

# STEP Ahead Newsletter

## Executive Director Reflects on Impact of STEP

In February I sent out an invitation for friends and families of STEP to tell us what you love about STEP. We were so touched by the stories that families posted on our Facebook page and sent into our offices. Many of those stories spoke of a long journey with STEP through their child's lifetime. Those stories inspired me to share a bit of my journey with our STEP readers. Many of you are familiar with the lovely young lady, Sarah Harrison, who was my introduction to the unique world of parenting a child with special needs. Sarah's life has been one of miracles and as I reflect back on the years I see a long line of people who shared information, hugs and encouragement, stories of their successes, and unlimited support. One person in particular, Peggy Cook, changed our lives forever. She was an Early Intervention Specialist who hosted a STEP workshop in 1993 and invited me to attend. Sarah was two and a half and discussions were starting about entering the school system. Back then STEP offered an all day training; 3 hours on BASIC Special Education Rights and 3 hours on the Individualized Education Plan. As you might expect, my eyes were glazed over after all the information but I felt so empowered knowing that I had a right to be an active participant during her school years and a responsibility to become prepared. And become prepared, I did! I prepared myself to talk about the benefits of inclusion and being in her neighborhood school, the necessity of intensive supports to meet her needs, and a determination to have high expectations for her throughout her lifetime. Now, Sarah is in her last year in public school and as she is preparing to go to the prom with friends, is keying contacts into her ipad so she can stay in touch, and cashing her paychecks for working at the vocational school part-time, I pause and wonder, "What if I had never learned that I had a right to be an active, fully participating member of her IEP team?"

My desire is to ensure every parent and family member who is raising a child with special needs in TN is given an opportunity to have the information that I was blessed with. To that end I have worked for STEP for 16 years spreading the word that parent involvement makes a difference. This year is one of many milestones, among them, I turned "50" (eek) this month. Sarah's life would not be as fabulous as it is now if I had missed that information. Although STEP has workshops, training DVD's, and other information that reach many families, my desire is to create an online module that families can access at any time to learn their rights and have the opportunity I had to improve the outcomes for their children. SO many still do not know. This is something that STEP does not have resources to accomplish. I am asking for my **50th birthday** for **50 friends, family members, and colleagues** to **donate \$50 to STEP** so this important module about special education rights can be created.

### Will you be One of the 50?

Go to [www.tnstep.org](http://www.tnstep.org) to the DONATE Now button or send a check to our STEP business office. Mark your donation: **"I am one of 50"**. Thank you to the founders of STEP for making sure information was available for me. Thank you to each one who has hosted a workshop, served on our board, made a donation, volunteered your time, and shared with others what you have learned. We are all working together to ensure a brighter future for children with disabilities.

**Karen Harrison, Executive Director**



Sarah with friends since 1st grade: Maggie, Amber, Eric & Kayla

### IRIS Center Module on Differentiated Instruction: Maximizing the Learning of All Students.

The IRIS Center is pleased to announce the posting of its latest *STAR Legacy* Module, *Differentiated Instruction: Maximizing the Learning of All Students*. In *Differentiated Instruction: Maximizing the Learning of All Students*. Follow along with Mr. Shelton as he learns the importance of differentiating three aspects of instruction—content, process, and product—and as he explores the student traits—readiness level, interest, and learning profile—that influence learning. To view the module, please go to <http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/di/chalcycle.htm>

*steps to a brighter future for children with disabilities*

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## Answering the Question: What goals do you want your child to work on?

During meetings where parents and school staff are gathering to develop educational plans for our children with disabilities, we are often asked, "What goals do you want your child to work on"? That can often be difficult without a starting place. One way to address this question is by asking some questions of the team, such as: What are typical peers my child's age working on? Or What skills are needed to help close the achievement gap between my child and his same age typical peers?

Our goal as parents is for our children to achieve as many of the same goals as their peers who do not have disabilities. Often, we do not have a good understanding of what the expectations are for children without disabilities at a certain age or grade. When we were planning goals for our daughter at age three we were given a checklist by an IEP team member that outlined expectations for Kindergarten students. I am sure I looked quite puzzled by that. She went on to explain that if our goal was that Sarah would be able to function in a typical Kindergarten class, then we should start working on those skills early and intensely, both at home and at school. For children with significant delays it may take longer for them to master these objectives, so addressing these skills early will give a window of opportunity to break the skill down and provide the time needed to master the skill.

