

NEWSLETTER

BACK TO SCHOOL EDITION

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WELCOME TO TNSTEP

SPECIAL EDUCATION SUPPORT FOR TENNESSEE FAMILIES AND YOUTH

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Welcome to TNSTEP!

Welcome to TNSTEP! We're so happy you're here.



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A Message from Executive Director, Karen Harrison

"New school year, new website, new phone system, and even more ways to connect with TNSTEP! We're thrilled to begin this school year better equipped than ever to support Tennessee families, with a new multilingual website, an updated phone system, a full calendar of in-person and virtual trainings, and the debut of our TNSTEP Family Connection Circle. Whatever this school year brings, our team is here to help families feel informed, empowered, and supported every step of the way."

TNSTEP DEBUTS NEW ACCESSIBLE, MULTILINGUAL WEBSITE

At TNSTEP, our mission has always been to provide families with accurate, timely, and relevant information about special education and related services. As Tennessee's only federally designated Parent Training and Information Center (PTI), we are committed to ensuring families have access to resources that help them understand their options, participate in decision-making, and support their children's success.

We know that attending a training or working directly with a TNSTEP Family Resource Specialist may not fit every family's schedule. That's why we worked hard to create a redesigned [TNSTEP.info](https://www.tnstep.info)—a resource center that puts trusted information at families' fingertips whenever they need it.

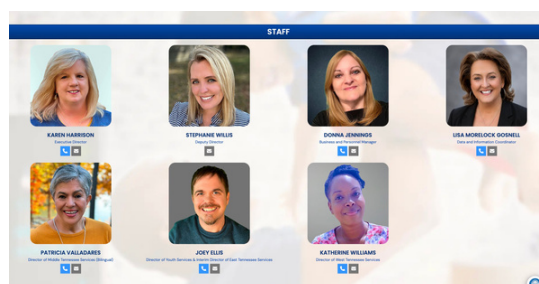
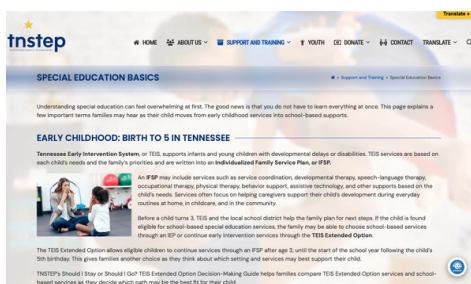
Using best practices in website navigation and user pathways, we created a more accessible and user-friendly experience that helps families quickly find the information they need. The new website includes:

- Multilingual access with one-click translation into Tennessee's four most commonly spoken languages.
- A new Special Education Basics page to help families build foundational knowledge.
- A robust Frequently Asked Questions section addressing common questions from families.
- An AI-powered chatbot to assist with self-guided searches and connecting visitors with relevant resources and direct support.
- Meet the Staff and Meet the Board of Directors pages to help families put faces with the names of those who serve them.
- A dedicated Youth page designed for youth with disabilities as they prepare for adulthood, including resources to support transition planning and self-advocacy. This addition was made possible through the generous support of the Nashville Predators Foundation Helper Grant.

Being a resource center means continually evolving to meet the needs of Tennessee families and youth with disabilities. While this website launch is an exciting milestone, our work doesn't stop here. We look forward to continuing to update and expand [TNSTEP.info](https://www.tnstep.info) with resources that are accessible, relevant, and responsive to the families we serve.

The new website was created in partnership with Pixelcraft Studio, LLC. Creative direction was provided by TNSTEP Deputy Director Stephanie Willis, with project support from Data, Research, and Information Coordinator Lisa Gosnell.

We invite you to explore the new [TNSTEP.info](https://www.tnstep.info) and discover the many tools and resources available to support your family. We hope you find a website that is welcoming, accessible, and built with Tennessee families and youth with disabilities in mind.



THANK YOU, TNSTEP COMMUNITY, FOR STANDING WITH US

TNSTEP has been working alongside our community, partners, and state leaders to secure dedicated state funding that would allow us to expand our team and provide support to even more Tennessee families. While we were ultimately not successful in securing this funding in the final state budget, we want to take a moment to express our deepest gratitude to everyone who helped make this effort possible.

When we began this process nearly two years ago, many state leaders were unfamiliar with TNSTEP, the role we serve in Tennessee's education landscape, and the impact of Parent Training and Information Centers. Through this campaign, we accomplished something incredibly important: we built awareness, strengthened relationships, and ensured that state leaders across Tennessee better understood the critical role TNSTEP plays in supporting families of children and youth with disabilities.

This effort was truly a team accomplishment. It included frequent conversations with Governor Bill Lee's senior leadership team, meetings with key education and finance leaders across the legislature, a roundtable we were invited to convene with the Governor's leadership team and the Commissioner of the Tennessee Department of Education, a presentation to the House Education Committee, and countless conversations with partners, families, and community members who shared why this work matters.

