

# Networker

FALL 2007

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parent network  
+ resource center



## Assistive Technology in Special Education

*(Information for this article was obtained from California Assistive Technology Systems and the Family Center on Technology and Disability)*

According to federal special education law, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, assistive technology (AT) is any device or system (either "off-the-shelf" or modified/customized) used to increase, maintain or improve the functional capabilities of children with disabilities. If a child has a disability that causes them to need specialized services to benefit from their education, the need for assistive technology or assistive technology services will be reviewed by the Individual Education Program team. Assistive technology is considered a related service and determinations about the need for AT is based on assessments. Assistive technology can be "high tech" or "low tech" and when determined as a student need, is provided at no charge to parents.

When assessing the need for assistive technology, it is important to consider a child's strengths as well as their weaknesses, their likes and dislikes and what strategies are helpful in interacting with a child. You can have a "high tech" device that seems useful, but if it does not work with that particular child then it is of little value. A child may resist using a device that makes them feel different from the other students, whereas a less conspicuous or less "nerdy" device may help them "fit in" with his classmates.

*Some questions to ask when the IEP team is considering AT devices:*

- What does your child need to do but is unable to do because of his disability (consider physical, communication, cognitive, social/emotional, academic difficulties)?

- What are the customary environments for your child (classroom, playground, cafeteria, etc.)?
- What are your child's biggest educational challenges (writing, mobility, reading, etc.)?
- What AT tools are available to help with these challenges (consider both low and high tech options)?
- What criteria will be used to later determine if the AT has been successful in helping your child in her educational program?
- What are the qualifications of the professional who will be doing the more formal AT assessment?
- Who will need to be trained on helping your child successfully use the device?

Sometimes it takes a few tries with different devices before the right match occurs between child and device. Both the child and the adult working with the child need to learn how to work together using the device. Schools often have equipment on hand that they use for various students that can be piloted with your child. Remain open to descriptions of various devices, their pros and their cons, during the assessment process. Something that you saw in a magazine or on the internet may not be the best device for your child—there are many options and not all of them will be marketed similarly.

If you believe that your child could benefit from an assistive technology device, bring this up at an IEP meeting. Describe your concern and how

*Continued on page 7*

# All About Matrix

Matrix Parent Network is a 501(c)(3) organization founded in 1983 to serve families of children with special needs.

We serve Marin, Napa, Solano and Sonoma Counties.

## MISSION STATEMENT

*Empowering families of children with special needs to successfully understand and access the systems that serve them.*

## MATRIX BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Have a child with special needs?

Have questions?

WE CAN HELP!

**Matrix HELP Line  
(800) 578-2592**

Open  
Monday–Thursday  
9am to 3pm

## New in Solano

## Message from the Director

“Parent Participation, Parent Involvement” are the new buzz words. Parent participation is prominently figured in No Child Left Behind and parent involvement even has its own indicator; Indicator 8, “Percent of parents with a child receiving special education services who report that schools facilitated parent involvement as a means of improving services and results for children with disabilities.” This language is in all State Performance Plans that are submitted to the U.S. Department of Education. In IDEA 2004 there are several mentions of meaningful parent participation, from assessment and evaluation process to equal members of the IEP team. It seems that there is a good deal of attention being paid about our role as parents in law, statute and monitoring.



Is it just me or has the importance of our actions on behalf of children always been important? What made the focus shift in these past few years so that it had to be so clearly embedded and articulated within all aspects of education for our kids?

As parents, are we all being expected to do more, participate more, be even more involved in our children’s education? Don’t they know how busy we are already? Sometimes it seems that it’s all we as parents can do to get our children to school, help with homework, dry the tears, kiss the boo-boos and learn all we can to make sure our kids are getting the most appropriate education. Are we being asked to do even more? Are they nuts? Are we being given some extra hours in the day to do that? Yeah, right.

### There’s good news and bad news...

**Good news:** Our participation is critical for positive system changes, we must “represent” on behalf of our children.

**Bad news:** Our active involvement in system change takes time and commitment.

**Good news:** States and districts are being asked to pay attention and measure the level of parent involvement, improving and increasing it: they are being held accountable.

**Bad news:** If you don’t do it, to figure out how to fit it into your busy life, you shouldn’t complain about the results.