As you read the list you might want to put a (+) sign by the skills your child has already mastered, a (-) sign by the skills they have not yet mastered, and an (e) by any skill that is just starting to emerge. I often joke at workshops that there are things on this Kindergarten Checklist that my husband has not yet mastered...so don't panic! (And don't show my husband this newsletter). This tool can be a great start to assist you in answering the question, "What goals do you want your child to work on"? Remember that although our goal is for our children to do these things independently, this can also be used to open discussions about what supports a child will need to be fully included with their same age peers in the least restrictive environment.

### HELPFUL ENTRY LEVEL SKILLS—REVISED (HELRSR) Kindergarten Skill Summary

<p><b>Classroom Rules</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Walks rather than runs indoors.</li> <li>2. Waits quietly in line.</li> <li>3. Sits or waits appropriately.</li> <li>4. Complies with simple directions provided to a group.</li> <li>5. Makes transition from one activity to another with minimal assistance.</li> <li>6. Uses appropriate behaviors to get teacher attention.</li> <li>7. Replaces material, cleans up own activity area.</li> <li>8. Stays in own space for activities.</li> <li>9. Stays with group outside classroom.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Work Skills</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Refrains from disturbing the activity of others.</li> <li>2. Stops activity when given direction to "stop".</li> <li>3. Works independently on developmentally appropriate material.</li> <li>4. Completes tasks with materials.</li> <li>5. Follows simple directions related to tasks.</li> <li>6. Engages in developmentally appropriate activities for 1-3-5-10-15 minutes.</li> <li>7. Waits until directions are completed to begin activities.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Social Behavior Skills</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Responds positively to social recognition and reinforcement.</li> <li>2. Modifies behavior when provided with verbal direction.</li> <li>3. Follows school rules.</li> <li>4. Separates from parents and accepts school personnel.</li> <li>5. Interacts cooperatively with others.</li> <li>6. Respects others and their property.</li> <li>7. Expresses emotions and feelings appropriately.</li> <li>8. Exhibits self-control regarding aggressive behavior to self or others, i.e. hitting, biting, using obscene language.</li> <li>9. Defends self appropriately.</li> <li>10. Is willing to try new activities.</li> <li>11. Waits to take turns and shares.</li> <li>12. Uses imitative behavior appropriately.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Communication Skills</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Comes to an adult when signaled.</li> <li>2. Communicates own needs and preferences.</li> <li>3. Answers questions about self/family, name, address, age, birthdate, parents' name.</li> <li>4. Attends to a peer or adult who is talking.</li> </ol> 	<p><b>Self Management Skills</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Eats lunch or snack with minimal assistance.</li> <li>2. Is aware of/attends to appearance, i.e., keeps nose clean, adjusts clothing.</li> <li>3. Locates and uses restroom.</li> <li>4. Cares for bathroom needs.</li> <li>5. Puts on/takes off outer clothing with minimal assistance.</li> <li>6. Seeks out adult if hurt or cannot handle social situations.</li> <li>7. Is aware of obvious dangers and avoids them.</li> </ol>	 <p><a href="http://facebook.com/stepn">http://facebook.com/stepn</a></p> <p><b>Like Us on Facebook</b></p> <p><i>a brighter future for children with disabilities</i></p>

## Saying Good-bye to a Founder of STEP

We are deeply saddened to announce the death of our friend and disability leader Nancy Diehl who passed away Jan. 31, 2013. Nancy Diehl was a nationally recognized leader who advocated strongly for the rights of persons with disabilities. She was well-known and sought after as a powerful force effecting awareness and change in the disability community. As both a parent and professional, she has an impressive resume of achievements. This includes, joining founder Carol Westlake, directing a statewide disability organization, Tennessee's only Parent Training and Information Center. She developed and produced training and curriculum for 12 legal rights and topical workshops and published a 350 page parent training manual in print and CD on legal rights.