We were also grateful to see strong legislative support for TNSTEP, including a House appropriations amendment filed by **Representative David Hawk** and a Senate appropriations amendment led by **Senator Becky Massey and co-sponsored by Senators Dawn White, Mark Pody, London Lamar, Richard Briggs, Tom Hatcher, and Rusty Crowe**. We sincerely thank these legislators and every elected official who took the time to learn about TNSTEP and support our mission.

Most importantly, we want to thank the TNSTEP community. Families, partners, board members, staff, and supporters across the state reached out to their Legislators, shared our story, and helped raise awareness about the importance of the accessible, reliable information and support TNSTEP provides to families navigating special education.

Although we did not secure state funding this year, we are proud of what we accomplished. TNSTEP is stronger because of this effort. We have built new relationships, increased awareness among state leaders, and created a foundation that will continue to support our efforts to grow and expand our services across Tennessee.

Our commitment remains unchanged: we will continue working to ensure families have access to the information, training, and individualized support they need to participate confidently in their children's education.



Bernadette Gray, Karen Harrison, and Carol Westlake (above) and Stephanie Willis (below) speaking to the House Education Committee.



Parents and Special Education Professionals Convene for TNSTEP Round Table at the TN Capitol

Thank you for standing with TNSTEP and the families we serve. We are grateful for your partnership, your encouragement, and your belief in this important work.

TNSTEP RECEIVES NASHVILLE PREDATORS FOUNDATION “HELPER GRANT” TO SUPPORT YOUTH PROGRAM



TNSTEP is honored to once again be selected as a recipient of the Nashville Predators Foundation Helper Grant, supporting our ongoing efforts to provide meaningful resources and opportunities for youth with disabilities across Tennessee.

Through annual Helper Grants, the Nashville Predators Foundation provides funding to local nonprofit organizations for families throughout Nashville and Middle Tennessee.

This generous funding will support TNSTEP’s youth-to-adulthood transition services, which focus on helping youth with disabilities build self-advocacy skills, explore their goals, and prepare for life after high school. With support from the Helper Grant, TNSTEP has already launched a dedicated Youth page on our newly redesigned website, [TNSTEP.info](https://www.tnstep.info), and we look forward to continuing to expand resources for youth and families.

Upcoming projects supported by this grant include updating our Youth Transition Toolkit and creating new education stations that will enable TNSTEP to engage directly with youth at community events and share information about available resources and services.

Preparing youth for adulthood requires access to accurate information, opportunities to build confidence, and connections to resources that support their goals. We are excited to continue growing our youth programming and reaching more young people across Tennessee.

We extend our sincere gratitude to the Nashville Predators and the Nashville Predators Foundation for their generosity, partnership, and commitment to strengthening communities across Middle Tennessee. Their support helps organizations like TNSTEP continue creating opportunities for youth with disabilities to develop the skills they need to pursue their future goals.

For more information about Nashville Predators Foundation, visit <https://www.nhl.com/predators/community/foundation/helper-grants>

UPCOMING OPPORTUNITIES - AUGUST 2026



Free Workshops & Trainings

August 18

6:00 – 8:00 ET

In Person

Preparing for Effective Participation in IEP Meetings

Trainer: Joey Ellis

Location: Dolly Parton Children's Hospital Rehabilitation Center

August 18

6:00 – 7:00 CT

Virtual

Family Connection Circle: Collaborative Advocacy Training

Part 1 of 2: Understand Your Role on Your Child's IEP Team

August 20

5:00 – 7:00 CT

In person

Early Childhood:

Planning for Smooth Transition for Infants and Toddler

Trainer: Joey Ellis, Director of Youth Services

Location: Developmental Services of Dickson County

August 21

12:00 – 1:00 CT

Virtual

TNSTEP: Who We Are & What We Do (with TN Disability Pathfinder)

Presenter: Patricia Valladares, Director of Middle TN Services

August 21

In person

Tennessee Disability Megaconference

Embassy Suites by Hilton Nashville, Murfreesboro, TN

August 25

6:00 – 7:00 CT

Virtual

Family Connection Circle: Collaborative Advocacy Training

Part 2 of 2: Put Your IEP Meeting Skills to Work in Small Group Activities

Based on Real-Life Scenarios

August 26

11:30 – 12:30 CT

Virtual

TEIS Family-Focused Lunch and Learn Series Presentation:

Transitioning from Early Intervention to School Based Services

Presenter: Katherine Williams, Director of West TN Services

Please note: Tennessee spans two time zones. Be sure to check the time zone listed for each training.

Event Details and Registration Links Can Be Found at tnstep.info/calendar/

NO PARENT OF A CHILD WITH A DISABILITY SHOULD HAVE TO WALK THIS JOURNEY ALONE.

We believe parents know their children best and CAN BE their child's best advocate. Families who receive TNSTEP services report these results:

- Increased skills to address their children's mental health and behavioral needs;
- Consistent and improved school attendance;
- Increase in functional skills that impact independent living;
- Improved academic achievement that leads to graduation and employment.



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Contact Us

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YOUR TAX-DEDUCTIBLE GIFT TELLS A PARENT,
"YOU DON'T HAVE TO WALK THIS JOURNEY ALONE."