spaces and highlight some of the fantastic accessible playgrounds available in our state.

Furthermore, we delve into our School Finder Campaign, which aims to assist families in finding the right educational options for their children. We provide an in-depth look at the campaign's progress, success stories, and the resources available through our dedicated School Finder Help Line.

Continued on Next Page.

Welcome to the Summer Edition of Newline!

By Pam Nourse, Executive Director

In every edition of Newline, our goal is to provide you with practical information, resources, and stories that empower and inspire. We hope that the Summer Edition will equip you with valuable knowledge and support as you navigate the summer months with your children.

I encourage you to take the time to explore the articles, engage with the content, and share your thoughts and feedback with us. Your input is invaluable in shaping the future direction of our organization and ensuring that we continue to meet the needs of our community.

Thank you for your unwavering support of the Federation for Children with Special Needs. We are here for you every step of the way, advocating for inclusive education, empowering families, and championing the rights of children with special needs.

Wishing you a wonderful summer filled with joy, growth, and memorable moments!

Warm regards,

Pam Nourse

Executive Director

Federation for Children with Special Needs





For Our Friend David Bartley (February 1935 - June 2023)

By Bob Crabtree

David M. Bartley was Speaker of the House during the years 1970-72 that produced several major pieces of legislation that improved educational access for kids that had been marginalized and, in some cases, altogether excluded as uneducable. He was an educator before he was a State Representative for Holyoke and he, like Senate President Kevin Harrington and my boss Mike Daly, House Chairman of the Education Committee – each of whom had also been teachers – treated education reform as a priority during their terms in office. With Speaker Bartley's recent death at the age of 88, all three of those civil rights champions have now passed. (A fourth champion, if only because he enthusiastically signed Chapter 766 into law when it reached his desk 51 years ago, was Governor Frank Sargent; he and his wife Jesse were dedicated advocates for those with developmental disabilities.)

I write this both on my own behalf, as one of the first Research Directors to be appointed to a legislative committee when Speaker Bartley took on the task of professionalizing legislative staff, and also on behalf of all the stakeholders who have benefitted from his work with Representative Daly to create a responsive and accountable system of special education and related services for kids who need such interventions in our schools.

Daly was a legislative member of the Task Force on Children Out of Schools (now the Mass. Advocates for Children). Inspired by that work, he brought two major missions to his committee chairmanship in 1971: one to create a system of transitional bilingual education for non-English-speaking students; the other to completely reform the requirements and procedures for educating kids with learning, emotional or physical challenges that undermined their access and progress in school. The Speaker wholeheartedly joined Daly as a co-sponsor of the bilingual education initiative in 1971 and, when his research assistant, Connie Kaufman (now Rizoli) put our proposed changes to special education law on his desk early in 1972, he did not hesitate for a second before he signed on as a co-sponsor of the complex over-hall of special education law that became Chapter 766.

Continued on Next Page.

For Our Friend David Bartley (Continued)

Bartley did not merely add his name as a co-sponsor of the special education initiative: his decisions at some key points in the process were critical to its ultimate passage and success as a system of rights and services. Inevitably, major differences arose among those with interests in the proposal, especially when it came to costs, controls over programs, definitions that would govern access to services, and how much and of what nature access would be afforded to parents - the highest stakeholders of all, besides the children themselves.

Up to that point, all educational decisions for public school students were solely and indisputably in the hands of school districts and state institutions, with little, if any, recourse for parents if they disagreed. Both Daly and Bartley, teachers and parents in their own rights, brought a clear determination to the mix to ensure both that parents would play a central role in the educational decisions for children who needed special attention and supports and that conflicting positions over what a child needed would be resolved with the input of experts from outside the school systems as well as from the school's own personnel.

In a radical innovation within any known public education system to date, Bartley and Daly agreed to call for the establishment of a due process system, with independent hearing officers charged with deciding points in contention between schools and parents and with parents given rights to secure independent expert evaluations and recommendations, all to be litigated, if need be, through hearings and judicial appeals. Two years later, that due process system was joined by federal legislation - now called the IDEA - modeled on Chapter 766, allowing for appeals up to the U.S. Supreme Court if necessary.

When questions needed to be resolved between stakeholders with opposing interests, we submitted those to the Speaker. Daly's approach - unique at the time - to work up a complex piece of legislation like the bilingual education and special education proposals, was to invite all the stakeholders we could think of to meet at the offices of the Education Committee to review proposed drafts line by line, to identify questions that needed to be resolved and to debate proposed solutions. Key disputes, sharpened through that process, were ultimately given to the Speaker to resolve.