Early in her career, she served as Advocacy Coordinator for Tennessee's protection and advocacy organization, supervising advocacy services for eleven counties in Upper East TN. She was a guest teacher and speaker at many Colleges and Universities across the state of Tennessee as well as at National Disability Conferences. She was also tapped to provide extensive disability training to Saipan, Northern Mariana Islands, South Pacific. With a lifetime of community service, Nancy served on a variety of boards and commissions. She was appointed by Governor Alexander to serve on the Developmental Disabilities Council, served on the State Rehabilitation Council, the Admissions review board for Greene Valley Developmental Center, the Regional Advisory Board-Division of Mental Retardation, and a disability advisory board for Senator Bill Frist. She also served as Vice-President of the Autism Society of America, TN State Chapter, and on the Board of Directors of the Autism Society of America-East TN. Nancy was elected to serve as President for the Association for Children with Disabilities and Vice-President of the Genessee County Arc. Her strong parent advocacy skills also led her to be appointed as the Parent Advocate for Alexander Central School.

One of Nancy's proudest moments was when she was invited to speak with President Clinton and Vice President Al Gore at the White House as the only parent representative in a small contingent of disability leaders. She has also testified before the Senate on the reauthorization of the IDEA, and was present at the White house for the signing of the IDEA reauthorization in 1997. Nancy was the recipient of the Earl A. House Award from Tusculum College, and a SALT by the world-renowned Highland Center. Well-known and loved, her history included many opportunities to collaborate with and advise national, state and local leaders in the field of disability and her legacy for the improvement of persons with disabilities will continue to touch lives and make a difference on a local and national level, as she was committed to improving the lives of people with disabilities.

Her example set in everyday life was truly inspirational and a testament to her admiring strength and heart for family, friends, students and those experiencing disabilities. I am honored to have known such a compassionate and tenacious person. She was a true champion.

**Written by Donna Jennings**

Condolences can be sent to Andy Diehl, 4425 Westlawn Dr. A301, Nashville TN 37209

Memorial contributions may be made in her name to:

National Autism Association 20 Alice Agnew Drive, Attleboro Falls, MA 02763

<http://nationalautismassociation.org/>

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### STEP 2013 Planning Survey: Parent Input Requested

STEP is a non-profit organization devoted to helping families of children with disabilities to understand their special education rights to attain the requisite services for a free and appropriate education for their children. We are assessing the effectiveness of our current offerings and trying to determine what future offerings may be needed to improve our support to families across Tennessee.

Over the past year, STEP has implemented some specific initiatives to better serve our families of children with special needs. We would like to find out from you how we are doing. If you are a parent or family member who has used STEP services, please follow this link to complete a short survey.

(One response per family member please). <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/STEPsurvey2013>

It will take about 5 minutes to complete the survey.

Thank you for your time and letting us know what is important to you and your family.





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### Insight from Derek Flake:

#### STEP's Family & Youth Education Specialist

#### **Working with At-Risk Students**

My experience has taught me these several rules to working with at-risk youth with disabilities.

- Be Transparent
- Be Consistent
- Build the Mentor/Mentee Relationship over time
- Communicate with them as persons and not in a way that defines them by their disability or the juvenile delinquency issues.

Mr. Flake has an extensive background working with at-risk youth and will be using his expertise and experience to help STEP develop programs to meet the needs of youth with disabilities who have been incarcerated or who are at risk for suspension, expulsion or dropping out of school.

### Recognizing that all children can achieve.....

#### Consider the following four "dead-end kids"....

- One was spanked by his teachers for bad grades and a poor attitude. He dropped out of school at 16.
- Another failed remedial English and came perilously close to flunking out of college.
- The third feared he'd never make it through school - and might not have without a tutor.
- The last finally learned to read in third grade, devouring Marvel comics, whose pictures provided clues to help him untangle the words - These four losers are, respectively, Richard Branson, Charles Schwab, John Chambers, and David Boies.

Citation: Disabled World News (2009-07-25) - A collection of famous and not so famous interesting quotes regarding disability and health related disabilities:

<http://www.disabled-world.com/disability/disability-quotes.php#ixzz2OK9OGJme>



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