



**The
Family
Café**

**QUESTIONS
&
ANSWERS**

from

The

family

Café

11th Annual Conference

Featuring the Summit on Disabilities.



June 5-7, 2009

**Disney Coronado Springs Resort
Orlando, Florida**



**The
Family
Café**

Welcome to The Family Café Questions and Answers Book for 2009!

Navigating the service delivery system and finding the right resource has always been a challenge for persons with disabilities and their families. For ten years, The Family Café has been there to help. Since our founding in 1998, our mission has been to provide persons with disabilities and their families with information, training, support and opportunities to network with other families, professionals and public policy makers, and the main venue where that mission becomes realized has been The Family Café Annual Conference.

This year's 10th Anniversary Conference, held June 5-7, 2008, brought together a wide array of resources and information, with over 160 breakout sessions, an expanded Exhibit Hall and a series of engaging keynote addresses. Thanks to the participation of multiple state agencies, partner organizations and volunteers, The Family Café was able to provide conference participants with an unprecedented level of information. We were also able to expose attendees to the possibilities of outdoor recreation for persons with disabilities, thanks to the assistance of partners like the Florida Disabled Outdoors Association.

Our anniversary event once again included the Annual Summit on Disabilities, which provides a venue for families to engage in dialogue with state policy makers. This year the summit was hosted by Representative Bill Galvano, who offered a legislative perspective on the issues facing Floridians with disabilities. He also led a spirited conversation between conference attendees and representatives of the state, where a number of attendees had the chance to express their concerns.

As in past years, there were many more comments and questions than could be answered at the summit. The Family Café distributed "Pink Cards" as a means for conference-goers to submit their thoughts to the Governor's office and other state agencies, and The Family Café has once again obtained written responses from a number of agencies. Together, they make up this year's edition of **The Family Café Questions and Answers Book**. This book has been designed as a resource to address some of the most pressing concerns of Floridians with disabilities and their families. Although every family's situation is unique, **The Family Café Questions and Answers Book** can serve as a quick reference guide and a starting point for people seeking information. If you need more information than you can find here, we encourage you to contact the relevant state agency, and to make your needs known, and your voice heard.

Thank you very much for participating in the success that The Family Café has become, and for taking a moment to appreciate the quality of the information available here. We hope you will join us for The 11th Annual Family Café Conference next June 5-7, 2009, which will once again be held at the Disney Coronado Springs Resort. Until then, feed your need for information with **The Family Café Questions and Answers Book! And remember, we are always available online at www.FamilyCafe.net.**



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The Family Café

The hotel for The Family Café this year was wonderful! I really enjoyed being able to stay in my car during the check-in process. Can we have The Family Café at the Disney Coronado Springs Resort next year?

We are happy to hear that you had a positive experience at this year's Annual Conference. We always do our best to make sure that all of our attendees' needs are accommodated, and we are grateful to the Coronado Springs for helping us in that regard.

The 11th Annual Conference will be held at the Disney Coronado Springs once again next year, on June 5-7, 2009.

I just want to thank you for the great sessions that were given. There was too much walking if you have difficulty. This was my first time to attend and I enjoyed it and will come back again. Thank you again, God bless you for all your hard work.

We're happy to hear that you enjoyed the sessions at the Annual Conference. We do our best to provide a good variety of informative sessions to meet our attendees' need for information.

We understand that the size of the hotel and convention center can make getting around difficult for some attendees. We try to find a balance between our need for a space large enough to house our event with our desire to maximize accessibility.

Please bring back the Respite care. I would be willing to pay a fee for it.

The Roundtable groups were great. Maybe next year we could have more at different times. My child has four disabilities and it was hard to choose which ones to attend. It would be helpful to have one for single parents of a child with a disability. No one knows what it is like to go through it alone.

Thanks for your comments. We were not able to provide Respite care this year due to the high cost and the relatively small number of families we are able to serve through the Respite program. Given our limited resources, we felt it would do the greatest good to put all funding into financial assistance. We appreciate your suggestion that we make Respite available at cost, and we will investigate the feasibility of that idea. Typically contracts with Respite providers must be completed well in advance of the event, so providing Respite at cost would require The Family Café to secure commitments from families to purchase spaces months prior to the conference.

We agree that the Delegate Roundtable sessions were both successful and popular. As we continue to grow our Delegate program, we plan on including additional roundtable sessions and other opportunities for networking among families. We will discuss your suggestion to include a session on single parenting.

For several years now the date and location have been posted on the back of the program. This year it is not posted. Will this conference be held next year?

Yes! The 11th Annual Family Café Conference is set for June 5-7, 2009. The event will once again be held at the Disney Coronado Springs Resort.

The Family Café in Orlando was very good. I learned a lot from The Family Café conference. I hope next year is better, and that you will let all of the People First members be in the same hotel.

We are pleased to hear that you got a lot out of the conference this year. We always do our best to provide useful information in an engaging format.

If you have special requests regarding accommodation for your group, please contact our office prior to making any reservations. We can work with the hotel to keep your group together.

This has been the most wonderful experience. We had a lot of fun, got to relax, learned an awful lot and had wonderful entertainment. Thank you so much.

Thanks for the compliment! We do our best to provide useful information in a fun, family-friendly atmosphere. It's our pleasure to showcase the many services available in Florida, and to highlight the abilities of self-advocates. We hope you will be able to join us again next year!

Thanks for the excellent time! Where will the next location be?

The 11th Annual Family Café Conference is set for June 5-7, 2009. The event will once again be held at the Disney Coronado Springs Resort. There are no plans to move to a new location at this time.

Why is the food so very expensive?

At the conference it's nice to be able to have people outside to direct guests to and from sessions.

Thanks for your feedback. The Family Café works with the hotels that host the Annual Conference to find reasonably priced dining options for our attendees. Although we cannot provide for all of our attendees' meals, we feel it is important to provide them with choices that are as inexpensive and family-friendly as possible.

The people at the conference that direct attendees to the session rooms are our volunteer Room Monitors. They do provide a great service, and do so without compensation. They are a great example of the community generated by our event.

I had a good time here this year and look forward to next year. My question is: why don't the mobile carts have the ability for wheelchairs to be put on them? Also I would like to see more items put on the room menu to order from. I feel The Family Café should last longer, like 3 or 4 days, to give you more time to learn about other programs because the programs now are too cluttered, and you can't learn other things you need to know.

Thanks very much for your feedback and suggestions. The golf carts that are available to transport attendees at the Coronado are provided by the hotel. Unfortunately they do not have vehicles available to transport wheelchairs. The hotel is also responsible for the content of the room service menu. If you have special requests, they should be directed to the hotel staff on site.

We appreciate the challenges attendees face in taking advantage of all we have to offer during the event, but we do not have the necessary funds to expand the conference beyond its current schedule. If there are sessions that interest you that you cannot attend, we encourage you to contact the presenter for information.

I heard The Family Café may not be held next year.

I strongly hope that is not true. The information I get here I use and share with those who can't make it here. Please let the government know people need to know where and how they can get help with disabilities.

Thanks for your thoughts. We can assure you that The 11th Annual Family Café Conference will take place as scheduled on June 5-7, 2009 at the Coronado Springs Resort and Convention Center.

How much does it cost to fund The Family Café? How many participants actively attend meetings? Why do people who do not attend meetings receive funding and free rooms for a family vacation? This has been a problem for years, but this year was worse than ever!

There is no cost to attend The Family Café Annual Conference for persons with disabilities and their family members. Professional attendees, such as state agency employees, are asked to pay a \$100 registration fee.

This year's conference attracted 9,461 registered attendees. Due to the logistical challenges involved, The Family Café is not able to track the activities of every attendee at the event. We certainly encourage all financial assistance recipients to attend sessions and take advantage of all the conference has to offer. If you know of specific instances of fraud, please notify our office.

This was our first year at the Café. It was difficult choosing sessions because often topics (advocacy and PIP) were scheduled at the same time. One session the presenter was late, had a Mac and though my husband took time to set up her notebook/projector, she didn't know how to make her presentation work. Two other sessions, the main ones we wanted to attend, FACTS.org and the Bullying sessions, were both no-shows by the presenters. Since we waited 15-20 minutes for the presenters, other sessions of interest were often full. Suggestions: allow check-in Thursday night or put R and S in their own individual lines; would love to see more towards HFA and Asperger's Syndrome; session for 11-18 (youth) besides Florida Youth Council (workshops on how to handle bullying, time management, grooming, life skills, etc.). Despite cancelled sessions, it was an awesome experience and we look forward to next year!

Thanks for your feedback and your suggestions. It's great to hear that you enjoyed your first time at the Annual Conference. We do our best to make certain that all presenters appear as scheduled, and that all of their technological needs are met. Despite our best efforts, no-shows do sometimes occur, as do technical issues with individual presentations. The Family Café keeps track of presenters that fail to appear for future reference. We appreciate your understanding in that regard.

Thanks for the suggestions on possible topic areas for sessions. We will certainly take them under advisement. Due to staffing and scheduling issues, we cannot offer registration on Thursday evening. That said, we will do everything we can to ensure that registration operates smoothly next year.

Suggestion: When you do bag stuffing, set up one table the way it should be. The volunteers then can do the rest. Good job!

Thanks for the suggestion! We are fortunate to have generous volunteers to help us get all of the conference materials prepared for our attendees on the Thursday prior to the event.

They help by getting the conference bags prepared for distribution at the registration desks on Friday morning. We are always looking for additional volunteers to help out, and we encourage anyone that is willing and able to pitch in.

Is it true there is no funding for Café next year? Why? This is such an important event.

No, rumors that there is no funding available for 2009 are not true. The state budget does include some funding for The Family Café Annual Conference, although the level has been reduced. The Family Café is currently pursuing multiple sources of funding for The 11th Annual Conference, and the event will be held June 5-7, 2009 as planned.

Can we do the Café here next year? This resort was wonderful!

Yes! The 11th Annual Family Café Conference will be held at the Disney Coronado Springs Resort and Conference Center once again next year. The dates for the event are June 5-7, 2009.

This is not a question, it's a statement. I think that it is very unfair that the government is taking away The Family Café, the funding. This is the best place I have ever been. I have been here four years already, and the information is great and our children love it. They for once don't feel different and if you can do that just once a year that will make a difference.

Thanks so much for your support of The Family Café and the important work we do. Fortunately, it's not really possible for the government to "take away" The Family Café, as we are a private non-profit organization. We do receive funding from the State of Florida, as well as a number of private sponsors.

If you are concerned about the future of The Family Café and the state's commitment to supporting it, we would encourage you to contact your legislators in the Florida House and Senate. Personal stories about the benefits of the Annual Conference are very effective in helping legislators to understand the value of our event. When legislators understand what our event means for their constituents, it makes it much easier to make a case for continued funding.

I have volunteered three years now! Registration Desk! I think it would go smoother this way! I suggest that there be a Registration Desk for group homes to register. Ask for a list of names to be sent so we can set up a registration desk just for group homes or large groups of more than five. This would keep everyone from running around to each registration desk.

Organize name badges on Thursday. Have a group of volunteers take the cards, assign a certain amount of alphabet to them. Have them tear and alphabetize their assigned letters.

Thanks for volunteering to help at the registration desk. Our success depends to a great extent on the strength of our volunteers, and we really appreciate it.

We understand that there are challenges involved in getting so many people registered on the opening morning of the event. Your suggestion regarding large groups is a good one, and we will look into implementing a system that will make it easier for groups to register. We typically alphabetize the name badges before registration opens so they should be ready to go when registration opens on Friday.

How do we get a scholarship for the hotel for the conference?

The Family Café has a proud tradition of providing financial assistance to help families participate in the Annual Conference. To request assistance, all you have to do is note your request on the registration form when you register. Registration will open on February 14, 2009.

Will we have The Family Café next year? It's been so helpful for me and others I know.

Yes, The 11th Annual Family Café Conference will take place on June 5-7, 2009 at the Disney Coronado Springs Resort. We hope you can join us!

The Executive Office of the Governor

Let's pretend for a moment . . . your child has an accident. He/she is now wheelchair bound and non-verbal. Due to his "stationary condition," his/her joints and muscles now tighten, which causes pain. You apply for Physical Therapy to ease their pain. The State says "DENIED, Not medically necessary." How would you feel?

As you are probably aware, Florida faces a very difficult economic situation during the next few years with a dramatic reduction in state revenues. Reductions in program funding were required during the most recent Legislative session to meet the constitutional requirement of a balanced budget. While many difficult decisions had to be made, I have made every effort to preserve direct services to our state's most vulnerable citizens, including children, the disabled and the elderly.

Please be assured that I will continue to advocate strongly for Florida's disabled. My office is working with the Agency for Persons with Disabilities as it moves forward in the implementation of the system redesign to ensure that responsible practices are being utilized to provide quality care. We will also explore further options in collaboration with private and public partners, along with the Governor's Commission on Disabilities and the Task Force on Autism Spectrum Disorders, to find the best solutions for preserving and maintaining accountability of critical programs.

What do you like to do for fun?

I enjoy boating and fishing. My family moved to St. Petersburg when I was young and I learned to enjoy and respect Florida's natural beauty. In my youth, I loved waterskiing and still enjoy slipping away for a weekend fishing trip with my father when time permits.

Why are you cutting Family Café donations from the state?

Our state is currently faced with a difficult economic situation with a dramatic reduction in state revenues. Consequently, reductions in program funding were required to meet the constitutional requirement of a balanced budget. Priority was given to direct services and mandated programs. While difficult decisions had to be made in developing the budget for Fiscal Year 2008-2009, you will be pleased that Family Café will receive a direct appropriation of \$50,000 next year. In addition, Family Café is an independent 501(c)(3) organization and, therefore, able to raise funds independent of government to continue its programming. Our state agencies will have the opportunity to continue their relationship with the Café.

Why didn't you come to this conference? I was really counting on this . . . I am only 10 years old.

Unfortunately, scheduling restraints don't always allow me to attend an entire conference or event. However, I was fortunate to be able to attend this year's conference, not only to address and speak with attendees, but also to sign two disabilities-related bills into law.

Being the new Republican Governor of this state, it appears the disability community has lost support with your Administration. With budget cuts across the board for human services, these services still need to be provided (by the law) with or without state funding. How do you advise the state coordinators providing these services to continue programs without determination of the quality and substance needed to administer programs to the public?

The Agency for Persons with Disabilities is working to inform and assist providers and clients in handling the challenges ahead. The agency has held meetings throughout the state to report the impact of these changes. Information is also available at www.apd.org.

Our state is currently faced with a difficult economic situation with a dramatic reduction in state revenues. Consequently, reductions in program funding were required to meet the constitutional requirement of a balanced budget. In an effort to mitigate the impact of reductions, the Legislature authorized emergency loans from the state's reserve accounts. Priority continues to be given to direct services and mandated programs. I believe we must seek innovative ways to maintain the gains Florida has achieved over the past several years in the health and human services arena. My office is working with local, state and federal agencies to ensure preservation and accountability of critical programs during this challenging economic time.

I came up with an idea to raise money for all agencies that help the disability community: have a stamp made of a person's face and through the stamp would be the word "disabled." People would buy the 42 cent stamp and make a donation to all and any organizations and agencies the state government is cutting and other advocacy groups that help the disabled (People's First, Blind, etc.). How do I go about getting a postage stamp made up?

Your idea is very interesting and would require federal action. The U.S. Postal Service is a federal agency and its products (such as stamps) are handled by the Postal Regulatory Commission. For more information, check out their websites: www.prc.gov and www.usps.com.

What is happening about getting insurance for the uninsured?

I am excited about the "Cover Florida Health Care Access Program Act" which was signed into law on May 21, 2008. My office has been working with the Agency for Health Care Administration and the Office of Insurance Regulation to implement this legislation and develop the guidelines for Cover Florida plans which will provide affordable, quality health insurance products for Florida's uninsured citizens. Recently, I announced the opening of the competitive negotiation process for insurance companies to design such a product. Any approved product must offer consumers at least two plans, one with catastrophic and hospital coverage, and one without. All Cover Florida plans must include a robust set of benefits, including – at a minimum – coverage for preventive services, screenings, office visits, outpatient and inpatient surgery, urgent care, prescription drugs, durable medical equipment, and diabetic supplies. We hope to approve at least one statewide plan and regional plans to maximize consumer choice. Under the current time line, plans will be offered as soon as January 2009.

The Cover Florida legislation also expanded coverage options for children. All Florida families are now able to pay full premiums and "buy in" to the Florida KidCare Program, our state's low-cost, high quality health insurance program for uninsured children under age 19. Funding was provided during the last legislative session to cover an additional 38,000

children and continuing outreach efforts have successfully furthered my goal of providing children in Florida with access to quality, affordable health care.

Can the Governor come next year and speak to us all?

Unfortunately, scheduling restraints don't always allow me to attend specific conferences or events. I was able to address attendees this year and am hopeful that my schedule will afford an opportunity to share in future Family Café conferences.

In the past every year, the Governor spoke and answered questions. Last year the Governor did not answer any questions and this year he is not even showing up. I just want to know why. I am a strong supporter of Governor Crist but do have to wonder about his commitment to people with disabilities since he did not even come the Family Café this year.

Unfortunately, scheduling restraints don't always allow me to attend an entire conference or event. However, I was fortunate to be able to attend this year's conference, not only to address and speak with the conference attendees, but to also sign two disabilities-related bills into law. Senate Bill 856 promotes education of disability history and awareness, and House Bill 739 improves access to Guardian Advocates for people with disabilities. These two pieces of legislation are vital to the continued successes that persons with disabilities enjoy. In addition, Secretaries and staff of several state agencies who attend the conference on the state's behalf provide resources and respond to questions that are raised during the conference. Please feel free to contact me at Charlie.Crist@MyFlorida.com or (850) 488-7146, if your specific questions were not raised.

Why did Governor Crist decide to deny the people with disabilities by not coming to this conference? This appears to be another example of denial of benefits to anyone in Florida who is not wealthy and without a disability.

As Governor, I represent all Floridians regardless of gender, economic status, religion, ethnicity or any other characteristic that can be attributed to our state's diverse population. I take that job very seriously and am committed to responding to the needs of all of Floridians. Unfortunately, scheduling restraints don't always allow me to attend an entire conference or event. However, I was fortunate to be able to attend this year's conference, not only to address and speak with conference attendees, but to also sign two disabilities-related bills into law. Senate Bill 856 promotes education of disability history and awareness, and House Bill 739 improves access to Guardian Advocates for people with disabilities. These two pieces of legislation are vital to the continued successes that persons with disabilities enjoy. In addition, Secretaries and staff of several state agencies who attend the conference on the state's behalf provide resources and respond to questions that are raised during the conference. Please feel free to contact me at Charlie.Crist@MyFlorida.com or (850) 488-7146, if your specific questions or concerns were not raised.

When can I apply to be on the Governor's Commission on Disabilities?

You may apply for any Commission or Board to which I make appointments, including the Commission on Disabilities, by filling out the Gubernatorial Appointments Questionnaire at the following Web site for consideration as vacancies become available:

http://www.flgov.com/2007_boards_commissions. Detailed instructions and current vacancies are listed for your information and action.

Where was our Governor? I appreciate that Governor Bush made an appearance and answered questions as best he could at the time. It showed us he cared about us and our family's concerns. Governor Bush set a very high standard for the current and future Governors. I believe our families deserve the best. Time is very precious to all of us. I do not think four hours would have been asking too much.

Unfortunately, scheduling restraints don't always allow me to attend an entire conference or event. However, I was fortunate to be able to attend this year's conference, not only to address and speak with the conference attendees, but to also sign two disabilities-related bills into law. Senate Bill 856 promotes education of disability history and awareness, and House Bill 739 improves access to Guardian Advocates for people with disabilities. These two pieces of legislation are vital to the continued successes that persons with disabilities enjoy. In addition, Secretaries and staff of several state agencies who attend the conference on the state's behalf provide resources and respond to questions that are raised during the conference. Please feel free to contact me at Charlie.Crist@MyFlorida.com or (850) 488-7146, if your specific questions were not raised.

Why is the Governor's office not funding Family Café next year?

Our state is currently faced with a difficult economic situation with a dramatic reduction in state revenues. Consequently, reductions in program funding were required to meet the constitutional requirement of a balanced budget. Priority was given to direct services and mandated programs. While difficult decisions had to be made in developing the budget for Fiscal Year 2008-2009, you will be pleased that Family Café will receive a direct appropriation of \$50,000 next year. In addition, Family Café is an independent 501(c)(3) organization and, therefore, able to raise funds independent of government to continue its programming. Our state agencies will have the opportunity to continue their relationship with the Café.

I had a good time here today. I wish you would support more of this conference. Please do not take away funds for next year. This is a great educational conference that I have not been able to experience before. Thank you in advance for all the help you can give.

Our state is currently faced with a difficult economic situation with a dramatic reduction in state revenues. Consequently, reductions in program funding were required to meet the constitutional requirement of a balanced budget. Priority was given to direct services and mandated programs. While difficult decisions had to be made in developing the budget for Fiscal Year 2008-2009, you will be pleased that Family Café will receive a direct appropriation of \$50,000 next year. In addition, Family Café is an independent 501(c)(3) organization and, therefore, able to raise funds independent of government to continue its programming. Our state agencies will have the opportunity to continue their relationship with the Café.

Why wasn't the Governor in attendance? I am a registered voter (Democrat) but in years passed I supported Bush because he showed that the needs of disabled Florida mattered. Governor Christ showed me he is not personally committed and only delegates to others to do the work!!

Unfortunately, scheduling restraints don't always allow me to attend an entire conference or event. However, I was fortunate enough to be able to attend this year's conference, not only to address and speak with the conference attendees, but to also sign two disabilities-related bills into law. Senate Bill 856 promotes education of disability history and awareness,

and House Bill 739 improves access to Guardian Advocates for people with disabilities. These two pieces of legislation are vital to the continued successes that persons with disabilities enjoy. In addition, Secretaries and staff of several state agencies who attend the conference on the state's behalf provide resources and respond to questions that are raised during the conference. Please feel free to contact me at Charlie.Crist@MyFlorida.com or (850) 488-7146, if your specific questions were not raised.

I would like to know how funds are distributed in government. Why does so much go to tourism, beautification of our roadway medians, etc.?

Our state constitution and general laws govern Florida's budgeting process. Each year, our state Legislature reviews the requests of state agencies and recommendations from the Governor along with economic forecasts to develop a balanced budget as required by our state constitution. Currently, Florida anticipates spending 35% of its \$66+ billion budget for health and human services related programs. Education services consist of 31% of the budget. Transportation services, which include work on state funded roadways, comprise approximately 12% of the budget. Tourism represents less than one percent.

Why is Governor Crist is spending so much money on the Florida Everglades and cutting our Medicaid in half?

Our state constitution and general laws govern Florida's budgeting process. Each year, our state Legislature reviews the requests of state agencies and recommendations from the Governor along with economic forecasts to develop a balanced budget as required by our state constitution. Currently, Florida anticipates spending 35% of its \$66+ billion budget for health and human services related programs. This includes \$15.4 billion for Medicaid services; less than a 4% reduction from last year's Medicaid program funding. Funding for the Department of Environmental Protection, which includes funds to support the preservation of the Florida Everglades, represents approximately 3% of the total state budget.

What does the Commission on Disabilities do? What do they affect in policy or anything? Can their finished product be available on the internet?

The Governor's Commission on Disabilities was created on July 26, 2007 by Executive Order 07-148. The Commission is designed to advance public policy and work with state agencies and organizations on behalf of Floridians with disabilities. On July 1, 2008, the commission submitted its initial report. The entire report and further information about the commission is available at http://dms.myflorida.com/other_programs/commission_on_disabilities.