Continued on Next Page.





For Our Friend David Bartley (Continued)

Bartley brought a well-grounded pragmatism to his work – even – especially, perhaps – when his mission was as revolutionary as were his and Daly’s missions with their bilingual education and special education proposals.

He once said that he liked to appear conservative to the conservatives and progressive to the progressives; from my vantage point, while working with the Education Committee, his approach paid off beautifully. Lessons could be taken today from his approach, as it really amounted to finding a point of compromise that, while challenging and uncomfortable, made the democratic process actually work for people who needed services.

In that mode, for example, after we heard at one of the stakeholders’ meetings on the special education bill from agents of some of the state departments – in particular, DMR, DYS, DMH, DPH, and DOC – that they did not want to give up control over school programs within their residential (including correctional) facilities to the Department of Education as the bill had been drafted, we put the dispute to Speaker Bartley. The Speaker’s research assistant, Connie Rizoli, and I recommended that education for kids whose emotional or other challenges had led to their short- or long-term institutionalization be designed and overseen by educators, rather than primarily by therapists or physicians. Speaker Bartley readily agreed and the issue was resolved, leading to the creation of an office under the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education known as Special Education in Institutional Settings (SEIS) with authority over educational programs.

In another example of Speaker Bartley’s critical decision-making, some school systems were distressed by the prospect, if the special education reform act came to be, of having to change their programs and procedures, much less add many to their staffs to meet what they saw as a major expansion of their obligations. They could not – and for the most part did not – argue against the main premises of the proposal, though there was much anxiety about the prospect of having parents sitting at the table with educators over whether and what kinds of special education and supports would be provided for their kids – they pressed relentlessly against having any such major over-hall required to begin only a short time after the law was signed. The Speaker worked with advocates and school systems alike to achieve a compromise: what came to be Chapter 766 would not be deemed immediately effective; instead, its effective date would be set two years out – September 1974. School systems breathed relief and then set to work to prepare their systems, their programs, and their staff to make it happen.

Continued on Next Page.

For Our Friend David Bartley (Continued)

In these and other ways, we owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to Speaker David Bartley. Working with Mike Daly and adjusting as necessary to the demands of advocates on all sides, his good sense and pragmatism were indispensable to the enactment and implementation of Chapter 766. He committed himself to that success in the service of his total agreement to the merits of the special education reform that had followed so powerfully from the findings of excluded children made by the Task Force on Children Out of School, the creative analysis, and recommendations of the Mass. Advisory Council on Education (with Larry Kotin's legal input); and, let's say, the strategic grunt-work and fine-tuning of the bill by the newly professionalized staff of the legislature.

Some years later, David Bartley and I were two of the speakers at an annual conference of the Massachusetts Association of School Committees. The Speaker had retired from the House and was well into his new work as President of Mt. Holyoke Community College, but he was glad to take the time to talk with the MASC. It was great to hear him sing with pride about the special education law that he had played such a powerful hand in bringing to life and also to recognize the tone he'd brought to that mission in 1972 – a clear and unapologetic message to school committees reminding them of their deep obligation to those whose progress is undermined by special challenges, praising them for the progress that had been made across the state, and urging them to stay the course – i.e., not to put cost concerns over educational imperatives in their actions as an association or in their individual school systems. Dollars spent now, he said, are not only the ethical thing but also the sensible fiscal choice, compared to the loss of skills that could have been developed if the extra services had been provided.

Amen to that, Speaker Bartley. Rest in Peace.





Accessible Playgrounds in Massachusetts

By Pat Cameron, Director of Family TIES

It's summer and it's time to play! There are a number of accessible playgrounds sprinkled across the state.

What is an accessible playground? Most importantly, it has a ground cover that is both shock absorbent for falls and smooth so a child using a wheelchair can navigate throughout. Secondly, most of the equipment is lower and accessible for someone in a wheelchair. And the equipment is spaced to provide both safe fall zones and wheelchair access.

When choosing a playground, look for one with age-appropriate equipment. Most young children will try anything, and we want their choices to be safe ones. The Consumer Product Safety Commission issues [playground safety guidelines](#) including a helpful checklist of what to look for when it comes to playground safety. Here are some resources you can use to find accessible playgrounds near you!

