

**A Quarterly Publication
Produced BY & FOR NC Youth with Disabilities**

We have a lot of great information to share in this issue - be sure to click on "view entire message" at the bottom of this email to read the entire newsletter!

In the last YEP newsletter we asked readers to submit one strength, one challenge and one thing that helps them. Here are some replies:

Graphics created by: David Armas, YAT Social Media Manager

EMMA

Strength - Being On Time

Challenge - Fast Paces

1 Thing that Helps - Slowing down and taking one moment at a time

LELAH

Strength - I am able to ask questions.

Challenge - I deal with my own speech impediment that I have.

1 Thing that Helps - When I take my time and answer questions correctly, and not rush.

EMMY

Strength - I am great at making others laugh

Challenge - I sometimes have a hard time managing my emotions

1 Thing that Helps - I take breaks or get help from a trusted adult when I need it.

DONOVAN

Strength - Critical Thinking

Challenge - POTS

1 Thing that Helps - My Family

**From Awareness to Action: How Youth Are Advocating
Right Now
(with input from our youth teams)**

In our last newsletter, we talked about self-advocacy: understanding your strengths, recognizing your challenges, and speaking up about what you need to succeed. But self-advocacy doesn't stop at awareness. It turns into action in everyday moments.

Across North Carolina, youth are putting these skills into practice in ways that are powerful, personal, and real. We asked our Youth Advisory Teams how they are advocating for themselves every day.

At School: Speaking Up for Support

Many students are learning how to advocate for themselves in the classroom.



This might look like:

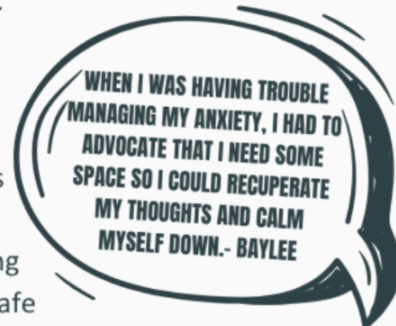
- Asking a teacher to explain something in a different way
- Requesting extra time or a quieter space for tests
- Participating in their IEP meetings and sharing what works for them
- For some, this is as simple, and as brave, as raising their hand and saying, "I don't understand yet."



At Home: Building Confidence and Communication

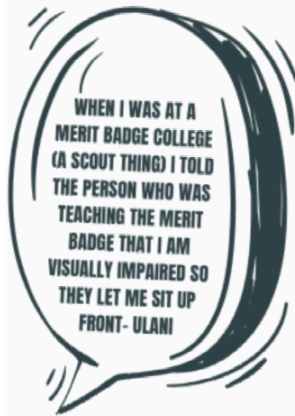
Self-advocacy also starts at home. Youth are:

- Talking with their families about what helps them focus or feel calm
- Sharing when something feels overwhelming
- Practicing how to express their needs in a safe space



These conversations build confidence and help youth prepare for speaking up in other settings.

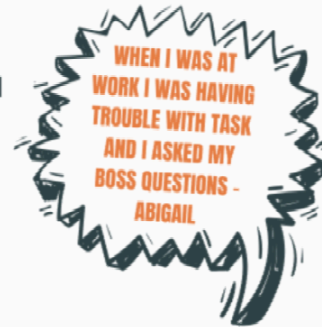
In the Community: Using Their Voice to Get Their Needs Met



At work, in clubs, and in activities they enjoy, youth are practicing self-advocacy in real and meaningful ways. This might look like asking for help on a task, explaining what helps them stay focused, or speaking up when something doesn't feel right.

In these spaces, youth are:

- Asking questions when they need clarification
- Explaining what supports help them do their best
- Speaking up about challenges or concerns



These moments may seem small, but they build confidence and independence over time. By using their voice in everyday situations, youth are not only supporting their own success, they are also helping others learn how to better support them. These small actions build skills over time and lead to greater independence and confidence.