Where was the Governor?

Unfortunately, scheduling restraints don't always allow me to attend an entire conference or event. However, I was fortunate to be able to attend this year's conference, not only to address and speak with the conference attendees, but to also sign two disabilities-related bills into law: Senate Bill 856 which promotes education of disability history and awareness, and House Bill 739 which improves access to Guardian Advocates for people with disabilities.

Last year the Governor showed sparsely. He was at a summit trying to fix the tax issue. This year he did not show at all . . . why did this happen?

Unfortunately, scheduling restraints don't always allow me to attend an entire conference or event. However, I was fortunate to be able to attend this year's conference, not only to address and speak with the conference attendees, but to also sign two disabilities-related bills into law. Senate Bill 856 promotes education of disability history and awareness, and House Bill 739 improves access to Guardian Advocates for people with disabilities. These two pieces of legislation are vital to the continued successes that persons with disabilities enjoy. In addition, Secretaries and staff of several state agencies who attend the conference on the state's behalf provide resources and respond to questions that are raised during the conference. Please feel free to contact me at Charlie.Crist@MyFlorida.com or (850) 488-7146, if your specific questions were not raised.

Why did the Governor not take the time to attend this conference?

Unfortunately, scheduling restraints don't always allow me to attend an entire conference or event. However, I was fortunate to be able to attend this year's conference, not only to address and speak with the conference attendees, but to also sign two disabilities-related bills into law. Senate Bill 856 promotes education of disability history and awareness, and House Bill 739 improves access to Guardian Advocates for people with disabilities. These two pieces of legislation are vital to the continued successes that persons with disabilities enjoy. In addition, Secretaries and staff of several state agencies who attend the conference on the state's behalf provide resources and respond to questions that are raised during the conference. Please feel free to contact me at Charlie.Crist@MyFlorida.com or (850) 488-7146, if your specific questions were not raised.

Why is the state spending millions subsidizing professional sports franchises (teams that make millions) while Florida cuts vital services to vulnerable persons with disabilities?

Our state is currently faced with a difficult economic situation with a dramatic reduction in state revenues. Consequently, reductions in program funding were required to meet the constitutional requirement of a balanced budget. Priority was given to direct services and mandated programs. Fortunately, we are still able to offer quality care to our current clients. I look forward to better economic times when we will be able to enhance care and serve additional clients.

Please don't cut the budget for the handicapped. We need assistance programs.

Our state is currently faced with a difficult economic situation with a dramatic reduction in state revenues. Consequently, reductions in program funding were required to meet the constitutional requirement of a balanced budget. Priority was given to direct services and mandated programs. Fortunately, we are still able to offer quality care to our current clients. I look forward to better economic times when we will be able to enhance care and serve additional clients.

Governor Crist, why do you want to stop helping and funding the handicapped people? If you were handicapped, would you want the funds to be taken away from you?

Our state is currently faced with a difficult economic situation with a dramatic reduction in state revenues. Consequently, reductions in program funding were required to meet the constitutional requirement of a balanced budget. Priority was given to direct services and mandated programs. Fortunately, we are still able to offer quality care to our current clients. I look forward to better economic times when we will be able to enhance care and serve additional clients.

Why do legislators keep cutting health programs and education budgets? What can you as Governor do about the homeowner's insurance promise? Thank you!

Our state is currently faced with a difficult economic situation with a dramatic reduction in state revenues. Consequently, reductions in program funding were required to meet the constitutional requirement of a balanced budget. Priority was given to direct services and mandated programs. Fortunately, we are still able to offer quality care to our current clients. I look forward to better economic times when we will be able to enhance care and services in this state. My office continues to work with various local, state and federal agencies to ensure preservation of critical programs during this challenging time.

Great conference! Why wasn't the Governor here again?

Unfortunately, scheduling restraints don't always allow me to attend an entire conference or event. However, I was fortunate to be able to attend this year's conference, not only to address and speak with the conference attendees, but to also sign two disabilities-related bills into law. Senate Bill 856 promotes education of disability history and awareness, and House Bill 739 improves access to Guardian Advocates for people with disabilities. These two pieces of legislation are vital to the continued successes that persons with disabilities enjoy. In addition, Secretaries and staff of several state agencies who attend the conference on the state's behalf provide resources and respond to questions that are raised during the conference. Please feel free to contact me at Charlie.Crist@MyFlorida.com or (850) 488-7146, if your specific questions were not raised.

Why are we giving millions of dollars to the football and baseball and other sporting teams to support them? What happened to our children? They should be first. How about cutting budgets to them and increasing educational funds for our future leaders. Where were you Governor, when you were a child?

Our state is currently faced with a difficult economic situation with a dramatic reduction in state revenues. Consequently, reductions in program funding were required to meet the constitutional requirement of a balanced budget. Priority was given to direct services and mandated programs. As Governor, I remain fully committed to supporting this state's most vulnerable citizens including our children, disabled, elders and veterans. I applaud state agencies and the Legislature for the commitment to preserve this state's most critical services, which include care for the disabled and support for children. We continue to explore funding options and seek innovative solutions in anticipation of better economic times.

Why did Governor Crist close access to people with disabilities to resources, and opportunities to participate? Calling his office results in being told programs are not entitlements.

Our state is currently faced with a difficult economic situation with a dramatic reduction in state revenues. Consequently, reductions in program funding were required to meet the constitutional requirement of a balanced budget. Priority was given to direct services and mandated programs. Florida's Medicaid program is a state and federal partnership that provides health coverage for selected categories of people with low incomes. Its purpose is to improve the health of people who might otherwise go without medical care for themselves and their children. Federal law mandates specific core services and states may enhance this care with optional services. These optional services vary from state to state. Over the years, Florida has added, expanded, reduced, and eliminated optional services based on state funding available.

Governor Crist, we need a Dad's Support Group.

Thank you for your suggestion of a Dad's support group. Families are essential to supporting individuals with developmental disabilities. Often, as the main natural support system, mothers and fathers are the primary advocate for a family member with a disability as well as for those who support that family member. In each of the APD areas, there is a local Family Care Council that meets monthly to share information with families, provide resources and materials as well as to provide the Agency with ideas and feedback on new initiatives. You may wish to attend their next meeting and introduce your idea. The Family Care Council maintains a website that can be accessed at www.fccflorida.org and from there you can access the webpage of each local council. You may also reach the statewide FCC toll-free at 800-470-8101.

Governor Crist, why does the government cut funding that effects the disabled, the elderly, children, education and the poor when there is a budget cut?

Our state is currently faced with a difficult economic situation with a dramatic reduction in state revenues. Consequently, reductions in program funding were required to meet the constitutional requirement of a balanced budget. Priority was given to direct services and mandated programs. As Governor, I remain fully committed to supporting this state's most vulnerable citizens including our children, disabled, elders and veterans. I applaud state agencies and the Legislature for the commitment to preserve this state's most critical services, which include care for the disabled and support for children. We continue to explore funding options and seek innovative solutions in anticipation of better economic times.

Governor Crist, why are you cutting funds to the Family Café Conference?

Our state is currently faced with a difficult economic situation with a dramatic reduction in state revenues. Consequently, reductions in program funding were required to meet the constitutional requirement of a balanced budget. Priority was given to direct services and mandated programs. While difficult decisions had to be made in developing the budget for Fiscal Year 2008-2009, you will be pleased that Family Café will receive a direct appropriation of \$50,000 next year. In addition, Family Café is an independent 501(c)(3) organization and, therefore, able to raise funds independent of government to continue its programming. Our state agencies will have the opportunity to continue their relationship with the Café.

Governor Crist, can you give positive feedback to those waiting on the Medicaid waiver list? Our developmentally disabled kids deserve programs, just as normal kids have daily school and transportation.

As you are probably aware, Florida faces a very difficult economic situation during the next few years with a dramatic reduction in state revenues. Reductions in program funding were required during the most recent Legislative session to meet the constitutional requirement of a balanced budget. While many difficult decisions had to be made, I have made every effort to preserve direct services to our state's most vulnerable citizens, including children, the disabled and the elderly.

Each year, several factors determine the number of individuals who can be added to the Medicaid waiver program. Individuals are generally served in the order of the date on which they were added to the waitlist. The Agency for Persons with Disabilities continues to evaluate the waitlist.

The handicapped population budget has been butchered. Why aren't we taking care of this population than cannot take care of themselves?

Our state is currently faced with a difficult economic situation with a dramatic reduction in state revenues. Consequently, reductions in program funding were required to meet the constitutional requirement of a balanced budget. Priority was given to direct services and mandated programs. As Governor, I remain fully committed to supporting this state's most vulnerable citizens including our children, disabled, elders and veterans. I believe our current economic challenge is a temporary situation. Unfortunately it has resulted in reductions in all areas, not just human services and education. I applaud state agencies and the Legislature for the commitment to preserve this state's most critical services, which include care for the disabled and support for children. We continue to explore funding options and seek innovative solutions in anticipation of better economic times.

What are you doing about rising gas prices and falling rates at work?

Your frustration related to gas prices is shared by many Floridians. As Governor, I am committed to promoting the use of renewable energy sources such as solar and wind energy, as well as alternative energy such as ethanol and hydrogen to help reduce costs and more importantly, preserve our environment. To learn about Florida's initiatives and efforts in this area please visit our website: www.myfloridaclimate.com.

I am also aware of the difficulties facing employees as they deal with rising costs related to gas, provision of health insurance and loss of revenues. Due to a dramatic reduction in state revenues, Florida is facing economic challenges. Every effort is being made to preserve and expand Florida jobs. We continue to explore funding options and seek innovative solutions in anticipation of better economic times.

Why are there not enough interpreters in the court system for the deaf?

Court interpreter and translation services are part of the state courts' funded, due-process services. The state courts system may enter into contractual agreements to share, on a pro rata basis, the costs associated with these services when resources are available. The courts are experiencing the same economic strain as all state entities as they deal with revenue shortfalls. In addition, availability of qualified interpreters varies throughout the state. Currently qualified interpreters are identified through the Florida Registry of Interpreters for

the Deaf, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation of the Department of Education and local entities, if available. The courts continue to make progress in increasing the availability of qualified court interpreters for all purposes; however, there is still work to be done to ensure that interpreters are available at all times.

When will the legislature realize our kids are people too?

I believe this state's leaders are committed to all residents, especially our children, disabled, elders and veterans. Although our state is currently faced with a difficult economic situation with a dramatic reduction in state revenues, we remain resolved in our commitment to provide direct care and mandatory services to this state's most vulnerable citizens. During the 2008 legislative session, reductions in program funding were required to meet the constitutional requirement of a balanced budget. These reductions impacted all areas of state government. I applaud state agencies and the Legislature for the commitment to preserve this state's most critical services, including care for the disabled and support for children.

Why did the Governor, who promised to be here last year, not speak at the Summit?

Unfortunately, scheduling restraints don't always allow me to attend an entire conference or event. However, I was fortunate to be able to attend this year's conference, not only to address and speak with the conference attendees, but to also sign two disabilities-related bills into law. Senate Bill 856 promotes education of disability history and awareness, and House Bill 739 improves access to Guardian Advocates for people with disabilities. These two pieces of legislation are vital to the continued successes that persons with disabilities enjoy. In addition, Secretaries and staff of several state agencies who attend the conference on the state's behalf provide resources and respond to questions that are raised during the conference. Please feel free to contact me at Charlie.Crist@MyFlorida.com or (850) 488-7146, if your specific questions were not raised.

The Office of Representative Bill Galvano

Representative Galvano, Representative Skidmore and Representative Richardson were fantastic! I am glad to hear that you, Representative Galvano, have come back to this conference year after year. He cares!!! We will not forget your HELP. Thank you! Keep up the good work!

Thank you for your kind words and for your support. I will continue to advocate for the disabled and look forward to joining you again at the conference.

You need to be thanked for your kindness and service. You seem to be a great statesman and a very kind soul, a caring individual. (I would like you to teach these skills to our Governor. You are warm and caring and he is cold and heartless.)

We will remember!

Thank you. I will carry your comments with me to Tallahassee and share them with my colleagues in the Florida House to ensure that the developmentally disabled are at the forefront of our policymaking.

Why is there a decrease in involvement in The Family Café from our Governor? Decreased government funding should not equal a decrease in the Governor's involvement. I was very disappointed that he did not appear. Instead he chose to send other Legislators to take responsibility for his decisions. However, I did appreciate Rep. Galvano's appearance and the concern that he has for families with disabilities.

I too was disappointed with the funding cuts. I will continue to work to provide future funding to our most vulnerable citizens. I have enjoyed visiting you at the Family Café Conference.

You did a great job on Friday, Representative Galvano! Thank you for caring and sharing your comments and commitment toward this population. You are very special too!

Thank you. I appreciate your taking the time to share your comments with me.

I asked you last year to look at Florida's ranking in the nation for dollars spent on Developmental Disabilities. We are still 49th?

Only four states, California, Minnesota, New York and Pennsylvania, spend more in total dollars for the Developmental Disabilities population on the Home and Community Based Services Waiver. Because we have so many people on the waiver we do rank lower in our per capita spending. Only two states outrank Florida in terms of total number of people served on the waiver – California and New York. Each state waiver varies based upon type and number of services offered.

The Agency for Health Care Administration

I am paying for my daughter's medicine on \$648 that she lives on. She is a diabetic. It is either medicine or living. She needs free diabetic medicine and equipment.

Medicaid beneficiaries, who are diabetic or might become diabetic, qualify to receive the needed medicine and/or related medical equipment with a doctor's prescription. Items like test strips, syringes, and insulin are covered by Florida Medicaid.

If your daughter is not currently a Florida Medicaid beneficiary, you may contact the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and request a Medicaid eligibility determination. You can call them at 1-866-762-2237 or apply online at <http://www.myflorida.com/accessflorida/>. On the site, you can select a "pre-screening" to see if she qualifies and then apply for Medicaid online.

Medicaid beneficiaries may contact their local Medicaid Area Office to find local Medicaid enrolled pharmacies or equipment providers. For more general information about Florida Medicaid, please visit our website at <http://ahca.myflorida.com/>.

It has been my experience that there is a disparity between the products and services available for people with disabilities and what is affordable, especially for those of us who are middle class adults living independently on our own. For example, homes can be renovated, cars can be adapted and therapeutic equipment exists. However, many of us are just beginning to enter the workforce and are still transitioning from the SSI system. What is being done to bridge the gap between products and services available for people with disabilities and what is affordable for people with disabilities?

Thank you for submitting your question at the Family Café Conference. I am sorry that you have experienced difficulties in obtaining affordable services as a person with disabilities. The Agency for Health Care Administration administers Medicaid services to low income individuals who qualify.

You did not say whether or not you receive Medicaid benefits. For assistance in getting an answer to whether you are eligible for Medicaid services, you may contact the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and request a Medicaid eligibility determination. You can call them at 1-866-762-2237 or apply online at <http://www.myflorida.com/accessflorida/>.

Also, the Adult Services program through the Department of Children and Families (DCF) provides services to persons with disabilities, 18 to 59 years of age. You may request an assessment for one of their programs. To find the local Adult Services office near you, call the Department of Children and Families at 850-487-1111 or go to their website: <http://www.dcf.state.fl.us/as/>.

To explore additional programs and resources, you may also contact the Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD). APD serves individuals with developmental disabilities that were diagnosed before the age of 18. APD has a toll free customer service number: 1-866-761-7043 and you may view their website at <http://www.apd.myflorida.com>.

My daughter's school says that there is no funding and that what little bit they do have is being cut for ESE Services. If our children are important to you then why is funding being cut? Why doesn't Florida Medicaid cover the same services other states do? Why is Florida ranked 50th out of 50 states plus the District of Columbia in child health care services and supports? If our issues are important to you, why aren't you here for the conference? Why isn't scheduling a time for this event important to you?

Medicaid has two programs for the school districts in Florida to participate, the Medicaid Certified School Match Program and the School District Administrative Claiming Program. These programs permit school districts to be reimbursed for services that are provided to Medicaid eligible students who have an Individual Education Plan or Individualized Family Support Plan. At this time there have been no cuts to either of these Medicaid programs. Medicaid is a federal and state partnership and each state has its own federally approved Medicaid State Plan, which authorizes the programs that are provided by each state. In order to expand services, additional services and funding would need to be authorized by the Florida Legislature. If you are interested in expanded Medicaid services, your local legislator may be of assistance. If you would like additional information on all the current services covered by Florida Medicaid, you can contact your local Medicaid office at (407) 317-7851.

This event is important to the Agency and Agency staff did attend the event.

Why won't Medicaid pay for a bilateral cochlear implant?

Currently Medicaid covers one cochlear implant in either ear. In order to expand this coverage, Medicaid would need to receive additional funding from the Florida Legislature.

My family needs to access services from Medicaid, and I need to know, how do I qualify?

Medicaid eligibility in Florida is determined either by the Department of Children and Families (DCF) or the Social Security Administration. DCF determines Medicaid eligibility for:

- Low income families with children
- Children only
- Pregnant women
- Non-citizens with medical emergencies
- Aged and/or disabled individuals not currently receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
- People eligible for SSI who live in Florida that automatically become eligible for Medicaid.

Once DCF has determined a person is eligible for Medicaid, the Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA) area Medicaid office can assist them with their benefits.

For more information regarding Medicaid eligibility you may contact the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and request a Medicaid eligibility determination. You can call them at 1-866-762-2237 or apply online at <http://www.myflorida.com/accessflorida/>.

For more information regarding AHCA's area Medicaid offices call 1-888-419-3456 or view a list of area offices online by visiting our website at <http://ahca.myflorida.com/Medicaid/Areas/index.shtml>.

For more information regarding SSI eligibility contact the Social Security Administration at 1-800-772-1213 or visit their website at http://www.ssa.gov/pgm/links_ssi.htm.

Can I be on Medicare and Medicaid?

Yes. If a person meets all the eligibility requirements for Medicare and Medicaid, that individual can be on both Medicare and Medicaid. If a person has Medicare and Medicaid, Medicare is the primary payer (Medicare will be responsible for paying for your care first).

To apply for Medicare, contact your local Social Security office. You can locate your local Social Security Office by calling 1-800-772-1213. Information about applying for Medicare can also be found at http://www.ssa.gov/pgm/links_medicare.htm.

To apply for Medicaid, contact the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and request a Medicaid eligibility determination. You can call them at 1-866-762-2237 or apply online at <http://www.myflorida.com/accessflorida/>.

Who provides dental care coverage, Medicaid or Medicare?

Medicare does not provide any dental services. Medicaid provides dental coverage for eligible Medicaid beneficiaries. The services covered differ for adults and children. For more information on what Medicaid covers, please contact your local Medicaid office.

For more information regarding AHCA's area Medicaid offices call 1-888-419-3456 or view a list of area offices online by visiting our website at <http://ahca.myflorida.com/Medicaid/Areas/index.shtml>.

How come some folks get Medicaid and others do not?

Medicaid eligibility criteria are set out in law by the Florida Legislature. The Department of Children and Families (DCF) then uses these criteria to determine Medicaid eligibility for:

- Low income families with children
- Children only
- Pregnant women
- Non-citizens with medical emergencies
- Aged and/or disabled individuals not currently receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
- People eligible for SSI who live in Florida that automatically become eligible for Medicaid.

For more information regarding Medicaid eligibility, contact the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and request a Medicaid eligibility determination. You can call them at 1-866-762-2237 or apply online at <http://www.myflorida.com/accessflorida/>.

For more information regarding SSI eligibility, contact the Social Security Administration at 1-800-772-1213 or visit their website at http://www.ssa.gov/pgm/links_ssi.htm.

I need a scooter. I am 64 years old with a disability. The commercials make it look so easy to get one. Medicare will not cover the cost for me . . . why not?

The Florida Medicaid program has no authority to determine Medicare's scooter or wheelchair requirements. We encourage you to speak with a Medicare benefit specialist about Medicare's durable medical equipment coverage policy. Their toll-free phone number is 1-800-MEDICARE.

You may also contact the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services at the following location:

Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services
7500 Security Boulevard
Baltimore MD 21244-1850
(877) 267-2323
<http://www.cms.hhs.gov/>

When will we have more choices for services (medical)? Right now there is only one mental health evaluator approved by Medicaid in our area.

Each area of the state has several Medicaid providers that provide mental health evaluations. For assistance in locating providers in your area, please contact your local Medicaid area office representative. A list of AHCA area offices can be found at the following website: <http://ahca.myflorida.com/Medicaid/Areas/index.shtml> or you can call 850-487-2618.

Is there any informational resource for mid-income families that are at risk of losing Medicaid coverage? Private insurance will be a great expense for a child on a ventilator and I need to know where to go if the opportunity of an increase in our income shows up. Should we refuse it to be able to keep the Medicaid?

The Florida KidCare program is the umbrella name for the government-sponsored health insurance plans for children in Florida. If your income increases and you are no longer eligible for Medicaid, then you can apply for coverage for your children with one of the KidCare programs. The KidCare programs are:

MediKids – for children 1 through 4, families pay \$15 or \$20 premium per month if their gross family income is less than 200% of the federal poverty level (\$41,300 for a family of 4). If your family income exceeds this amount, you may purchase MediKids coverage for \$159/month per child.

Healthy Kids – for children 5 through 18, families pay \$15 or \$20 premium per month if their gross family income is less than 200% of the federal poverty level (\$41,300 for a family of 4). If your family income exceeds this amount, you may purchase coverage for \$128/month per child.

Children's Medicaid Services Network – for children through age 18 who have special health care needs. Families pay \$15 or \$20 premium per month if their gross family income is less than 200% of the federal poverty level (\$41,300 for a family of 4). There is no full pay option for CMSN. If your child has special needs and your income exceeds the limit for subsidized coverage, you can then purchase MediKids or Healthy Kids coverage.

For more information, or to apply, visit www.floridakidcare.org or call the KidCare Information Line at (888) 540-5437.

When will therapies like recreation, hippotherapy, dance etc. be covered?

By law, Medicaid cannot cover any therapy service that is considered experimental or investigative in nature. You may contact the Boards of Physical, Occupational, Speech and Respiratory therapy at the Department of Health for more information on their professional position regarding alternative forms of therapy. You can reach the Department of Health at (850) 245-4444 or at <http://www.doh.state.fl.us/>.

Will it ever be possible for the Med waiver to follow the client from state to state? They would avoid “waiting periods” to re-start services and would not delay a med waiver client’s progress.

Because Medicaid and Medicaid Waivers are state-specific programs, funds can not follow the recipient to another state. Medicaid programs, including waivers, do receive federal funds but only as a match to state funding. Each state’s waivers have specific qualifications and eligibility criteria, so an individual eligible for the Developmental Disabilities Waiver in Florida may not be eligible for a similar waiver in another state.

How can someone get insurance as a disabled person (Parkinson’s Disease) once Medicaid drops them due to having SSDI over the state limit of \$400 per month? Right now, myself, my wife, and my son get SSDI about \$400 over the limit for Medicaid.

Even though you are no longer eligible for Medicaid because your income has increased over the Medicaid eligibility level, you appear eligible for Medicare. Social Security Disability Insurance recipients qualify for Medicare coverage. After receiving your Social Security Disability Insurance benefits for 24 months, you should receive your Medicare coverage. You should receive information from Medicare before your coverage starts. You can request additional information regarding your Medicare status by contacting your local Social Security office. The office can be located by internet, using the following site:

<http://www.ssa.gov/r&m2.html>, or calling toll-free 1-800-772-1213 (TDD 1-800-325-0778).

You can also obtain information on health insurance eligibility, if you or your wife are employed, through your employer. Contact your employer’s Human Resources department for health insurance information. Health insurance information can also be obtained through your local insurance office. Your local insurance representative will notify you of the health insurance options that are available in your area.