Massachusetts has lists of accessible playgrounds. Here are some resources you can use to find accessible playgrounds near you!

- [Let Kids Play!](#) Includes guidelines and tips as well as a list of sites
- [Boston Parent](#) Article *Universal Playgrounds: Where All Children Come Together*
- [Guide to All-Inclusive Playgrounds in Massachusetts](#) lists of playgrounds with photos
- [Department of Conservation and Recreation](#) offers a list of accessible parks and trails in MA

Have fun this summer!

Tis' the Season of Blooming!

Special Education Surrogate Parents Plant Seeds for Young People's Futures

By Mary-Beth Landy, Training and Support Specialist



It's hard to believe, but I think that it's finally here. Yup, it's the time of year for newness, for the sprouting of things planted long ago. It's almost hard to remember the time of planting, of germinating the seeds for growth. I find that this is a time of surprises and wonder. Maybe you aren't like me, and you remember where every plant and flower in your garden is. But sometimes, I have trouble remembering what I ate for breakfast, let alone, what is planted where in our yard! So, for me, these days of spring and early summer are amazing times!

I often find myself in a time of reflection these days. Maybe it's an age thing but, I am drawn to watching the children and youth come out of hibernation and experience things as new. New romance, new friends, new transitions. It gives me a chance to see things through their eyes. For years, when I was in my twenties and early thirties I worked as a youth counselor, working with at-risk teens in a variety of neighborhoods in the Boston area. And one of the hardest things, for me, was working very closely with teenagers, and then having them move on with their lives. This always left me with a longing to know what happened to them. Did I make any impact on their lives? That is a question I hear a lot from the Special Education Surrogate Parents (SESPs) that we assist in the Recruitment, Training, and Support Center (RTSC). And I believe unequivocally the answer is YES!

You see, our volunteers are trained to support students who experience the child welfare system in Massachusetts, as well as need to receive services from their schools, through Individualized Education Programs or IEPs. They specifically assist students who are living in congruent care facilities and don't have adults to help make special education decisions for them to meet their unique needs.

Continued on Next Page.

Tis' the Season of Blooming! (Continued)

What I love so much about my job is that our staff get the opportunity to not only sow the seeds through recruitment of volunteers, offer the knowledge of how to work with the most vulnerable children in the state, but most importantly, help them see what a difference they have made in the life of a student. The strength of a caring, active, and understanding adult on their side has a long-lasting impact on these kids, long after the appointment ends. SESP's are the gardeners of the seeds of resilience for years to come. Sometimes, we just need to be patient enough to see the blooms of springtime. Time, hope, and tender care will reap the bounty for us all!

If you or someone you know is interested in becoming a Special Education Surrogate Parent, and making a difference in the lives of a child, click here to [find out more information](#) and to fill out an [online application](#).

BECOME AN SESP

- ***Looking to become a change maker in a child's life?***
- ***Are you interested in helping at risk youth?***
- ***Become a Special Education Surrogate Parent (SESP)!!!***



The Recruitment, Training and Support Center (RTSC) for Special Education Surrogate Parents (SESPs) is a project of the Federation for Children with Special Needs.

The mission of the RTSC Project at the Federation for Children with Special Needs is to ensure that every child in state custody receives the educational supports they need to succeed.



If you want to serve Massachusetts youth at risk by becoming an SESP,



The New IEP Form

By Leslie Leslie, Director of MassPAC

For the first time in more than 20 years, Massachusetts has a new Individualized Education Program (IEP) form for students receiving special education services. Years of stakeholder input were collected, multiple drafts were shared with the public, and a final version was issued in late April. Although school districts may begin to use the new IEP form in the Fall of 2023, most districts will take some time to integrate the new form into their electronic systems and train educators on how to use it.

One goal of the redesign was to create a more student and family-friendly version, bringing more information together in one form for a simpler process. For example, the separate Transition Planning Form (TPF) will be discontinued after September 2024 as many of the elements are now incorporated into the new IEP form. The new form is question-based, which should drive a more conversational approach to planning for support and services.

The biggest change is the focus on student and family voices on the form and in the process. Student and Parent Concerns are listed first. Every student is asked to contribute to their IEP by documenting their vision--what they want to learn in school--even for the youngest students in preschool special education. Student Vision should guide the IEP Team's decisions.

