



## STEP AHEAD NEWSLETTER

FALL 2020

### From the Executive Director

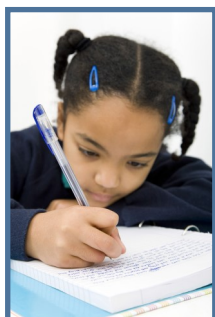
Hello STEP Friends:

With the temps cooling off a bit, we at STEP are enjoying the transition into sweater and sweatshirt weather. We also recognize that Fall means a new school year and all the new possibilities we look forward to as our children and teens take their next steps on their education journey.

This school year has been anything but typical, as school systems across the state have taken different approaches to the pandemic, with some providing classes in person, some only remotely, and then some a mix of the two. We know your families are experiencing many of the impacts of the ongoing pandemic—because our STEP Team families are right there making decisions for our children too, and spending some restless nights hoping we are making the right choices. It is of utmost importance to us to make sure that you have the information and tools you need to ensure your children's education, services, and IEPs continue, because each day in our children's education is important.

The most essential thing we want you to know during this time—and frankly always! - is that the STEP Team is here for you. **You Can COUNT on STEP** for any questions you might have about the special education process, and especially during this period when even the schools are setting new policies almost weekly. **You Can COUNT on STEP** for up-to-date information. **You Can COUNT on STEP** to get back to you as quickly as possible if you call or send us an email. **You Can COUNT on STEP** to have the expertise and experience to help you problem solve through these times. And **You Can COUNT on STEP** to always be working for families and students that experience disabilities to promote successful education outcomes.

**Karen Harrison**  
*Executive Director, STEP, Inc.*



#### A New Fiscal Year for STEP—What We'll Be Up To

We have new grant funding to support our efforts in the following topic areas throughout the next few years:

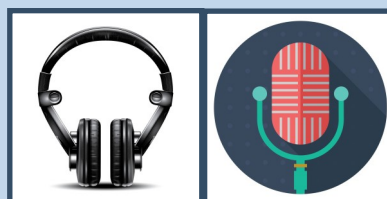
- Emergency preparedness and responsiveness
- Mental health and wellness
- Family and youth advocacy
- Family and school partnerships
- Interactive virtual training and support
- Supports for at risk youth and their families
- Focused outreach to foster and adoptive families

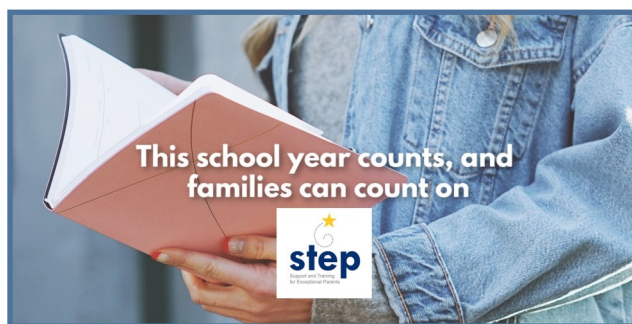
In addition, our website will feature expanded resource tabs on emergency preparedness and responsiveness, and information for educators. We are also developing a youth portal with interactive content. We're excited, and hope you are too!

#### New For Podcast Fans!

Families told us during our planning sessions that listening to podcasts is their "go to" media choice to stay informed and get inspired, during commuting time or waiting to pick up groceries or their school kids.

STEP is diving into the podcast pool and would love your suggestions. Send your ideas for STEP podcast topics to [lisa.gosnell@tnstep.org](mailto:lisa.gosnell@tnstep.org), and be entered to win a set of superb-sounding headphones!





STEP wants you to know about our **YOU CAN COUNT ON STEP** Campaign, designed to keep students and families informed during these challenging times. Each of the 5 main topics listed below has an accompanying **Infographic with 5 key points AND a video featuring one of the STEP Team members**. These videos can be watched at <http://www.facebook.com/steptn>. Please know that STEP Team Members are always available to help you understand any of these vital issues concerning your or your child's education.

### **5 Things You Can COUNT On About IEPs**

- 1) Even during the pandemic, IEPs must be implemented. The laws surrounding IEPs & Section 504 plans remain unchanged.
- 2) Parents can request an IEP team meeting at any time during the school year.
- 3) Parents are an essential part of all IEP decisions.
- 4) Student progress on goals must be recorded, reported, and discussed.
- 5) IEPs and other documents should be clearly understood before signing.