Keep Practicing!

Advocating for yourself is a skill, and like any skill, it gets stronger with practice. Whether it's at school, at home, or in the community, every step counts. Your voice matters, and it deserves to be heard.

Meet Our YAT Leadership Team



Hello, I am Matthew, and I'm excited to be President of the ECAC Youth Advisory Team. One of the things I love most about being part of the YAT is helping other people with disabilities like me feel more confident and supported. I hope that through our meetings, activities, panels, and events, members of the Youth Advisory Team can learn skills that help them in everyday life and feel more comfortable talking about their disabilities in a positive way. I want our community to be a place where everyone feels safe to speak for themselves, learn how to help others, and grow into strong leaders.



Hello, my name is David. I am excited to be the Social Media Manager for the ECAC Youth Advisory Team. I like being able to help others just like me to find what they really struggle with and find ways to advocate for themselves and overcome those weaknesses. I believe that as the Social Media Manager, I will be able to bring more awareness to the YAT program to those who would benefit from it. I hope we can bring more people to our community and get to collaborate with others in order to benefit everyone, by sharing our experiences on how to better ourselves, and with self-advocacy.



Hello, My Name is Hanuvind, Meeting Host and Facilitator, and I am very excited to be here. One of my favourite hobbies I like to do is play basketball, sing and learn about events that are going on. As a host of the leadership team I want everyone to feel like they are welcome. My favourite part about being on the YAT leadership team is inspiring everyone no matter what ability they have and to make sure they can have the self confidence and encouragement to become a leader one day.

North Carolina's Got Talent!

YEP's *North Carolina's Got Talent* is here to put a spotlight on the many talents and abilities of N.C. Youth & Young Adults with Disabilities ages 5 to 26. The format of submissions can be a poem, artwork, blog, video, song, essay, article, presentation, an "About me" article, you name it. ECAC's Youth Advisory Team then reviews the submissions and chooses which ones to feature.



Selected entries receive a \$25 check in the mail!

And the Winners Are...

"Calm"

Nia B.
Davidson County
Age: 18

"I use a bear to relax my sensory issues, so I drew the bear to relax me and hope others as well."



"A Scene of Gnome Ducks in Their Habitat"

Bethany I.
Durham County
Age: 10

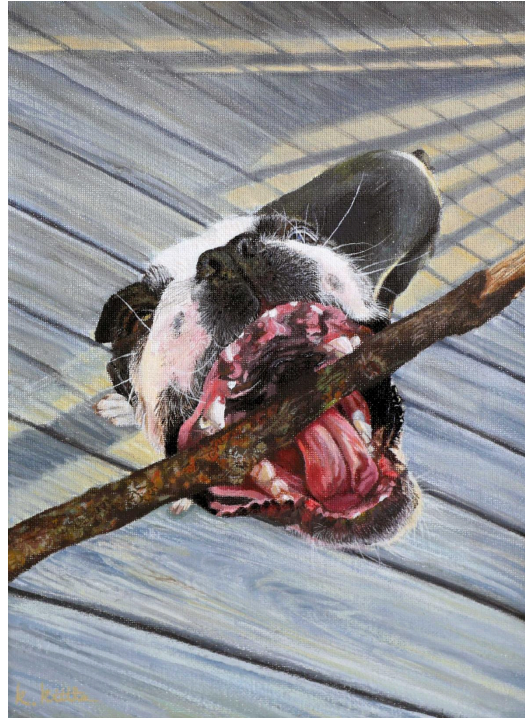
"This is a scene of a little house for the little gnome ducks we found on Amazon. I hope I can be chosen for this because I think my duck houses are very unique. I think it's unique because of the art materials I used when making this. I used my hot glue gun, hot glue, cardboard, perler beads, fabric, paper, and foam."