A student's complete learning profile is now part of the form, including whether the student is an English Learner, documenting any language needs and how they relate to the student's IEP. Whether a student requires Assistive technology is now a formal question and if the answer is yes, then the need can be addressed through the IEP.

Continued on Next Page.

The New IEP Form (Continued)

Another shift is the move away from IEP Teams copying evaluation language found in the prior "Key Evaluation Results Summary". Instead, the form requests data from classroom performance, parent, student, and teacher observations and assessments, as well as data from evaluations. The goal is to get a more well-rounded view of the student's current performance in class and how their disability affects progress in the general education curriculum. The new form asks for the IEP Team to document the Strengths, Interests, and Preferences of the student, following our federal IDEA law. A strength-based approach empowers students to participate in the development of goals to address their challenges.

Now for the hard part – bringing everyone (educators, parents, and students) up to speed on the new form and learning ways to collaborate for student success.

Here is where you can find both the Old and New IEP Forms. Both are available in English and Translated Versions:

- [Old IEP Form](#)
- [New IEP Form](#)

More information and training on the new IEP form will be coming this fall – stay tuned!



What's YOUR Best Option?

School Finder Help Line Can Help You Figure That Out!

By Aceriane Leal, School Finder Program Manager

The mom on the other end of the phone line is worried about her child, who refuses to go to school because of bullying. She tried speaking to the school but there is a language barrier.

What should she do?

- a.) Request an interpreter and a meeting to discuss safety planning and support for her child
- b.) File a complaint with the State
- c.) Look for other school options
- d.) **This was a trick question -- only the family knows the best choice for them**

The School Finder Help Line helps families understand their options so they can make informed choices for their children. We conduct outreach around the state to share information and present workshops on how to navigate school systems and understand your options. A major focus is Career and Technical Education, which combines challenging academics with training in a career field.

Too often, educational information is provided online and in English - leaving many students and families out. Families also sometimes report that they have been discouraged from exploring certain options because of their child's primary language or learning needs. The School Finder Help Line is here to make sure that all families understand their options and are able to access them.

Examples of topics we help families with:

- **School options** - based on location, grade level, and learning needs
- **Career & Technical Education** - options and how to apply
- **Options for responding to language-based or disability discrimination**
- **IEP Process as it relates to Out-of-district Placements**
- **Educational Systems in Massachusetts** - questions and concerns for immigrant families

Most families who've called us this year have had children who have IEPs, but we work with any family, regardless of language, background, location, or ability. Our team includes specialists who speak English, Spanish, Portuguese, Haitian Creole, French, Mandarin, and Vietnamese. We also use a phone interpretation service, allowing us to answer questions in nearly any other language.

If you or your organization would like to learn more, please reach out to us at 1 (800) 208-2242 or SchoolFinder@fcsn.org. Or, visit our website: www.fcsn.org/schoolfinder



Their future begins now.

School Finder Help Line
(800) 208-2242
SchoolFinder@FCSN.org

Or start your search today!
bit.ly/3oj3Bhi



Registration Now Open!

www.fcsn.org/PCTI



Summer 2023 Asynchronous PCTI



Super-Charge Your Special Education Knowledge Parent Consultant Training Institutes: 2023

By Emma Gregory

“Profound! I was engaged and intrigued by the vast range of topics and enthusiastic presenters. The collaboration of group interactions was wonderful. As long of a day it was, I found myself wanting more, wanting to continue the discussions.” - Participant

The Federation is excited to continue offering our Parent Consultant Training Institute (PCTI) this year. PCTI is an intensive training program designed to provide parents and professionals with a solid foundation in special education laws, policies, and procedures. In PCTI, participants can expect to learn about a broad range of topics, including parent rights, transition planning, discipline and suspension, bullying, BSEA mediation and hearings, educational and psychological evaluations, and more. Our presenters, who include attorneys, state agency representatives, psychologists, educators, and parents, provide opportunities to ask questions and engage meaningfully with the content. Many parents complete this course to support their own child's special education journey, while others complete the course to support families in their communities.

Participants can also expect to develop strong connections with others and build a community of people dedicated to supporting children in special education. Participants learn not only from our knowledgeable presenters but through engaging with and learning from the experiences of others in the course. And this community continues long after each PCTI session: PCTI creates a network of knowledgeable parents and professionals who can lean on each other for support.

I learn from participants myself when I go onto the PCTI Facebook Group and read posts from graduates who ask questions, share resources, and provide encouragement and support to others. Some PCTI graduates develop lifelong connections or go on to work together in different ways.