I have rheumatoid arthritis, fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue syndrome an under active thyroid and idopathic thrombocytopenia and currently I have malignant fibrosis tumors. I have no insurance and I need to have surgeries. I have four children under the age of 18 with me. My husband is disabled and they tell me I am too educated to be disabled and on Medicaid. What do I do? I need your help!

There are no education limits for Medicaid eligibility, but there are income and asset limitations and other criteria. The Department of Children and Families is responsible for determining Medicaid eligibility. The statewide toll-free telephone number for the Department of Children and Families is 1-866-76 ACCESS (1-866-762-2237). The ACCESS website to apply on line is <http://www.myflorida.com/accessflorida/>.

Why is Governor Crist spending so much money with the Florida Everglades and cutting the budget for Medicaid?

The state budgeting process is quite complex, but in sum, it is the Legislature, not the Governor, who determines the budget. While some rate cuts for Medicaid providers were necessary for the 2008-2009 budget, the Legislature was able to preserve Medicaid services to recipients. Importantly, the current budget provides for an increase in the number of children served through the Florida Healthy Kids program and an expansion of the nursing home diversion program for our seniors.

Medicaid information is very useful. Can anyone access this same information online with their computer? Thank you!

There are two website links for Florida Medicaid information.

For general Medicaid information, please visit our website at <http://ahca.myflorida.com/Medicaid/index.shtml>.

If you are a Medicaid provider, you can find detailed policy and billing information at www.mymedicaid-florida.com.

For additional information on healthcare in Florida, you may also want to visit www.FloridaHealthFinder.gov. There you can compare the quality of providers, nursing homes, health plans and hospitals.

For more information regarding Medicaid eligibility you may contact the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and request a Medicaid eligibility determination. You can call them at 1-866-762-2237 or apply online at <http://www.myflorida.com/accessflorida/>.

Where can I find information or services for my sister? She has post-polio syndrome, and does not have much money and she just became Medicaid eligible.

Medicaid information or Medicaid covered services may be found at the Agency website at <http://ahca.myflorida.com/Medicaid/Areas/index.shtml>. The location of your area office contact information at this website can be retrieved by clicking on "Area Offices" located under "Local Navigation."

How can I access medical supplies that Medicaid does not cover?

First, if you have not done so, ensure that the medical supplies at issue are not covered by Florida Medicaid. The local Medicaid area office can provide this information. To find your local area office information, please visit the agency's website at <http://ahca.myflorida.com/Medicaid/flmedicaid.shtml> or call 1-866-762-2237. If the medical supplies sought are not covered by Florida Medicaid, you may wish to contact local community resources, such as church organizations, United Way, or fraternal organizations like Shriners or Rotary International.

We need more Medicaid doctors and providers in our area. Why do we lose benefits and get punished for trying to work? My son has cystic fibrosis and gets SSI and we cannot live on the benefits and if I work full time we don't qualify. Why do I need "prior authorization" for meds? If a doctor hands me a script then it should suffice.

The federal Social Security Administration determines eligibility for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and should be able to explain to you how your son's benefit amount is determined and how much you would be able to work and still retain your son's eligibility. If your son is eighteen or older, the amount of his SSI will be determined without considering your income. These rules are set by the federal government. You can reach the Social Security Administration at 1-800-772-1213 or www.ssa.gov.

Some Medicaid services and products require that providers obtain prior authorization before the service is performed or the product supplied. This is to ensure the most effective and medically necessary care. Most drugs included on the Medicaid Preferred Drug List (PDL) are available without prior authorization. However, some PDL drugs with clinical protocol requirements require a prior authorization to ensure the clinical protocol is met.

If your son is 18 or older, you may find it helpful to discuss the possibility of him receiving services from the Adult Cystic Fibrosis program or the Adult Cystic Fibrosis Medicaid Waiver. Ms. Miranda Ray, the Director of the Adult Cystic Fibrosis Program at Abilities of Florida, can give you more information about the program and waiver. Ms. Ray can be reached at (727) 538-7370.

I need a hearing aid. Please help me to have one. Thanks a lot.

If you have Medicaid, call your area Medicaid office for assistance in getting a hearing aid. To find your local area office information, visit the agency's website at <http://ahca.myflorida.com/Medicaid/flmedicaid.shtml> or call 1-866-762-2237. Once the area office staff verifies your Medicaid eligibility they can provide you a list of hearing services providers in your area. The provider will request authorization from Medicaid for a hearing aid. Please know that Medicaid can only replace hearing aids every three years.

The Agency for Persons with Disabilities

The Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD), has had me on a waiting list for a long time now. I need the services ASAP! Please help!

Each year, the number of individuals who can be added to the waiver depends upon several factors. Individuals are generally served in the order of the date on which they were added to the waitlist. The factors that affect enrollment include:

- Funding availability
- Legislative requirements
- People in crisis that have first priority

As a result of changes to the law during the legislative session, the agency introduced cost efficiencies to decrease the expected deficit. As these savings grow, the funds available will be used to provide services to those who are waiting for services. As funding becomes available, the agency will enroll people from the waitlist. To date, the agency has served individuals with a waitlist eligibility date of February 13, 2003. The agency will continue to evaluate the waitlist for the Developmental Disabilities Home and Community Based Service waiver to ensure it is a true reflection of those people waiting for APD services.

If you would like to find out your waitlist eligibility date, you are encouraged to contact your local APD office directly and request this information from your support coordinator.

How does someone who receives Social Security and receives SSI retirement work, and what is the income limit for that person if they receive services on the Waiver?

To answer this question, we would need more specific information from the person about his or her work history and current status with the Social Security Administration (SSA). A person may receive "Supplemental Security Income" (SSI), "Social Security Disability Insurance" (SSDI) payments, or "Social Security Retirement" benefits – all of which originate from the SSA. All three of these are distinct and are issued from distinct funding sources within SSA. Accordingly, the particular type of payment received from SSA must be identified in order to understand a person's status with SSA and how earning income may impact their particular benefits – whether the benefits are derived from the Social Security Administration or from Medicaid waiver services or both.

There are people and resources who want to help you to work as much as you would like without losing your benefits. One example of such a resource is the Work Incentive Planning and Assistance program or "WIPA" which is funded by SSA and provides free counseling and assistance to persons receiving SSA benefits who wish to work but need help with applying work incentives and maintaining benefits. Currently in Florida there are five WIPA programs. The SSA website that provides WIPA information is found at: <https://secure.ssa.gov/apps10/oesp/providers.nsf/bystate>.

Go to the website and click on the drop down box for "Florida." The WIPA's located in Florida, along with other providers of assistance, are listed. You should contact the WIPA and the Community Work Incentive Coordinators (CWIC's are the employees who work in the WIPA program offices) who are assigned to your region of the state.

Another resource available is the “Work Incentive Liaison” or “WIL.” The WIL’s are employees of the SSA, and they are located within SSA’s offices. Not every SSA office has a WIL on staff, but the WIL located nearest the recipient or beneficiary making the inquiry can be contacted to provide assistance.

Another point of contact is the Area Work Incentive Coordinator or “AWIC.” These are also employees of the SSA, and their offices can be located at the website below:
<http://www.socialsecurity.gov/work/awiccontacts.html>.

Another resource available for assistance is the “Florida Benefits Information Resource Network” (F-BIRN). F-BIRN is composed of a diverse group of people from federal, state and local organizations who have completed intensive training provided by the National Disability Institute (NDI). The objective of F-BIRN is to assist people with disabilities in locating and utilizing the certified professionals who are trained to assist people in effectively managing their benefits.

For a list of current F-BIRN members you may go to <http://apd.myflorida.com/employment/fbirn.htm>.

The website has links to:

- The F-BIRN brochure, which contains an excellent checklist of information which will help you to succeed in working with the Social Security Administration to ensure that you maintain your benefits
- Names and contact information of members of F-BIRN who can assist you
- A brochure entitled “Disability Benefits & Work” which contains brief information about various Social Security work incentives.

If someone makes contact with a WIPA, CWIC or WIL and continues to have concerns or unresolved issues regarding benefits and/or work incentives, they are encouraged to contact an F-BIRN member for further assistance.

I put my son’s name on the med waiver wait list about 7 years ago. He is now 19 and needs services. Can you tell me where we stand?

Each year, the number of individuals who can be added to the waiver depends upon several factors. Individuals are generally served in the order of the date on which they were added to the waitlist. The factors that affect enrollment include:

- Funding availability
- Legislative requirements
- People in crisis that have first priority

As a result of changes to the law during the legislative session, the agency introduced cost efficiencies to decrease the expected deficit. As these savings grow, the funds available will be used to provide services to those who are waiting for services. As funding becomes available, the agency will enroll people from the waitlist. To date, the agency has served individuals with a waitlist eligibility date of February 13, 2003. The agency will continue to evaluate the waitlist for the Developmental Disabilities Home and Community Based Service waiver to ensure it is a true reflection of those people waiting for APD services.

If you would like to find out your waitlist eligibility date, you are encouraged to contact your local APD office directly and request this information from your support coordinator.

What is the med waiver and the purpose of it?

You may access the online version of the APD Yellow Notebook which is a resource notebook for individuals with developmental disabilities at <http://apd.myflorida.com/customers/notebook/>. Among other information, it contains descriptions of the Medicaid Waivers and our services.

How do I access medical supplies that Medicaid does not cover? How can I get Medicaid waiver services and not have to wait over 10 years?

If your family member is in need of medical supplies or equipment not covered by Medicaid, you may wish to contact your local APD office and speak with your support coordinator. Your coordinator will be able to provide information and assistance in locating the medical supplies you need.

Each year, the number of individuals who can be added to the waiver depends upon several factors. Individuals are generally served in the order of the date on which they were added to the waitlist. The factors that affect enrollment include:

- Funding availability
- Legislative requirements
- People in crisis that have first priority

As a result of changes to the law during the legislative session, the agency introduced cost efficiencies to decrease the expected deficit. As these savings grow, the funds available will be used to provide services to those who are waiting for services. As funding becomes available, the agency will enroll people from the waitlist. To date, the agency has served individuals with a waitlist eligibility date of February 13, 2003. The agency will continue to evaluate the waitlist for the Developmental Disabilities Home and Community Based Service waiver to ensure it is a true reflection of those people waiting for APD services.

If you would like to find out your waitlist eligibility date, you are encouraged to contact your local APD office and request this information from your support coordinator.

I have a question about the Tier System. I heard that people on the big waiver in our community will go to some of the Tiers. Is this true? Is there a big cut back?

The agency is implementing a four-tiered waiver system because it is required by law passed during the 2007 legislative session. Annual limits were established for how much the state will spend for services for people in three of the tiers. The limits are: Tier 1- no limit; Tier 2- \$55,000; Tier 3- \$35,000; and Tier 4- \$14,792.

The new Waiver system calls for people to be assigned to a tier based on how their needs match the established criteria. APD is currently determining to which tier each customer will be assigned. The services of most individuals will not be affected by their tier assignment. Some individuals will, however, have to reduce their current cost plans to remain within their tier limit.

Could we possibly get on the APD website, a dumbed down version of what is happening with the budget and everything else? There is so much jargon it is difficult to understand and so much left unsaid. Posting a simple but clear explanation once a month would be great.

We understand your concerns with the tiered Waiver program. To assist families, the Agency has placed a very special emphasis in continuing to provide current and additional

information written in plain language on its web site. News and information pertaining to critical areas of concern are provided on our website <http://apd.myflorida.com/>.

What is being done about the severe lack of physical therapists and occupational therapists to administer to special needs children and adults in Hillsborough County?

We take your concern very seriously. Currently, our Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD) office in Hillsborough County is recruiting occupational therapists to provide services to Medicaid waiver clients.

APD Area offices have conducted provider fairs, corresponded with local colleges and universities, distributed brochures, and advertised in the local media and internet to recruit needed providers for specific services.

How can the med waiver take away something they already approved? We were approved for bathroom changes then a year later they took it away, before it got started. Help!

In order to assist you with your inquiry, we will need the name of the individual for whom the bathroom modifications were approved. Please feel free to contact Lorena Fulcher by calling (850) 488-5998 or e-mailing lorena_fulcher@apd.state.fl.us with this information so that we can better assist you.

Very recently I submitted a request for an additional 30 hours of PCA for my son who has spastic quadriplegia and requires total care and has other health problems and concerns. He is a very complex child. The additional hours are PCA for the summer because he is home 24 hours for the summer – two weeks ago, I received a denial letter from APD. I did not understand why. Could you help me with this? My son’s coordinator re-submitted a letter on my behalf for reconsideration. If APD does not give additional PCA for my son it is critical. How can I get those additional hours approved by the regular waiver? What is the procedure? Thank you! I would appreciate your answer on this problem.

If your son does not need intensive level service, personal care assistance services are limited to 180 hours per month. If, however, he meets the “intensive” criteria in the Medicaid Waiver service handbook, then he could potentially receive over 180 hours per month. The handbook details that in order for him to receive additional hours, there would have been a significant change in condition or circumstance that affects his health and safety. I recommend that you work with his Waiver Support Coordinator (WSC) and Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD) Area Office on the status of the current pre-service authorization review. You or your support coordinator can obtain additional information on the handbook by accessing the following website: http://www.apshealthcare.com/publicprograms/florida/fl_support_coordinators.htm.

Will APD be locally organized?

The Agency for Persons with Disabilities has 14 local area offices throughout the state. Our website provides a map of the various areas and contact information for those local offices. Please visit the link provided: <http://apd.myflorida.com/area/>.

What is the process for obtaining a Medicaid waiver for adults with disabilities?

The Agency for Persons with Disabilities serves individuals with developmental disabilities as defined in Florida Statutes, Chapter 393. This includes individuals who have cerebral palsy, spina bifida, autism, mental retardation, Prader Willi Syndrome, and very young children who are at high risk for having a developmental disability.

If a person has been diagnosed with a developmental disability as defined above, they can contact the local Agency for Persons with Disabilities office for more information about applying for services. Our website, <http://apd.myflorida.com/area>, contains a listing of APD's area offices which can be used to determine which area office you would need to contact.

If a person wishes to obtain and fund his or her services under the Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services Waiver, they must apply for services and secure a place on the waiting list for this program. Legislative appropriations are available for this program but it is important to point out that individuals who have been waiting the longest time will be served first.

You may access the Developmental Disabilities Waiver Coverage and Limitations handbook at <http://floridamedicaid.acs-inc.com>. The handbook is a reference guide to the services that may be purchased for individuals eligible for the Developmental Disabilities Home and Community Based Services waiver. The handbook describes consumer eligibility and enrollment on the waiver, provider enrollment through the waiver, each service, qualifications required for providers of each service, how the service may be delivered, documentation requirements, how the provider is paid, and many other important details.

You may also access information on a variety of programs and services available to Floridians with disabilities from Florida's Family Care Council website via this link: <http://www.fccflorida.org>.

My issue is non-emergency transportation as parent/caregiver/guardian for two mentally handicapped adults, resident of Polk County. I have been spoken to rudely on the phone, never given adequate information and been denied services. The reason given: your son and daughter do not have Medicaid, which is not true as they have SSI and Medicaid. My question is why?

Transportation continues to be a challenge to the people we serve. Currently, the local Agency for Persons with Disabilities office is recruiting providers for transportation services in Polk County.

Let's end or lessen the Med waiver wait list for services.

Each year, the number of individuals who can be added to the waiver depends upon several factors. Individuals are generally served in the order of the date on which they were added to the waitlist. The factors that affect enrollment include:

- Funding availability
- Legislative requirements
- People in crisis that have first priority

As a result of changes to the law during the legislative session, the agency introduced cost efficiencies to decrease the expected deficit. As these savings grow, the funds available will be used to provide services to those who are waiting for services. As funding becomes available, the agency will enroll people from the waitlist. To date, the agency has served individuals with a waitlist eligibility date of February 13, 2003. The agency will continue to

evaluate the waitlist for the Developmental Disabilities Home and Community Based Service waiver to ensure it is a true reflection of those people waiting for APD services.

If you would like to find out your waitlist eligibility date, you are encouraged to contact your local APD office and request this information from your support coordinator.

Please, I need massage therapy for my back. This is very important!

For many years the Home and Community Based Waiver offered a wide array of services. The Agency has been experiencing a budget deficit due to the variety and increasing costs of providing services to over 31,000 persons. To begin addressing these problems, the 2007 Legislature Session made changes to Florida law which included service eliminations and limitations. The selected services for elimination and modification were finalized by the legislature. Unfortunately Massage Therapy was eliminated. You are encouraged to discuss alternative supports that may be available in your community or through other funding sources with your waiver support coordinator.

We need to get on the Medicaid waiver.

The Agency for Persons with Disabilities serves individuals with developmental disabilities as defined in Florida Statutes, Chapter 393. This includes individuals who have cerebral palsy, spina bifida, autism, mental retardation, Prader Willi Syndrome, and very young children who are at high risk for having a developmental disability.

If a person has been diagnosed with a developmental disability as defined above, they can contact the local Agency for Persons with Disabilities office for more information about applying for services. The following website contains a listing of APD's area offices which can be used to determine which area office you would need to contact: <http://apd.myflorida.com/area>.

If a person wishes to obtain and fund his or her services under the Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services Waiver, they must apply for services and secure a place on the waiting list for this program. Legislative appropriations are available for this program but it is important to point out that individuals who have been waiting the longest time will be served first.

You may access the Developmental Disabilities Waiver Coverage and Limitations handbook at <http://floridamedicaid.acs-inc.com>. The handbook is a reference guide to the services that may be purchased for individuals eligible for the Developmental Disabilities Home and Community Based Services waiver. The handbook describes consumer eligibility and enrollment on the waiver, provider enrollment through the waiver, each service, qualifications required for providers of each service, how the service may be delivered, documentation requirements, how the provider is paid, and many other important details.

You may also access information on a variety of programs and services available to Floridians with disabilities from Florida's Family Care Council website via this link: <http://www.fccflorida.org>.

When can we have a facilitated behavior plan?

The term "facilitated behavior plan" is not familiar to the Agency for Persons with Disabilities; however, we would be happy to discuss behavior plan options with you. Please feel free to contact our Senior Behavior Analyst, Dr. Steve Coleman, to discuss behavior plan options. He can be reached by calling 1-866-APD-CARES (273-2273).

The automated system (telephone) for Medicaid and APD are extremely frustrating. It seems impossible to get through to a live person. Is there any way to fix this?

Open communication and prompt response to requests for information are among my top priorities. Your concerns have been shared with the APD Area Administrator that serves your area and your comments will be forwarded to the Area Medicaid office as well. We regret the frustrations you have encountered.

The handicapped population's budget has been butchered. Why aren't we taking care of this population? These folks cannot take care of themselves.

The Legislature has the responsibility of passing a state budget that is within projected revenues. This balanced budget requirement is contained in the Florida Constitution. When revenues decline it is the responsibility of the Legislature to either increase revenues or decrease spending. During this past Legislative session, many state programs experienced significant reductions to their budgets due to declining revenues.

Please be assured that within the resources available, the Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD) will continue to do all that is possible to safeguard the health and well-being of individuals with developmental disabilities in Florida. Our web site "apd.myflorida.com" has a "planning resource" link to assist people during this critical period. In addition, your support coordinator will be able to assist you with changes needed to your support plan and to make necessary referrals to other state programs as appropriate.

As we look toward the future, your continued advocacy and support will be invaluable. Please contact your local legislative delegation and express your concerns directly to them.

Can you give positive feedback to those waiting on the Medicaid Waiver list? Our developmentally disabled kids deserve a program just as normal kids have daily school and transportation.

Each year, the number of individuals who can be added to the waiver depends upon several factors. The factors that affect enrollment include:

- Funding availability
- Legislative requirements
- People in crisis that have first priority

As a result of changes to the law during the legislative session, the agency introduced cost efficiencies to decrease the expected deficit. As these savings grow, the funds available will be used to provide services to those who are waiting for services. As funding becomes available, the agency will enroll people from the waitlist. To date, the agency has served individuals with a waitlist eligibility date of February 13, 2003. The agency will continue to evaluate the waitlist for the Developmental Disabilities Home and Community Based Service waiver to ensure it is a true reflection of those people waiting for APD services.

If you would like to find out your waitlist eligibility date, I encourage you to contact your local APD office and request this information from your support coordinator.

Can anything be done to help people expedite the med waiver process? Will the waitlist ever be shorter?

Each year, the number of individuals who can be added to the waiver depends upon several factors. Individuals are generally served in the order of the date on which they were added to the waitlist. The factors that affect enrollment include:

- Funding availability
- Legislative requirements
- People in crisis that have first priority

As a result of changes to the law during the legislative session, the agency introduced cost efficiencies to decrease the expected deficit. As these savings grow, the funds available will be used to provide services to those who are waiting for services. As funding becomes available, the agency will enroll people from the waitlist. To date, the agency has served individuals with a waitlist eligibility date of February 13, 2003. The agency will continue to evaluate the waitlist for the Developmental Disabilities Home and Community Based Service waiver to ensure it is a true reflection of those people waiting for APD services.

If you would like to find out your waitlist eligibility date, you are encouraged to contact your local APD office and request this information from your support coordinator.

Why aren't there services for young adults in their early 20's? Also why are services limited for certain disabilities and areas in Florida?

The Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD) serves individuals with developmental disabilities as defined in the Florida Statute, Chapter 393 This includes individuals who have cerebral palsy, spina bifida, autism, mental retardation, Prader Willi Syndrome, and very young children who are at high risk for having a developmental disability.

APD can begin providing services to a person at the age of three and once a person is receiving APD services they will not lose them due to their age. In order to apply for our services, please contact our local area office. Please visit the following link to our website which includes a listing of our area offices. <http://apd.myflorida.com/area/>. The local area office can also help you find the services that you are looking for in your area.

What is the CDC+ waiver?

CDC+ means Consumer Directed Care Plus. It is a long-term care program alternative to the Developmental Services Home and Community Based Services Waiver that began here in Florida approximately eight years ago as a research and demonstration project. Based on the philosophy of self-determination and the growing national trend in self-directed services, the program provides participants the opportunity to choose which services they will receive, when they will receive them, and who will provide them. Participants develop a purchasing plan to manage an allocated monthly budget designed to meet their long-term care needs.

Data has shown that increased consumer and family satisfaction with supports and services, a higher number of achieved goals, and the ability to hire better employees are just a few of the benefits an individual can experience by participating in the CDC+ program.

On March 1, 2008, the program became a permanent Florida Medicaid State Plan option. Although program enrollment is currently closed, the Agency for Persons with Disabilities hopes to be able to open enrollment to a limited number of individuals in the near future. If you know of a Developmental Disabilities Waiver participant who would like to be placed on the CDC+ enrollment notification list, please contact CDC+ Customer Service at 1-866-761-7043.

Why did APD change to the Tier system?

The agency is implementing a four-tiered waiver system because it is required by law passed during the 2007 legislative session. Annual limits were established for how much the state will spend for services for people in three of the tiers. The limits are: Tier 1- no limit; Tier 2- \$55,000; Tier 3- \$35,000; and Tier 4- \$14,792.

The new Waiver system calls for people to be assigned to a tier based on how their needs match the established criteria. APD is currently determining to which tier each customer will be assigned. The services of most individuals will not be affected by their tier assignment. Some individuals will, however, have to reduce their current cost plans to remain within their tier limit.

Please do not reduce my med waiver services.