"Jaws"

Kaitlyn K.
Mecklenburg County
Age: 17

"I have submitted "Jaws" which is a 9"x12" acrylic painting. This particular piece is of my dog, Tybee. He is a Boston Terrier that gets these spurts of spark, and he looks like a shark! This painting means a lot to me because he is family, and shows all his imperfections and qualities. I hope this will be featured because of the forced perspective, personal value, depth, and silliness of this pup!"



"Tybee"

Zoe K.
Mecklenburg County
Age: 15

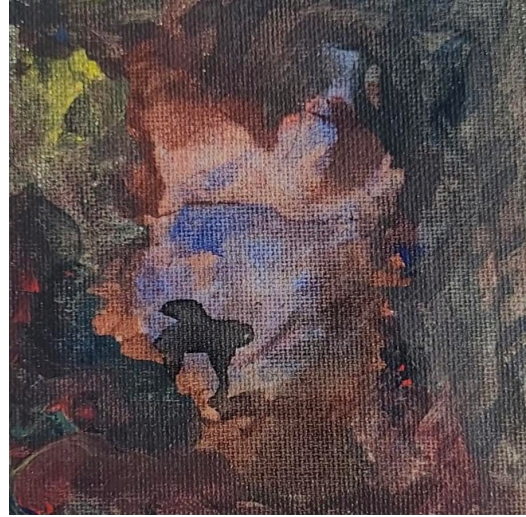
"I sent a portrait of my Boston Terrier, Tybee, who was a three month old puppy at the time. I hope it will be featured in the next issue of YEP, because I want to grow as a photographer and share my work with more people. Having dyslexia has shown me that my mind sees things differently and that is a gift. I want to show others that differences are worth celebrating."



Original Painting

Naji M.
Guilford County
Age: 6

"I am sending in one of my original paintings. I want my painting to be featured in YEP so that other people have an opportunity to enjoy my art as much as family and friends do."



Godzilla



Moses P.
Cabarrus County
Age: 13

"The piece of work I am submitting is of Godzilla. I am self taught in Procreate. I hope to inspire other kids to learn digital art."



JP Playing the Guitar

JP S.
Pasquotank County
Age: 25



Sweet Curevo

Jade S.
Age 14
Perquimans County

"My sweet cat Curevo was the same age as me, died in November at Thanksgiving week. We had him since I was 2 and he helped me with anxiety, calming, and helped my sisters learn to crawl and walk. He let us dress him up, pet him, cuddle him, always waited

for us. He was our best pet. I miss him so much but he is now an angel over the rainbow bridge watching us."



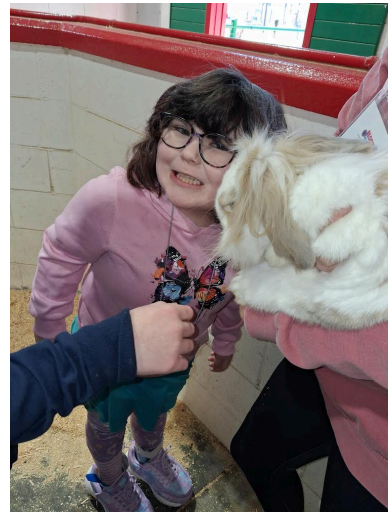
Nature

Tempest S.

Age 8

Perquimans County

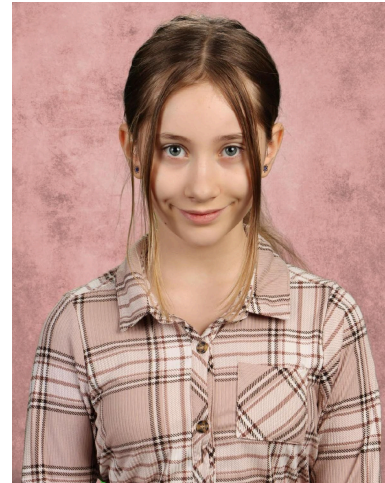
"I like spring flowers and cool weather but fall is my favorite and I miss it. Nature is my calm place. I would like others to see my drawing of nature. I have bad tremors and can't draw well or write."