Continued on Next Page.

Super-Charge Your Special Education Knowledge (Continued)

This Winter, for example, two of our PCTI participants applied as a team for a LEND Fellowship recognizing shared interests through their PCTI experience.

PCTI also offers continued learning opportunities. The 50-hour internship with the Federation's Information Center provides an opportunity for PCTI Graduates to develop their skills by supporting families who call us with questions or concerns. Interns learn how to take calls with our experienced staff until they feel ready to take calls on their own. The internship is an excellent opportunity for those hoping to support parents in their communities.

We have two more PCTI courses coming up this year!

Summer Asynchronous PCTI

- Monday, July 17 - Monday, September 1.
- \$275 for Parents
- \$295 for Professionals

[Register now on our website!](#)

Fall 2023 PCTI in Spanish

- October 14th - November 1st
- *More information coming later this summer!*

Registration Now Open!

www.fcsn.org/PCTI



**Summer 2023
5-Day Intensive PCTI**





Is Delay Okay? Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) and Timely Services

By Ruth M. Diaz, Parent Training and Information Center Director

The U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) decisively addressed the above question in two memoranda issued several years ago. MTSS is a process that schools may use to provide increasing levels of support to students who are struggling. For example, students might participate in extra reading support in a small group or 1-1 with a reading specialist. MTSS does not involve specialized instruction and is not a special education service. Out of concern that local school districts continue to delay or deny initial special education evaluations until the child goes through the state's MTSS, OSEP recently re-distributed the two memoranda.

In a memo dated January 21, 2011, OSEP stated that the *child find* provisions of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA – Section 612(a)(3)) requires states to have in place policies and procedures to timely identify, locate, and evaluate all children with disabilities residing in the state, including children who are homeless, wards of the state, home-schooled, or attending private school, who are in need of special education and related services, regardless of the severity of their disability. While supporting state and local implementation of MTSS (formerly RTI) strategies with its characteristic multiple levels of instruction that are progressively more intense based on the child's response to the instruction, OSEP was clear; MTSS may not be used to delay or deny a timely initial evaluation of a child suspected of having a disability (See 34 Code of Federal Regulations §§300.304-300.311).

Further, federal regulations allow a parent to request an initial evaluation at any time to determine whether the child has a disability under IDEA (See 34 Code of Federal Regulations §300.301(b)).

Continued on Next Page.

Is Delay Okay? (Continued)

Likewise, Massachusetts special education regulations state that the school district “shall provide or arrange for the evaluation of the student by a multidisciplinary team within 30 days” upon the consent of the parent (See 603 Code of Massachusetts Regulations 28.04 (2)).

In a memo dated April 29, 2016, OSEP pointed out that *child find* requirements allow referrals from private and public preschools and community-based childcare programs that suspect a child may be eligible for special education and/or related services. Once a school district receives a referral from a preschool program, the school must initiate an evaluation process to determine if the child is a child with a disability. Evaluations of 3- to 5-year-old children enrolled in preschool programs cannot be delayed or denied to implement an MTSS strategy.

What should you do if you or your preschool program makes a referral for a special education evaluation and your school district wants to delay or deny your referral to implement an MTSS strategy first? Here are three options:

1. Use informal procedures for resolving the issue. Ask for a meeting with the team leader, special education director, principal, or superintendent of the school. Bring copies of the relevant OSEP memoranda linked in this article to share with the administrator you meet with. Research shows that when parents and school staff work collaboratively, the outcome contributes to better school/parent relationships and is beneficial for the child in the long term.
2. If you are not able to obtain the needed evaluation of your child through discussion, consider filing a complaint with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Problem Resolution System (PRS). The school cannot reject or delay an initial evaluation in favor of the child’s participation in MTSS under the law. Nevertheless, you must file a timely written complaint with PRS within one year of the school’s failure to evaluate, so do not delay. You can include in your complaint the steps you took to resolve the issue with the school informally. Visit the PRS website for more information on filing a complaint and the procedures for an investigation: doe.mass.edu/prs. You can also call to speak with someone at PRS about your complaint: 781 338-3700.
3. Alternatively, you also have a right to file a complaint with the Bureau of Special Education Appeals (BSEA). The BSEA conducts due process hearings and issues decisions concerning eligibility, evaluation, the provision of special education services, and procedural protections for students with disabilities. For more information about BSEA visit their website at: mass.gov/orgs/bureau-of-special-education-appeals.