Each year, the number of individuals who can be added to the waiver depends upon several factors. Individuals are generally served in the order of the date on which they were added to the waitlist. The factors that affect enrollment include:

- Funding availability
- Legislative requirements
- People in crisis that have first priority

As a result of changes to the law during the legislative session, the agency introduced cost efficiencies to decrease the expected deficit. As these savings grow, the funds available will be used to provide services to those who are waiting for services. As funding becomes available, the agency will enroll people from the waitlist. To date, the agency has served individuals with a waitlist eligibility date of February 13, 2003. The agency will continue to evaluate the waitlist for the Developmental Disabilities Home and Community Based Service waiver to ensure it is a true reflection of those people waiting for APD services.

If you would like to find out your waitlist eligibility date, you are encouraged to contact your local APD office and request this information from your support coordinator.

My child is disabled and needs services, how long must we wait?

Each year, the number of individuals who can be added to the waiver depends upon several factors. Individuals are generally served in the order of the date on which they were added to the waitlist. The factors that affect enrollment include:

- Funding availability
- Legislative requirements
- People in crisis that have first priority

As a result of changes to the law during the legislative session, the agency introduced cost efficiencies to decrease the expected deficit. As these savings grow, the funds available will be used to provide services to those who are waiting for services. As funding becomes available, the agency will enroll people from the waitlist. To date, the agency has served individuals with a waitlist eligibility date of February 13, 2003. The agency will continue to evaluate the waitlist for the Developmental Disabilities Home and Community Based Service waiver to ensure it is a true reflection of those people waiting for APD services.

If you would like to find out your waitlist eligibility date, you are encouraged to contact your local APD office and request this information from your support coordinator.

How long do I have to wait until I get off this waitlist?

Each year, the number of individuals who can be added to the waiver depends upon several factors. Individuals are generally served in the order of the date on which they were added to the waitlist. The factors that affect enrollment include:

- Funding availability
- Legislative requirements
- People in crisis that have first priority

As a result of changes to the law during the legislative session, the agency introduced cost efficiencies to decrease the expected deficit. As these savings grow, the funds available will be used to provide services to those who are waiting for services. As funding becomes available, the agency will enroll people from the waitlist. To date, the agency has served individuals with a waitlist eligibility date of February 13, 2003. The agency will continue to evaluate the waitlist for the Developmental Disabilities Home and Community Based Service waiver to ensure it is a true reflection of those people waiting for APD services.

If you would like to find out your waitlist eligibility date, you are encouraged to contact your local APD office and request this information from your support coordinator.

Why are the needs of the disabled in Florida not prioritized? People First!

The mission of the Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD) is to support individuals with developmental disabilities in living, learning and working in their communities. APD is currently serving over 31,000 persons through the Developmental Disabilities Home and Community Based Services Waiver (DD-HCBS). For many years, the waiver has offered a wide array of services to people with developmental disabilities. The Medicaid waiver is a support to individuals and families. However, it is not meant to, nor is it able to meet every need of a person with a developmental disability. The natural support of families and community services are still the primary sources of support for that person.

During the 2007 Legislative Session, the Florida Legislature created four waivers for individuals who are receiving waiver services. The Legislature imposed annual limits on how much the state will spend for services for people in three of the waivers. The limits are: Tier 1- no limit; Tier 2- \$55,000; Tier 3- \$35,000; and Tier 4- \$14,792. In addition, the Legislature established the eligibility requirements for the Four Tier Waivers and has directed the agency to implement the new waivers in 2008.

The new Waiver system calls for people to be assigned to a tier based on how their needs match the established criteria. APD is currently determining to which tier each customer will be assigned. The services of most individuals will not be affected by their tier assignment. The state, however, may not be able to pay as much for services for some people and there may be service reductions.

Supporting persons with disabilities continues to be a top priority for our state and we look forward to enhancing these efforts with your support and input.

Have you ever lived in an institutional setting? Of course not! Have you ever worked in an institutional setting? Of course not! Why would everyone be happy to rename institutions Developmental Disabilities Centers, as if that changes the “pit of hell,” or the quality of care and resources? We spent two decades teaching people that they have rights and choices. You are setting the future. Please don't!

APD continues to support and provide a continuum of living situations ranging from

independent living to developmental disabilities centers. The type of living arrangement in which a person resides is chosen by the consumer or guardian.

How can people get involved with the Family Care Councils?

In each of the 14 APD areas, there is a local Family Care Council that meets monthly to share information with families, provide resources and materials as well as to provide the Agency with ideas and feedback on new initiatives. You may wish to attend their next meeting.

The Family Care Council also maintains a website that can be accessed at www.fccflorida.org and from there you can access the webpage of each local council. The statewide Family Care Council also maintains a toll free number where you can receive information specific to the councils, as well as general information about resources and services available in each community. The toll free number is 866-966-7226.

What kind of groups can help me better understand about disabilities besides The Family Café?

There are many such resources within Florida and the United States. The first resource that you may refer to is the APD website which is located at <http://apd.myflorida.com>.

The APD website provides an extensive list of resources and information with regard to waiver services and issues, lists of available providers of services, among other important information such as supported employment, supported living, personal care assistance, respite care and many others. The single resource that contains most of the information pertaining to APD's services is the "Yellow Notebook," Navigating the Developmental Disabilities Program: You're the Driver. You may find this resource at the website: <http://apd.myflorida.com/customers/notebook/>. The "Yellow Notebook" is updated from one year to the next, and is an invaluable reference guide to APD services.

In addition there are other organizations which you may contact for information, such as the Family Network on Disabilities found at <http://www.fndfl.org/> and the Family Care Council, located at <http://www.fccflorida.org/>.

How can we share our problems with receiving service with the Legislature?

A great resource for Legislative News and contacts is Florida's Online Sunshine website. This website provides information about Legislators in the Senate and the House: <http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Welcome/>.

Another resource is our Agency's Legislative Affairs website. The Legislative Affairs unit maintains a newsletter to help consumers stay up-to-date on the latest legislative issues affecting persons with developmental disabilities. You may find this information at: <http://apd.myflorida.com/legislative/>.

Help me to get more services. I need services from APD, help!

The Agency for Persons with Disabilities serves individuals with developmental disabilities as defined in Florida Statutes, Chapter 393. This includes individuals who have cerebral palsy, spina bifida, autism, mental retardation, Prader Willi Syndrome, and very young children who are at high risk for having a developmental disability.

If you have been diagnosed with a developmental disability as defined above, you should contact the local Agency for Persons with Disabilities office for more information about

applying for services. If you are already receiving services from the Agency, please contact your Support Coordinator to discuss options.

I would appreciate it if you would just one day put yourself in our shoes. The experience you would have would be unmanageable. Consider removing the tier system. Every family that has two homes and is on CDC should be investigated because some of them have Medicaid, SSI, etc. Granted the child should have the full Medicaid benefits.

As you may know, the four-tiered waiver system was established in law in the 2007 legislative session. We understand families are concerned about the tiered Waiver program and, to assist, the Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD) has additional information regarding the Four Tier Waivers on its website <http://apd.myflorida.com>.

Why do we not have more services for children? My daughter is 14. She has no dentist, her companion was taken away without notification and they did not pay the provider either. We were told to take companion hours and put them with PCA hours and I received a denial!

In your letter you mentioned dental services. The Medicaid Waiver does not cover Dental Services for children. This service may, however, be available to you under the Medicaid State Plan. Please contact your waiver support coordinator for assistance in accessing State Plan services. You may also wish to learn more about Florida Kidcare, our state's children's health insurance program for uninsured children under age 19 by accessing their website at www.floridakidcare.org.

You have also mentioned the loss of companion services without notification. If you were denied a service, you have due process rights to appeal such a decision. Again, please contact your waiver support coordinator for assistance.

I have been trying to get myself and my son on the waiver waiting list but I cannot seem to get anyone to take an application. Who can help?

Please contact your local APD area office to complete an application and to be determined eligible for the Agency for Persons with Disabilities. During the eligibility determination process, you may also request an eligibility determination for waiver services. If your son is determined eligible for both APD services and waiver services, your son's name will be added to the waitlist for waiver services.

I am an activity director for the developmentally disabled and I run into a problem with them not receiving enough money to do community outing trips due to needing one-on-one assistance. Is there any way we could change this?

In many cases, the activity or organization that you plan to visit will agree to a request for an accommodation, including allowing staff free admission. This process has been successful in the past, and would be appropriate for persons requiring any type of assistance regardless of the ratio.

As you know, in many cases the rates for one-to-one service provision are higher than rates of other staff-to-client ratios and the additional costs related to providing that staffing and service are the reason.

How will persons under age 21 be able to continue their Personal Care Assistance under the Medicaid state plan rather than the waiver? How will consumers be able to add additional PCA services and have them authorized? How will consumers under 21 on the CDC+ waiver be able to access their PCA funding to pay their current employees who are not Medicaid or Medicaid waiver providers?

Beginning July 2008, the Agency for Persons with Disabilities and the Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA) are transitioning Personal Care Assistant services for individuals under age 21 to the Medicaid State Plan from the Developmental Disabilities waiver. Both agencies are working together to prevent gaps in service provision during the transition. Information on the transition to individuals receiving services and their parents or guardians will be sent at a future date.

In order to ensure continuity in care, AHCA is expanding their provider capacity. They will be sending out information to Personal Care providers so that they may enroll as a provider within the Medicaid State Plan. AHCA contracts with KePRO (a Peer Review Organization) to prior authorize all Medicaid State Plan funded Personal Care. AHCA and KePRO will provide training to transitioning providers on submitting requests for prior authorization for the service.

The Agency for Persons with Disabilities is also working with AHCA to develop processes which will allow individuals enrolled in the Consumer Directed Care program to have consumer directed options with providers through the Medicaid State Plan.

What services will be available with the reductions in CDC+ funds?

Some CDC+ participants have expressed concerns regarding whether consumers who are assigned to Tier 4 (the Family and Supported Living Waiver) will have access to the full range of CDC+ services.

Please be assured that CDC+ participants who are assigned to Tier 4 will be able to utilize all CDC+ service codes in developing their purchasing plans. Although Tier assignments may reduce the total funds available in the consumer's CDC+ budget, they will not impact the range of services that may be purchased using the budget. CDC+ participants have the opportunity to reduce the impact of budget cuts through creative budgeting and negotiation. If we can be of further assistance with regard to CDC+, please do not hesitate to contact our CDC+ Customer Service staff toll-free at 1-866-761-7043.

What agency has authority to allocate state owned property or state funded developmental funds (or portions of them) for use for housing for disabled people?

The Department of Environmental Protection is the primary state agency that oversees the management of state lands. You may visit their website <http://www.dep.state.fl.us/lands/> or contact their Director at 850-245-2555.

I pay for Occupational Therapy and Speech Therapy out of pocket because I have to. Why can't you help? What good is APD?

If you are currently enrolled in the Developmental Disabilities Home and Community Based Waiver you may be eligible to receive these services if determined medically necessary. The Family & Supported Living (FSL) waiver, however, does not offer these services. Please contact your support coordinator to obtain more information on supports and services that may be available to you and how to access them.

Does the Governor care about individuals with disabilities? Why doesn't he show up at conventions like The Family Café and answer direct questions with direct answers? Stop cutting funding to med waiver support services and save billions in long-term support services.

Governor Crist attended the Family Café this year and signed legislation that will benefit persons with developmental and other disabilities. In addition, the Governor's recommended budget included just over \$60 million in additional funds for the Home and Community Based Services Waiver.

Funding decisions are also made by the Florida Legislature. I would suggest that you contact your local State Representatives and Senators. You can also become involved with local advocacy organizations such as the Family Care Councils. You can reach the Family Care Council Florida (FCCF) by calling 1-800-470-8101. Additional contact information, including local FCCF information, can be found at the following link: <http://www.fccflorida.org/auxiliary/contact.htm>.

Why cut med waiver support services? With earlier support we could and would save the state long term support service dollars. Why doesn't the Governor show up and answer direct questions with direct answers, or this is what we can expect from the Republican leadership?

Governor Crist attended the Family Café this year and signed legislation that will benefit persons with developmental and other disabilities. In addition, the Governor's recommended budget included just over \$60 million in additional funds for the Home and Community Based Services Wavier.

Funding decisions are also made by the Florida Legislature. You may wish to contact your local State Representatives and Senators. You can also become involved with local advocacy organizations such as the Family Care Councils. You can reach the Family Care Council Florida (FCCF) by calling 1-800-470-8101. Additional contact information, including local FCCF information, can be found at the following link: <http://www.fccflorida.org/auxiliary/contact.htm>.

Why when we look for alternatives are we directed to group home living or an ICF? How will this save the state money? Why is it that family care is not of any value to the state?

The Agency for Persons with Disabilities is committed to ensuring that the provision of services and supports to individuals with developmental disabilities will, to the greatest extent possible, enable those individuals to live and work in the environments of their choosing. This is not only our Agency's philosophy but is, in fact, the law. Section 393.062 of Florida Statutes states, in part, that ". . . the greatest priority shall be given to the development and implementation of community-based services that will enable individuals with developmental disabilities to achieve their greatest potential for independent and productive living, enable them to live in their own homes or in residences located in their own communities, and permit them to be diverted or removed from unnecessary institutional placement."

Please know that the Agency acknowledges and values the role that family care plays in the lives of persons with developmental disabilities. We fully recognize that the provision of such natural supports on an ongoing basis is essential in maintaining the health, safety, and welfare of thousands of Floridians every day. Therefore, I strongly encourage you to contact your waiver support coordinator or area APD office for additional suggestions for local

resources that may be available to allow you or your family member to continue to live and work as independently as possible for as long as possible.

I want to be independent and not lose my Medicaid and not burden my parents regarding my work status.

The first thing that you should know is that there are people and resources who want to help you to work as much as you would like without losing your benefits. One of these resources is the Florida Benefits Information Resource Network (FBIRN). FBIRN is composed of a diverse group of federal, state and local employees who have completed intensive training through the National Disability Institute. The objective of FBIRN is to assist people with disabilities in locating and utilizing professionals who are trained to assist people in effectively managing their benefits.

For a list of current members, you may go to the following website: <http://apd.myflorida.com/employment/fbirn.htm>.

The site has links to:

- The FBIRN brochure, which contains an excellent checklist of information that will help you to succeed in working with the Social Security Administration to ensure that you maintain your benefits
- Names and contact information of members of FBIRN who can assist you
- A brochure entitled “Disability Benefits & Work”, which contains brief information about various Social Security work incentives.

Another example of such a resource is the Work Incentive Planning and Assistance program or “WIPA” which is funded by Social Security Administration (SSA) and provides free counseling and assistance to persons receiving SSA benefits who wish to work but need help with applying work incentives and maintaining benefits.

Currently in Florida there are five WIPA programs. The SSA website that provides WIPA information is found at: <https://secure.ssa.gov/apps10/oesp/providers.nsf/bystate>.

Go to the website and click on the drop down box to FL for “Florida.” The WIPA’s located in Florida, along with other providers of assistance, are listed. You should contact the WIPA and the Community Work Incentive Coordinators (CWIC’s are the employees who work in the WIPA program offices) who are assigned to your region of the state.

Another resource available is the “Work Incentive Liaison” or “WIL.” The WIL’s are employees of the SSA, and they are located within SSA offices. Not every SSA office has a WIL on staff, but the WIL located nearest the recipient or beneficiary making the inquiry can be contacted to provide assistance.

Another point of contact is the Area Work Incentive Coordinator or “AWIC.” These are also employees of the SSA, and their offices can be located at the website below: <http://www.socialsecurity.gov/work/awiccontacts.html>.

Why don’t they have dentists that will accept the mentally disabled? Why is there such a long waiting list for the mentally disabled? It seems like the mentally disabled get treated badly. They are people with feelings and they can be smart.

Access to dental services continues to be a challenge for persons with disabilities in some areas. The local Agency for Persons with Disabilities office is recruiting providers for dental services in your county.

Each year, the number of individuals who can be added to the waiver depends upon several factors. The factors that affect enrollment include:

- Funding availability
- Legislative requirements
- People in crisis that have first priority

As a result of changes to the law during the 2006 legislative session, the agency introduced cost efficiencies to decrease the expected deficit and to demonstrate accountability and integrity in managing the waiver program within legislative funding. As these savings grow, the funds available will be used to provide services to those who are waiting for services.

My son is on a special formula called Elecare and it can only be ordered through a pharmacy. WIC provides a total of 9 cans per month. He requires 15 cans. The formula costs \$47.50 per 14 ounce can and only can be ordered in cases of 6 cans. I have been requesting that Medicaid assist us further with the difference but I have gotten nowhere. I just wonder if there is anything else I can do?

We contacted the Agency for Healthcare Administration, Medicaid office. They informed us that Elecare is a product that is available through the Medicaid State Plan under Durable Medical Equipment, for individuals under the age of 21. They may be able to provide for the additional cans that exceed what you receive from WIC. The product is covered under code HCPC B4161, and requires that claims be submitted with an invoice for pricing. For assistance with requesting Elecare, please contact the local Area Medicaid office by calling (727) 552-1191 or 1-800-299-4844.

Children's Medical Services is another program that might also be helpful in assisting you with obtaining the Elecare. For assistance, please contact (727) 893-2775.

I am a woman with cerebral palsy living on my own. I have been on the consumer directed care plus program (CDC+) since it was a pilot program. This program has given me a productive life. Now Maximus is trying to take all that away from me. I am in the process of appealing this decision in a hearing. What does Maximus have to do with services that have already been approved for consumers on CDC+ since the pilot program over 5 years ago?

First, we are very pleased to learn that the CDC+ program has supported enhancement of your quality of life. This program offers people with disabilities the opportunity to access more individualized and cost-effective services. Your satisfaction with the program is also a result of your successful management of your budget and we congratulate you for this achievement.

With regard to your budget reductions, it is important to recognize that the CDC+ budget is directly based on the current approved Developmental Disabilities (DD) Waiver cost plan, and any changes to the DD Waiver cost plan directly impact the CDC+ budget. The CDC+ budget is comprised of the current approved DD Waiver budget minus the discount rate and administrative fee (currently 8% for the discount rate and 4% up to a maximum of \$160.00 monthly for the administrative fee).

We have researched your specific cost plan and found that Maximus determined that the Specialized Mental Health services as well as the additional units of hourly In Home Support Services requested were not medically necessary. Additionally, Maximus found that some of the Consumable Medical Supplies (CMS) requested are specifically excluded from being funded by the Waiver, such as Centrum and Hypotears. The denial of some requested CMS items reduced the CMS allocation on the Waiver cost plan from the requested \$216.00 to

\$180.00 monthly. As you are probably aware, however, CDC+ budget dollars may be used to purchase these items upon approval by your Area Office, as CDC+ purchases are not limited to approved Waiver goods and services.

An additional source of recent reductions for participants in the Developmental Disabilities (DD) waiver is a legislative mandate to reduce provider reimbursements for many services by 7.21%, and to set the Personal Care Assistance rate at \$15.00. This was necessary due to a shortfall in state revenues.

The shortfall in revenues has required reductions in a variety of state services including the APD service continuum. We believe that the flexibility and freedom of the CDC+ program offers participants the opportunity to make the most of available dollars, though we do recognize that this is a difficult time for DD Waiver participants, including those who participate in the CDC+ program. If we can be of further assistance with regard to CDC+ issues, please do not hesitate to contact our CDC+ Customer Service staff toll-free at 1-866-761-7043.

When do you think the waiting list will totally be served? It is currently at 22,249.

Each year, the number of individuals who can be added to the waiver depends upon several factors. Individuals are generally served in the order of the date on which they were added to the waitlist. The factors that affect enrollment include:

- Funding availability
- Legislative requirements
- People in crisis that have first priority

As a result of changes to the law during the legislative session, the agency introduced cost efficiencies to decrease the expected deficit. As these savings grow, the funds available will be used to provide services to those who are waiting for services. As funding becomes available, the agency will enroll people from the waitlist. To date, the agency has served individuals with a waitlist eligibility date of February 13, 2003. The agency will continue to evaluate the waitlist for the Developmental Disabilities Home and Community Based Service waiver to ensure it is a true reflection of those people waiting for APD services.

If you would like to find out your waitlist eligibility date, you are encouraged to contact your local APD office and request this information from your support coordinator.

When will parents be included more inclusively in committees, councils, and task forces, not just “professional parents” but parents who “live the life” every single day?

The Agency for Persons with Disabilities considers families essential to supporting individuals with developmental disabilities. Families and parents are almost always the main natural support system for the individual with a disability; and as such, are the representatives of the concerns of the individual with a disability as well as the concerns of all who support that individual. All parents, their perspectives and contributions are valued by the APD.

APD is especially interested in having parents and family members from a variety of life situations and backgrounds participate on committees, councils, task forces, etc. If you have not been in touch with your local area APD office to let them know you want to participate in local or statewide committees, projects and initiatives, please do that as soon as possible. You can contact your area APD office or go to the APD website at <http://apd.myflorida.com>. On the APD web site there are also links to other disability-related organizations that historically want to hear from parents and families of individuals with disabilities.

APD works specifically with families through the statewide Family Care Councils (<http://www.fccflorida.org>) where parents and families assist APD with policy development, implementation of policy, needed legislation and in suggesting and making any change that will best support individuals with disabilities. Anyone can participate with a Family Care Council and this is a great first step.

If you want to be heard or included as a participant then you are encouraged to let that fact be known; become a volunteer or get involved with the local Family Care Council or your local school PTA, community civic organizations, faith based groups, or community recreation programs, just to name a few. There is always a need for more parent and family participation.

Why is it so hard for me to get some help to pay for speech?

In general, to receive speech therapy services a person must be at least 21 years old and must have a prescription and assessment indicating the need for speech therapy. You or your support coordinator can obtain additional information on the handbook requirements for this or other services by accessing the following website: http://www.apshealthcare.com/publicprograms/florida/fl_support_coordinators.htm.

Department of Children and Families

How do I get Mental Health Services for my child? The doctor wants her to take many drugs, but they seem so harsh. What is NAMI and can they help? Are there any parent groups out there that I can talk to about the effects they have on children?

Thank you for your question. You may contact the local Substance Abuse and Mental Health Program Office in your area and ask for the Children's Mental Health Specialist in that office. The specialist can tell you about services and supports that are available in your area. You can find the number for your local Department of Children and Families office at <http://www.dcf.state.fl.us/admin/dcfcontacts.shtml> or in your local directory.

NAMI is for the National Alliance on Mental Illness. It is a national organization with chapters in all states, including Florida, made up of people diagnosed with mental illness and their families. The national NAMI website can be found at www.nami.org. NAMI can be a great source of information and support.

In addition to NAMI, the Federation of Families and other groups are a source of information, support and advice. My Florida Web is a good source of information if no family organizations are listed in your area directory: <http://flweb211.myflorida.com/>.

Why is it if you get food stamps it effects how much you get in SSI?

The receipt of food stamp benefits does not affect the amount of Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Food stamp benefits are public assistance and are not counted as income in the determination of eligibility for any other assistance programs. The Social Security Administration website at <http://www.ssa.gov/> is an excellent resource for questions regarding SSI.

How do I adopt a child with a disability? I see the need, and need resources. Why doesn't your agency promote this form of adoption?

Thank you for your interest in adoption and especially in adopting a child or children with disabilities. Both Governor Crist and The Department of Children and Families are very much interested in promoting adoption. Web sites sponsored by the Governor's Office and by the Department of Children and Families are below. Please review these sites for information about the general adoption process as well as information about children available for adoption and information about resources to support families who adopt.

- <http://www.adoptflorida.org/>
- <http://www.dcf.state.fl.us/adoption/>
- <http://www.adoptflorida.com/information-center.htm>

If you would like more information about adoption of children with special needs, please contact the Office of Family Safety at the Department of Children and Families in Tallahassee at 850-922-6030. They will be able to connect you with adoption staff in your local community to assist you.