**Good news again:** By coordinating and networking, we can work as a group to make sure all the important pieces are being covered. We at Matrix are committed to supporting parents who are interested in polishing their parent leadership skills.

### Where to start:

Your Community Advisory Committee is always looking for parent representation; contact your SELPA (Special Education Local Plan Area) to find out more about your CAC (Community Advisory Committee). See page 7 for more information.

Schools have Site Councils where there is a need to have the perspective of parents of children with special needs represented.

These are just some of the local opportunities where parent participation is key. Do you need more ideas on ways to participate or some coaching/partnering when you go to these meetings? Just call us, we can help you prepare and make an impact. The schools and the education systems need our voices and our input. I have always said, “If it weren’t for us having these kids, all those folks would be in another line of work.”

*Nora Thompson*

## Matrix Solano Has Moved

The Solano County office of Matrix Parent Network moved from Vallejo to Fairfield.

*The new address is:*

1615 West Texas Street, Suite 4, Fairfield  
(707) 423-2545 phone  
(707) 423-4585 fax





### ***A Parent's Guide To Special Education: Insider Advice on How to Navigate the System and Help Your Child Succeed,***

LINDA WILMSHURST AND ALAN BRUE, 2005

Written by school psychologists, this book was designed to 'walk' parents through the special education process, step by step. Well organized, this guide covers recent federal law changes, section 504 information, and chapters providing insight and understanding on disabilities, assessments, eligibility, IEPs/service delivery and procedural safeguards. The second part of the book gives "helpful hints" for positive parenting that include communicating with your school, coping with stress, building your child's self-esteem and social competence, and a guide to discipline and behavior. Sample charts, forms, plans, and a listing of resources are included in the appendix.

Whether newly on this path or already familiar with the special education process, this comprehensive guide will certainly be useful to anyone navigating this system.

### ***Engaging Autism: Using the Floortime Approach to Help Children Relate, Communicate and Think,***

STANLEY I. GREENSPAN, M.D. & SERENA WIEDER, PH.D., 2006

This book describes in detail a new model for teaching children with Autism of all ages. Floortime is a technique employed in Greenspan's DIR model. DIR is a developmental, individual-difference, relationship-based model. What this means is that the approach does not focus on symptoms or behaviors of children with Autism, but instead on "truly intimate relating, empathy, and creative problem-solving." The book is divided into five parts, with three appendices that present research supporting the DIR model. After first defining Autism and presenting commentary on various methods historically used to treat children, Greenspan and Wieder present the case for their own techniques. The book provides detail on how families can implement Floortime, illustrating the techniques and giving advice on specific problem areas that are common in children with Autism. The book also gives information on how to assess whether the program is working well for a particular child. Engaging Autism is clearly written, with a family-friendly focus. It is recommended reading for anyone looking at the variety of options available for teaching and relating to a child with Autism.

#### **Networker Express**

Get your IEP tip of the month from our monthly e-newsletter, *The Networker Express*.

To sign up for this great monthly resource from Matrix Parent Network, visit [www.matrixparents.org](http://www.matrixparents.org) and go to "Publications" then "Networker Express."

### ***How to Compromise With Your School District Without Compromising Your Child,***

GARY MAYERSON, ESQ., 2004

This book helps a parent understand some of the dynamics in difficult IEP situations and how to effectively work through them. This is not a book about legal rights. The book offers suggestions to work things out on your own, avoid lawyers and keep your child as the focus. Chapters include:

- Why is there Often So Much Conflict at IEP Meetings?
- Be Aware of the Language of Intimidation
- The IEP Meeting and the Development of the IEP
- Why Getting the Right Evaluations Early On is Critical
- Making and Preserving "The Record"
- School Discipline

Numerous practical tips are given on IEPs such as specific wording for letters, how to present information visually, how to recognize and support the positives in what may feel like a mass of problems. Short and to the point, this book motivates and provides useful information.

### ***The Source for Processing Disorders: Auditory and Language,***

RICHARD GAIL, 2001

The "Source" book series, (LinguSystems Publishers) are easy to read references with charts, checklists and graphics, and this topic is no exception. After a simple introduction to processing disorders, following chapters include:

- Central Auditory Processing
- Language Processing
- Behavior Characteristics in Processing Disorders
- Processing Assessment
- Remediation for Auditory and Language Disorders

The chapter on how processing disorders impact behavior offers comic strips to add humor to what can be a complex topic. Remediation ideas are targeted and specific. The assessment chapter helps one understand specific tests and provides examples on interpreting results. This is a must read book for processing deficits that impact learning, listening, speaking and behaving.