### **5 Things You Can COUNT On About Special Education Timelines**

- 1) The laws about IEPs and Section 504 plans remain unchanged. Federal and state timelines are still in effect.
- 2) Parents and families should continue to advocate for the services their children need.
- 3) Schools must continue to follow IDEA and Section 504 laws and work with parents to determine how services can be effectively delivered.
- 4) Schools need to ensure that students with special education needs get the support they require, whether they're learning in a school building or remotely.
- 5) Parents can still request an IEP team meeting at any time.

### **5 Things You Can COUNT On About Transition to Adulthood**

- 1) Knowing the roles of the participants in transition planning.
- 2) Actively participating in IEP Transition Planning - youth and family!
- 3) Being informed about diploma options.
- 4) Accessing adult services when needed.
- 5) Building skills for adulthood.

### **5 Things You Can COUNT On About Communication**

- 1) Establish communication with your child's IEP or 504 Team early.
- 2) Familiarize yourself with supports and services offered by your school system.
- 3) Encourage open dialog.
- 4) Follow the chain of command.
- 5) Follow up and follow through.

### **5 Things You Can COUNT On About Staying Engaged**

- 1) Know your child's needs and what services are possible through an IEP or 504 Plan.
- 2) Establish an effective communication system with your child's teachers.
- 3) Get to know the members of your child's IEP or 504 Team.
- 4) Work with the IEP or 504 Team to make sure your child's Plan is followed properly.
- 5) Talk with your child about his or her school day.



**YOU CAN COUNT ON THE STEP TEAM MEMBERS**

## STEP 2020 ADVOCATES OF THE YEAR AWARDS



### Garfield Adams—Winner of the 2020 Wayne Parker Advocate of the Year Award

In January 2018, Garfield Adams was hired as Special Education Director for Hamilton County Schools. He began by visiting every principal in the county and talking with parents. Based on what he learned, Garfield worked with LifeLine and Chattanooga Inclusive Ed to build a three-year plan to reduce the segregation of special education students, eliminate cluster sites where students were segregated, and provide professional development to staff on disability-related topics and co-teaching. He has advocated for additional positions and succeeded in adding 10 more special education teachers and 30 additional paraprofessionals.

According to Award nominees Lisa Mattheiss and Trish Cox, Garfield has “created a trust with Hamilton County families and service organizations...He has invited ideas and collaboration and advocated internally and externally for the access of students with disabilities and the involvement of their families in the process.”

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### Drake Box—Winner of the 2020 Wesley Rice Advocate of the Year Award

Drake Box is 19 and lives in Dyersburg, Tennessee. He was adopted as a two-year-old from Ukraine by Gary and Laurie Box. Diagnosed with cerebral palsy, Drake has been through multiple surgeries at the Shriner’s Hospital in St. Louis. “He has a positive attitude and an extraordinary work ethic,” said Marsh Naidoo, who nominated Drake for this award. “He is a full-time student at Dyersburg Community College and a part-time employee at Kroger.”

Drake has excelled in his life through determination and perseverance. Despite his physical limitations, Drake has relished playing baseball and other sports. His goal is to earn a physical therapy assistant degree, in the hopes of working at Shriner’s Hospital some day. He wants to motivate other children with cerebral palsy to live their best lives, and serves as a mentor to Marsh’s seven-year-old son, Kellan, who has spastic diplegia.



## THE ARC TENNESSEE 2020 ANNUAL AWARDS



On November 4, 2020 The Arc Tennessee hosted its Annual Awards Event. These awards are given to individuals and entities that do outstanding work for families and people who experience disability, and promote the inclusion of people with disabilities in their communities.

Congratulations this year go to:

**Naveh Eldar**, for receiving the **Public Awareness Award**. Naveh hosts **The Landscape Podcast**, which shares fascinating stories about people, programs, and businesses that are changing the landscape for individuals with disabilities.

**Jenna Murphy**, for receiving the **Exemplary Educator Award**. For many years, Jenna has been involved with **The Arc Anderson County’s After-School Program** for young people with developmental and intellectual disabilities, serving the city of Oak Ridge and the surrounding area.