We appreciate your inquiry and wish you much success.

Mental Health issues are not considered a disability issue? Why not? Doesn't having a mental health condition qualify you for services? It does in the school I go to.

Mental health issues may indeed be classified as a disability, although the majority of individuals living with mental illness do not have signs or symptoms that prevent them from participating fully in their chosen occupations. Individuals who are unable to participate fully without accommodations or who meet Social Security Administration criteria for disability may indeed be classified as disabled. In Florida, the Division of Disability Determinations in the Department of Health is responsible for making decisions regarding the medical eligibility of Florida citizens applying for benefits under federal disability and state Medicaid programs. For further information, you may contact the Division of Disability Determinations at (850) 488-3330 or visit the Department of Health website at www.doh.state.fl.us.

We need to have more educational session on mental health. Most of us have a dual diagnosis and sometimes need intensive mental health services. Mental health services are not offered as readily as they should be.

Your comments have been shared with Family Café organizers regarding the need for more presentations about mental health issues. It can often be difficult to access services. Your family doctor is a good place to start.

Again, what is PBS? How can we access this service? I need to learn about eligibility. I missed your session. Can you elaborate?

Positive Behavior Support (PBS) is a school-based service that provides an effective, evidence-based alternative to traditional discipline, including school suspension and expulsion. PBS interventions can be designed for entire schools, classrooms, or individuals. The Florida Mental Health Institute at the University of South Florida is home to Florida's Positive Behavioral Support Project. Their website can be found at http://flpbs.fmhi.usf.edu/whatispbs_def.asp.

In addition, a number of schools in Florida have already incorporated this program. Please check with your local school board for availability.

I would like to hear more about families and their stories and successes about how they cope with mental health and their families. It is never discussed. Please have more sessions on mental health needs for those of us of all ages.

Your comments have been shared with Family Café organizers regarding the need for more sessions on mental health. Please visit the Department of Children and Families Mental Health Transformation at <http://www.dcf.state.fl.us/mentalhealth/mhtransform/index.shtml> for information and success stories. Local and national NAMI organizations (www.nami.org) and Federation of Families (www.ffcmh.org) are additional sources of information and links to families in your area.

My high school friend was just diagnosed as bi-polar. His family says it is a death sentence. I thought you could just take medications and be okay. His dad says he cannot finish college now. I am confused. Is mental health the silent killer? What does this mean to my friend? His family is on suicide watch. It cannot be this bad! What can I do? We were close friends and on the football team together and now his life is over. What the heck!!! It is 2008; don't we have pills for this? He is only 21. My sister has a disability that she functions well with everyday. Sure it is a struggle, but suicide?

Thank you for your questions about Bipolar disorder, also known as manic depression. Bipolar disorder is a medical illness that causes extreme shifts in mood, energy, and functioning. These changes may be subtle or dramatic and typically vary greatly over the course of a person's life as well as among individuals. Over 10 million people in America have bipolar disorder. Bipolar disorder is generally a life-long condition with recurring episodes of elevated mood and depression that can last from days to months.

While there is no cure for bipolar disorder, it is a treatable and manageable illness. Most people can achieve an optimal level of wellness. Medication is an essential part of successful treatment. In addition, psychosocial therapy is important to help people understand the illness and to internalize skills to cope with the stresses that can trigger episodes.

Suicide is a serious concern that should not be taken lightly. It sounds like your friend's family is taking necessary precautions. If someone is thinking about suicide, they need immediate help from a mental health professional. A resource such as 1-800-273-TALK can also be very helpful to a person thinking about suicide, as well as to their family and friends.

For people who are already receiving psychiatric treatment, family education may be an effective approach to help family members better understand the issues that their loved one is experiencing. Education can also help to increase understanding and help the family learn how to cope with a psychiatric illness.

For more information about mental illness and suicide prevention, go to <http://www.nami.org> and <http://www.suicidology.org/>.

Department of Education

Accessibility

Why can't state laws require playground equipment to be compliant with the American with Disabilities Act (ADA)? We received new equipment but none was ADA-compliant for students with disabilities.

Florida Statute 1000.05, cited as the Florida Educational Equity Act, prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability. This statute contains all of the compliance requirements of the Americans with Disability Act. If there are concerns regarding specific playground areas or if a student is not able to access the playground due to his or her disability, individuals should contact the school principal where the playground is located as well as the local district administrator in charge of facility services.

Accommodations

Can computers be used for the reading and math portions of the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test® (FCAT) for students receiving exceptional student education (ESE) services?

Although assistive technology may be used to provide alternate presentation formats or alternate ways of responding, it is important for parents and students to understand that the different standardized tests have allowable and non-allowable accommodations. Therefore, the test administration manual or the test publisher should be consulted. Any time accommodations that are not allowable on the FCAT are being allowed in the classroom, parents must be informed. For example, in the area of reading, the FCAT does allow for directions to be given orally using a script provided in the test administration manual. However, students are expected to read the test passages and questions for the FCAT reading, mathematics, and science items independently and interpret illustrations and graphics. The prompt (topic) for the FCAT writing test is provided in writing. Passages and questions used in the FCAT reading tests must be read by the student through visual or tactile means and may not be signed, read aloud, or communicated through text-to-speech technology.

What, if any, training do general education teachers receive in implementing accommodations in the classroom?

Florida's Teacher Certification Examination currently includes items related to the instructional needs of exceptional students. Most teacher training programs (if not all) in Florida include coursework that addresses the basics of ESE. Additionally, the Department of Education (DOE) supports a number of initiatives to assist schools and school districts to implement inclusive educational practices, including accommodations for students with disabilities. These include fiscal as well as human resources designed to provide professional development, learning opportunities, and information to educators, families, and community members. Additional information on these initiatives can be found at the following Web sites:

Florida Inclusion Network (FIN)—www.floridainclusionnetwork.com

Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resources System (FLDRS)—<http://www.fdlrs.org>

Coordinating Existing Networks to Reach All Learners (Project CENTRAL)—<http://projectcentral.ucf.edu>

Accommodations and Modifications for Students with Disabilities Project—<http://www.cpt.fsu.edu/ese>

Florida's Positive Behavioral Support Project—<http://flpbs.fmhi.usf.edu>

Alternate Assessment

What is being done to improve education and evaluations that allow students with autism to demonstrate what they know? My concern is the alternative assessment does not accurately measure the ability of a child with autism who is language impaired but highly intelligent. Assistive technology, evaluations, and many sources of information based on current research prove that these individuals have the ability to learn far beyond the education system's ability to teach.

There are currently several changes under way to facilitate the education of all students with disabilities and allow them to demonstrate what they know. In January 2006, the State Board of Education (SBE) adopted a six-year cycle for regular review and revision of all K–12 content standards. Additionally, this schedule included the alignment of the new standards with assessments, instructional materials, professional development, and teacher licensure exams for a fully integrated culture of instruction and assessment. The SBE first approved the Sunshine State Standards (SSS) in 1996 as a means of identifying academic expectations for student achievement in Florida. As the achievement of Florida students began to increase over time, it was recognized that the level of rigor of the 1996 standards was inadequate to address the increased levels of achievement registered by our students.

Additionally, as part of the revision to the SSS, access points for students with significant cognitive disabilities have been developed. Access points are expectations written for these students to enable them to access the general education curriculum at appropriate levels. Embedded in the SSS, access points reflect the core intent of the standards with reduced levels of complexity. The three levels of complexity include participatory, supported, and independent.

The student's individual educational plan (IEP) team is responsible for making the determination as to which students will be working on the access points and taking the Florida Alternate Assessment and which students will be taking the FCAT. Only students with significant cognitive disabilities who are working toward a special diploma will be working toward meeting the access points and taking the alternate assessment. Mastery of the access points is measured through the alternate assessments.

Although accommodations are not new strategies, it is important to remember, for those students with disabilities taking the FCAT, accommodations that allow the student with a disability to demonstrate what they know are permitted during testing. Accommodations are changes in how testing is provided. Accommodations do not change the content of what is being tested. The FCAT does not allow changes in the content that is tested. Accommodations may be provided in five general areas: presentation, response, setting, scheduling, and assistive technology.

Additional information on accommodations can be found at the DOE's Web site at <http://www.fldoe.org/ese/pub-home.asp>.

Asperger's Syndrome Resources

Can you provide resources for individuals diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome?

Below is a list of some resources that can be found on the Internet simply by typing in "Asperger's syndrome." This is not an all-inclusive list but many of the Web sites below provide links to other resources, including resources in Florida:

Centers for Autism and Related Disabilities (CARD) focuses on providing communities, organizations, agencies, service providers, and families with the knowledge and skills to support children and adults in early intervention, school, community, work, and home settings. CARD centers address issues that impact individuals across the life span. For more information, visit <http://card-usf.fmhi.usf.edu/>.

The Partnership for Effective Programs for Students with Autism (PEPSA) is funded by the DOE Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services (BEES) and is designed to provide training and technical assistance to teachers or a school program that wishes to enhance the educational program for students with autism spectrum disorder. Each teacher or school will be matched to a CARD professional who will mentor the teacher or school staff member in developing a plan for implementing innovative and effective practices within educational programs for students with autism. The CARD partner will provide support, resources, technical assistance, and training that is specific to the needs identified by the teacher or school. Additional information can be found at <http://doepartnership.usf.edu/serviceareas.asp>.

More Advanced Individuals with Autism, Asperger's Syndrome, and Pervasive Developmental Disorders (MAAP) is a non-profit organization dedicated to providing information and advice to families of more advanced individuals with autism spectrum disorder, Asperger's syndrome, and pervasive developmental disorder (PDD). Additional information about MAAPS and Florida resources can be found at <http://www.maapservices.org/>.

Autism Society of America (ASA), a national grassroots autism organization, exists to improve the lives of all affected by autism. ASA does this by increasing public awareness about the day-to-day issues faced by people on the spectrum, advocating for appropriate services for individuals across the lifespan, and providing the latest information regarding treatment, education, research, and advocacy. Additional information about ASA and local chapters can be found at <http://www.autism-society.org/site/PageServer>.

Online Asperger's Syndrome Information and Support (OASIS) is another web site with information and links to other resources. Additional information about OASIS can be found at <http://www.udel.edu/bkirby/asperger/>.

Why aren't there more schools in Florida that are specifically geared toward helping children with autism and helping them overcome their condition?

The cornerstone for specially designed instruction, supplementary aids, and services for students with disabilities is the IEP. Public schools offer programs based on the individual needs of the student based on his/her IEP. The purpose of the IEP is to determine the needs of the student as they are related to his/her ability to access the general education curriculum and progress toward his/her IEP goals. Parents, students, ESE teachers, regular education teachers, and any others who have knowledge of the student develop the IEP collaboratively.

Special education class size and configuration is a district-level decision. ESE directors work with local principals and administrative school district staff to provide the needed services based on the needs of the students with disabilities assigned to that school, to include provision of services in the most appropriate and least restrictive environment. Parents may provide their input into staffing decisions through participation in school, district, and other advisory committees.

Additionally, as a parent, you may want to become involved in local or national advocacy groups concerning autism, such as those mentioned in the answer to the previous question.

Braille Services

My school says my daughter, who is 8 years of age and legally blind, is not in need of braille services. They want her to use a “spectacle” to assist her to read. She has a genetic disorder that will render her totally blind in her late teens or twenties. Why won’t they teach her braille now when it would be easier to learn? Learning both options is not a bad thing. She wants to learn.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and Florida State Board of Education rules indicate that, when developing the IEP of a student who is blind or visually impaired, the IEP team must consider the use of braille as a learning medium. Determinations on whether a student will learn braille are made based on the functional vision assessment and learning media assessment. The team must also consider the student's current reading level as well as future reading needs.

If the parent is still unable to resolve their concerns, he or she may contact the district's ESE office. Many school districts have procedures in place to assist families in resolving disputes.

In addition, parents may contact the BEESS by telephone at (850) 245-0476 to discuss the following administrative remedies: mediation, state complaints, and due process hearing requests. Additional information on dispute resolution processes can be found at <http://www.fldoe.org/ese/resolution.asp>.

Disability History and Awareness Curriculum

How are you going to supply a curriculum for Senate Bill 856 now that it has passed?

Senate Bill 856, which passed in 2008, created a new section in law, section 1003.4205, Florida Statutes (F.S.), Disability History and Awareness Instruction. Based on this new statute, district school boards will be required to designate the first two weeks in October each year as “Disability History and Awareness Weeks.” During these two weeks, district school boards may provide disability history and awareness instruction in all K–12 public schools.

The purpose of the instruction is to expand students' knowledge, understanding, and awareness of individuals with disabilities, the history of disability, and the disability rights movement. It is recommended that the instruction be integrated into the existing school curriculum. Qualified school personnel or knowledgeable guest speakers may deliver instruction with a focus on including individuals with disabilities.

Currently, BEESS is researching various resources to assist school districts with providing disability history and awareness instruction to their students. These resources will be posted on the DOE Web site at <http://www.fldoe.org/ese/linkhome.asp>.

Dispute Resolution

The session on dispute resolution was wonderful and helpful! Who do you go to when you have troubles with your IEP? When they do not supply the services on your IEP or try to take away services? Who can I get to help when local people will not return my calls?

Parents and school districts are encouraged to work together to resolve issues regarding a student's ESE needs. When concerns or disagreements regarding a student's exceptional educational needs arise, it is helpful for the parent to immediately speak with the student's teacher, guidance counselor, staffing specialist, or school principal.

If the parent is still unable to resolve their concerns, he or she may contact the district's ESE office. Many school districts have procedures in place to assist families in resolving disputes.

In addition, parents may contact the BEESS by telephone at (850) 245-0476 to discuss the following administrative remedies: mediation, state complaints, and due process hearing requests. By calling this number you may speak to Ms. Howell who will be happy to send the handouts provided during the meeting. Additional information on dispute resolution processes can be found at <http://www.fldoe.org/ease/resolution.asp>.

When will there be legal help to defend our children's rights against the schools?

There are currently several potential sources of legal assistance in Florida. The list below is not all-inclusive but provides information on some of the potential resources available.

Florida Bar Lawyer Referral Service (LRS) provides referrals to attorneys who will conduct an initial one-half hour office consultation for \$25. LRS also has established low fee, elderly, AIDS law, and Disability Law Panels for clients in need. Additional information concerning LRS can be found at <http://www.floridabar.org/tfb/flabarwe.nsf> or by calling (800) 342-8011.

Advocacy Center for Persons with Disabilities, Inc. is a non-profit organization providing protection and advocacy services in the state of Florida. Additional information about the Advocacy Center can be found at <http://www.advocacycenter.org/index.html> or by calling toll-free: (800) 342-0823 or TDD: (800) 346-4127.

The Children's Advocacy Center represents children in foster care, juvenile delinquency, health care, special education, disability, social security, and criminal law cases. Additional information can be found at http://www.law.fsu.edu/academic_programs/jd_program/cac/index.html or by contacting the Florida State College of Law, 425 West Jefferson Street, Tallahassee, Florida 32306-1601 or by telephone at (850) 644-9928.

Southern Legal Counsel, Inc. (SLC) is a not-for-profit public interest law firm. Additional information about SLC can be found at <http://www.southernlegal.org/> or by calling (352) 271-8890.

Statewide Advocacy Network on Disability (STAND) is a not-for-profit organization based in Florida. Additional information on STAND can be found at <http://www.standadvocates.org/index.html> or by calling (813) 258-5700.

Electives

How do I get to play in the band at school? I have a disability and am in the ESE special classes. I can play the clarinet well.

If you are interested in being in the band, you need to talk with your teacher or your high school band instructor to learn the process for enrolling in band. Being in ESE classes or having a disability does not exclude you from general education classes or extracurricular

activities. Although high school band may have some entrance criteria, you may discuss this with the band instructor.

Why don't the schools offer sex education classes in ESE classrooms?

It is possible that instruction in this area is being delivered by the ESE teacher and is incorporated into a science, social skills, life management, and/or health related course. All students, except those seeking a special diploma, are required to take a ½ credit class in life management skills before graduation. If you have not already done so, we recommend you ask your child's teacher if this topic is being covered in any of their subjects.

Evaluations/Eligibility

Is it appropriate to delay providing a service for a child with a disability until they are a certain age or grade? Why does it take so long to get school-based services? It took us nine months or longer to get an evaluation for services.

No, it is not appropriate to delay providing a service for a child with a disability until they are a certain age or grade. When a student is having difficulty learning, the school's problem-solving team may suggest specific teaching strategies or intervention programs targeted to the student's needs at increasing levels of intensity. You would be able to see the results as the school collects and reports how the student responds to the interventions being implemented. Some students may have a progress-monitoring plan (PMP) that provides information about the effect of the interventions being implemented by the school. You may want to use the PMP as a tool for discussing your child's needs with the teachers and how they might best be met through the instruction and intervention process.

Public schools are required to conduct individual evaluations free of charge to you. To clarify the usual process for an evaluation through the public school system, an individual evaluation is a way of collecting information about a student's learning needs, strengths, problems, and interests. It is used to make decisions about whether a child has a disability and is eligible for any special programs, including the Section 504 plan or ESE services.

After the evaluations are completed and the information is reviewed, the school district will hold a meeting called an eligibility staffing. The parents and the rest of the team at the eligibility staffing discuss the information collected about the student. The team then determines whether the student is eligible for any special programs, including ESE services. To receive ESE services, the child must meet the criteria listed in Florida State Board of Education rules, which can be found at <https://www.flrules.org/gateway/ChapterHome.asp?Chapter=6A-6>. If a student meets eligibility requirements, then an IEP is developed to meet the student's needs.

This process is required within a 60-school-day timeframe once the written parental consent to conduct an evaluation is received. Additional information regarding the eligibility process for an ESE program may be located at the following websites:

Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services—<http://www.fldoe.org/ese/>

Summary of Procedural Safeguards—<http://www.fldoe.org/ese/pdf/procedural.pdf>

For Parents of Students with Disabilities—<http://www.fldoe.org/ese/pdf/pis3412a.pdf>

What Is ESE for Students with Disabilities—<http://www.fldoe.org/ese/pdf/what-ese.pdf>

When will our schools be held accountable when they refuse to evaluate our children and they are later diagnosed with autism? We sent a letter signed by our doctor to our child's school and they still refused to test her. It took five years to get the school to evaluate our child.

A school district may refuse to conduct an initial evaluation if the school and teacher believe the student's learning is not a concern. An evaluation must be conducted when the district suspects that the student has a disability and needs special education and related services. When a school district refuses a parent's request for evaluation, the parent must be notified in writing, including a description of the refused activity, an explanation of the reason(s) the district refused to evaluate the child, a statement that the parents have protection under the procedural safeguards of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The means by which the parent may obtain a description of those safeguards, sources to contact to obtain assistance in understanding the law, a description of any other options considered, and other factors relevant to the district's decision must be provided to the parent.

A parent who feels that the school district inappropriately denied the child an evaluation may request mediation, file a state complaint (within one year of the district's refusal to evaluate), or request a due process hearing (within two years of the district's refusal to evaluate). You may find additional information at the Bureau website <http://fldoe.org/ese>.

Can you provide me with the criteria for eligibility for ESE programs for students with Asperger's syndrome and for the Medicaid Waiver? It is my understanding that DOE recognizes five criteria but the Medicaid Waiver program does not.

Section 6A-6.03023, Florida Administrative Code (FAC.), provides the definition and eligibility requirements for special programs for students who are autistic. It states:

(1) Definition. Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Autism Spectrum Disorder is defined to be a range of pervasive developmental disorders that adversely affects a student's functioning and results in the need for specially designed instruction and related services. Autism Spectrum Disorder is characterized by an uneven developmental profile and a pattern of qualitative impairments in social interaction, communication, and the presence of restricted repetitive, and/or stereotyped patterns of behavior, interests, or activities. These characteristics may manifest in a variety of combinations and range from mild to severe. Autism Spectrum Disorder may include Autistic Disorder, Pervasive Developmental Disorder Not Otherwise Specified, Aspergers Syndrome, or other related pervasive developmental disorders.

(2) Activities prior to referral. Prior to referral for evaluation the requirements in subsections 6A-6.0331 (1)-(3), F.A.C., must be met.

(3) Evaluation. In addition to the procedures identified in subsection 6A-6.0331 (4), F.A.C., the evaluation must also include the procedures identified in the district's Policies and Procedures for the Provision of Specially Designed Instruction and Related Services for Exceptional Students as required by Rule 6A-6.03411, F.A.C.

(4) Criteria for eligibility. A student with Autism Spectrum Disorder is eligible for exceptional student education if all of the following criteria are met:

(a) Evidence of all of the following:

1. Uneven developmental profile as evidenced by inconsistencies across or within the domains of language, social interaction, adaptive behavior, and/or cognitive skills; and

2. Impairment in social interaction as evidenced by delayed, absent, or atypical ability to relate to people or the environment; and
 3. Impairment in verbal and/or nonverbal language or social communication skills, and
 4. Restricted repetitive, and/or stereotyped patterns of behavior, interests, or activities; and
- (b) The student needs special education as defined in paragraph 6A-6.03411(1)(c), F.A.C. For information and clarification about the criteria for the Medicaid Waiver program, contact the Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD) at (866) 273-2273 or e-mail the director of APD at [HYPERLINK "mailto:APD_Director@apd.state.fl.us"](mailto:APD_Director@apd.state.fl.us) APD_Director@apd.state.fl.us.

Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test® (FCAT)

Why do we still use the FCAT? It does not work for everyone!

Federal laws, like the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act and the IDEA, require that students with disabilities participate in statewide testing programs and be afforded appropriate accommodations in instruction and assessment.

Students with disabilities who do not participate in the statewide testing program must be assessed by the Florida Alternate Assessment. The decision to exclude a student with disabilities from taking the FCAT is made by the IEP team based on the guidelines in Rule 6A-1.0943, FAC. Only those students who meet both of the following criteria are exempt:

- Students whose demonstrated cognitive ability prevents them from completing the required coursework and achieving the SSS
- Students who require extensive direct instruction to accomplish and transfer skills and competencies needed for domestic, community living, leisure, and vocational activities

Why can't our state switch from the FCAT to subject tests? I am going into the 11th grade, but last year on the FCAT math we had to test on geometry. I took my geometry class in the 8th grade. I am so far ahead in my math classes that I did not take a class last year. Why are we being tested on things that may not be challenging or on grade level: if we have a 9th grader taking calculus, should they have to be tested on Algebra I? Shouldn't a senior in intensive math have to take a test on pre-calculus? Please explain why we haven't switched to a better system of determining how much one has learned.

The FCAT measures knowledge and skills from the SSS, the general curriculum adopted by the State of Florida. Designed by teachers, the SSS tell what Florida students should know and be able to do at each grade level. The FCAT contains tests for measuring students' knowledge of selected benchmarks in reading, writing, mathematics, and science from the SSS.

As you are taking higher-level courses, at least in the mathematics area, you may be interested in taking advance placement subject exams. You can find out more about advance placement exams by talking with your guidance counselor and researching the information at the College Board website at <http://www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/ap/about.html>.

I understand why we have FCAT. It is there to make sure teachers are teaching and students are learning. I also understand it would be better if FCAT tested on just life skills like counting money, and how to manage a banking account.

The FCAT measures knowledge and skills from the SSS, the general curriculum adopted by the State of Florida. Designed by teachers, the SSS tell what Florida students should know and be able to do at each grade level. The FCAT contains tests for measuring students' knowledge of selected benchmarks in reading, writing, mathematics, and science from the SSS. Based on the broad knowledge needed for today's workforce, the SSS and the FCAT cannot focus just on activities of daily living.