*The Matrix Library is located at 94 Galli Drive, Suite C in Novato. The library is open Monday through Friday from 9 A.M.–5 P.M. The library is occasionally used for meetings so we ask that you please call in advance to ensure that it is available. Call (415) 884-3535. All are welcome to come and browse the shelves.*



# Thanks to Our Contributors July 1, 2006–June 30, 2007

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& Joel Neecke  
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### \$5,000–\$9,999

The Schow Foundation  
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### \$1,000–\$4,999

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West Bay Builders, Inc.

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Microsoft Giving Campaign  
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The Maisel Foundation  
NIAID Laboratories  
North Bay Corvette Association  
The Shooter Company  
Environmental Management  
Weiss Family Trust

### Up to \$99

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Chevron Employees'  
"People Making A  
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Chevys Fresh  
Mexican Restaurant  
La Vita Wellness Center  
Mary's Pizza Shack  
M. Schumacher Design  
Parents Let's Unite for Kids  
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*We have made every effort to acknowledge all of our donors. We apologize if we have overlooked someone. Please notify us so that we may make the correction in our next publication. Please call us at (415) 884-3535.*



## IN KIND

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### Thank you, Mary Higgins!

The new Matrix website is up and running. Mary Higgins of Mary Higgins Design has generously donated her time and talents to redesign [www.matrixparents.org](http://www.matrixparents.org). Check it out!

*Mary Higgins*  
webdesign

## What is Student Progress Monitoring?

Student Progress Monitoring may sound like one more way our children will be subjected to the onslaught of tests that seem to increase each year. However, Student Progress Monitoring is different. It is truly to benefit your child, not just some score that is used to rank a student or rank a school.

The bottom line is: how will you know if your child is making progress if there is no system in place to track this? Parents typically rely on routine "progress reports," report cards, or the annual IEP review of progress on the past year's goals. Progress monitoring, on the other hand, is a way to determine if and how your child is making progress so that the teacher can use this information to adjust strategies and teach your child more effectively.

According to Kathleen McLane of the National Center on Student Progress Monitoring, "A teacher who uses progress monitoring works with the goals in the IEP, and the state standards for the child's grade level, to develop goals that can be measured and tracked, and that can be used to divide what the child is expected to learn by the end of the year into shorter, measurable steps."

An example is provided: "the child may have a math goal that is stated as the

number of problems scored correctly on tests covering the math content for the year. Once the teacher sets the goals and begins instruction, then he or she measures the child's progress toward meeting the goals each week. All the tests have the same level of difficulty, so the weekly tests can reflect the child's rate of progress accurately. With each test, the teacher compares how much the child is expected to have learned to the child's actual rate of learning."

If a child's rate of progress is not what is expected, the teacher might change the strategies used, the instructional time, how students are grouped or other instructional approaches. The weekly tests should take from 1-5 minutes so that the student does not feel that they are constantly being tested.

Ask if your child's school and teacher are implementing Student Progress Monitoring. Another term that is used is Curriculum Based Measurement. You may receive materials from the school about this type of progress reporting and once it is initiated you will receive regular reports and graphs tracking your child's progress. In this way there should be no "surprises" during the annual IEP meeting. For further information visit [www.studentprogress.org](http://www.studentprogress.org).

## Pearl's Car Rally Raises \$1700+ for Matrix



Chuck Lee, owner of Sonoma's Pearl's Restaurant (561 5<sup>th</sup> St. West), was beginning to plan Pearl's Third Annual "Hot Rod" Charity Car Rally when his customer and friend, Sonoma resident Greg Rank, realized that the Rally was just what he was seeking. Greg, a close friend of Dave and Laurel (Director of Parent Services) Fichman, wanted to raise money for Matrix. Soon after Greg and Chuck talked, the call came: Matrix would be the beneficiary of the July 2008 rally.

With dozens of really cool cars, people of all ages, delicious hamburgers, drinks and a raffle, more than \$1700 was raised for Matrix. Thanks, Chuck! Thanks, Greg! Thanks to everyone who supported Matrix!