"Blaze Soakin' the Sun"

Ava W.
Age 10
Rockingham County

"Needle felting of my cat Blaze. He is enjoying the sunshine. He loves sunbathing. I hope it will be featured to share the joy of cats with everyone."



Resources

Disability Benefits 101

North Carolina

Home | Work & Benefits | Programs | My DB101

Youth & Parents

See what makes the biggest difference for young people.

Want to work?

See how working and staying in school can help you.

Disability Benefits 101

New website/tools for youth and parents from IEPD - Employment and Independence for People with Disabilities (EIPD). See what makes the biggest difference for young people.

[Click here to view the website](#)

Communication & Artificial Intelligence (AI) Factsheets

Using Artificial Intelligence as a Tool: Preparing for IEP Meetings
A Resource for Parents

Artificial intelligence (AI) tools are becoming increasingly common, and families may wonder whether and how to use them. This fact sheet explains what AI tools can do for you and how to use them to your advantage. It provides information on how to use AI tools to prepare for your child's IEP meeting, and how to use them to help your child succeed in school and in life.

Preparing for an IEP Meeting With the Help of AI
Parents can use AI tools to help them prepare for an IEP meeting. AI can support parents in the following ways:

- Summarizing IEP documents that include reports or progress notes.
- Writing questions to ask at the IEP meeting.
- Helping parents organize their concerns and priorities.
- Reviewing IEP documents to identify changes and helping explain them to parents, teachers, and other IEP team members.
- Drafting and proofreading letters that parents can discuss with the IEP team. These tools should be personalized to fit each parent's unique situation.

AI can help explain terms like "technological assistance," "self-directed," or "functional functioning" in plain language to parents who are not familiar with IEP terminology and goals development.

Using AI Before, During, and After an IEP Meeting
AI can be used at different points in the IEP process:

- **Before the meeting:** Parents may choose to use AI to:
 - Organize concerns and priorities.
 - Write questions to ask at the IEP meeting.
 - Summarize documents or progress reports.
 - Identify areas where more information or data may be needed.
- **During the meeting:** AI should not be used for taking notes, but preparation with AI can help parents feel more confident asking questions.
 - Organize what was said and what was not said.
 - Use focused on their top priorities.

www.peac.org 703-532-0551 | car@peac.org

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

What is Artificial Intelligence?
Artificial intelligence (AI) is a type of computer or machine designed to think, learn, and solve problems on its own. You already use AI every day! How? AI is what helps:

- Your phone recognize your face for a video.
- YouTube and Netflix suggest videos you might like.
- Google Maps find you the fastest way to get somewhere.
- Correct what you write with spell check.

AI can make your life easier, but it's important to use it wisely and safely.

How Can AI Help You?
AI can support you at school, at home, and at work by:

- **Reading or Writing:** Read text aloud or help you organize your thoughts.
- **Learning:** Explain topics in simple words or give examples to help you understand.
- **Remembering and Organizing:** Keep track of schedules and tasks.
- **Accessibility Tools:** Turn speech into text or text into speech.
- **Job Preparation:** Suggest jobs that match your interests and help you practice for interviews.
- **Independence:** Help you control devices with your voice, translate languages, or get directions.

AI is like a smart helper – but you are still the one in charge!

PEAC: 703-532-0551 | www.peac.org

Artificial Intelligence (AI)
Artificial intelligence, or AI, is a type of computer or machine that can think, learn, and solve problems for people.

When You May Use AI Now

- **Phone:** Using your face to open your phone or your voice to ask a question.
- **YouTube and Netflix:** Showing you videos you might like.
- **Google Maps:** To help you find how to get to where you want to go.
- **Spell Check:** Correct what you write.