Additional information about the SSS and FCAT can be found at DOE's website at <http://etc.usf.edu/flstandards/index.html> and <http://fcats.fldoe.org/default.asp>.

When will FCAT rules change so they are not used to hurt students and become a tool to help them?

The FCAT measures student achievement of SSS. The FCAT includes a variety of item types and assesses high-level, challenging standards appropriate for the student's grade level. In general, students are required to pass both Reading and Math portions of the test before graduating from high school with a standard diploma. Accommodations may be provided in five general areas: presentation, response, setting, scheduling, and use of assistive technology.

Decisions about accommodations are made during a student's IEP or 504 plan team meeting. Students eligible for ESE programs have IEP's. Students who are not in the ESE program but qualify as students with a disability under Section 504 have 504 plans. The purpose of the IEP or 504 plan is to determine the needs of the student as related to his/her ability to access the general education curriculum. The IEP and the 504 plan are developed collaboratively by the parent, the student, the student's teachers, and any others who have knowledge of the student. A student's IEP or 504 plan should clearly spell out the types of accommodations, if any, to be used in the classroom and in testing situations, including the FCAT. It is important to note that accommodations on the FCAT should be based on the student's performance on similar tasks in the classroom. If your IEP or 504 plan does not indicate any accommodations, we encourage you and your parents to request that your IEP or 504 team be reconvened to discuss the accommodation needs you may have.

For some students with disabilities, the IEP team may determine the FCAT is not an accurate assessment of their abilities even with allowable accommodations. In these situations, there is a process to waive the graduation requirement for a passing score. For the FCAT score requirement to be waived, the IEP team must meet during the student's senior year to determine whether the FCAT can accurately measure the student's abilities, taking into consideration allowable accommodations. To be considered for a waiver, there are several other requirements the student must meet.

Additional information on accommodations and the waiver can be found at:

- **Planning FCAT Accommodations for Students with Disabilities—**
<http://www.fldoe.org/ease/fcat/fcat-tea.pdf>
- **The IEP Team's Guide to FCAT Accommodations—**
<http://www.fldoe.org/ease/pdf/fcatteam.pdf>
- **Accommodations and Modifications for Students with Disabilities—**
<http://www.fldoe.org/ease/pdf/ac-mod-parents.pdf>

- **Waiver of the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) Graduation Requirement for Students with Disabilities**—<http://info.fldoe.org/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-2817/k122005-20a.pdf>

In addition to accommodations, recent changes to the SSS have incorporated access points to facilitate access to the general education curriculum for students with significant cognitive disabilities.

For 10th graders who do not pass both parts of FCAT but demonstrate proficiency on other assessments and have good grades, what types of activities meet the burden of intensive remediation to qualify for a waiver at graduation?

Currently, the law is not prescriptive regarding the type of intensive remediation a student must participate in to be eligible for the FCAT waiver. Therefore, the remediation efforts should be based on the individual needs of the student with disabilities as determined by the IEP team. The IEP team should determine the specific skills, benchmarks, and/or standards that the student must master to achieve a passing score on the FCAT. Those specific areas of need would then be reflected in the annual goals and short-term objectives or benchmarks, as well as the description of services to be provided to the student. Additionally, the IEP team should take into consideration whether the student needs a different, targeted program, rather than simply repeating the previous year's program.

Financial Aid

People with intellectual disabilities should have the same opportunity to attend colleges and universities, live in dorms, audit classes, and apply for financial aid to do so. Right now they are not allowed to get the financial aid.

The Higher Opportunity Education Act was reauthorized and signed into law on August 14, 2008. Provisions impacting students with disabilities include the following:

- Permits students with certain intellectual disabilities to receive Pell Grants, Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant Program (FSEOG), and Federal Work Study opportunities
- Creates a new program to expand the number of postsecondary programs for students with intellectual disabilities
- Supports model demonstration projects to make college course materials more accessible for students with print disabilities
- Establishes a National Technical Assistance Center at the Department of Education to support all efforts to enhance the participation of students with disabilities in higher education

More postsecondary education opportunities are becoming available for students with disabilities. There is even a website, <http://www.ThinkCollege.net>, which includes a searchable database of postsecondary education programs that support youth with intellectual disabilities.

There are some additional initiatives to financially support postsecondary education opportunities for students with intellectual opportunities. These initiatives include:

Dual enrollment programs: Some school districts offer opportunities for dual enrollment at a college campus program for their students with disabilities who are 18 to 21 years of age. These programs are funded using IDEA or local school district funds. Additionally, some of the

higher education institutions can waive tuition in these dual enrollment programs. Additional information in the Department of Education's technical assistance paper, "Serving Students with Disabilities Ages 18 to 21," located at DOE website <http://www.fldoe.org/ese/pdf/y2006-4.pdf>.

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR): If the student's coursework is directly related to accessing employment, state VR funds may be used.

Other rehabilitation organizations: The state developmental disability program may be able to provide some funding to assist a student with intellectual disabilities to access postsecondary education programs.

Scholarships: Foundations or organizations can give scholarships to students enrolling in a postsecondary education program regardless of their financial or disability status, providing the student meets other requirements.

AmeriCorps programs: Funded by the Corporation for National and Community Services, these programs provide an education award or stipend to participants who volunteer for one or two years.

Plans for Achieving Self-Support (PASS Plans): PASS Plans were developed by the Social Security Administration as an incentive to encourage individuals who receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Supplemental Security Disability Income (SSDI) to enter the workforce. This plan allows an individual to work and save money without being penalized with a deduction from their SSI or SSDI check. There are restrictions on how the saved money can be used, but college tuition and fees would be permissible if shown to relate to a career goal and outcome.

Why does the Bright Futures Scholarship requirement differ for students with disabilities?

The Bright Futures Scholarship requirements are the same for all students. All initial applicants for the Bright Futures Scholarship Program must meet the general requirements for participation in this program and specific requirements for the individual award.

The Florida Bright Futures Scholarship Program establishes three lottery-funded scholarships for Florida high school graduates who demonstrate high academic achievement and enroll in eligible Florida public or private postsecondary institutions. There are three award levels for which high school seniors may qualify: Florida Academic Scholars, Florida Medallion Scholars, and Gold Seal Vocational Scholars. The scholarship may be used for either full-time or part-time enrollment and is renewable. Additional information on the Florida Bright Futures Scholarship Program can be found at <http://www.FACTS.org>.

Funding

My daughter's school says that there is no funding and that what little bit they do have is being cut for ESE services. Why has so much money been taken away from special needs education programs? What are you going to do in regards to the huge impacts state budget cuts are making on our state's school districts, particularly with our special needs children?

Due to challenging economic conditions that Florida and the nation are facing, revenues for the state were smaller than in recent years. The Florida Legislature, following their constitutional mandate to have a balanced budget, had to make choices within available funds. Some of the budget decisions have resulted in public school funding per student being slightly lower than last year.

However, the cornerstone for developing specially designed instruction and supplementary aids and services for students with disabilities remains the IEP. Public schools offer programs based on the individual needs of the student according to his/her IEP. The purpose of the IEP is to determine the needs of the student as they are related to his/her ability to access the general education curriculum and progress toward his/her IEP goals. Parents, students, ESE teachers, regular education teachers, and any others who have knowledge of the student develop the IEP collaboratively.

Special education class size and configuration is a district-level decision. ESE directors work with local principals and administrative school district staff to provide the needed services based on the needs of the students with disabilities assigned to that school, to include provision of services in the most appropriate and least restrictive environment. Parents may provide their input on staffing decisions through participation in school, district, and other advisory committees.

Where are the funds from the state lottery going?

Lottery funds are provided as enhancement funds for school districts as determined by the Legislature based on the Florida Education Finance Program allocation. Prior to the receipt of lottery funds, districts must establish policies and procedures describing the type of expenses that will be considered. When Governor Charlie Crist signed the fiscal year 2008–2009 budget, it included \$18.1 billion for K–20 education. The lottery portion of these funds equaled \$1.2 billion.

Why is it so hard for me to get some help paying for speech in the classroom?

Speech and language (S/L) impairment continues to be recognized as a primary exceptionality in the state of Florida, based on eligibility criteria defined in State Board of Education Rule 6A-6.03012, FAC. In addition, IEP teams may determine that a student with a disability will receive speech or language (S/L) instruction as a related service if needed, to benefit from special education services. Rule 6A-6.03012(2)(b), FAC., outlines the criteria for eligibility for special programs for students with S/L impairments, specifically in the area of articulation. It states that an articulation disorder is present when at least one of the following is met:

- Based on normative data, the frequency of incorrect sound production and the delay of correct sound production are significant.
- The error pattern is characteristic of disordered rather than delayed acquisition.
- Articulation is rated as moderately or severely impaired on an articulation severity rating scale.

School districts in Florida make the decision regarding the data to be used in determining eligibility. For instance, they often use information presented in the articulation test manual to determine the criteria for a “significant” delay.

As the IEP team determines the services necessary to provide a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to students with disabilities and parents are important members of the IEP team, you have the right to request that the IEP team reconvene to review or rewrite the IEP if you feel your child is not progressing, or if any components of the IEP are not appropriate to your student's needs.

Inclusion

Why is it necessary for an inclusion specialist to be “invited” into a school that has ESE programs/classrooms to provide training to the general education teachers? I would think it should be part of continuing education credits for the teachers as it creates a better academic atmosphere in the community.

The Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services has funded a special project titled the Florida Inclusion Network. The FIN Project has been in place in Florida for over a decade and assigns inclusion specialists in different regions around the state. The inclusion specialists work with school administrations and teaching staff to problem-solve issues and to provide information and professional development for teachers. Information on the project may be accessed at <http://www.floridainclusionnetwork.com>.

What happens if a school promotes that they “provide inclusion” for additional funding but they really do not? Who do you report the discrepancy to?

It is the position of the DOE that students with disabilities are general education students first and, like all students, have access to effective instruction in the general curriculum. As a result, the DOE supports a number of initiatives to assist schools and school districts to implement inclusive educational practices. IDEA Part B §300.114(a)-(b) addresses the federal requirements for providing least restrictive environment placements for students with disabilities. The extent to which an individual student is educated with nondisabled peers is an IEP team decision based on student goals and objectives.

In addition, the regulation language prohibits states from maintaining funding mechanisms that violate the least restrictive environment (LRE) provisions. No specific additional state or IDEA dollars are awarded to any school or district for providing an inclusive environment. The school principal would be interested in parent input and support with developing more inclusive environments for students.

Why doesn't DOE do more with kids to get them involved in the classrooms, teaching them and introducing them to students with disabilities?

Several districts and schools provide disability awareness training. The Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resource System (FDLRS) Associate Centers have training available for schools and parents to use. To find the FDLRS that serves your area, go to <http://www.fdlrs.com>.

Additionally, with the passage of Senate Bill 856 during the 2008 legislative session, district school boards will be required to designate the first two weeks in October each year as “Disability History and Awareness Weeks.” During these two weeks, district school boards may provide disability history and awareness instruction in all K–12 public schools.

Currently, DOE is researching various resources to assist school districts with providing disability history and awareness instruction to their students. These resources will be posted on the DOE's Web site at <http://www.fldoe.org/ese/linkhome.asp>.

Also, within the Major Activities of Interest, some school districts are offering high school students two options in which they may earn elective credits related to careers in teaching. First, students may enroll in “Teacher Assisting,” a career (vocational) education program in Public Service Education, and earn credit for successful completion of the program's courses. The required courses include a teacher assisting practicum experience. To successfully complete a teacher assisting practicum experience, students must be involved in direct student contact for at least 75 hours in a classroom at an elementary

school, a junior high/middle school, or a special education/alternative education program. Second, students may enroll in the courses Exploratory Teaching I and II. The purpose of these courses is to provide students with knowledge and skills of effective teaching and teacher responsibilities in a variety of areas. Laboratory activities and assigned field experiences are an integral part of the program.

If interested, students may wish to discuss these options with their guidance counselor, the appropriate career (vocational) education teacher, and/or staff responsible for teaching the Exploratory Teaching courses.

What about inclusion in the schools? Why can't we mandate an inclusive environment in the schools? After all, we all live in the same world!

Although federal and state laws indicate a clear intent for educating students with disabilities in general education classrooms with their typical peers, federal regulations and state laws also recognize that additional placement options may be necessary. Furthermore, the extent to which an individual student participates in the regular education setting with the use of supplementary aids and services is determined on a case-by-case basis by the IEP team. This involves individualized inquiry into the unique educational needs of each student.

DOE supports a number of initiatives to assist schools and school districts to implement inclusive educational practices. These include fiscal as well as human resources designed to provide professional development, learning opportunities, and information to educators, families, and community members. Additional information on these initiatives can be found at the following Web sites:

Florida Inclusion Network (FIN)—<http://www.floridainclusionnetwork.com>

Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resources System (FDLRS)—<http://www.fdlrs.org>

Coordinating Existing Networks to Reach All Learners (Project CENTRAL)—
<http://projectcentral.ucf.edu/>

Accommodations and Modifications for Students with Disabilities Project—
<http://www.cpt.fsu.edu/ese>

Florida's Positive Behavioral Support Project—<http://flpbs.fmhi.usf.edu>

My 8-year-old niece has autism. She goes to a special school. She can read and write well, but because she cannot sit in her seat, she is unable to go into a general education classroom. Why is this?

The extent to which an individual student participates in the regular education setting with the use of supplementary aids and services is determined on a case-by-case basis by the IEP team. Although it is the position of the DOE that students with disabilities are general education students first and, like all students, have access to effective instruction in the general curriculum, it is important that the IEP team work to assure the educational benefits, both academic and social, are achieved in the general education classroom. If a student is disruptive of the education of others, this disruption must be mitigated through use of specially designed instruction and supplementary aids and services, if possible. As it is the IEP team that determines the annual goals, special education, related services, supplementary aids, appropriate accommodations, placement, and other components designed to meet the unique needs of the student based on the effect of the disability, parents have the right to request that the IEP team reconvene to review or revise the IEP. If the IEP team believes

that the child is not progressing, or if any components of the IEP are not appropriate to the student's needs, the team should discuss developing a functional behavior assessment (FBA) and a positive behavior intervention plan for the student to begin to learn to reduce her out-of-seat behaviors using positive behavioral supports.

DOE funds several initiatives to assist school districts to implement inclusion practices and positive behavior supports including:

Florida Inclusion Network (FIN)—<http://www.floridainclusionnetwork.com/page265.aspx>

Florida's Positive Behavior Support Project—<http://flpbs.fmhi.usf.edu/>

Individual Educational Plan

Are school districts responsible for considering a child's needs related to their disability outside of the school environment?

Rule 6A-6.03028(7) (c), FAC., indicates that the IEP should include:

"...a statement of the specially designed instruction and related services and supplementary aids and services to be provided to the student...modifications or supports for school personnel that will be provided for the student to advance appropriately toward attaining the annual goals; to be involved and progress in the general curriculum in accordance with paragraph (7) (a) of this rule; to participate in extracurricular and other nonacademic activities; and to be educated and participate with other students with disabilities and nondisabled students in the activities described in this paragraph."

In addition, the final regulations for IDEA 2004 § 300.117 ensure that each public agency must provide that each child with a disability participates with nondisabled children in extracurricular services and activities to the maximum extent appropriate to the needs of the child. "The public agency must ensure that each child with a disability has the supplementary aids and services determined by the child's IEP team to be appropriate and necessary for the child to participate in nonacademic settings."

I need a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) in the classroom and I need help with my toileting needs. However, I cannot reach agreement with the IEP team about these services. How can I get help with my IEP?

On behalf of the Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services, we want to commend you for your self-advocacy approach to this concern. Self-determination is a very important skill to learn.

As you know, the IEP team determines the services necessary to provide a free appropriate public education to students with disabilities. The IEP team determines the annual goals, special education, related services, supplementary aids, appropriate accommodations, placement, and other components designed to meet the unique needs of the student based on the effect of the disability. You and/or your parents have the right to request that the IEP team reconvene to review or revise the IEP if any components of the IEP are not appropriate or included as special services necessary for a student to receive FAPE.

If you are still unable to resolve these concerns, you may contact the district's ESE office. Many school districts have procedures in place to assist families in resolving disputes.

When will facilitated IEP's be available? How can I get trained to be an IEP Facilitator?

Whether to use the facilitated IEP process is a district- and school-based decision. Additional information concerning the facilitated IEP process and training can be found at The Consortium of Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education (CADRE) website at <http://www.directionservice.org/cadre/index.cfm>.

What can we do when services outlined in the IEP plan are not delivered? The school says they do not have the funds to implement the required services. Is this legal?

Section 6A-6.03028(11), FAC., addresses the implementation and accountability that states and local district school boards have toward students with disabilities in their district.

“The school district, or other state agency that provides special education and related services either directly, by contract, or through other arrangements, is responsible for providing the specially designed instruction and related services to students with disabilities in accordance with the student’s IEP’s. However, it is not required that the school district, teacher, or other person be held accountable if a student does not achieve the growth projected in the annual goals and benchmarks or objectives. An IEP must be in effect before specially designed instruction and related services are provided to an eligible student and is implemented as soon as possible following the IEP meeting.”

Parents and school districts are encouraged to work together to resolve issues regarding a student’s ESE needs. When concerns or disagreements regarding a student’s exceptional educational needs arise, it is helpful for the parent to immediately speak with the student’s teacher, guidance counselor, staffing specialist, or school principal.

If the parent is still unable to resolve their concerns, he or she may contact the district’s ESE office. Many school districts have procedures in place to assist families in resolving disputes.

The classes I have observed for students identified as trainable mentally handicapped need more structure so our children can learn more.

The cornerstone for developing specially designed instruction and supplementary aids and services for students with disabilities is the IEP process. Public schools offer programs based on the individual needs of the student according to his/her IEP. The purpose of the IEP is to determine the needs of the student as they are related to his/her ability to access the general education curriculum and progress toward his/her IEP goals. Parents, students, ESE teachers, regular education teachers, and any others who have knowledge of the student develop the IEP collaboratively.

Recognizing that teachers are key to implementing the IEP, DOE funds and provides technical assistance and professional development for teachers in a variety of areas to assist them to be more effective in the classroom. Districts also offer a variety of technical assistance and professional development for teachers.

Finally, teachers are evaluated on a regular basis. School principals are responsible for evaluating the performance of teachers in their school in accordance with district guidelines. If you would like to know more about the guidelines for evaluation of teachers in your school district, we suggest you contact the local school district office.

Interpreter Services

Why is it so hard to get interpreters for school and after school events? My daughter is hard-of-hearing, but we constantly struggle with getting her an interpreter for school. Because she speaks verbally as well as signs, they say she does not need an interpreter. She prefers signing in school as she tends to miss a lot of information, especially in noisy environments or if people are talking behind her. When will there be enough funding so we don't have to fight tooth and nail for everything our children need for their education needs? They need your help!

The IEP team must consider the communication needs of a child as it relates to his/her ability to access the general education curriculum and progress toward their IEP goals. It is the responsibility of the IEP team, of which you are a member, to write appropriate goals and objectives and determine the appropriate service delivery model and related services needed to assist the student in meeting goals and objectives. Interpreter services are considered supportive services.

We encourage you to re-convene with your child's IEP team to continue to discuss the communication needs of your child. If you are still unable to resolve these concerns, you may contact the district's ESE office. Many school districts have procedures in place to assist families in resolving disputes.

In addition, parents may contact BEESS by telephone at (850) 245-0476 to discuss the following administrative remedies: mediation, state complaints, and due process hearing requests. Additional information on dispute resolution processes can be found at <http://www.fldoe.org/ese/resolution.asp>.

Why doesn't the school system supply a sign language interpreter for students who are deaf and hard-of-hearing when they go to their office or program for help? Isn't it a state law?

Section 504 of The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) guarantee that people who are deaf or hard-of-hearing have a right to have an interpreter or auxiliary aid/services provided to them, when necessary, at no cost. However, it is the responsibility of the person who is deaf or hard-of-hearing to inform the school that he or she needs an interpreter or auxiliary aid/service. It is prudent to provide enough time in advance so that the service can be located and scheduled if not readily available on site.

McKay Scholarship Program

What is the McKay scholarship? I am interested in sending my 11-year-old son to private school in 2009 when he begins middle school. I need help understanding the McKay Scholarship and I need assistance applying for it. I also need to know what schools are available for him.

The John M. McKay Scholarships for Students with Disabilities Program, commonly known as the McKay Scholarship Program, allows parents of students with disabilities to choose the best academic environment for their children. This scholarship program provides a variety of options, including the opportunity to attend a participating private school or transfer to another public school. Eligible students include students with disabilities who have an IEP and who were enrolled and reported for funding by a Florida school district. In 2007–2008, 824 private schools in Florida participated in this program. The application process may be done online. Prior to taking any action related to the McKay you should go to the DOE website at <http://www.floridaschoolchoice.org/Information/McKay/> or call the DOE Office

of Independent Education and Parental Choice at (800) 447-1636. It is important that you do not withdraw your child from public school prior to providing notice of intent to apply as it could interfere with your eligibility for the scholarship.

Why were changes made to McKay Scholarship Program?

Section 1002.39, F.S., "The John M. McKay Scholarship Program for Students with Disabilities," was amended during the 2006 legislative session to include language requiring regular and direct contact with the teacher at the school's physical location. The statute was further amended to state that students in a home education or private tutoring program are no longer eligible for the McKay Scholarship Program funds. These legislative changes build in accountability for the use of these public funds.

At the present time, when a parent of a child with a disability uses the McKay Scholarship to attend a private school, the dollars generated by that student to the public school system go to the private school quarterly. If a parent removes the child from the private school and goes back to the public school (for whatever reason), the funds that are received by the private school are not pro-rated to be returned to the school system. So if a child with a disability leaves the private school after their enrollment period, the private school can keep all of the funds for that quarter even if the child was enrolled for only a very short time (let's say two weeks). We need to change or amend the legislation to correct this.

Pursuant to Rule 6A-6.0970, FAC.: "(e) When a scholarship student attends multiple private schools or a private school and the public school in the same payment period, the right to retain the scholarship payment shall be given to the first private school the student attends for ten (10) or more school days during that payment period. If the student does not attend a private school for at least ten (10) days and attends a public school, then the funding generated, if any, shall be retained by the school district and no scholarship payment shall be generated."

The funds are not pro-rated, but only returned to the district (or transferred to the next private school) if the student was in attendance in the first private school for less than 10 school days during the payment period.

Contact information for the Parental Choice Office is provided at the website <http://www.floridaschoolchoice.org/Information/McKay/> or you may call the DOE Office of Independent Education and Parental Choice at (800) 447-1636.

Parent Involvement

Why don't we have more family involvement programs offered from the Department of Education?

Currently the DOE funds a number of initiatives that facilitate parent involvement in their children's education. These include but are not limited to:

- The Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resources System is a statewide network serving children with disabilities or special needs by supporting educators, families, and communities (<http://www.fdlrs.org>).
- The Florida Parent Network Web site allows parents to see their student's Sunshine State Standards FCAT Reading, Mathematics, Science, and Writing+ results as soon as they are available. The information provided here, as well as additional details found at the

FCAT website (<http://fcats.fldoe.org>), can help you understand your student's results (<https://www.fcatsparentnetwork.com/welcome.do>).

- Sparkplugs is published in conjunction with the Florida Parent Teacher Organization. The publication recognizes exemplary practices in parent involvement for the previous year. Sparkplugs 2007 publication, along with other parent involvement information, can be found at <http://www.flpie.net/resources.htm>.

Parent Support Groups

How can parents find other parents at their schools to form support groups?