**holly lu conant rees**, for receiving the **Roger Blue Award**. holly lu is a life-long advocate for children with disabilities, and has worked tirelessly on behalf of families who experience disability.




# NEW! STEP QUICK GUIDE TO SCHOOL AT HOME TERMS

Since school closures began taking place in late March and April due to the Covid-19 pandemic, families have faced uncertainty and confusion about how their child's education and special education services would continue. It has been especially difficult as school systems have had to create or update policies based on coronavirus surges in certain areas. STEP staff have been continually fielding questions from families during this challenging time, and, in particular, explaining the differences between several terms that refer to learning at home. In response, STEP produced a **Quick Guide to School at Home Terms**, which explains the differences between the following instructional labels:

- **Homeschooling**
- **Homebound Instruction**
- **Virtual or Remote Learning**

For each of these terms, the Quick Guide gives details about public school status; IEP status; returning to school and the continuation process; responsibility for instruction; scheduling determination; IDEA rights status; and additional resources.

To access the STEP Quick Guide, please go to [www.tnstep.org](http://www.tnstep.org).

 <b>QUICK GUIDE TO TENNESSEE SCHOOL AT HOME</b>			
<i>Tennessee's Parent Training and Information Center, STEP, knows there are questions around schooling your child at home. It is vital that students and families understand the definitions of and differences between terms, like "Homeschooling," "Homebound Instruction," and "Virtual or Remote Learning," as explained in this Quick Guide. Please contact STEP if you have further questions or need special education assistance or visit <a href="http://www.tnstep.org">www.tnstep.org</a>.</i>			
	Homeschooling	Homebound Instruction	Virtual or Remote Learning
<b>PUBLIC SCHOOL STATUS</b>	The student is removed from enrollment in the public-school district.	The student remains enrolled in the public-school district.	The student remains enrolled in the public-school district, including students being educated through virtual or remote learning due to emergency closures or public health crisis, and students enrolled in Tennessee's Virtual School.
<b>IEP STATUS</b>	The student's IEP is no longer valid and all educational and related services will no longer be provided unless the student has a "services plan" agreed to by the school and family.	LEA (Local Education Agency) Review Team determines homebound eligibility based upon certified medical necessity. The IEP remains in effect with the educational placement changed to home instruction.	The student's IEP remains in effect with no change in placement. A new IEP can be written during this virtual or remote learning period. An IEP team meeting can be requested at any time by the student or parents.
<b>RETURN OR CONTINUATION PROCESS</b>	To return to the district, the student must be re-enrolled and may be re-evaluated for eligibility for special education services.	Homebound is meant to be a temporary placement – with a maximum of 30 school days unless there are extensions for medical necessity – with the goal of the student returning to a less restrictive environment.	The student's return to in-person learning is dependent on the school district's policies regarding emergency closures and/or public health crisis.
<b>RESPONSIBILITY FOR INSTRUCTION</b>	Instruction is the responsibility of the parent, including curriculum, lesson plans, assignments, and tests. (Including state mandated tests)	Instruction is delivered in the home or another appropriate setting for a minimum of 3 hours per week. Related services listed in the IEP must also be provided.	Instruction is the responsibility of the student's teacher and school district. This includes the curriculum, lesson plans, assignments, and tests.

## CONTACT YOUR STEP REGIONAL DIRECTORS:

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DONNA JENNINGS | STEP BUSINESS/PERSONNEL MANAGER

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NED ANDREW SOLOMON | COMMUNICATIONS SUPPORT

**NEW ADDRESS!** The main STEP offices in East TN have moved. If you are mailing an item to our business office or East TN staff, please send to STEP, Inc., 1113 Tusculum Blvd. #393, Greeneville, TN 37745. If you are coming by for an appointment, the new physical address is 113 Austin Street, Greeneville, TN 37745.



The PTI is funded through OSEP. STEP, Inc. produced this website under the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs Grant No. # H328M200054. Kristen Rhoads serves as the project officer. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the positions or policies of the Department of Education. No official endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education of any product, commodity, service or enterprise mentioned on this site is intended or should be inferred.