## Trainings & Workshops

To register for any of these workshops (unless another phone number is provided), call (415) 884-3535 or toll-free (800) 578-2592. Or email [info@matrixparents.org](mailto:info@matrixparents.org) with your name, number, email, and what workshop you would like to attend.

### • MARIN COUNTY

11/14, 9–11:30 A.M.

**Special Education Idea 2004: Core Features of an Individual Education Plan (IEP); Key Aspects of Idea 2004 (Including the New Rti); IEP Elements and Sequence of Developing an IEP**

Novato Matrix

12/6, 9–11:30 A.M.

**Understanding Special Education Assessments as They Relate to Individual Education Plans; Requesting an Evaluation, Understanding Reports, Tests and Scores, and Using the Reports**

Novato Matrix

**Watch for further details of the December 9, 2007 Holiday Toy Run!**

### • NAPA COUNTY

10/20, 10 A.M.-NOON

**Accessing Services Through Regional Centers for Developmental Disabilities**

Napa Library. Call (707) 648-4073 to register.

### • SOLANO COUNTY

10/20

**Now What? How to Make Sense of and Organize Your IEP Papers**

Fairfield Matrix

11/13, 10–NOON

**IEP Basics: An Overview of the Special Education Process and Building the IEP Document**

Fairfield Matrix

11/13, 7–9 P.M.

**Accessing Services Through Regional Centers for Developmental Disabilities**

Solano County Office of Education, Fairfield

Call (707) 648-4073 to register.

12/18, 10–NOON

**Annual Holiday Celebration for Children with Special Needs and Their Families**

Silveyville Christmas Tree Farm, Dixon

Call Kerry at (707) 423-2545 ext. 102 for reservations.

### • SONOMA COUNTY

11/7, 6:30–8:30 P.M.

**IEP Basics: An Overview of the Special Education Process and Building the IEP Document**

Petaluma Library

12/1, 10–NOON

**Accessing Services Through Regional Centers for Developmental Disabilities**

Petaluma Library. Call (707) 648-4073 to register.

## Support Groups

Support groups listed below are open to parents in any county. Please call (800) 578-2592 or (415) 884-3535 for more information.

### • MARIN COUNTY

**Support Group for Parents of Students with Asperger's Syndrome & Similar Profiles**

Meets monthly  
(415) 475-2182

**Adoption Support Group for parents of School-Age Adopted Children with Special Needs**

(415) 475-2188

**Support Group for Parents of Children with Down Syndrome and Other Developmental Disabilities**

First Saturday of every other month, 10 A.M.–12:30 P.M.  
Matrix in Novato.  
(415) 475-2184

**Support Group for Grandparents of Children with Special Needs**

Sundays, Nov. 4, Jan. 6, March 2 & May 4, 2008, 2–4 P.M.  
Matrix in Novato.  
(415) 475-2118 or [brendagm@matrixparents.org](mailto:brendagm@matrixparents.org)

### • SOLANO COUNTY

**Support Group for Grandparents Raising their Children with Special Needs**

Matrix in Fairfield  
RSVP to Kerry (707) 423-2545 ext. 102

**Support Group for Parents of Special Needs Kids**

Second Monday of the month, 6:30 P.M.  
Matrix in Fairfield  
(707) 422-4593

**Support Group for Parents of Children in Early Start**

Second Tuesday of the month, 10 A.M.  
Exceptional Tots, Vallejo  
(707) 423-2545 ext. 102

**Support Group for Parents of Infants and Toddlers with Special Needs**

First Wednesday of the month, 9:15–10:15 A.M.  
Irene Larsen Center, Vacaville  
(707) 423-2545 ext. 102

### • SONOMA COUNTY

**Mom's Support Group**

First Sunday of the month for breakfast, 9 A.M.  
Breakaway Cafe in Sonoma.  
(415) 475-2121



## Accessing Regional Centers

This Fall, there will be a series of workshops for parents whose children have developmental disabilities and who are interested in learning how to access the services that regional centers can provide (for example, North Bay Regional Center and Golden Gate Regional Center).