If you have further questions or would like to discuss your specific circumstances, please do not hesitate to contact our Information Center at fcsn.org/fcsn-intake-form/ to complete an intake form or 617 236-7210 to leave a message and we will promptly return your call or emailed intake form.



Expanding Our Language and Cultural Access

By Susan Ou, PTI Outreach Team Manager

When I first began working for the Federation in 2011, we had one team of staff members who reached out to members of our cultural communities to help them understand how to navigate the complex school special education system. Much of our work focused on the Boston area. Today, the Federation has expanded our capacity in multiple ways: we have more bilingual staff members working on more programs, reaching out to families in many more cities and towns. And, we keep expanding.

We have staff members who can speak individually with families in their own language, in Spanish, Portuguese, Haitian Creole, French, Cantonese, Mandarin, Vietnamese, Russian, Amharic, and Tigrinya. If we don't have staff who speak a particular language, we use a language interpretation line so that we can support families in different languages. Our website has a computer translation link at the tip of the screen, and we are working on building pages in additional languages as well.

Our vision is to expand our capacity even further by working with community partners so that more families can benefit from Federation services. Of course, we wish we had staff who speak more languages but there are more than a thousand languages in the world, so we need to utilize community partners to reach more families. At the same time, community organizations that are rooted in language and cultural communities know best how to approach the community in a more culturally and linguistically appropriate way.

Our capacity has also expanded beyond the PTI program. Through our School Finder Help Line, we directly support language access in educational systems through a team that speaks six languages – whether or not the families have a child with special needs. We also have additional bilingual staff members focused on early childhood options and transition-related options as well as on healthcare concerns.

Continued on Next Page.

Expanding our Language and Cultural Access (Continued)

The best way for families to access support in their language is to contact the Federation through our website at fcsn.org/fcsn-intake-form or to call us at (800) 331-0688. We have so many different services and people who can help - just call, and we'll connect you to the right person.

If you are bilingual and would like to volunteer with our programs, we would love to hear from you - especially if you already have some knowledge of education systems or special education. You can fill out a volunteer application at fcsn.org/volunteer-application. If you have experience as a parent or caregiver of a child with special needs, consider volunteering with the Parent-to-Parent support program. Learn more at <https://www.massfamilyties.org/parent-to-parent-program>.





Transition Planning

By Rebecca Davis

“When you talk, you are only repeating what you know; but when you listen, you learn something new.”
– Dalai Lama.

Teens and young adults crave social activity and belonging. The importance for young people to develop social skills and to find fun, meaningful things to do cannot be understated, especially now as we begin to understand the lingering effects of the isolation and heightened anxiety caused by the recent pandemic.

To confirm this statement, I could do a quick Google search to find countless articles and cite them as resources.

Or, as I was reminded earlier this year, I could ask a question and then, listen, really listen, to the answer.

This spring, the Federation held an in-person event for transition-aged youth at the Schrafft Center. Thirty teens and young adults attended. Over the course of the day, we talked with youth attendees about their plans for life after high school. We talked about what transitioning from school to adult life might look like for them.

We did an exercise, a simplified trajectory from Charting the Life Course.
(<https://www.lifecoursetools.com/>) We asked the group to answer two questions:

“What do you want in your life?” “What don’t you want?”

Continued on Page...

Transition Planning

By Rebecca Davis

The students were given post it notes and asked to put their answers on one of two lines drawn on a poster board. One line was the “What I want” line. The other “What I don’t want”. The students took time to write thoughtful answers. One by one, they stood up, walked over to the poster on the wall, and placed their brightly colored squares near or next to the others. When they were finished, I thanked them and went to read their words.

The notes, written by a group of diverse students who did not know each other and who had not conferred with each other, shared common messages.

The top two responses:

- 1.They want to have and to be with friends. (“Accessible community” as one student described it.)
- 2.They do not want to be bored. (This was a big winner.)

Reading the students' responses, I was humbled by the urgency of these simple requests. The words, ***Postsecondary transition***, can often cause panic and worry in the hearts of well-meaning parents and professionals, myself included. Heck, I'll put myself right there at the front of the pack. There is so much to do! The paperwork! The research! What are our options? What are the next steps? What if ***this*** happens? What if ***that*** happens? What's an ABLE account? Guardianship or Supported Decision Making? College? Employment? What will they do all day? Healthcare? What? You mean she can't see her pediatrician until she's 50? How can we make the best possible life for our young person? Repeat as necessary.