Due to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, schools cannot give out information concerning parents of children with disabilities. However, there are several ways you could connect with other parents of children with disabilities in your area. One way is to become involved in trainings and programs offered by the FDLRS Associate Center for your school district. The FDLRS Associate Centers have parent services specialists who offer valuable training and consultations. Additional information about the FDLRS centers can be found at <http://www.fdlrs.com/>. By attending FDLRS trainings, you will meet other parents and learn about local parent groups and resources.

You can also contact one of the federally funded Parent Information and Resource Centers (PIRC) in the state to find out what they offer that might enable you to meet other parents. There are two PIRC centers in the state: the Central Florida Parent Center and the Family Network on Disabilities. Additional information about these centers can be found at their websites: <http://www.cflparents.org> or <http://www.fndfl.org>. There is also a federally funded Community Parent Resource Center in Miami, Parent to Parent of Miami, Inc. Their website is <http://www.ptopmiami.org>.

Annually, The Family Café, Inc., hosts a conference in central Florida. Many parents attend this event to meet other parents and learn more about state resources. More information about the 2009 conference and The Family Café can be found at their website <http://www.familycafe.net>.

We would like to be able to talk to other families in our school district as well as meet families from other counties in Florida as there are few children in our county with the disabilities our children have (one child with attention deficit disorder and one child with visual impairments). We would like to exchange names, phone numbers, and email addresses. Our county said they do not have such a list.

Due to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, schools cannot automatically give out information concerning parents of children with disabilities. However, please review the answer to the previous question as a way to meet parents in your area and in Florida.

Additionally, you can do a Web search by disability to find resources and possibly parent groups for contact with families with children with disabilities similar to your children. For instance, the Children and Adults with Attention Deficit Disorders (CHADD) have chapters throughout the United States. By going to their national website, you can locate chapters in Florida.

Positive Behavioral Supports

Why don't we focus more on behavior issues in our schools where our children are picking up a lot of bad behaviors?

Research shows that schools using traditional types of discipline continue to experience significant increases in violence and destructive behavior as well as increases in the number of students excluded from instruction due to suspension or expulsion. Positive behavioral support (PBS) provides a positive and effective alternative to the traditional methods of discipline. PBS methods are research-based and proven to significantly reduce the occurrence of problem behaviors in the school, resulting in a more positive school climate and increased academic performance.

PBS is consistent with the IDEA, which advocates the use of positive behavior interventions and school-based disciplinary strategies that reduce or eliminate the need to use suspension and expulsion as disciplinary option. Additional information on the DOE-funded PBS initiative can be found at <http://flpbs.fmhi.usf.edu>.

Safety Drills

Do you know that they do not include the students with disabilities in fire drills? They let them go outside on the field before the drill begins. What would happen if the school really did have an emergency? Our students would not know how to respond appropriately nor would the teachers and administrators. Please check your policies.

Planning for an evacuation in an emergency should involve both students with disabilities and students without disabilities. Title IV of the No Child Left Behind Act requires schools to have emergency management plans in place. Although the legislation does not prescribe specific requirements for those plans, the U.S. Department of Education recommends that schools develop all-hazards plans that address the four phases of emergency management (Prevention-Mitigation, Preparedness, Response, and Recovery). Plans should be designed around each school's unique needs and hazards and vulnerabilities. This planning and preparing for evacuation must include the needs of special populations.

The requirements for IEP's as outlined in the IDEA also do not include any specific requirements related to emergency procedures, such as evacuation standards, for students with disabilities. However, there is also nothing that would prevent schools from developing a student-specific evacuation plan similar to an IEP. In an emergency, students with disabilities may face a variety of unique challenges in evacuating to safety. Schools need to establish procedures to ensure that students with special needs can evacuate the area of an emergency in a variety of conditions, with assistance when it is needed.

Each student's individual emergency plan could then be integrated with the larger plan that covers the school building to ensure that the plans are complementary. In addition, schools need to remember to account for students that may have temporary impairments—such as a broken leg—when constructing their plans and updating their building-specific needs.

Finally, it is critical to practice the plan using drills and exercises. Although drills and exercises may disrupt the school day, it is a critical aspect of emergency management planning. Practicing evacuations is important for all students, including students with special needs. For this reason, it is important that special needs students and classrooms be part of the drill or exercise. Regular practice of the plan will ensure that it is common knowledge among relevant staff and will also help to identify areas of the plan that may need to be updated or changed.

School Choice

When can we get a scholarship to homeschool our children who are not being served? If every child is entitled to a free public education, why can't we use that money towards a homeschool education?

In Florida, K–12 students and parents are afforded the right to educational choice. Florida's fundamental educational choice options for parents of public school students, as authorized by Section 1002.20(6), F.S., include public school choice and private school and home education.

Home education is a parent-directed educational choice that became effective by law in Florida in 1985. The law is broad, giving parents considerable freedom to direct their children's education. Florida has minimal requirements for home education. The state does not require a particular education background for parents or standard curricula for home-educated students. However, a portfolio of records and materials showing student work must be maintained for two years and made available to the school district if requested in writing. There is no attendant requirement for home education students, as the learning environment is not restricted to a regular classroom setting. The law allows parents the flexibility to choose from five annual evaluation methods, enabling them to select the best measure of learning for each student.

When Section 1002.39, F.S., "The John M. McKay Scholarship Program for Students with Disabilities," was amended during the 2006 legislative session to include language requiring regular and direct contact with the teacher at the school's physical location, it was also amended to state that students in a home education or private tutoring program are no longer eligible for the McKay Scholarship Program funds. These changes build in accountability for the use of these public funds. The changes did not eliminate the choice of parents to home educate their children. However, Florida statutes do not authorize funding for home schooling.

The DOE provides technical assistance, information, and home education materials to school districts and parents. Also, in accordance with the provisions outlined in the statute, home education program students:

- May participate in interscholastic extracurricular student activities
- May participate in the Bright Futures Scholarship Program
- May participate in dual enrollment programs
- Are eligible for admission to community colleges
- Are eligible for admission to state universities
- May receive testing and evaluation services at diagnostic and resource centers

Several independent organizations, such as the Florida Parent-Educators Association (FPEA) and Life of Florida, also provide resources and support for home educators.

Contact information for these organizations may be located online at <http://www.floridaschoolchoice.org/>.

When can I expect better programs for teaching my daughter to be independent? As it is now, my daughter is sitting at home and this isn't helping her.

The cornerstone for developing specially designed instruction and supplementary aids and services for students with disabilities is the IEP process. Public schools offer programs based on the individual needs of the student according to his/her IEP. The purpose of the IEP is to determine the needs of the student as they are related to his/her ability to access the

general education curriculum and progress toward his/her IEP goals. Parents, students, ESE teachers, regular education teachers, and any others who have knowledge of the student develop the IEP collaboratively.

Special education class size and configuration is a district-level decision. ESE directors work with local principals and administrative school district staff to provide the needed services based on the needs of the students with disabilities assigned to that school, to include provision of services in the most appropriate and least restrictive environment. Parents may provide their input into staffing decisions through participation in school and district advisory committees or by providing feedback through the needs assessment process.

If your child is below 22 years of age, we encourage you to continue to work with your school district to design an appropriate education program for her. If your child is older than 22 years of age, we encourage you to contact the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation in your area to determine if your daughter would be eligible for their assistance for training and/or to find employment.

Section 504

I would like to know more about the 504 programs. Also, how is Florida working with the schools to bring this program ahead?

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504) is a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in public and private programs and activities that receive financial assistance from the federal government. Section 504 guarantees students a free appropriate public education. Students who may not be eligible for services under the IDEA may be eligible for protection from discrimination under Section 504.

An individual is protected under Section 504 if any of the following three situations exist: the person 1) has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities; 2) has a record or history of a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the individual's major life activities; or 3) are regarded as having a physical or mental impairment when in fact such impairment may or may not actually exist.

School districts must evaluate students suspected of having a disability according to established policies and procedures. It should be noted, evaluation under Section 504 is not a comprehensive evaluation as required under IDEA.

Once a student is determined to have a disability for which accommodations are necessary, a 504 plan is developed. The district must document activities and decisions made regarding students with disabilities. At a minimum, an accommodation plan (504 plan) should address the educational impact to the identified disability and the necessary accommodations to facilitate access to education and other school activities in the least restrictive environment.

The BEESS provides technical assistance to school districts and families concerning the requirements for 504. Each school district has a Section 504 coordinator. DOE has an online introductory tutorial to Section 504 at <http://sss.usf.edu/504tutorial/> and additional information is available at DOE Clearinghouse Information Center's website at <http://www.fldoe.org/ese/pubxhome.asp>.

Specific Learning Disability Resources

Do you know of any resources for people with specific learning disabilities? I am specifically looking for workshops that could help me to learn about education and employment assistance.

Some resources you may want to research include, but are not limited to, the following:

Learning Disability Association of America (LDA) provides information on learning disabilities, practical solutions, and a comprehensive network of resources, including a link with Florida chapters. Additional information about LDA can be found at <http://www.ldanatl.org/>.

LD OnLine seeks to help children and adults reach their full potential by providing accurate and up-to-date information and advice about learning disabilities and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). The site features hundreds of helpful articles, multimedia, monthly columns by noted experts, first person essays, children's writing and artwork, a comprehensive resource guide, very active forums, and a referral directory of professionals, schools, and products. Additional information can be found at <http://www.ldonline.org/>.

GreatSchools is the new host for the valuable articles and resources developed by SchwabLearning.org to provide information and inspiration to parents of children with learning and attention difficulties. GreatSchools acquired and began hosting SchwabLearning.org on January 14, 2008. Additional information may be found at <http://www.schwablearning.org/>.

Local resources include the **FDLRS Associate Center** that serves your area. You can go online at <http://www.fldr.com> to find out more about FDLRS.

Student Progression

How do I go about changing mandatory third grade retention for children with developmental disabilities when they are not able to pass the FCAT without changing their diploma track? This is an outdated rule that is harmful to children's success in inclusion!

Third graders who do not achieve above a level one on the FCAT are required by state law to be retained. The Florida Legislature eliminated social promotion in the 2003 legislative session. Within the law there are six good cause exemptions for retention for students who are unable to pass the FCAT. Included in those exemptions are ways that students can demonstrate reading proficiency, including a portfolio and alternative assessment. The Florida FCAT measures a specific set of academic skills in reading, math, and writing. These skills are described in Florida's Sunshine State Standards, which tell what Florida students should know and be able to do. They are in line with national education standards. Students following the Sunshine State Standards should, in fact, be at grade level. Recognizing that this is not always the case, intensive remediation activities are provided to increase the students' skills and to achieve grade level standards.

Florida law requires that local school districts establish a comprehensive plan for student progression. This plan must be based, in part, on student proficiency in reading, mathematics, writing, and science, and must include standards for evaluating each student's performance on the Sunshine State Standards. Some school district plans apply the third grade promotion requirements set in statute for all other grades, while other districts have established their own requirements for grades other than third. An IEP team may make a recommendation; however, the final decision about whether a student is promoted or retained rests with the school's principal based on the school district's student progression plan and Florida law.

If you want to advocate for further changes regarding this issue, you will need to speak with your local legislators and legislators in the appropriate committees in the House of Representatives and the Senate.

Summer School

Miami-Dade needs more summer camps for special needs children, especially for kids who are not toilet trained.

There are three types of educational programs that may be available during the summer: summer school, Summer Reading Camps, or Extended School Year (ESY). Summer school is offered to help students with and without disabilities that are having trouble meeting the SSS and being promoted to the next grade. Summer Reading Camps are provided for third graders who have been retained because of scoring at level one on the FCAT. Although DOE has set forth guidelines for these Summer Reading Camps, individual school districts decide how to implement the requirement. ESY is the provision of special education and related services to students with disabilities beyond the regular 180-day school year. Under IDEA, school districts must provide ESY services if the IEP team determines that the student requires those services to receive a FAPE. School districts are not required to provide ESY services to all students with disabilities—only those who have an IEP indicating that such services are required. The technical assistance paper “Determining an Individual Student’s Need for Extended School Year Services” and other documents are available on the DOE website at <http://www.fldoe.org/ese/pubxhome.asp>.

Surrogate Parents

I learned a lot about surrogate parenting in the school system. Tell me again how to get the training to help kids?

You may contact your local ESE office to let them know you are interested.

Transition

Can you have trained teachers to help with transition and ESE in high school?

The Florida Department of Education, Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services, funds several projects with responsibility for providing training and technical assistance in the area of secondary transition. Currently, BEESS is restructuring projects, and in the coming months, Project 10: Transition Education Network (TEN) will be the primary project providing training and technical assistance to Florida’s school districts in the area of transition.

Additionally, most Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resources System Centers have staff trained to provide teacher training in the area of transition. Each Florida school district has a designated district transition contact. In many districts, the district transition contact provides training in the area of transition. Additionally, the Professional Development Alternatives for Exceptional Student Educators (PDA/ESE) Transition Module, which is a comprehensive online module available through local FDLRS Centers, is designed to assist with identification of the components of effective transition planning and knowledge of the essential elements that must be in place for an individual with disabilities to successfully transition from school to work and adult living. Upon satisfactory completion of this facilitated module, teachers may be awarded 60 in-service points. For additional information on the PDA/ESE program, visit <http://www.pda-ese.org>.

My son will finish high school in January 2009. I have visited different agencies; I am looking for help for him. He needs to continue to take his mechanic classes as he would like to be a boat mechanic, but on the agency's information it says that he needs to be on the Medicaid Waiver program. For the Medicaid Waiver program, he has to wait at least 5 years because approximately 15,000 people are waiting to be on the waiver. Now I'm told that I have to stay home with him. I need somebody to tell what I can do to help my son.

Transition needs of individual students are required to be addressed at each IEP meeting beginning at age 14. At these meetings, one of the discussions should be about the type(s) of agency support, if any, that will be needed after the student graduates from high school. Agency representation is required at the meetings beginning at age 16, or earlier if appropriate. The DOE has a variety of informational materials available for parents, young people, and school district personnel related to effective transition services and supports available to students as they transition into adulthood. It is important that parents and students communicate with the IEP team about the transition needs and goals of the student.

Because your child is still in school, we encourage you to meet with your child's guidance counselor, transition staff person, or request the IEP team to reconvene to discuss your child's options. Some resources you may want to research include the following Web sites:

Division of Vocational Rehabilitation—<http://www.rehabworks.org/>

Florida Center for Inclusive Communities at the University of South Florida—
<http://flfcic.fmhi.usf.edu/>

Regarding children with ADHD and coexisting learning disabilities: in early high school, these kids often lack the skill to self-advocate. What can middle and high school education do to facilitate and develop a transition program for these very high-functioning, highly intelligent children?

For students age 14 and older, the IEP team must consider the need for instruction in or the provision of information about the area of self-determination. Self-determination activities are designed to assist the student to actively and effectively participate in IEP meetings and to self-advocate when necessary.

Documentation of needs would likely appear in the present level of academic achievement and functional performance statement, and needs would be addressed through measurable annual goals and short-term objectives or benchmarks, or through services on the IEP.

Many school districts are using Florida curriculum and resources, such as Standing Up for Me or Dare to Dream, to teach self-determination skills, including self-advocacy, to students with disabilities. A few additional resources on self-determination and self-advocacy can be found through the following Web link: <http://www.ncset.org/topics/sdmhs/default.asp?topic=30>.

Some creative practices used by a few Florida districts for teaching self-determination skills have included integrating content into regular coursework, integrating it into character education, conducting mini-workshops, and/or providing fact sheets and informational resources.

Teacher Training

How can we get our teachers more informed about the children with Asperger's syndrome who are functioning well in some areas but not others, so we do not hear things like, "They are so smart, they should know better"? It seems teachers and other school personnel do not understand these children.

Recognizing that effective teachers are key to educating our students and implementing the IEP, DOE funds and provides technical assistance and professional development for teachers in a variety of areas to help them be more effective in the classroom. Districts also offer a variety of technical assistance and professional development for teachers.

One such program that DOE funds is The Partnership for Effective Programs for Students with Autism (PEPSA), which is designed to provide training and technical assistance to teachers or a school program that wishes to enhance the educational program for students with autism. Each teacher or school will be matched to a CARD professional who will mentor the teacher or school staff in developing a plan for implementing innovative and effective practices within educational programs for students with autism. The CARD partner will provide support, resources, technical assistance, and training that is specific to the needs identified by the teacher or school. Additional information can be found at <http://doepartnership.usf.edu/serviceareas.asp>.

Additional information on the various initiative DOE funds can be found at <http://www.fldoe.org/ese/net-home.asp>.

Miscellaneous

What do I need to do to be a professional advocate?

We are not aware of any criteria to be a professional advocate at this time. However, the Statewide Advocacy Network On Disabilities, Inc. (STAND) offers training and certification for special education advocacy for all children with disabilities.

Additional information about STAND and their training program may be found at <http://www.standadvocates.org/index.html>.

When will schools have to comply with IDEA and not claim "Home Rule"?

Regardless of Florida's local decision-making rules, schools must comply with applicable federal and state laws, including IDEA.

Funding from the State of Florida to support the Florida Youth Council is needed, especially by the DOE.

Congratulations to The Family Café on being awarded a three-year grant from the Administration on Developmental Disabilities within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to create a Youth Information, Training and Resource Center in Florida, and using the funds to create the Florida Youth Council. The Florida Youth Council is a select group of youth and emerging leaders with disabilities who are committed to advocating for the successful transition of their peers with disabilities.

They have a positive start with their successful lobbying for Senate Bill 856. The bill designates the first two weeks in October as "Disability History and Awareness Weeks." DOE is supporting this effort by gathering a list of resources that teachers and districts can access to provide

lessons and activities related to disability history and awareness.

Additionally, many school districts are using Florida curriculum and resources, such as Standing Up for Me or Dare to Dream, to teach self-determination skills, including self-advocacy, to students with disabilities. Self-determination becomes an important skill as students participate in the IEP meetings and help plan their transition from public school to postsecondary education or employment.

Messages of Appreciation

I like that the ESE Director (Bambi J. Lockman) shows up for the Family Café each year. In the past, her sessions have been very informative. She has helped my child and me. Thank you.

This is for Ms. Lockman and Kathy Burton. Last year you provided me with help during the conference. Just to provide you with an update, my child's IEP for the first time was awesome. I was able to work with the school, and although it could have been smoother, we did come to consensus without tears.

Thank you DOE for informative sessions; your Clearinghouse exhibit is always informative. The DOE is always present during the conference to help!

Thank you all for taking the time to give us an update and for letting us know that we were able to help in some way. The key support for your children is you. Never forget that the research is consistent and convincing about the power of parent involvement in your children's lives. Families have a major influence on their children's achievement in school and throughout life. So continue to be positive and to stay involved. In addition, again, thank you for letting us know we helped. Everyone, children and adults, enjoys positive feedback.

Department of Health

I would like to see more information and conversation about type II diabetes. It is rising at a rapid rate among children.

The Children's Medical Services (CMS) Diabetes program provides coordinated, family centered care by a team of medical professionals with extensive experience in treating children with diabetes, both types 1 & 2. Along with the epidemic of obesity among children and adolescents in the United States, additional risk factors for type 2 diabetes among these age groups are becoming increasingly apparent. The medical team, along with the CMS nurse care coordinators, work together to provide medical management, and educate children and families about the importance of diabetes management, good healthy eating habits, and incorporating physical activity and sports into a child's daily routine. All these components are important strategies to help children with diabetes live long and healthy lives.

I have private insurance that is breaking us financially. CMS is income based and does not want to support us. Why is Florida Healthy Kids not income based for typical kids, but CMS is income based for special needs kids? I cannot change insurance to a cheaper policy because of preexisting conditions for my special needs children.

The CMS Network does not have a "full pay" option because the individual per child premium rate would have to be set at a high amount to cover the cost of coverage. (This means the rate would have to be set high enough to make it actuarially sound.) While there is no full pay option for the CMS Network, a family whose child has special health care needs may choose to purchase full pay MediKids (for children ages 1 through 4) or full pay Healthy Kids (for children ages 5 through 18). The full pay rate for MediKids is \$159 per child, per month. The full pay rate for Healthy Kids with dental is about \$128 per child, per month.

I have a newborn with significant disabilities and I am tired. What can and should I be doing? My friends brought me to this conference to learn. I need help at home!

Children's Medical Services (CMS) may be able to provide you with some assistance. CMS Network, one of the Florida KidCare Programs, serves children who have special health care needs. Children with special health care needs are those children under age 21 whose serious or chronic physical or developmental conditions require extensive preventive and maintenance care beyond that required by typically healthy children.

CMS Network enrolled children receive the full Medicaid benefit package of services for children through a network of 22 CMS area offices located throughout the state. Individuals may also receive medical and support services in local private physician offices or through an integrated network of health care organizations, regional programs, hospitals, referral centers and statewide programs.

You may learn more about Children's Medical Services by accessing the following link: <http://www.cms-kids.com>. We encourage you to work closely with your local CMS area office to determine what medical services may be available to your family. You can locate the office nearest you at <http://www.cms-kids.com/ContactUs/CMScontacts.pdf>.

Children's Medical Services works in collaboration with the Family Resource Coalition (FRC) which is an organization that supports families of children with special needs by

providing ongoing training, technical assistance, and resources. You may learn more about FRC by logging onto their website at <http://www.FRC4KIDS.org>.

What services does the Early Steps Program provide? What is Early Steps?

Early Steps offers early intervention services to infants and toddlers (birth to thirty-six months) with significant delays or an established condition that is likely to result in developmental delay. These services are provided by contracted local Early Steps offices across the state of Florida. Early Steps provides families or caregivers with services to enhance their child's development so they are ready to learn when they enter school. For Early Steps services there will not be a charge, or they will be covered by insurance or Medicaid if applicable.

Early Steps helps infants and toddlers who have special needs to be:

- Involved in as many of their family's daily activities as possible,
- Supported in participating in community activities,
- Included in playing and learning with children without disabilities on a regular basis.

To be enrolled in Early Steps, your child must first be found eligible. If your child is eligible, a thorough assessment will be made of your child's skills and abilities. In addition, an Individualized Family Support Plan (IFSP) will be designed just for your family with expected services for outcomes and goals based on your child's unique development.

For more information or to find out how to contact a local Early Steps office please see our website at: <http://www.cms-kids.com/EarlyStepsFamilies.htm>, or call toll-free 1-800-654-4440.

Why doesn't the health department provide training on disability care and treatment?

For persons who meet the eligibility requirements, the department's Brain and Spinal Cord Injury Program (BSCIP) provides direct services including: case management, acute care, inpatient and outpatient rehabilitation, transitional living, assistive technology, home and vehicle modification, and long-term community-based supports funded under contract with specific not-for-profit agencies.

BSCIP is funded through traffic-related fines, surcharges for driving under the influence and boating under the influence convictions, temporary license tag fees, and a percentage of funds from the motorcycle specialty tag. These funds are deposited into the BSCIP Rehabilitation Trust Fund. Funds from the Trust Fund are used to assist individuals and their family identify and access all available federal, state and third party and community resources.

In addition, the Program funds education, prevention, and research activities and expands its services through contracts with community based partners such as the Brain Injury Association of Florida, Florida Alliance for Assistive Services and Technology, the Florida Spinal Cord Injury Resource Center, and the Florida Association of Centers for Independent Living.

For more information, please contact the Brain and Spinal Cord Injury Program at (850) 245-4045 or toll-free at 1-800-342-0778.

Why can't I get KidCare Insurance services if I work for the state? This is not fair.

Federal law does not allow states to use federal funds to provide premium assistance to children who could qualify for state health benefits. In 2008, however, the Florida Legislature removed the cap on "full pay" Florida KidCare health insurance for children ages 1 through 18. State workers may purchase Florida KidCare coverage at the full price monthly cost of

\$159 per child (ages 1 to 5), or \$128 per child (ages 5 to 19). For more information about Florida KidCare, visit the web site at www.floridakidcare.org, or call 1-888-540-5437.