If you have questions about your child's regional center Individual Program Plan (IPP); if you wonder about how decisions should be made; if you would like to know how to request services; if you would like to learn about the legal obligations of the regional centers, you will be interested in one of these workshops.

### **NAPA Napa Library**

Saturday, October 20, 2007, 10:00 A.M.—NOON

### **SOLANO Solano County Office of Education**

Tuesday, November 13, 2007, 7–9:00 P.M.

### **SONOMA Petaluma Library**

Saturday, December 1, 2007, 10:00 A.M.—NOON

Please call Area 4 DD Board at (707) 648-4073 to register. This series will also be offered in Spanish.

Please call Yulahlia Hernandez, Clients' Rights Advocate at (707) 224-2798 for information regarding the Spanish language workshops.

This series is sponsored by collaboration between Matrix Parent Network, Area 4 Developmental Disabilities Board and the PAI Office of Clients' Rights Advocacy.

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## **Assistive Technology** *(Continued from front page)*

you feel that this impacts your child's ability to benefit from their educational program. It is possible that the introduction of something simple (a slant board or pencil grips) could be included in the IEP. If the need seems more complex or there are additional needs, you can request an assistive technology assessment. Put your request in writing even if it is agreed on during the IEP meeting. Assessment timelines apply in making this request.

Many districts have staff whose sole responsibility is to assess students for assistive technology, train the child and staff on using it, and trouble-shoot problems that occur. The assessment will involve many steps including observing your child in the impacted environments (classroom, playground, etc.), discussions with staff and a review of possible devices. You are an important part of this process and can be of help as AT selections are determined.

For more information on this subject you are invited to browse the Matrix library. The Family Center on Technology and Disability ([www.fctd.info](http://www.fctd.info)) has a very useful website and CD. Additional websites of interest include:

[www.atnet.org](http://www.atnet.org)

[www.nichcy.org](http://www.nichcy.org)

[www.schwablearning.org](http://www.schwablearning.org)

[www.familyvillage.wisc.edu](http://www.familyvillage.wisc.edu)

## Community Advisory Committees

Community Advisory Committees for Special Education are required by state law. The state is divided into "areas" for the purposes of administering special education services for students with disabilities. These areas are called Special Education Local Planning Areas (SELPA). Each SELPA must submit a Local Plan to the state every few years describing how services will be delivered to students receiving special education services in their planning area in accordance with the law.

State law requires that every SELPA have a Community Advisory Committee (CAC). By law, CAC members are mostly parents of students within the SELPA and a majority of those parents must have a child receiving special education services. Other members may include students with disabilities, adults with disabilities, teachers, school district personnel, community agency representatives and other individuals concerned with the needs of individuals with disabilities. Members are appointed by the Board of Education.

CAC serves in an advisory capacity to district, county office and SELPA administration. Responsibilities of the CAC include advising development of or amendments to the Local Plan, recommending priorities, recruiting volunteers to contribute to implementation of the Local Plan, and encouraging parent involvement and supporting individuals with disabilities. Information on CAC meetings in Marin, Napa, Solano and Sonoma Counties is available as follows:

### **Marin County SEAC**

9 A.M.

10/18, 11/15, 1/23, 2/15, 3/19, 4/23, 5/21, 6/11

Marin County Office of Education

(415) 499-5850

### **Napa County SEAC**

12:30-1:30 P.M.

9/27, 10/25, 11/15, 1/24, 2/21, 3/20, 4/24, 5/22

Napa County Office of Education

2121 Imola Ave, Napa

(707) 253-6807 or email [devans@ncoe.k12.ca.us](mailto:devans@ncoe.k12.ca.us).

### **Solano County CAC**

(not including Vallejo)

Third Thursday of the month, September–June

(707) 399-4460 or email [MGermano@Solanocoe.net](mailto:MGermano@Solanocoe.net)

### **Vallejo City Unified School District CAC**

(707) 556-8921

### **Sonoma County SEAC**

6:30 P.M.

First Wednesday of every other month

The Santa Rosa City Schools' Board Room

211 Ridgeway Avenue, Santa Rosa

[www.sonomaselpa.org](http://www.sonomaselpa.org), click on "workshops/meetings"



**Matrix Parent Network and Resource Center**

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## Networker Fall 2007

*"To empower families of children with special needs to successfully understand and access the systems that serve them"*

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MARIN COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

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