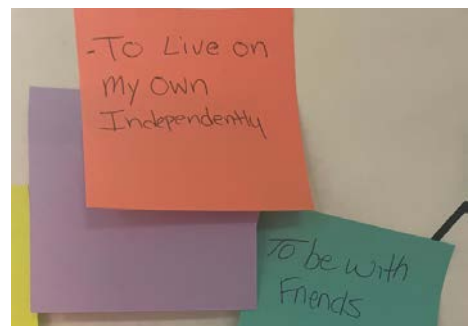
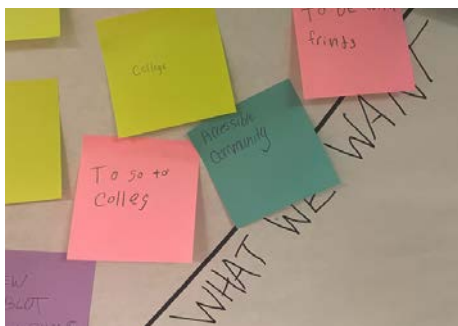
This is in no way to suggest that these questions are not a necessary part of the process of transitioning from high school to adult life. It is a process for every teenager, not just teens with disabilities. It will take time and effort. Trial and error. There will be options to consider, people to meet, and new things to try. There will be successes and failures, both learning opportunities.

Colorful squares on a poster board reminded me that there are voices that need to be heard, to be at the center of every conversation. The lives being planned and discussed and worried about by parents and professionals are the lives of young people who, simply put, want to have friends and to do things that matter to them.

Often, the simplest things are the most important.

So, let's get connected! Here are some suggestions about programs, events and a calendar you can use to begin reaching out to your community! Good luck!

Continued on Page ...



Transition Planning

By Rebecca Davis

Connecting YOU(th) is the Federation's monthly conversation with transition-aged youth about topics that are important to them. Sometimes we will introduce a program or discuss a topic suggested by our youth audience. Sometimes we will talk about what our group wants to discuss that day. It is a flexible format, hosted by FCSN's NextGen Careers Coordinator, Mikayla Metcalf, and a variety of youth guest hosts. Connecting YOU(th) occurs on the second Tuesday of each month in the afternoon. Contact Transition@fcsn.org for more information.

[Easterseals Youth Leadership Network](#) offers opportunities for mentoring, building community, and learning advocacy skills. Contact Desi Forte, Dforte@eastersealsma.org for more information.

[Partners of Youth with Disabilities \(PYD\)](#) PYD programs all provide youth and young adults with disabilities with three key things: **self-confidence**, **community**, and **purpose**. PYD builds disability pride, leadership skills, healthy relationship skills, and community involvement, and ensures that youth are successful in school and in seeking employment. PYD's programs focus on [mentoring](#), [career readiness](#), [theater arts](#), and [leadership development](#). These programs largely serve youth in the Greater Boston area.

[PYD's Young Leaders Rising \(YLR\) program](#) is an 8-week youth-led leadership program (starting July 10th !) for high school students with any type of disability (ages 14-22). YLR participants build leadership skills and leave better prepared for future employment, higher education, and independent living. YLR 2023 has added an **in-person culminating event** for each of the four series. Click on the link for an application and more information.

[Empowering People for Inclusive Communities \(EPIC\)](#) EPIC Service Warriors is a community service and leadership development program for youth with disabilities between the ages of 16-23. EPIC Service Warriors meet for one year to participate in community service projects and leadership development workshops. By creating the change they want to see in the world the Service Warriors learn more about local communities and develop practical skills that will help them develop as leaders and pursue future goals.

[Greater Massachusetts Special Needs Disability Events Calendar](#) The go-to calendar for so many events for youth of all ages and abilities. All regions of the state are represented on this fantastic resource for families.

[Family Resource Centers:](#) Can you imagine a place in your neighborhood where people of all ages, incomes, and abilities are welcome to develop helpful and caring connections with each other? A place where skilled and thoughtful professionals help parents, children, and families find emotional support and practical assistance to succeed in life? A place that offers sensible solutions to families seeking health, safety, educational, and employment services? That place is part of the Massachusetts Family Resource Centers (FRCs) network and is already in your own neighborhood. Click here to find a location near you: <https://www.frcma.org/locations>