What is KidCare? How do I access their services? They never answer the phone when I call them.

Florida KidCare is our state's health insurance program for uninsured children from birth through age 18. General information about the Florida KidCare state children's health insurance program is available online at www.floridakidcare.org.

If you already have a Florida KidCare account, visit www.healthykids.org and click on "My Account." You will need your family account number to check the status online. You may also check your account status by telephone. The Florida KidCare customer service center is open Monday-Friday, from 7:30 am – 7:30 pm (Eastern). The telephone number is 1-800-821-5437. The line tends to be busy during peak hours, but there is a feature that allows a caller to leave a call-back number and the best time of day to reach you.

I have had problems with my child since birth. I lost my job. I need help with my baby. She is 1 ½ years old. What type of help do you have for genetic disorders?

The Children's Medical Services (CMS) Regional Genetics Program provides access to specialized medical care for genetic medical conditions. Medical evaluations, diagnosis and counseling services are available for children under the age of 21. If your baby has been diagnosed with a genetic medical condition, you and your other children, and grandparents may also receive services under the program. You may learn more about Children's Medical Services and the Regional Genetics Program by accessing the following link: <http://www.cms-kids.com>.

I need services. I have a traumatic brain injury (TBI) and need help!

If you have recently sustained a TBI and are a resident of the state of Florida, please contact the Brain and Spinal Cord Injury Program Central Registry at toll free 1-800-342-0778. If this is not a new injury, for assistance please contact the Brain Injury Association of Florida's Family Help Line at toll free 1-800-992-3422.

What can you do to see that the needs of medically fragile children continue to be met? I hear that funding keeps getting cut for staples such as nutritional supplements and equipment such as Mickey buttons, tubing and bags.

Currently, the CMS Network has not had funding for nutritional supplements and other medical supplies cut. CMS clients are provided the Medicaid benefit package and CMS follows Florida Medicaid policies and medical necessity criteria. Funding decisions for Medicaid benefits are determined by the Florida State Legislature. Please see the following Medicaid website site for additional information: <http://www.fdhc.state.fl.us/Medicaid/dme/index.shtml>.

Where can we get help to do the paperwork required for benefits (Medicaid, CMS, etc.) when we are disabled?

Children's Medical Services (CMS) can provide you with assistance in filling out the required paperwork. Contact your local CMS area office to request assistance from a Member

Services representative or from a Care Coordinator. You can locate the office nearest you at <http://www.cms-kids.com/ContactUs/CMScontacts.pdf>.

I would like to see more funding for Early Steps and all birth to three years of age programs. Would the state allocate funds specifically for a designated person to do Public Relations to educate doctors, etc. on programs available for children with special needs? Also, could the state increase funding for Medicaid Transportation for families with special needs, children and adults?

Funding for Early Steps is approximately 49% federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Part C grant funding and 51% funding by the Florida Legislature. Increases in funding would have to come from either an increase in total funds allocated in the federal budget for IDEA, or by an increase in funding of Early Steps by the Florida Legislature.

We talked about Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) but maybe we should offer AA or Al-Anon opportunities for the conference attendees. The guilt, the stress, is amazing. Maybe a professional from the Department of Health can offer counseling during the conference next year.

The Department of Health offers the following suggestions as possible options for next year's Family Café conference that would offer support to those experiencing guilt and stress associated with effects of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome:

Provide a group counseling session in the form of an AA or Al-Anon meeting. Several different groups of families might be interested in this resource, including those with FASD who have substance abuse problems, biological mothers of children with FASD who are or are not in recovery, family members of the above, and others who are interested in trying out or who attend meetings at home.

Provide a local community alcohol/substance abuse counseling resource session, where agency(ies) that offer counseling services to birth parents, caregivers and those living with an FASD could present their services and offer appointments for consultation. Some resources which are available include:

Lakeside Behavioral Healthcare – 407-822-5025 x6344

Believing Everyone Live Successfully (faith based) – 407-929-1255

Regina's House for Women – 407-862-2021

Florida Safety Council – (407-897-4426)

Also, to obtain contact information for AA, Al-Non, and/or other appropriate counseling resources, conference planners could work with DCF Substance Abuse Program staff at (407) 245-0400.

Provide a session where a birth mother presents her story and shares resources. In addition, the department can assist with exploring the possibility of getting the NOFAS Vice President and Spokesperson (<http://www.nofas.org/about/trainer.aspx>), or another birth mother of adult children with FAS to speak at The Family Cafe next year. They can talk about their own experiences and about resources such as The Circle of Hope (COH), a birth mom network of women in recovery from alcohol and drug addiction who used alcohol during pregnancy and may have children with FAS/FASD.

As a new parent, the session talked about advocacy and the skill needed. I just want to find services and help. Please let me know more about “Early Intervention” for my baby.

Early Steps offers early intervention services to infants and toddlers (birth to thirty-six months) with significant delays or an established condition that is likely to result in developmental delay. These services are provided by contracted local Early Steps offices across the state of Florida. Early Steps provides families or caregivers with services to enhance their child's development so they are ready to learn when they enter school. For Early Steps services there will not be a charge, or they will be covered by insurance or Medicaid if applicable.

Early Steps helps infants and toddlers who have special needs to be:

- Involved in as many of their family's daily activities as possible,
- Supported in participating in community activities,
- Included in playing and learning with children without disabilities on a regular basis.

To be enrolled in Early Steps, your child must first be determined eligible. If your child is eligible, a thorough assessment will be made of your child's skills and abilities. In addition, an Individualized Family Support Plan (IFSP) will be designed just for your family with expected services for outcomes and goals based on your child's unique development.

For more information or to find out how to contact a local Early Steps office please see our website at <http://www.cms-kids.com/EarlyStepsFamilies.htm>, or call toll-free 1-800-654-4440.

More needs to be said about HIV/AIDS and disabilities. Thank you! Keep talking about this important health issue.

There are many families with children whose lives have been affected by HIV/AIDS. The Children's Medical Services (CMS) Pediatric HIV Program provides services to infants, children and adolescents who have, or have been exposed to HIV. Through CMS, eligible children can receive medical care, social services, case management coordination, and nutritional counseling, to help promote and improve healthy lifestyles and living with HIV. Additionally, educational programs and resources are available to children and their families to learn more about HIV and issues specifically related to children.

Division of Emergency Management

I live on the coast. The weather with a hurricane hits our area hard all the time. Evacuation is slow. Any updates?

Several initiatives have been developed: Calling for evacuation earlier; rolling evacuations (starting from the furthest point out, then the next area, etc.); contra direction evacuation routes on the interstates (using both sides of an interstate to evacuate people out of harms way).

If it is hurricane season and we have a plan, but no one will be here left to help. What is your plan to help me?

If an evacuation is ordered, you should leave! For no one to be around, a mandatory evacuation would have been ordered. This means that there is potential for death and great devastation. If you have special needs, be sure to register with your county's special needs database. Go to the following web address to find your county's Emergency Operations Center information: http://www.floridadisaster.org/fl_county_em.asp.

The weather is changing. Terrorism is all around us. Who will take care of us if an epidemic happens?

Contact your county Emergency Operations Center for your local information. They can be found at the following Web address: http://www.floridadisaster.org/fl_county_em.asp.

I am scared that my neighborhood will get hit by a hurricane. We are not prepared as a community. What can I do to assist with this process?

Volunteer to serve on emergency preparedness committees. Contact you county Emergency Operations Center for your local information. They can be found at the following Web address: http://www.floridadisaster.org/fl_county_em.asp.

Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

I need help at work. How do I get Vocational Rehabilitation to assist me?

The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) provides a wide array of vocational rehabilitation services to eligible persons with disabilities who desire to work. Persons with disabilities who are determined eligible receive required services which could assist with becoming suitably employed or maintaining suitable employment. The DVR website, www.rehabworks.org, has additional information and an application for services. Additionally, the website contains a directory of DVR Area Offices to contact about applying for DVR services or further information. The DVR Ombudsman's Office can be reached at (866) 515-3692 to discuss applying for DVR services or problems with services.

As we transition into our 40's and 50's with disabilities and begin living longer, what state plan does VR have for flex hours, job sharing and volunteerism for seniors? Additionally, what services or accessible equipment are available for job security regarding the need to be part of the community where full time employment cannot be a requirement for help?

The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) provides a wide array of vocational rehabilitation services to eligible persons with disabilities who desire to work. DVR works with eligible persons to determine what suitable employment means to them, including part-time employment or employment with flexible hours, to assist them to become successfully employed. DVR provides services designed for individuals to become employed, but not for volunteer outcomes. The DVR website, www.rehabworks.org, has additional information and an application for services. Additionally, the website contains a directory of DVR Area Offices to contact about applying for DVR services or further information. The DVR Ombudsman's Office can be reached at (866) 515-3692 to discuss applying for DVR services or problems with services.

To learn about volunteer opportunities, contact the Governor's Commission on Volunteerism & Community Service at (850) 921-5172 or info@volunteerflorida.org.

Two times VR set my son up with agencies that promised him employment. He was placed at a job site where he worked for days. At the end, he was told he was employable but no job was available, so VR was charged for an evaluation.

The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) works with customers and vendors to provide appropriate and timely job development services. There are many factors that may impact the speed and effectiveness of a job search. The type of job being sought, the local labor market and the needs of the consumer may make job development or placement more challenging. DVR is committed to making every effort to assist consumers in this quest; however, it is also beneficial for consumers to work with other local resources to identify potential job leads. The DVR Ombudsman's Office can be reached at (866) 515-3692 to discuss problems with services.

I want to work, I need help! What is VR? How do I get them to ensure I am employable?

The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) provides a wide array of vocational rehabilitation services to eligible persons with disabilities who desire to work. Persons with disabilities who are determined eligible receive required services which could assist with

becoming suitably employed or maintaining suitable employment. The DVR website, www.rehabworks.org, has additional information and an application for services. Additionally, the website contains a directory of DVR Area Offices to contact about applying for DVR services or further information. The DVR Ombudsman's Office can be reached at (866) 515-3692 to discuss applying for DVR services or problems with services.

What does VR offer? I need to work!!

The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) provides a wide array of vocational rehabilitation services to eligible persons with disabilities who desire to work. Persons with disabilities who are determined eligible receive required services which could assist with becoming suitably employed or maintaining suitable employment. The DVR website, www.rehabworks.org, has additional information and an application for services. Additionally, the website contains a directory of DVR Area Offices to contact about applying for DVR services or further information. The DVR Ombudsman's Office can be reached at (866) 515-3692 to discuss applying for DVR services or problems with services.

My son, age 21, will finish high school in January 2009. I have visited different agencies; I am looking for help for him. He needs to continue to learn. He is taking mechanic classes and loves boat mechanics, but other agencies said that he needs Medicaid waiver. The situation for the Waiver is that he has to wait at least five years because there are about 15,000 people in front of him. They said to me that I have to stay at home with him. Please, I need somebody to tell me what I have to do to help my son! He can do some work if you help.

The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) provides a wide array of vocational rehabilitation services to eligible persons with disabilities who desire to work. Persons with disabilities who are determined eligible receive required services which could assist with becoming suitably employed or maintaining suitable employment. The DVR website, www.rehabworks.org, has additional information and an application for services. Additionally, the website contains a directory of DVR Area Offices to contact about applying for DVR services or further information. The DVR Ombudsman's Office can be reached at (866) 515-3692 to discuss applying for DVR services or problems with services.

Regarding questions or concerns about the Medicaid Waiver program, please contact the Agency for Persons with Disabilities at (866) 273-2273.

Why would VR counselors repeatedly ask for information in writing from someone whom they know cannot read and write? Why are you not accommodating my disability? Under ADA, accommodations are required, but they have not been provided by your agency.

The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) provides vocational rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities who desire to work. The customers seeking DVR services have varying disabilities. Part of the DVR process is to assess the individual's disability and to determine what services are required from DVR to obtain employment. Applicants and customers should notify the DVR staff member they are working with about any problems with the DVR process. DVR counselors are available to provide the accommodations that are required. The DVR Ombudsman's Office can be reached at (866) 515-3692 to discuss applying for DVR services or problems with services.

Is there a website or office that we can contact to access information regarding assistance with establishing our own micro-enterprise or self-employment business (especially if you do not have the Medicaid waiver or any other assistance!)?

The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) is committed to supporting self-employment as an employment outcome for customers. In efforts to ensure that necessary supports are in place for customers, DVR is developing self-employment providers or Certified Business Technical Assistance and Consultation providers.

The first step for any customer interested in pursuing self-employment would be to discuss the possibility with his/her DVR counselor. Once self-employment is included on the Individual Plan for Employment, the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor will assist the customer in selecting a Certified Business Technical Assistance and Consultation provider. The provider will then assist the customer in:

- Determining a business concept that is in line with the customers strengths, interests and capacities;
- Conducting the necessary market research to determine the viability of the business concept;
- Developing marketing and financial plans and projections for the business;
- Identifying resources to support the start-up of the business;
- Determining the feasibility of utilizing Social Security Work Incentives to assist with the business;
- Developing a viable business plan that includes the identification of ongoing supports, if necessary; and
- Providing the necessary ongoing supports until the customer's case with the DVR is completed.

Additional information on self-employment and a list of Certified Business Technical Assistance and Consultation providers can be found on the DVR's website, rehabworks.org under the Vendor section.

The 10th Anniversary Family Café Conference Report Card 2008

Attendees at The 10th Anniversary Family Café Conference were given the opportunity to grade their experience on the following scale:

A = Excellent **B** = Very Good **C** = OK **D** = Not So Good **E** = Poor

The table below displays average grades for 2008, along with grades from the previous five years.

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
I thought the conference location was...	B+	A-	A	B+	B	B
I thought the hotel accessibility was...	B-	A-	B+	B+	C+	B
The organization of the conference was...	A-	A-	A	B+	B	B
The choices for breakout sessions to meet the needs of different interests was...	B+	B+	B+	B	B	B
Overall, I would give the conference a...	B+	B+	A	B+	B	B

Attendees at The 10th Anniversary Family Café Conference were also given the opportunity to grade the Questions & Answers Book on the following scale:

A = Strongly Agree **B** = Agree **C** = Neutral **D** = Disagree **E** = Strongly Disagree

The table below displays the results of the surveys:

	Average Results
I use the book to find answers to questions about services.	B+
I share information I find in the book.	B+
The content of the book is well organized.	A-
The book is a good way of getting this information out to families.	A-
Overall, I find the book useful.	B+

The final question on the survey asked respondents to indicate how many times a year they use the Q & A Book by circling one of the following options: 0-5 times a year, 6-10 times a year, 11-15 times a year, 16-20 times a year, 20+ times a year. These options were given numerical values of 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 respectively.

The average result of the survey was 2.28 which corresponds to the 6-10 times a year category.

Below is a sampling of answers we received to the remaining questions on the evaluation form:

As a result of attending The 10th Anniversary Family Café Conference, I am able/will be able to...

- Get more information (updated) regarding my son's disability
- Get better programs for my children through school
- Focus more on finding out more in depth information on topics that are of interest to our family, and be more aware of other disabilities also
- Understand better the issues to keep in mind as my grandson grows
- Better assess to the future needs of my child and better my knowledge of the maze of government rules
- Network more with other parents
- Empower my daughter
- Make new friends
- Have a special needs trust done
- Bring back information to parents with disabilities unable to attend
- Be more support to my daughter and her children
- Understand and know what to do to help my daughter
- Meet people
- Tell my story at the Delegate roundtable discussion
- Gain lots of information and tips so I can improve at home
- Family Café is something I cherish and look forward to every year. It lets me focus on my needs and learn; it is a place I can relax and breathe. I hope it is here always
- Access needed services
- Proceed with special needs trust planning
- Get information to go back to work
- Know where to go to get the information I need
- Get information on trading my van for one that is handicapped accessible
- Be a better advocate for my two handicapped children
- Apply for APD services for my daughter and apply for prior authorization for her prescription before her meds run out
- Be more informed
- Be informed and uplifted

- Be ready for a disaster
- Interact with families to get resource information
- Tell others more about what is in our area as far as resources
- Better serve my two handicapped children please, please do not let the funding disappear. I would not have or have known about the services I have for Jeffrey and Lisa if it were not for this conference. You cannot put a price tag on the valuable information given to parents/caregivers and the disabled at this conference. Please see to it there is a #11!
- Improve services and access services needed for my daughter who is deaf, autistic and has Cerebral Palsy
- To understand how many different kinds of people can come together as one
- Meet new people
- Have fun with my family
- Understand more about people
- Continue to meet the needs of my daughter
- More effectively educate my children
- Understand Medicare/ Medicaid better

In general, the most helpful to me was. . .

- Finding out that we are not so different from the next human being
- I can make a difference
- Being part of it
- Learning different options I did not know there were for my son
- That we are not alone. That there are people struggling looking for help like us
- Sharing and meeting other parents
- Blind services information
- Relay services
- The conference helped me to understand myself
- Meeting other families
- Learning how to be active and I always enjoy meeting people in the same boat as me. You can never underestimate this. This is my second year coming. I am fulfilled. Thank you
- Sibling session. It gave me a different perspective of what my kids feel.
- Being with "like" people
- New equipment for wheelchair clients
- Inspiration
- Therapy information
- CDC Plus and 26 Successful Marriage Session
- Talking with decision maker who presented, Representative Galvano
- Exhibit hall

- Gathering what I need and being able to meet families with the same needs
- The different programs out there for the disabled
- Meeting with people
- Learning about living opportunities
- The small sessions where you could ask questions
- The Delegates group on networking
- Learning more about how to understand my son and his interaction with the environment
- The guardian advocacy
- To talk about feelings
- The roundtable talks
- Getting to help people
- All the information I have a chance to find out about

I thought we could have more of...

- Hurricane disaster preparedness; how to set up a plan; hurricane and safe travel session; and more classes during conference so more people can attend
- Ideas regarding vocational opportunities and specific jobs, what companies work best with the disabled
- Autism workshops
- Sibling workshops
- Children with apraxia
- Breakout rooms on Saturday, similar to what was on available on Friday
- Meetings by regions or cities so as to work collaboratively and form coalitions with local organizations
- More variety for visually impaired people without other disabilities
- Respite
- Medicaid information
- Creative ideas for recreation and leisure (demos of adaptation)
- Dad support
- Workshops on sexuality and relationship workshops for us, the consumers
- I love the recreation talks this year and want more! More information on transportation. I wish meetings would repeat!
- Interaction between Government agencies and the services they provide. (Workshops on filling out proper paperwork, etc!)
- More activities for siblings without disabilities
- A better place to dance and maybe an opening or breakout for the keynote speaker
- More sessions about alternative therapy options, like hyperbaric oxygen, hydro therapy, etc.
- Autism

- Inclusion
- How to start my own business
- Information and assistance regarding the hearing impaired; being deaf in one ear and in danger of losing all hearing, I was hoping for much more
- Respite

I thought we could use less of...

- Nothing; the more the better
- Nothing, everything was helpful, if not to me then other families
- Same break out at different times
- Inclusion
- Can't think of a thing
- Government agencies, human services: Workers who deal with us have no interest in being here
- Having to pay extreme prices for food
- Too spread out
- Too many classes to choose from
- Info for ADHD and gifted
- Info on organizations only serving specific geographical locations
- Nothing only more . . . maybe more food options
- Would like more breakouts
- Walking
- People not attending sessions
- Paper in the bags (to protect the environment)

I am interested in finding more about...

- Next year
- Youth council
- Everything
- Families
- Changing the education system and including our kids
- Medical professionals in my area to help my son
- DAD support group
- Regional organizations and events throughout Florida
- The peer mentoring program
- Different meetings for my daughter's disability
- Teen things, college
- 14 yr to adult transition

- Autism, stress management and uplifting break outs
- Medicaid, CMS, sibling issues, camps, less wasted papers
- More services for adults
- Classes about gifted and ADHD
- Spanish readings
- Future conferences
- Middle school inclusion
- Respite care and Medicaid
- Vocational Rehabilitation
- ADD and living on my own
- 504 programs
- Jobs for disabilities
- Med wavier, independent living and how to get medical supplies
- Helping children with autism who aren't talking that will develop advanced language and social skills so that they can better adapt to the world around them
- Health care
- Autism
- Disability and how to live better
- Everyday living and surviving on your own
- I got what I needed
- CDC + program

I would like to suggest for future conferences...

- Respite is very important
- How to help single parents cope with the stress of raising a child with a disability
- Having lists of booth locations
- More sibling workshops
- Things we can do as a group to improve things
- More specific vocational rehabilitation opportunities. More Bill Palmer. Good guy!
- More time on marriage and families
- Classes at different times
- Be held in hotels that aren't so spread out
- The present conference was excellent as is
- Free food
- More days to learn other things
- Less walking
- More fun dances
- This was really good! Look forward to the next one

- If we could have a private room for a while for the Cerebral Palsy talk with parents, because there were so many we could not hear each other. Thank you! My first time here and loved it and look forward to coming back next year
- Larger rooms for popular titles or classes
- Disability specific talks
- More entertainment; I love the Pyramid Players
- Access to cheaper food
- Braille and large print materials during sessions
- The children enjoyed the activities, especially seeing Mickey Mouse on Saturday night

Comments...

Thank you for this information, I enjoyed The Family Café. Please know I have one suggestion – could you schedule break out sessions on Autism in larger rooms? I tried to get in to one on Saturday afternoon only to find a small crowded room and crowded hall. With the Autism Epidemic, please try to find bigger rooms. Folks are hungry for information on supporting these folks and their families.

Thank you

We had an awesome time and enjoyed The Family Café immensely, thank you! The only big critique I had was the registration process. Perhaps we could alphabetize and prepare for registration on Thursday more intensely.

As a member of the community that we served I am proud to have had the opportunity to give back to you in this small way. I do want to be sure that you are all given a round of thanks for the many hours you contribute on our behalf all year long. I also want to send kudos to Theresa, at the A-L Registration Desk. Theresa you were able to keep calm and pull everyone together – no small feat in the midst of mainstream registration. Thank you for the strong leadership that you exhibited throughout the event! Please place my name on the list for next year's night before opening day event. I would love to assist with alpha sorting and my daughter can help with bag stuffing. Also, keep the contact information for the Valencia Volunteers. They will be a great resource for next year now that we know they can help. Congratulations again on a wonderful event!

I was ecstatic to be able to come to your 10th Anniversary Family Café Conference. I have 2 year old twins with Cerebral Palsy. I was overwhelmed and excited all at the same time. I found it to be very informative and made quite a few connections and friends along the way. I would love to get more information on the whole Delegate process. If you could get that to me I would very much appreciate it. I am looking forward to attending the next conference next year. Thank you for your time.

We hated leaving!!!! But couldn't wait to get home to THANK you all for such a wonderful, fun, amazing and magical weekend! The conference was AWESOME!!!!!! This was our first year. We didn't know what to expect but it surpassed our imaginations by MILES!! You ALL were amazing. We so enjoyed seeing all these families who REALLY enjoy their kids! That was

one of my personal favorite things. The hotel was heavenly. The exhibits TOTALLY interesting. And the kids had a BLAST! Just an all around perfect weekend. And we CANNOT wait until next year! Thank you SO very VERY much

Thank you so much for leading us to help others. You have a beautiful spirit!

Thanks for everything. For me it was the most wonderful experience in my life. I learned a lot. I hope I can be with you next year. God bless all of you.

Notes

Notes



**The
Family
Café**



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YOU!**

**THEY
NEED
YOU!**

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