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[Using Artificial Intelligence as a Tool: Preparing for IEP Meetings \(English\)](#)
[Spanish](#)

[What is Artificial Intelligence? \(English\)](#)
[Spanish](#)

[Artificial Intelligence - Visual \(English\)](#)
[Spanish](#)

A PEAT
Do You Know...

Artificial Intelligence (AI): Helping Students Learn, Work, and Live More Independently (English)

What is AI?

Artificial intelligence, or AI, is a technology that allows computers to learn from information and perform tasks that would normally require human intelligence. This includes visual perception, speech recognition, decision-making, and self-correction. AI is used in many ways, from recommending movies to self-driving cars.

How is AI used in schools?

- Customizing learning experiences for individual students
- Automating administrative tasks like grading and scheduling
- Providing personalized feedback to students
- Supporting students with learning disabilities
- Analyzing student data to identify areas for improvement

How is AI used in the workplace?

- Automating repetitive tasks
- Analyzing large amounts of data
- Improving customer service
- Enhancing productivity

Using AI Wisely - A Quick Checklist

- Did I read the information carefully?
- Did I understand what the AI was doing?
- Does it help me learn more about the world?
- Am I using it to help me learn?

Artificial Intelligence in Social Education - What Families Need to Know (Spanish)

What is Artificial Intelligence (AI) and How is it Being Used in Schools?

Artificial intelligence (AI) is a technology that allows computers to learn from information and perform tasks that would normally require human intelligence. This includes visual perception, speech recognition, decision-making, and self-correction. AI is used in many ways, from recommending movies to self-driving cars.

How is AI used in schools?

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Artificial Intelligence (AI): Helping Students Learn, Work and Live More Independently. (English)
Spanish

Artificial Intelligence and How Is it Being Used in Schools. (English)
Spanish

Opportunities for Youth and Young Adults!



The Laws of Life Essay Contest

The Laws of Life essay contest encourages elementary, middle, and high school students to reflect and write about a core value that means the most to them – and why. All essay writers will be recognized by Character.org. They will also recognize the most compelling essays and feature them on their website and social media channels.

Submission deadline: May 15, 2026

[Click here to learn more](#)

Student Advisory Council
Admission

GOAL
Center student voices in shaping safe, supportive, and inclusive learning environments. The Center for Safer Schools Student Advisory Council would advise on safety issues – both physical and emotional – and help develop strategies that reflect real student experiences.

Purpose
To provide a structured platform for middle and high school students to:
• Share real-life concerns about school safety, mental health, bullying, violence, discrimination, etc.
• Collaborate with education and safety officials on policy and program development
• Promote a culture of safety and support within schools
• Develop student-led initiatives to improve school climate

Council Structure
• Grades: Middle (8th & High: 10th)
• Composition: Diverse representation from different school districts, backgrounds, abilities, and lived experiences
• 24 students total = 3 people each CFSB region = 1 middle, 1 high, 2 character/middle/high
• Term Length: 2 academic years with opportunity to renew
• Selection: Application process with support from school counselors, teachers, or principals

Admission Open Now

Student Advisory Council

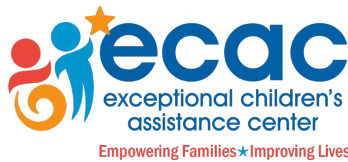
Do you want to help create a safer, more supportive and inclusive school environment? **The Center for Safer Schools Student Advisory Council** is now accepting applications! The council brings together middle (eighth grade) and high school (10th grade) students from across the state to share real experiences, discuss important safety concerns and collaborate with education leaders to make meaningful change. If you're passionate about mental health, bullying prevention, school climate or simply ensuring that

student voices are heard, this is your opportunity to lead and make an impact. [Apply today](#) and be part of the change.

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The production of this material was funded by the Office of Special Education Programs Grant No. H328M200039. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the positions or policies of the U.S. Department of Education. No official endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education of any product, commodity, service or enterprise mentioned is intended or should be inferred.

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